

# Best defense in the NFL has a job opening. And Shane Ray's name is top of the stack.

By Nick Groke  
Denver Post  
August 2, 2016

Shane Ray loomed over the right side of Denver's defense Monday in full 3-D. He is pumped up, in a Hans and Franz sense. And when Demaryius Thomas, one of the biggest and bulkiest receivers in the NFL, took a dinky dump-off pass, Ray made him look like a cardboard cut-out.

With one hand, Ray grabbed Thomas by the shoulder and ripped him down to the grass. The second-year linebacker kept his dreadlocks this season, but he shed the hesitation.

"For me, to open my toolbox, I needed to get bigger with more strength, so I can get physical with guys on contact," Ray said.

The best defense in the NFL has a job opening. While the Broncos fuss around finding their heir apparent to Peyton Manning at quarterback, a much more quiet search is unfolding at weakside linebacker. Veteran DeMarcus Ware is withering under a recurring back injury. He missed five games last season, then skipped all offseason training activities to recover. He still hasn't put on pads in the preseason.

The Broncos foresaw all of this when they drafted Ray in the first round a year ago. He is their future. And the bridge to then is now.

"I've jumped over that curve, and now I can be a consistent playmaker," Ray said. "That's why I was drafted. That's what I'm capable of doing. I don't think there will be any drop-off between Von (Miller)'s and DeMarcus' production when I'm in. That's how I have to carry myself."

Ware said he wants to return before the Broncos open their season Sept. 8 against the Carolina Panthers. If he does, it probably will be as a third-down pass-rush specialist. The bulk of the work will fall to Ray or third-year former practice squad linebacker Shaquil Barrett from Colorado State.

But Ray's pedigree gives him an edge. He was the SEC defensive player of the year and an All-American at Missouri before the Broncos used the 23rd pick to select him. Now past his rookie year, and with a clear opening in the starting lineup, Ray is playing with the first-team defense and acting like he belongs.

"When you have a rookie that comes in, a first-round draft pick, they get a rude awakening with the experience and guys that are mature and have done it for a long time," Ware said of Ray. "Expectations are there. When you take those expectations off, not saying that you're a rookie anymore and taking that title off, you can see how much he's matured."

The Denver defense is set up to allow Miller to freelance around the strong side in pass coverage and edge rushes. But the Super Bowl MVP is a marked man, one of the most obvious scouting targets in the NFL. The weak side, then, will get tested.

Ware last season started just 10 games, but his 7½ sacks trailed only Miller's 11 for the team lead. The Broncos used him sparingly down the stretch, holding him back to allow his back to heal. They unleashed him in the playoffs, and he sacked Cam Newton twice in the Super Bowl.

The Broncos can't live without Ware — after Manning retired, Ware is their veteran leader, and his voice grabs the most attention in the locker room. He just might not play the most downs.

Barrett was a better backup last season. He got to the quarterback 22 times for knockdowns and hurries, 4½ more than Ray. And Ray, who missed two games with a knee injury, has not yet started a game in the NFL.

But Ray added 11 pounds of muscle in the offseason and an attitude to match. His time is now. Coach Gary Kubiak called Ray a "gut player," part of a group of talented young players ready to rise.

"I want to be complete," Ray said. "I'm ready. I think they know that. I love DeMarcus, and he's a great coach to all of us, a great mentor. I'm still asking him every day how I can get better as a player. I'm looking forward to the season and my role expanding — and just taking it and running with it."

Who's next?

*Veteran DeMarcus Ware, after a series of back injuries, will need a replacement at the Broncos' weakside linebacker position. How his career compares to Shane Ray, his likely successor, and Shaquil Barrett, who is also in the running:*

Player	Seasons	Games Started	Tackles	Assists	Sacks	
DeMarcus Ware	11	168	165	492	147	134.5
Shane Ray	1	14	0	15	5	4
Shaquil Barrett	2	16	6	35	15	5.5

# How MMA and an unorthodox offseason is helping Shane Ray transform into a complete player

By Cameron Wolfe

Denver Post

May 14, 2016

It's big man day.

Anthony Johnson, Ultimate Fighting Championship's second-ranked light heavyweight contender, is Shane Ray's opponent on a cool March morning in Boca Raton, Fla., at XPE Sports Academy.

The battle is on Johnson's turf, too, a crash course in mixed martial arts against one of the best in the world, a man with one-punch knockout power. Ray survives. He's not about to let his fight be questioned, so he asserts every drop of energy.

Next up, head-to-head in the trenches with Saints defensive tackle John Jenkins, a man who has more than a 100-pound weight advantage. Brothers Mike and Maurkice Pouncey, 300-pound interior linemen for the Dolphins and Steelers respectively, will take their turn, too.

It's a bit of an unorthodox training regime, but it has a purpose. The Broncos' second-year linebacker got a wake-up call in his rookie season. His speed rush wasn't working against NFL offensive linemen. He needed more strength and better technique.

Once Ray got the hang of power on big man day, it was time to transition to little man day later in the week, when he tried to cover speedy Chargers receiver Travis Benjamin.

Ray played at 234 pounds last season at weakside linebacker, but lacked the size to also play strongside, which limited the versatility defensive coordinator Wade Phillips prefers.

He already was playing behind All-Pros Von Miller and DeMarcus Ware. Rising star Shaquil Barrett was more advanced in his technique and strength so he beat out Ray, who was No. 4 on the depth chart.

It was a learning experience for the 2015 first-round pick.

"At this level you've got guys that are very smart in everything they do as far as technique," Ray said. "Your athletic ability can only take you so far."

That brought Ray to the XPE gym, where he spent 3½ weeks between February and April training twice a day to get stronger and work on his first step quickness. He gained eight pounds of muscle and now weighs 245 pounds, with 10 percent body fat.

"I feel as big, fast and explosive as I've ever felt," he said last week.

He'll likely go back to XPE between offseason workouts and training camp.

"We never treat Shane like an outside linebacker," said Tony Villani, owner of the XPE gym that is home for many athletes before the NFL combine, including four of the top 25 players drafted this year. "We want him to have the strength of 300-pound linemen. We want him to be as smooth as 185-pound defensive backs."

Feeling the heat

Ask Ray where to eat in Kansas City and he'll rattle off a list. Obviously, it starts with barbecue. Kansas City Joe's is Ray's go-to spot. Fried foods were also a favorite of his. But after 22 years of eating when he wanted and where he wanted, Ray knew he had to change his mind-set to each the next level.

"You can't just treat it like it's college and go eat fast food," Ray said. "Everybody heard Von (Miller) say you can't eat cheese sticks and put that food in a Ferrari."

Ray changed his routine for meal plan prep everywhere he went. Leaner meats such as chicken and fish, a lot of water and almost no sugar. Villani's staff prepared three to four 500 calorie meals for him a day when he was in Florida.

"He's like an engine, we have to constantly feed him," Villani said. "He looks like a different person now."

Broncos strength-and-conditioning coach Luke Richesson will look to advance Ray's progress in preparation for the grind of a long season.

Ray said last season didn't go as planned. He had goals of being the defensive rookie of the year, but despite a strong finish he ended with four sacks and spent most of the year watching Miller and Ware.

"It was a shock for him initially," Broncos coach Gary Kubiak said in March. "It took him some time to gravitate to those two guys and say, 'I'm over that. Now let me learn from these guys.'"

Ray's already talked to quarterback Paxton Lynch about the pressures that come with being a first-round pick. He shared his experience of feeling "a lot of heat" and learning to tune everything out. His message: take coaching, have fun and love your job.

Pride of your city

Ray didn't go to South Africa like Ware and Demaryius Thomas or the Bahamas like Barrett during the off-season. He went back to Missouri, splitting time between Columbia, where he went to college, and Kansas City, where he grew up.

It was a warm welcome for the Super Bowl champion. He made stops at his old high school and 7-on-7 team to share his story of getting out of the 64130 zip code, known as the Murder Factory, to find success. He stopped by University of Missouri practices to train on his old stomping grounds.

It was all love until he got the tattoo that caused a big storm. A full back portrait captioned 'The Town' of all of Kansas City's sports teams, most notably the rival Chiefs, along with other notable landmarks.

The backlash was heavy.

Ray's message to Broncos fans was simple: Kansas City made me who I am today. You don't get Shane Ray the player without Shane Ray the man coming with him.

# Broncos linebacker Shane Ray bulks up for 2nd season

By Pat Graham  
Associated Press  
May 12, 2016

Shane Ray found a way to get under the skin of Denver fans: A tattoo that features the skyline of his hometown Kansas City, accompanied by the logo of the rival Chiefs.

Nothing personal, the Broncos linebacker insisted. It's just a little ink to honor where he came from.

On the field, his loyalty of course lies with Denver. That's why he only took a week off after the Super Bowl before returning to his workout program. He even overhauled his diet and cut out fast food to get leaner as well as quicker.

