

# Vernon Davis reunited