Still, Ray caught some flak for that art work across his back, which also features the slogan, "The Town."

"There are going to be people that are going to like things you do and don't like the things you do," said Ray, who went to high school in a suburb of Kansas City and was a 2015 first-round pick out of Missouri. "I have a lot of pride in my city and things I've been through and come from. I let the Broncos fans know it has nothing to do with how I'm going to play the Chiefs every game.

"I'm going to go out there and play the best I possibly can. I'm a Bronco. I love being here."

Ray is coming off a solid season in which he predominantly backed up DeMarcus Ware. The highlight moments included sacks of Teddy Bridgewater, Derek Carr, Philip Rivers and Ben Roethlisberger. The frustrating moments included a lingering foot injury from college that hampered his development early on and a knee injury later in the season that sidelined him for two games.

"Coming in, kind of being behind the curve and realizing what I did in college was not going to transfer to the league as easily as I thought it would," Ray said. "At this level, you have guys that are very smart in everything they do as far as technique. Your athletic ability can only take you so far. That was a big thing for me, understanding that my athletic ability would take me this far, but I had to find another piece, another key."

That's why he dedicated the offseason to getting stronger. In the middle of last season, he checked in at 234 pounds and 10 percent body fat. This spring, he's closer to 245 and still at 10 percent body fat.

His expectations haven't changed, though — wreak havoc on QBs.

"I set the bar high for myself last year and the bar hasn't changed," said Ray, who's eating leaner meals and staying away from sugar. "I still want to dominate and be the best I can be for this team."

Ray was taken under the wings of Von Miller and Ware last season, soaking up all their advice. He wasn't afraid to ask questions, either, and then put their responses to good use on a dominating defense.

His primary role was simple: Rush the passer. This season, he feels confident enough to drop back into coverage if necessary.

"I'm more relaxed and comfortable because I know where I'm supposed to be and how I'm supposed to play the technique," Ray said.

Recently, Ray had a chat with rookie quarterback Paxton Lynch about the pressure of being a first-round pick. His biggest suggestion was keep things simple and listen to veteran QB Mark Sanchez.

"In this program, in this organization, when you're a first-round pick, I think across the board everybody has huge expectations in you to contribute," Ray said. "That's something where last year I felt a lot of heat. I had to learn to tune everything out and focus on being the best player I could be."

Ray and fellow linebacker Shaquil Barrett may see increased playing time this season to keep Ware — who turns 34 on July 31 — from wearing down.

"The expectation for us as young guys is to step up, do what we're supposed to do and help lead this team," Ray said. "I feel as big, fast and as explosive as I've ever felt."

NOTES: After the Super Bowl, Barrett said he went on a Caribbean cruise. ... CB Chris Harris Jr. represented the team as the Colorado House of Representatives paid tribute to the Super Bowl-winning Broncos on Wednesday at the state capitol. ... Denver recently claimed fullback Toben Oporum off waivers from the New Orleans Saints and waived rookie tight end Anthony Norris.

# Shane Ray hopes altered diet, improved study habits help him bring more to Broncos in Year Two

By Andrew Mason  
DenverBroncos.com  
May 12, 2016

From an individual perspective, Shane Ray's rookie season did not go as he would have hoped.

A lingering toe injury kept him from taking part in offseason work. A sprained medial collateral ligament suffered in Week 6 sidelined him for two games.

"I felt like I was a little bit behind, and I had to work extra hard to try to catch up to where I felt I needed to be," Ray said.

Those were the factors beyond his control. But Ray also learned that his study of the game and his dietary habits were not where they needed to be for long-term pro success.

"It was a whole season worth of learning for me," he said. "Staying in D-Ware [DeMarcus Ware] and Von [Miller's] ear and Coach Pug [Outside Linebackers Coach Fred Pagac], just learning what I need to do to get better."

Ray wasted little time acting on what he learned. After taking "a week and a half off," he dove into his offseason program, training in Boca Raton, Fla. But the work wasn't just about weight training and conditioning; his meals were prepared, and he carried the same concepts with him when he returned to Broncos headquarters, where the team's nutrition staff further helps that process.

"One thing that I struggled with as a rookie was having my meals and eating properly," Ray said. "You can't just treat it like it's college and go eat fast food. Everybody heard Von say you can't eat cheese sticks [because] you can't put that fuel in a Ferrari. For me it's treating my body as such."

Ray's diet emphasized lean steak, fish, chicken, vegetables, salads and water. Fried foods were out; foods with sugar were limited.

"I probably eat four or five times a day -- just pure, lean food," Ray said.

Better meals and the workouts with Strength and Conditioning Coach Luke Richesson combined for results that were easily visible.

When Ray stepped up to the podium in the media room at the UCHealth Training Center on Wednesday, he looked stronger and more sculpted than at this time last year. He now weighs 245 pounds, but his eight-pound weight gain is all lean muscle, as his body fat remains at 10 percent.

But altering the diet was only going to get Ray halfway to where he needs to be. In order to step forward and become a dominant, first-team-caliber outside linebacker, he had to double his efforts in his study habits, as well.



He realized last year that his previous level of cerebral work would not be enough.

"In this league, you have guys that are very smart in everything they do as far as technique. Your athletic ability can only take you so far," Ray said.

"And that was a big thing for me -- just understanding that my athletic ability took me this far, but I had to find another piece, another key, and that was just the intellectual part of understanding film study, what guys are going to do, what guys are going to give me, formations and also just my technique and my footwork and just how much more crisp it needed to be."

One early result of Ray's work -- both in the weight room and the meeting room -- is the ability to work at strong-side outside linebacker, instead of just on the weak side. He said he's seen repetitions there, which gives him flexibility and helps the entire defense work while Von Miller's contract situation remains unresolved.

This gives Ray greater responsibilities against tight ends not only against the run, but in coverage.

"This offseason I put in tons of work in just making myself more of a complete player," Ray said. "Last year I was limited to play a lot of 'will' linebacker, which was majority [pass-]rush, but now I play the 'sam' just as freely as I play the 'will' as far as drops, coverages and just knowing my assignment and knowing what I'm supposed to do.

"Now I'm more relaxed. I'm more comfortable because I know where I'm supposed to be."

And if the work pays off, Ray will be en route to what a first-round pick should eventually become: a consistent playmaker, and one of the core components of a successful team.

# The Curve

By Shane Ray  
The Players' Tribune  
December 8, 2015

This is NFL Rookie Diaries, a series where NFL rookies take you inside their new lives as NFL players. From adjusting to playing the game at its highest level, to learning the locker room culture, to adjusting to life off the field, these rookies tell it like it is. Welcome to the NFL.

\*\*\*

Fact: You can't beat Von Miller at Connect Four.

I know, because as a rookie, that's one of my duties. I carry stuff in from practice like every rookie in the history of the NFL probably has, and I have to play Von Miller in Connect Four. Every day. And he's got it down to a science. He's the master. I've gotten him a couple of times, but he's as close to unbeatable as it gets. And he'll let you know it, too.

I met Von in Miami before I was drafted — before I became a Bronco. Coming out of college he was a guy I looked up to as a pass-rusher, and there I was, standing on the sidewalk listening to him talk about NFL locker room culture. Next thing I know, we're talking football, and he's demonstrating proper footwork and giving me tips right there on the sidewalk as people walk by.

He didn't know me at the time. He didn't know what team was going to draft me. And there he was, trying to educate me and make me better.

When you're a first-round pick, a lot of times you just get thrown into the fire. You have coaches there to help you on the field, but don't have anybody there to guide you on how to do the right things off it, or how to take care of your body.

Me? I'm in the ideal situation. I'm here with probably two of the greatest outside linebackers in the game in Von Miller and DeMarcus Ware. I can ask questions and learn from them every day. That's an advantage most rookies don't have.

Take Von, for instance.

You can tell watching tape that Von is an incredible athlete. But when you see him up close, it's insane. I watch how quick his feet are — how many steps he takes and how he sets himself up to swipe the blocker's hand and dip his shoulder to get around the edge. I think, *OK, let me try that. Let me take my steps like this and work it into my own style.*

His get-off is the fastest I've ever seen. He just explodes off the ball. So one day at practice, I just walked up to him and said, "Hey man, I'm having trouble. My get-off is not looking like yours. What am I doing wrong?" He bent down, grabbed my feet and put them in the right stance, then showed me how to lean — how to balance my body to maximize my get-off speed. I started working on that on my own, and next thing you know, I'm getting off the ball faster. I could notice the difference. All because he was there, and I asked.

Von is the guy who teaches me the physical stuff. DeMarcus is the veteran — the guy whose brain I just want to pick. He's so much more technical. We'll be watching film, and he'll stop, rewind, and replay it in slow motion.

"Hey, did you guys see that? The quarterback is leaning before he snaps the ball. If you key on that, it can help you get off the ball faster."

We're all looking around at each other.

*I didn't notice that ... you?*

*Nope, me neither.*

DeMarcus picks up on things nobody else in the room sees because he's just been doing it for so much longer.

Von is a freak athlete, but DeMarcus has a totally different approach to the game. He sets guys up. He has enough experience to know what he's going to get from an opponent and how to expose his weakness.

When we were playing the Raiders earlier this year, I was going up against a bigger guy. DeMarcus came up to me and said, "You're strong and you're fast. That guy's bigger than you. You gotta be able to set him up. Give him a couple of speed rushes to take him up the field and get him moving back a little bit. Then hit him with a power rush. He'll be on his heels and you can shed him easier. The quarterback is gonna step up in the pocket and you'll be right there."

And that's exactly what happened. The quarterback stepped up in he pocket, and I was right there to get the sack.

As a rookie, I feel like I'm still trying to find out what I do best. *What's my go-to? What's my move? What do I do that's better than what other guys can do?* And having Von and DeMarcus has helped me tremendously. I can learn the physical tools from Von and the mental game from DeMarcus. From there, I can start figuring things out for myself and putting the pieces together to define the kind of player I want to be.

They look out for me off the field, too.

A blizzard swept through Denver recently, and I wasn't prepared. I drive a Dodge Challenger. I live in the mountains and I don't own an SUV. Rookie mistake.

So I called Von.

"Hey man. There's no way I'm gonna make it through the snow ... Can I use one of your SUVs to help me get to the practice facility?"

He didn't even think twice.

DeMarcus has opened his home to me. One day he came up to me and said, "If you need to get some treatment, you can come to my house. I have some laser therapy that'll help get you right. We can watch film, too. Break stuff down." It's like an open invitation whenever I need it — to get healthier, to get better.

You hear stories around the league about being a rookie and being at the bottom of the totem pole. Coming into our locker room, it's the complete opposite. T.J. Ward, Chris Harris, Aqib Talib — all these guys talk to me and take the time to share their knowledge to help me understand everything. Not just the game, but this whole new lifestyle.

But they've still got me carrying helmets in from practice.

I wasn't supposed to be in Denver. I wasn't supposed to fall to 23rd in the draft. But I made a mistake before the draft and paid the price. Now, all I can do is work my ass off to be the best player I can be on the field and the best teammate and person off it. Everything happens for a reason, and at the end of the day, I don't think there's a better place I could have landed than right here with the Broncos. I get Von and DeMarcus and the other guys to learn from and support me, and as a rookie, I get a chance to compete for the playoffs and for a Super Bowl.

And maybe if I play my cards right, I'll get the ultimate reward ...

The secret to mastering Connect Four.

# Shane Ray proud of Mizzou football's protest

By Ben Swanson

DenverBroncos.com

November 11, 2015

The proud legacy that Shane Ray left at the University of Missouri—one of excellence, given his single-season school record of 14.5 sacks in 2014—equals the impact that the school left upon him.

Ray watched from afar as many of his previous teammates bonded together to support a fight against racial inequality and injustice on campus led by Concerned Student 1950, a group of protestors named for the year African-American students were first admitted to the university. The group of protestors, unsatisfied with little action from university leadership in response to their concerns, issued a list of demands, including plans to "promote a safer, more inclusive campus," as well as the removal of Tim Wolfe as the University of Missouri system's president.

About two weeks later on Nov. 7, the movement gained a powerful boost as athletes of color on the Tigers' football team announced they would not participate in any team activities until Wolfe resigned or was removed from his position "due to his negligence toward marginalized students' experiences," safety Anthony Sherrills wrote in a post on Twitter announcing the addition of their voices to the movement.

One day later, the rest of the football team, including head coach Gary Pinkel and the coaching staff, announced they would support the players who previously joined the protests.

One day after that, Wolfe resigned.

Two states over, Ray was moved by the powerful and difficult decision his former teammates made and the domino effect that followed.

"They did something where they felt that they needed to make a difference and I was just really proud of those guys for doing that," Ray said. "Of course everyone's going to have their opinions on the situation. I was more so proud that my former teammates made a decision that this was that important to them, whether people felt that it was the right or wrong thing to do."

The considerable risk that the first group of players took in taking a stand is hard to fathom as even simply raising the subject of racism can be a divisive third rail, and the support of Pinkel and the rest of the team was a significant backing. The statement that they made was stunning, but not necessarily surprising, Ray said.

"He's backed us in all situations—win, lose, it doesn't matter. Once you go to the University of Missouri, you're Coach Pinkel's guy and he's going to do everything in his power to make sure that his players are taken care and treated with respect," Ray added. "He's a really genuine guy, and he really cares about the team, and once again, he's shown it by backing the football players."

After bubbling below the surface, racial prejudice became an issue that could no longer go unaddressed or ignored, and Missouri's students and football team helped foster the environment to lead to change.

"A lot of students experienced some things that made them feel uncomfortable enough to ask for the president to step down," Ray said. "That's pretty powerful. And you can't deny or ignore those kind of

accusations or people's feelings on that level. It's really important, and I'm glad those guys were able to make a change and make a difference.

"If there's true racial injustice or sexist injustice, or anything along those lines that people feel like that they should step up for, this is the time. Missouri is opening up a door that if it's a problem, it can be addressed and a change can happen."

# Shane Ray happy with increased opportunities with Broncos

By Cameron Wolfe  
Denver Post  
October 13, 2015

Rookies are expected to struggle in the NFL as they adjust to the pro game. Well, linebacker Shane Ray didn't quite get that luxury. With a defense as talented as the Broncos, if you don't play well, you don't play.

When he walks on the field on Sunday, he doesn't consider himself a rookie.

"That tag is taken away when you're thrown in the fire and your teammates expect a lot of you," Ray said. "I can't make an excuse if I mess up and say, 'Oh well, it's because I'm a rookie.' "

Sacks in back-to-back games indicated how well Ray is learning.

It'd be easy for Ray, a 2015 first-round pick, to get down, facing the challenge of playing behind DeMarcus Ware and Von Miller. Even former Colorado State star Shaquil Barrett has gotten snaps in front of him after Barrett's impressive training camp and preseason.

But if Ray pouted about his lack of playing time, he wouldn't be prepared to step up if needed, such as happened Sunday in Oakland when Ware went out with back spasms.

Ray was ready and it showed. On the Raiders' second-to-last drive Ray bull rushed his way toward sacking Oakland quarterback Derek Carr. The sack led to an unsuccessful fourth-down play that all but ended Oakland's comeback bid.

With Ware's status for Sunday's game against Cleveland unknown, Ray could get more chances.

"It's not any more pressure, it's more opportunity," Ray said. "I can't control reps, but I can control my performance. I've been continuing to play better and make plays each week and that's not going to change."

In recent weeks, the injury bug has bitten the Broncos, allowing players to shine in backup roles. Ray is one of 11 players who have accounted for Denver's 22 sacks.

"That's confidence. That's something we preach all the time," Broncos coach Gary Kubiak said. "We kind of go into the game thinking that everybody is going to get a chance to contribute. Well, it's true."

Losing Ware for any length of time would be huge, but the Broncos are perhaps their deepest at outside linebacker, with Ray and Barnett in the wings.

"They're producing. They're getting the sacks, they're stopping the run and they're doing what they need to do to make sure that running back cuts back," defensive end Malik Jackson said. "They've just got to keep doing it and keep chugging away."

**More time to eat**

*The snap count for Broncos linebacker Shane Ray is on the rise:*

<b>Game</b>	<b>No. of defensive snaps played</b>	<b>No. of defensive snaps</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Week 1 win over Ravens	14	58	24.1%
Week 2 win over Chiefs	17	64	26.6%
Week 3 win over Lions	15	78	19.2%
Week 4 win over Vikings	24	75	32.0%
Week 5 win over Raiders	24	72	33.3%



# Broncos Q&A: Shane Ray talks sacks, Von Miller's dancing, more

By Nicki Jhabvala  
Denver Post  
October 8, 2015

Shane Ray arrived in Denver with high hopes and high expectations.

The Broncos' first-round pick was projected to go in the top 10 before a marijuana citation days before the draft hurt his stock and allowed Denver to trade up to get him at No. 23.

Ray has said it was a blessing. The Broncos have, too.

In Denver, Ray has spelled veteran outside linebacker DeMarcus Ware and added to an already deep pass rush that leads the league in sacks (18) and fewest yards allowed per game (295.5) through Week 4. Against Minnesota on Sunday, Ray joined the list of 11 Broncos players with a sack this season when he notched the first of his career in the opening quarter. It's one, he hopes, will lead to many more.

Ray recently sat down to talk about the start to his pro career, his first sack, Von Miller's dancing and more.

Q: What was it like getting your first NFL sack?

A: It felt really good. Now I just want to continue to grow on that and make more.

Q: When you think back to where you were at the start of organized team activities, how much have you changed as a player?

A: When I first came in here, I was a little slow getting back on the field, coming back from my (toe) injury. A lot of people were questioning if I would be ready, but I think now, progressing through the preseason, I've gotten better and better and more comfortable on the field. That's a testament to my coach, and to Von and DeMarcus for helping me get back in my rhythm, and just reps. The more I play, the more plays I'm able to make. Now people are starting to see what I'm capable of doing.

Q: Seems like the defense as a whole has really embraced defensive coordinator Wade Phillips. What is it about him that you guys have taken to?

A: He trusts us as players. He has high expectations for us and puts all in positions to make plays. I think we mesh well as a defense, and we take advantage of the opportunities that he puts us in. When it's time to make a play, you got guys all across the board ready to make a difference.

Q: You took a bit of flak for your sack dance in the preseason. What have you learned from Von?

A: More creativity. For my first sack, I didn't have a dance ready because I was just so happy and full of energy. So next time it happens, I'll have something ready for y'all to talk about.

Q: How far are you willing to go? Are you willing to get fined?

A: Uh no. I'm not. I'm not willing to get fined. I don't have the pay grade for fines yet. If I sign a big contract later on, maybe I'll take a fine for a dance. But until then, no.

Q: What are some of your personal goals for the rest of the season?

A: Just to progress every week. Control what I can control. Of course I want to be one of the best defensive rookies to play, but I have to control what I can within my reps and what I do on the field. I'm realistic about what I can do and what I have time to do. I just want to make sure when I go in I'm dominant and there's no drop-off.

#### About Ray

Height: 6-foot-3

Weight: 245 pounds

Born: May 18, 1993, in Shawnee Mission, Kan.

Drafted: 2015, first round, No. 23

College: Missouri

- Totaled 120 tackles (82 solo) and 19 sacks in three seasons at Missouri
- Southern Eastern Conference Defensive Player of the Year in 2014
- Led SEC with 14.5 sacks and 22.5 tackles for loss in 2014
- Has two tackles, one sack, one quarterback hit through Week 4 with Broncos

# Broncos' Shane Ray responds well after bump on the learning curve

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

September 24, 2015

Call it a teaching moment.

A teaching moment in a nationally-televised classroom, with 76,000 or so folks in the seats around him. But mark down Denver Broncos rookie linebacker Shane Ray for a lesson learned.

Right about the time in the second quarter last Thursday night when he was unblocked, strayed a little too far up the field, only to then see Kansas City Chiefs running back Jamaal Charles cut back, to Ray's inside shoulder, and go 34 yards for a touchdown.

It is also the longest play the Broncos' defense has surrendered in two games. While Ray wasn't the only Broncos defender who had a chance at the elusive Charles -- safety T.J. Ward got caught in Charles' second cut-back in the run -- it was Ray who was in the crosshairs from defensive coordinator Wade Phillips a bit more this week.

"Jamaal Charles is a great back," Phillips said Thursday. "We made a big mistake on his long run, that obviously added to his yardage."

Asked what Ray should take away from the play, Phillips dead-panned "Take the running back and tackle him instead of letting him run."

"He's practicing real hard this week and sometimes it takes something like that to let you know 'hey, I've got to get even better, I'm not where I need to be in this league,' and he's taken the bull by the horns," Phillips added.

In an effort to rotate players and manage snaps, Phillips has constructed lineups in such a way in the Broncos' first two games the defense has had 17 players play at least 23 percent of the team's defensive snaps. Charles' run was one of those plays with Ray and Shaquil Barrett at the two outside linebacker spots instead of Von Miller and DeMarcus Ware.

"We take it very personally because when we go in the game, we're expected to hold down the front," Ray said. "When communication errors happen like that and big plays happen, we're responsible for that, and we understand that. We have to do better when things like that happen to make sure when we do get on the field that we stop it."

For the season Ray, who the Broncos traded up five spots, to No. 23, to select in this year's draft, has played just over 25 percent of the Broncos' plays on defense. Phillips has used players like Ray, Barrett and rookie nose tackle Darius Kilgo to spell some of the more experienced Broncos.

But it means occasionally the risk of an assignment error from a young player is possible.

"I told our guys all along, our philosophy is if you're good enough to play, then we're going to find you, we're going to get you some playing time," Phillips said.

# Shane Ray taking steps in 'right direction' for Broncos

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

August 3, 2015

Though rookie outside linebacker Shane Ray was held out of most of the on-field work in the Denver Broncos' offseason program because of a toe injury Ray suffered in his final game at Missouri, Ray has not been limited in the opening week of training camp.

Ray might even have had his best day of the early going on Monday, when he worked with the starting defense because both Von Miller and DeMarcus Ware were among the veteran players who were held out of the practice to rest. Ray worked at outside linebacker with the starters and consistently showed the kind of explosiveness that made him the team's first-round selection in this year's draft.

"I'll tell you what, Shane had a good practice," Broncos coach Gary Kubiak said following Monday's practice. "He started slow early in practice. We got him going and he made some plays late in practice. We need him to show up and quick, and (Monday) was his day to be a starter. Obviously, we've got two great ones right there, but he was brought here to be a big part of that. He took a step in the right direction today."

In the early days of camp both Miller and Ware have worked extensively with Ray in between drills as well as before and after practices, giving advice, showing techniques and discussing different situations that could come up in games.

"We're getting him ready," Miller said. "He's not a rookie to me and DeMarcus, not at all, he needs to be ready to play because he's going to help us."

Ray had suffered what he called a "variation of turf toe," in Missouri's bowl game to close out the 2014 season. From their perspective, the Broncos felt Ray did too much in the pre-draft build-up to fully let the injury heal.

Ray did not participate in workouts at the scouting combine, but he continued to prepare for his pro day and was limited some in his on-campus workout to the point where some scouts in the league wondered before the draft if the injury was going to be an issue for Ray.

The Broncos rested him for much of the offseason work, giving him limited snaps, and also gave him some orthotics to wear in his shoes. The fruits of that strategy have been easy to see in camp's early going.

"It felt great," Ray said. "You have to come out and be a little bit more physical, work different techniques, especially in the running game, and I felt really good. Now it's football. You have the pads on, guys are hitting, getting really intense, attitudes are rising a little bit, but that's what football is all about. With these kinds of practices, we have the opportunity to show how good of a football player you really are."

Ray is certainly not going to displace either Miller or Ware in the lineup, but the Broncos do want to manage Ware's snaps differently than last season, when he led the defensive linemen in snaps played and had just two sacks over the last eight games -- none in the final four games of the regular season.

Defensive coordinator Wade Phillips has also said he looks forward to putting Miller, Ware and Ray in the formation at the same time. But in the end, Ray said he's glad just to feel healthy and back in the mix.

"It's very frustrating when you're injured and as much as you want to go out and compete, you can't," Ray said. "To be out here, to be with your teammates and be able to actually sweat and feel pain -- as crazy as that sounds -- but to do that with your brothers is a great feeling. I'm glad that I'm out here with my guys every day."

# Shane Ray eager to show why he was Broncos' top NFL draft pick

By Troy Renck  
DenverPost.com  
July 29, 2015

Shane Ray represents an atypical top draft pick. He defused his own hype with a misdemeanor marijuana citation in April, leaving him available to the Broncos with the 23rd selection in the first round.

The outside linebacker showed humility over his freefall, handling the issue with candor and contrition over the past three months.

This week is different. He began practicing with rookies at Dove Valley. Veterans report Thursday, carrying Super Bowl ambitions in their luggage. Ray can't keep paying for his mistake. It's time to start rewarding the Broncos for their leap of faith.

Ray embraces the challenge, eschewing patience for confidence befitting his former college superstar status at Missouri.

"I am very eager. I think that sometimes people forget that I was SEC defensive player of the year because of where I fell in the draft and my situation," Ray said. "For me to come out and remind everybody of what I'm still capable of doing is very important to me."

Though uncertainty surrounds the health of linebackers Brandon Marshall (foot) and Danny Trevathan (knee), the Broncos return the bulk of their defensive starters. Ray provides an intriguing weapon, capable of spelling Von Miller and DeMarcus Ware. The Broncos received little production last season from top reserve Quanterus Smith, who was jettisoned in April.

Ware predicted last month the trio would create a "tornado" of pressure as a "Fearsome Threesome."

The praise speaks to Ray's talent and work in the film room. Miller and Ware refuse to treat Ray as a kid. They believe he can make an impact this season.

"I still have to be broken in like any other rookie, but as far as what they expect of me to do on the field, they have a higher expectation than others might have," Ray said. "They don't look at me as a rookie in that aspect. They look at me as a person that's here to play and produce. That's what I need to do."

Ware recognized Ray's first-step quickness in practice. Miller appreciated Ray's desire to learn. That can't be overstated this month when camp becomes a grind and those who pay attention to detail excel.

Miller will continue to provide pointers in the run game, on reading and shedding blockers. Ware's guidance focuses on pass-rush technique, how to learn from a blocker's stance and how to vary looks.

"I told him, 'I am going to show you the move and you figure out how to do it yourself, '^" Ware said. "That's the key to sticking up here: performing and getting results."

Ray's optimism sprouted earlier this week because of his health. He's no longer dealing with a right turf toe injury that limited him during offseason workouts. Ray expects to be 100 percent in drills, allowing defensive coordinator Wade Phillips to get a better read on the linebacker and where he fits.

"In college, he played one, basically the right side," Phillips said. "But he played on the left some. We're letting him play both sides here. For a rookie, I think that's exceptional that he's learned a lot of things as quickly as he's learned them."

Ray, who plans to play at between 245 and 250 pounds, acclimated to the altitude to by training at the Broncos facility over the past month. He looked strong and fit on Monday when meeting the press, a sleeveless shirt revealing a tattoo on his right arm which captured the past three months : The Prince (off the field) vs. The Beast (on it).

"I'm very excited. I think that there are a lot of questions that people have on what I can do and what I was brought here to do," Ray said. "This is an opportunity for me to show everybody what I'm capable of."

# Rest pays dividends as Shane Ray is '100 percent' for Broncos training camp

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

July 29, 2015

Turns out Denver Broncos defensive end Shane Ray had a good read on his own health.

Ray, who suffered what he called a "variation of turf toe" in his final game at Missouri last season, consistently said in the weeks following the draft and into the Broncos' offseason program he would be ready for training camp.

And with the Broncos' rookies having arrived to the team's suburban Denver complex already this week and the team's veteran players set to formally report for camp Thursday, Ray said he's full-go when the Broncos take the practice field Friday for their first full training camp practice.

"I'm 100 percent ... all drills, 100 percent," Ray said this week.

Ray had taken part only sparingly in the Broncos' offseason work because of the injury, something the Broncos both expected and enforced after they traded up five spots in the first round of the draft to select Ray at No. 23. The Broncos felt Ray did too much in the pre-draft build-up to fully let the injury heal.

Ray did not participate in workouts at the scouting combine, but he continued to prepare for his pro day and was limited some in his on-campus workout. So much so some scouts wondered before the draft if the injury was going to be an issue.

That, combined with a citation for marijuana possession just days before the draft, resulted in Ray's draft slide -- the Broncos had Ray as their No. 10 player on the draft board. The Broncos then held Ray out of the on-field work in the team's minicamp and eased him into the rest of the organized team activities and minicamps, though he did not participate in a full workout.

"We just felt like rest was something he needed, treatment and rest," said Broncos coach Gary Kubiak. "He just needed to get himself back right and our staff did a great job with that."

"The issue was that I didn't have any time to rest during the pre-draft process and get the proper treatment," Ray said. "As soon as I got here, I got the things that I needed, the treatment that I needed ... and my recovery happened like it was supposed to. Now it is not an issue."

The Broncos have also given Ray orthotics to wear in his shoe during practices and games.

"I'm very excited. I think that there are a lot of questions that people have on what I can do and what I was brought here to do. This is an opportunity for me to show everybody what I'm capable of."

The Broncos have plenty of optimism for the SEC's Defensive Player of the Year -- he finished the 2014 season with 14.5 sacks and 22.5 tackles for loss. Defensive coordinator Wade Phillips has said he will



devise ways to get Ray on the field with linebackers Von Miller and DeMarcus Ware in some pass-rush situations.

Ray will work as Ware's backup much of the time on the weak-side of the formation. Miller said despite Ray's limited work in the offseason program, he saw enough of the rookie's potential that "I told him he's not a rookie in my eyes when camp gets here ... and me and DeMarcus aren't going to treat him like one."

Ray is expected to work at least some in practices at Miller's strong-side spot as well -- he did the classroom work for both outside spots in the offseason program. Miller is expected to play more snaps overall so more of Ray's potential playing time could come in some kind of rotation with Ware if the three aren't in the formation together.

"I feel like they have really high expectations. They told me, 'You didn't come here to ride the bench. You came here help this team.' With that being said, every day that I come here I'm trying to get better and trying to be the best that I can be so that I can help this team accomplish its goal, which is a Super Bowl."

# Shane Ray's big move and big steps forward

By Ben Swanson

DenverBroncos.com

July 22, 2015

Growing up, Shane Ray didn't envision himself owning a house, and especially not at 22 years old.

His home neighborhood, located in a Kansas City, Mo. zip code infamously known as "The Murder Factory," has received notoriety, and Ray knows his life could have gone in an entirely different direction where he didn't—or couldn't—leave.

Years later, the contrast is stunning. Having signed his contract with the Broncos, Ray bought a house and began shopping for furniture. He can recall the times when he and his mother slept on the floor and lived off food stamps, and that kind of poverty must seem so incredibly far away for them now.

"It's kind of surreal, like Wow, I'm 22 years old but I'm an actual homeowner. I have a real job," Ray said earlier in July. "It's huge. There's kids my age in my city that still don't have anything, that are experiencing a lot of just negative things in their lives and for me to make it out of that environment..."

Ray trailed off momentarily as he reflected on his journey, one that's probably tough to put into words.

"I was home last week," Ray began again, "and I had family members who were like 'Wow, dude, you've made it.'"

Ray was taken a little aback by the observation. With a busy schedule jumping from the draft to rookie minicamp to OTAs, he hadn't yet taken that step back to look at where he is, what he's accomplished and where he came from. It was eye-opening for the rookie outside linebacker.

"When you hear somebody say that to you, you know, for me I'm just playing football, trying to do what I've always wanted to do with my life," he said. "But when you hear your people say that to you, you kind of sit back and think about where you came from and everything you had to go through to get here. It kind of hit me a little bit. I got back to reality but it's a big deal for me and I take a lot of pride in what I've been able to do with my life and to get where I'm at now."

The transition to the NFL hasn't been without adversity, however. A marijuana citation the week before the draft invited criticism questioning Ray's character from analysts and countless NFL fans making judgment from afar.

Ray took immediate ownership of his mistake, speaking openly about it on live television during the NFL Draft and showing accountability, but he knows he won't be able to prove to everyone that one mistake doesn't define who he is.

"What I realize is everyone is going to have an opinion about you and you can't make everybody like you," Ray said. "I know the kind of person I am and everybody who knows me understands the kind of person that I am and what I've done positively."

With that in mind, Ray refuses to let the incident drag down his character but he also won't spend his energy going out of his way to try to convince people that he's the person who he knows himself to be.

"For me, I've moved past it and if people want to continue to think that, that's fine," Ray concedes. "It's not affecting me, they're just wasting time and energy while I'm continuing to get better, continuing to be a better person and growing every day."

That's exactly what he's been doing this offseason. During OTAs Ray worked to rehab his foot, eventually getting repetitions in 7-on-7 drills. He learned as much as he could from DeMarcus Ware and Von Miller, trying to understand the finer points of technique and how to get the most out of their offseason program practices. Then once OTAs concluded, Ray stuck around and worked out with the Broncos' training staff during a strictly voluntary period.

That's just the way he is and the way he has always been. It's the way he's always had to be to get this far.

"Everything I've ever wanted in life I've had to work hard to go get it," Ray said. "I'm here in Denver grinding every day, preparing for the season, trying to be the best that I can be. I can do whatever my coach asks me to do. If people didn't get that while I was in high school, people didn't understand that when I was at the University of Missouri then they still probably won't get it now looking at me as a pro but I'm going to continue to do what's made me successful and this is the steps that I'll take."

# Shane Ray making progress, eager for camp

By Ben Swanson

DenverBroncos.com

July 8, 2015

Shane Ray's foot injury hindered his combine process but surgery was deemed unnecessary and the Broncos jumped at the opportunity to draft a player with his talent, confident that he would heal quickly.

And on Wednesday, Ray confirmed that his injury has become little more than an afterthought for him.

"My foot feels great. I feel like 100 percent," he said Wednesday morning from the practice facility. "It's not even something that comes to mind when I'm performing or doing anything on the field anymore, so that's really good for me."

Ray had progressed during OTAs and minicamp with limited participation, working his way up to 7-on-7 repetitions. When the offseason program wrapped up and players left town to work out on their own and get in rest before training camp, some stayed in Denver to work with the training staff or rehab.

Through the years: Broncos draft pick Shane Ray

Though he still does preventative exercises to ensure he doesn't have any setbacks, at this point Ray says he has shed restrictions on what he can do.

"I don't think I have any limits, actually. I do everything," Ray said. "I'm full go in everything in the weight room and I'm full go in everything on the field."

One of the things that Ray said he was doing to help get a better understanding of things despite limitations in practices during OTAs and minicamp was peppering DeMarcus Ware and Von Miller with questions. After all, it might be hard to think of two better people to learn from if you're a young outside linebacker.

For Ray, that duo is especially helpful because of their differing skill sets and he gave a bit more detail on what he's been able to glean from each of them.

"DeMarcus is very technically sound because he has that veteran experience. He sees things a little bit different," Ray said. "And Von is more so just a pure athlete: reaction, getting off the ball and being able to do things on the stop of a dime.

"So to be able to kind of combine both of those and to what I do and to be able to see from both of their perspectives on how they pass rush, it's been a lot of help because I can say something like 'Hey, DeMarcus, what were you thinking here?' and he'll be like, 'OK, this is what you should try,' and I'll try it. And then I'll ask Von, 'OK, what were you seeing here?' And so it's basically you're combining two different guys' kind of pass rush and using the things you learn from both of them, adding it to your game and of course it's just making me better because I have tools that I'm gaining from both of them."

And when training camp gets underway in about three weeks, Ray will finally be able to incorporate all that he's learned from Miller and Ware.

# Shane Ray setting goals to set tone for his season

By Ben Swanson  
DenverBroncos.com  
June 23, 2015

Shane Ray garnered some headlines on Monday when he told NFL.com that his goal is to be Defensive Rookie of the Year, but making goals is just part of how he's always set himself on a course before the season.

"[It's] just like it was for me in college," Ray told Broncos TV on Tuesday. "I said I wanted to be SEC Defensive Player of the Year and I had other goals that I set and I wrote it down and I made a followable goal. My goal for me was one sack a game and I followed that goal and actually did better than that and that's what helped me get to my goal."

For some (who maybe a tad cynical), the 'day-by-day' mantra is a mere cliché but setting bigger goals and compartmentalizing them into smaller goals is a key way to accomplishing them.

"Setting that Defensive Rookie of the Year [goal], it's just taking everything day by day, being the best that I can be, doing everything that I can," he said, "and if I play how I'm supposed to play and work how I'm supposed to work, everything will fall into place."

"I've always set goals for myself and this is just another one I'm setting for myself to continue to push myself and continue to compete against everybody," Ray added.

Ray is currently in Ohio for the NFL's Rookie Symposium but after a short return home to Kansas City for a week, Ray will return to Denver to resume his physical preparation for training camp. Though he hasn't been through an NFL training camp before, he feels like he understands what will be expected of him.

"You've got to be able to tough through some days; some days will be hard," he said. "It might be hot. You're going to have to learn your plays and know what you're doing but as long as you focus on the day-by-day, make sure you've got everything down, you'll be all right and that's how I feel like I'll be."

As Ray continues to rehab from his foot injury to get back for training camp, his return and preparation with the rest of the Broncos' outside linebackers could make for a trying challenge for opponents.

"You've got Von and DeMarcus and now you add me to the mix," Ray said with a chuckle. "I mean, I don't know really who you're going to want to block because if any of us hit your quarterback, it's going to be a bad day."

# Shane Ray mentally sharp at OTAs despite injuries

By Nicki Jhabvala

DenverPost.com

June 15, 2015

Even during rehab, Shane Ray found a way to get his reps.

There he'd be on the sideline of the Broncos' practice field, donning a white bucket hat and standing alongside a coach who would pepper him with questions as the defensive line ran through drills.

"What's the formation of the offense?" the coach would ask. "What's your responsibility on this? What didn't he do right? What did he do right? Where are you supposed to be?"

Ray occasionally would point, gesturing as he explained his reasoning, then turn to the coach for a nod of approval.

The Broncos' first-round draft pick hasn't been a factor on the field for much of the offseason program as he has recovered from a turf toe injury and a recently strained right quad.

Monday, in the final week of organized team activities, Ray was integrated into drills, getting his first substantial on-field practice since the Broncos selected him with the No. 23 pick in April.

But he's already exceeded expectations in the classroom, getting mental reps at and away from the Broncos' facility to try to master defensive coordinator Wade Phillips' 3-4 defense and become accustomed to the speed of the pro game.

"I'll be honest, the transition to the NFL and learning playbooks and everything that you're supposed to do based off the formations and stuff, that's difficult," Ray said. "I make sure I get enough repetitions so I know what I'm supposed to do."

So he arrives at every meeting with a notebook and pen in hand, ready to take notes on offensive formations.

He puts in hours away from practice, studying coverages and field placement.

And he turns to Pro Bowl linebackers Von Miller and DeMarcus Ware for tips on how they line up, and how they make their way to the quarterback.

"He's so sharp on the board and in watching film," Phillips said. "For a rookie, that's exceptional that he's learned a lot of things as quickly as he's learned them."

But the learning really started long before he was drafted. His teacher then was Miller.

The two met through Marcus Murphy, Ray's former Missouri teammate and Miller's former high school teammate. The three spent time in Miami, where Miller and Murphy worked out with the same trainer.

"I was telling him about the locker room and how to respond to the vets and all that stuff, and how we do stuff here at the Broncos, not knowing that he was going to come here," Miller said. "So he had a great vision of how things are supposed to go here and how he can be successful in the league."

Ray is a first-year player on paper, but not to Miller and Ware.

"In their eyes, I'm somebody who's supposed to come in and have an instant impact," Ray said. "That's what they expect of me, and that's how they treat me in the film room and how they treat me at practice. That just says a lot about how they respect me as a player. That's why I take so much pride in it."

Ray is now putting his mental reps and months of learning the Broncos' system to use. Although he played primarily on the right side at Missouri, he's playing both sides in Denver. He'll back up Ware and Miller, and he'll join them in three-pass rusher sets Ware dubbed the "Fearsome Threesome."

With his toe healed, Ray has set his sights on the season. He wants to be defensive rookie of the year. He wants to live up to the high expectations the Broncos set for him.

He wants to get better.

"Smart players get better," Phillips said. "That's always been the case. They learn how to do it a little bit better. He's a smart player and he will get better."

#### **Ray file**

A look at Broncos first-round draft pick Shane Ray:

**Height/Weight:** 6-foot-3, 245 pounds

**Position:** Linebacker

**College:** Missouri, 2012-14

**2014 Stats:** 65 tackles (47 solo), 14.5 sacks (most in Southeastern Conference), 22.5 tackles for loss (most in SEC), three forced fumbles

**2014 Awards:** SEC defensive player of the year, first-team All-America

# After slow start, Shane Ray ready to join team drills

By Mike Klis  
9 News Sports  
June 11, 2015

Some NFL teams wish they had one dominant pass rusher.

The scary defenses have two.

The Denver Broncos' plan this year is to have not one, not two, but three outside linebackers who can get after the quarterback. The top two are well-established: Von Miller and DeMarcus Ware.

The key to having a terrific trio, though, is Shane Ray.

"Von and DeMarcus are two of my idols," Ray said Thursday following an hour of treatment on his slightly pulled right quad and fast improving big right toe. "People that I see things in and see their success as Pro Bowlers -- that's where I want to be. To be able to go out and compete against them every day and learn from them as well, to have them take me under their wings means a lot to me."

For the most part, Ware lines up standing up on the right side. Miller has always liked passing rushing from the left. Ray was a right defensive end at Missouri, but he'll play both sides for the Broncos.

"He'll spell both," said Broncos Head Coach Gary Kubiak. "We'll have a rotation where if he goes in for Von he replaces (Von's position). If he goes in for DeMarcus, Von may flip over. We'll see how it pans out and whether he can handle both or not."

First things, first. Ray has to get on the field. The first-round rookie is off to a slow start. First, he had the right toe injury suffered in a Jan. 1 bowl game that set him back five months. Now he's got a pulled quad.

The good news is his toe is finally coming around thanks to the rehab and treatment work of Broncos' 40-season trainer Steve "Greek" Antonopoulos. And some custom-fitted orthotic shoes that takes stress off the toe as he cuts, plants and pushes off.

"I feel the best I've felt since the injury," Ray said. "I feel like I'm almost 100 percent."

Upon his return last week, Ray quickly pulled his quad. It was the type of injury where if he was an undrafted rookie desperate to make the team, he wouldn't miss a snap. But because he was the 23rd player selected in the draft and the Broncos invested a \$4.891 million signing bonus in the former Missouri star, the team held Ray out as a precaution.

"Just kind of pushing a little, just a little tweak, nothing serious at all," he said. "Coming back from my foot injury, they want to make sure there's nothing else that slows me down. It's nothing serious."

He should start participating in team drills for the first time next week, which is the final week of the Broncos' offseason. After next week's final OTA session, Monday through Thursday, the team will break until training camp in late-July.



Eventually, the idea is to have Ray spell both Ware and Miller. They combined for 24 sacks last season. Ware in particular will get fewer plays as a way to preserve his 33-year-old legs. Ware had 8.0 sacks through the Broncos first eight games last year, but only 2.0 in their final nine, including their playoff loss to Indianapolis.

But there will be times when Ware, Miller and Ray are on the field at the same time.

This is not a novel concept. Kubiak said when he was with the Baltimore Ravens last year, they had three outside rushers in Elvis Dumervil, Terrell Suggs and Courtney Upshaw.

"I was around it and Wade and I talked about it a little bit," Kubiak said, referring to Broncos' defensive coordinator Wade Phillips. "But I think the biggest thing is to get some snaps off of DeMarcus, somehow, some way."

The less-is-more philosophy works. Dumervil played roughly half the snaps last year, yet finished third in the league with 17 sacks.

Ware said the Phillips-coached Dallas Cowboys also employed Greg Ellis, Anthony Spencer and himself as a pass-rushing trio in 2007-08.

So when the Broncos made Ray their first-round choice instead of taking a player at a more pressing position of need, Ware said he didn't wonder whether the team was sending him a message that his days are numbered.

"No, when they drafted him in the first round I knew that this is a guy coming in here who can really wreak havoc," Ware said. "I thought about now instead of having two guys we have three guys and then you have Malik (Jackson) there, too. So my mentality was they're bringing in a third guy because we're going to be that type of pressure team that's going to bring that pressure and make those big plays in key situations with all three of us in the game."

# Shane Ray turns Broncos' pass-rushing duo into a trio

By Arnie Stapleton

Associated Press

June 11, 2015

When a state trooper found weed in his car just four days before the NFL draft, Shane Ray knew he hadn't helped himself.

Or had he?

His misdemeanor citation certainly wound up costing him financially after he fell from a projected top-10 pick all the way to No. 23, where the Denver Broncos traded up to grab the SEC player of the year.

Ray, however, has found himself in an ideal situation.

"If you're going to fall," said his mother, Sabrina Johnson, "who better to catch you than John Elway?"

And who better to learn from than Von Miller and DeMarcus Ware?

Instead of serving as a cornerstone for a rebuilding franchise, Ray's playing for a contender with a pair of top pass rushers he's long admired.

"It's very helpful to me, especially as a rookie, because I get to see from the eyes of two Pro Bowlers and how they view things, and now I can apply it to myself," said Ray, who has vowed to reward Elway for given him his second chance.

Ray had his most extensive action yet on Thursday when the Broncos wrapped up their three-day mandatory minicamp.

The Missouri alum was limited for most of the Broncos' offseason program because of a right toe injury he sustained in the Citrus Bowl. Then, last week, he tweaked his right thigh, which he called a minor setback.

The Broncos conclude their offseason training activities next week, and Ray is slated for even more extensive work: "I think next week will be a big week for him," defensive coordinator Wade Phillips said.

After being mostly limited to classroom work, Ray said he's eager to start playing alongside the likes of Miller and Ware.

Ray actually picked Miller's brain before they were teammates. They met through a mutual friend, running back Marcus Murphy who was drafted by the Saints.

"I was telling him about the locker room and how to respond to vets and how we do stuff here with the Broncos — not knowing that he was going to come here," said Miller, who asked Phillips right after the draft to draw up plays where he, Ware and Ray would be on the field together.

First things first: Ray has to get up to speed physically and the tutoring sessions from Miller are part of his continuing education.

"I've always looked up to Von," Ray said. "And when I finally was able to sit down and talk to him and kind of ask him some questions about pass rush, it was just like, wow, it was so cool. When I got drafted here, he texted me and told me, 'Congratulations,' and now I'm able to sit in a room and kind of learn from his point of view ... just like with DeMarcus."

Ray's on-field work has mostly been standing on the sideline next to an assistant coach who's peppering him with questions about every play he's watching, the offensive formation, the outside linebacker's responsibility, what he would have done.

"I'm seeing it even though I'm not doing it," Ray said.

That's starting to change now that his injured toe is getting better and he's able to display that explosive first step that became his calling card at Missouri.

"I feel the best I've felt since the injury. I feel like I'm almost to 100 percent. I'm able to break and run and stop," Ray said.

Ray was fitted with an orthotic in his right shoe that protects the toe, which he kept re-injuring while training for the combine and team workouts.

"I didn't have that support with an already messed up toe. I kept hurting myself. And I kept taking steps back," Ray said. "So, with the orthotic, it's allowed me to heal properly in all of my rehab and it also kind of prevents any other injury. So, I feel great. I'm running again, I'm changing direction like I used to. So, I'm excited. That's why I'm so excited for next week."

# Shane Ray won't get rookie treatment from Von Miller, DeMarcus Ware

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

June 3, 2015

There is no question Denver Broncos outside linebacker Shane Ray is a rookie.

He was the Broncos' first-round pick -- selected 23rd overall -- he has yet to play in an NFL game and, because of a toe injury he suffered in his final game at the University of Missouri, Ray has yet to even participate in his first full NFL practice.

Yet, when Von Miller and DeMarcus Ware interact with the Broncos' prized rookie now and for the remainder of Ray's first year, the two Pro Bowl rushers say they will refuse to acknowledge Ray's first-year status.

"I told him the rookie stuff is out the window, I'm not going to treat you like a rookie," Miller said. "DeMarcus? He's not going to treat you like a rookie. Everybody else is different, but me and DeMarcus, we're going to treat him like we've been playing with him for a couple years now. He's going to do a lot of great stuff for us."

Ray, who suffered what he has called a "variation of turf toe" in the Tigers' bowl game, took part in his first practice since the draft on Monday. He did individual drills with the linebackers, though the Broncos held him out of team drills.

The plan, coach Gary Kubiak said earlier this week, is to have Ray take part on a limited basis in this week's OTA practices and perhaps, if all goes well, pick up the pace and participate in some of the team drills in next week's minicamp. Both Kubiak and Ray have said they believe Ray will certainly be at full speed by training camp.

Miller, however, said the Broncos have already seen enough to know Ray's potential. Ware said he knew of Ray's elite first-step quickness in the pass rush and that even with the injury, Ray has shown some of that explosiveness.

"You could see it, even though he wasn't doing everything," Ware said. "... You could see that part of his game."

Miller said Tuesday that he had spent some time with Ray in Miami, before the draft, as both players were using separate trainers to get ready for the season.

But at the time, Miller added he believed Ray was too highly rated of a prospect to be available for the Broncos at the bottom of the first round. The Broncos entered the draft with the 28th pick, but traded up five spots when Ray suffered a draft-day slide because of a citation for marijuana possession just before the draft.

"I never thought he was going to come here," Miller said. "... Shane's going to come in and he's going to help us right away. ... When I was talking to him about the locker room, how to respond to the vets and all that stuff, what the vets do, how we do stuff here at the Broncos, not knowing he was going to come here ... he's got a great vision of how things are supposed to go here."

Broncos defensive coordinator Wade Phillips said he's already devising ways to use Miller, Ware and Ray on the field at the same time.

"[I'm] looking forward to playing and being successful. ... I'm feeling great about this year like any other year," Miller said. "You can see it in practice with all of the interceptions and tipped balls that we get."

"We want to get that tornado going," Ware said. "Where the offense doesn't know where we're coming from, where they have to make choices about where they are sliding the protection and they have a hard time getting everybody."

# Shane Ray's rise to stardom started at rock bottom

By Nicki Jhabvala

DenverPost.com

May 2, 2015

Craig Kuligowski, the defensive line coach at Missouri, hesitates, wracking his brain for pivotal moments in his four seasons with Shane Ray. There have been many for the Broncos' first-round draft pick, who has overcome years of feeling abandoned by his father, a string of deaths in his family and growing up in an 8-mile swath of Kansas City known as "The Murder Factory." But there's one that stands out to Kuligowski.

"Oh, here's a good moment," he begins.

It was the Tigers' fourth game last fall. Missouri was hosting Indiana, a team that lost to Bowling Green the week before.

The Tigers were heavy favorites, but they didn't have their star defensive end, Markus Golden, a senior and the team's vocal leader. Golden injured his hamstring in practice the week before.

"Once he went, it was very quiet," Kuligowski said. "Shane was the first guy to step up and fill that void. At that point, he became as good a leader as Markus was. They made sure things were done right and that everybody played with the right excitement level."

Indiana upset Missouri that day, but the Tigers rallied to play in the Southeastern Conference championship game and Ray, the kid who arrived in Columbia as an angry, selfish player, had morphed into one of the best leaders and most coachable players Kuligowski has seen.

Thursday the Broncos provided Ray, a 6-foot-3, 245-pound All-America defensive end, another pivotal moment when they traded up five slots to select him at No. 23.

They gave up a lot to take a flyer on a kid who tumbled on NFL draft boards because of a citation for marijuana possession three days prior. They took a chance, believing he wasn't a troublemaker.

"All the teams that passed on me that were in the top 10, I feel like they made a huge mistake," said Ray, 21. "And as a Denver Bronco, I plan to show them about the mistake they made."

The first, perhaps most significant, pivotal moment in his life came when Ray was too young to understand.

## Growing up without a dad

His father, Wendell Ray — a standout defensive lineman at Missouri who was drafted by the Minnesota Vikings in 1981 — walked out on him and his mother, Sebrina Johnson, when Shane was 1 year old. Johnson said Wendell was never around for Shane when he needed him. Wendell, who spent a brief stint in county jail for failing to pay child support, has said that he tried to be involved in Shane's life as he was growing up but that Johnson didn't want him around Shane.

Johnson remarried when Shane was 6, but that marriage crumbled about four years later. Shane had, again, lost a father figure, and he and Johnson were on their own in a world of mayhem. The kid had seen more than most see in a lifetime. Drug deals. Drive-bys. Dead bodies.

As Johnson struggled to make ends meet, her son struggled to cope with the feeling of not having a father. Then things got worse. His older cousin, Justen Johnson, was shot and killed in 2007. His aunt, an ardent supporter of Ray, died of colon cancer six months later. A year later, Ray's great uncle died of a stroke.

On the outside, Ray started to rebel. On the inside, he was shutting down.

"At one point I thought I couldn't reach him," Johnson said. "I just told him, 'I don't care how much you push me away, I'm still going to be there. I'm not going to give up on you.' "

Over the years, Johnson made a conscious effort to line up male mentors in Ray's life, hoping they could "teach him how to be a man."

One of those mentors was a local dentist and youth football coach, Tom Shortell, who gave Ray a spot on the 39th Street Giants when he was in the eighth grade and treated him like family. Shortell's four boys became brothers to Ray.

Another was Tim Grunhard, a former Kansas City Chiefs center who became the football coach at Bishop Miege High School in Shawnee Mission, Kan. He pushed Ray, physically and mentally, and helped him develop into an elite prospect. But tuition at Bishop Miege cost nearly \$10,000 a year and even with financial aid, Johnson struggled to pay for it. She worked multiple jobs to keep her son in school.

"My mom sacrificed everything for me at every point in time in my life, just to make sure I was successful," Ray said.

Gradually, Johnson saw her angry child begin to mature. Acting out was replaced by a strong work ethic and desire to go far with football. And the once chubby kid turned into a stout athlete who garnered the attention of top college programs, including the school where his father made his name.

At the start of his college career, however, Ray's focus was on trying to prove he was better than his father — as a player and a person. He redshirted his first season at Missouri, then played in 12 games in 2012.

Before spring practice in 2013, his roommates, who understood what Ray had been going through with his family, sat him down and told him he had to change. He had to be a better teammate and friend, they said. He had to let go of the anger over his dad.

Ray took down all of the articles about his father that were hanging on the wall of his room. He then met with Kuligowski and the Tigers' defensive staff.

"He said, 'You know, I can see that I have been a selfish player. I don't want to be a selfish player. I want to be a team player,' " Kuligowski recalled. "That was probably the first moment of change there."

Ray quit trying to be better than his father.

"When he let that go and started playing for himself and becoming a team player," Johnson said, "he just exploded and he was just able to do the things he did."

Some of those things: 39 tackles, 4½ sacks and one fumble recovery in 14 games as a sophomore. In his junior and final season at Missouri: a season school record of 14½ sacks, 22½ tackles for a loss, 65 total tackles and SEC defensive player of the year honors.

Ray had become one of the nation's top pass rushers.

And with those things came forgiveness. Shane let his dad back in his life, and they are slowly mending their relationship.

"It's going to take time for them to develop that relationship, but it's definitely on the up and I encourage it," Johnson said. "At the end of the day, he's still your dad. You still have to love him. And Shane's working on that right now."

"An issue of this magnitude"

For months, Ray expected to be drafted in the first round. But three days before the fulfillment of his dream, he had to tell his mother it might not happen.

At 6:07 a.m. last Monday, Ray was pulled over near Columbia, Mo., for speeding and was charged with possession of 35 grams or less of marijuana. He said he wasn't under the influence when police stopped him, but the citation ensured he would be placed in Phase 1 of the NFL's drug program and be subject to random testing.

His future became cloudy again.

"I was devastated," Johnson said. "... We've been very close, and he's never gotten in trouble before. To one day have an issue of this magnitude, it was devastating."

Johnson told her son he had to be a man about the situation. He had to own up to it. He had to face the questions in Chicago at the draft. "You worked for this all your life," she told him. "You deserve to be here."

Ray did as his mother instructed. He answered questions. He owned up to his mistake. He pledged that this would never happen again. He assured Broncos general manager John Elway and coach Gary Kubiak it was a one-time mistake.

Around 8:30 p.m. Thursday — sitting with his mother, brother, grandmother, girlfriend and agent in the green room of Chicago's Auditorium Theatre of Roosevelt University — Ray got the call. He had been picked by the Broncos. Elway and his staff wanted to believe he was a good kid, one whose maturity and devotion to football had been masked by a mistake, and one whose talent was greater than the No. 23 slot in the draft.

"My mom was in tears," Ray said. "Tears of joy."



# With draft pick Shane Ray, mom knows best

Paul Klee

Colorado Springs Gazette

May 2, 2015

Mom deserves the best. A single mom raising a rebellious, sometimes angry boy into a man? If there's something better than the best, she deserves that.

Shane Ray's mom is sweeter than Tupelo honey, the kind of lady who uses "heck" instead of the other word, "gosh" instead of the alternative. I don't know Sebrina Johnson's entire story, just what I learned in a conversation at Dove Valley.

But if mom is the central figure in her son's life, and her son was a controversial first-round pick of the Broncos, mom deserves a voice in the story. Here is hers.

"It was devastating," Johnson told me of the incident.

She didn't deserve a phone call at 6 in the morning last Monday, or the news her son had been issued a citation for marijuana possession while driving in Missouri.

"He's never gotten in trouble before. No history of any issues. All he wanted to do was play sports. Never any issues," Johnson said while watching her son conduct another series of media interviews at Broncos headquarters. "Then to one day have an issue of this magnitude? It was devastating. It was like, 'How could you put yourself in this position to be here?'"

Good question. The football world wondered, too, why a gifted prospect projected to go in the Top 10 would risk millions and his NFL future by riding dirty.

This is the point in the NFL offseason when teams introduce their rookies and, if there were issues in college, the easy route is to suggest the player is a changed man with something to prove. OK, then. Prove it. Stay clean.

But the smart move for the rest of us is to wait and see. You never know until you definitely know.

It looks like the Broncos made a high-risk, high-reward decision in trading up to draft Ray with the No. 23 pick of the first round. But when a 20-year-old has the ability to be NFL defensive rookie of the year, it's totally worth the risk.

Ray is that kind of talent.

Even so, only a Broncos fanatic squinting through orange-colored glasses would believe Ray's run-in with an illegal substance - three days before the draft - was the first time he's crossed paths with a drug banned by the NFL. Let's be real here.

His mom told her son, in so many words, to grow up. Instead of staying home and hiding from questions like No. 1 overall pick Jameis Winston did, Ray was forced by his mom to attend the draft, to answer the inquiries that targeted his character.

"I told him: 'You're going to be a man. You're going to own up to your mistake. And you're going to face it. We're going to the draft. You're going to answer the questions,'" she said.

She added: "That's what's most important. It's not the money or him sliding down (in the draft). At the end of the day, is he going to be a good man? Is he going to have the fortitude to get past hurdles and deal with them responsibly? As a mother, that's what is important to me. And I think he did that."

Ray gives the Broncos flexibility. He can spell DeMarcus Ware, who looked all of his 32 years over the final seven games of 2014. And in an ironic twist, if Von Miller flubs another drug test and endures a suspension, a player who fell to Denver thanks to a drug incident could be Miller's replacement.

There are mixed stories on why Ray's father, Wendell Ray, who also played football at Missouri, was absent for most of Shane's life.

"The toughest was being a single parent, when a young man starts to try to figure out how to be a man. Well, I can't teach him how to be a man," Johnson said. "But I can teach him what I think a man is, and how he's supposed to treat people."

Growing up without a father, his mom said: "At first it had an impact on his life that I thought was kind of negative. It drove his anger. He played with anger."

A history of anger added to a marijuana incident - in an NFL that treats the drug as if it were Adam's sinful apple - is a shaky combination. Why should the Broncos believe Ray won't test the rules again?

"I know it scared the heck out of him," his mom said, noting the police report from last Monday showed Ray was not under the influence when he was stopped. "This could have been taken away. His entrance into the NFL could have been gone."

Sebrina's son was a "chubby kid," she said, who had to wear husky pants. She was simply hoping he would earn a scholarship to attend Benedictine College in Kansas.

"This was not in our plan," she said of the NFL. "My plan was to make sure my son was a good person and a good man and had the right tools to be successful."

Ray got a weed ticket. He didn't rob a bank.

"My mom just started crying. When something like that happens, you understand it was such a disappointment," Ray said.

Now he must prove the incident was a red blip, not a red flag. Mom deserves that.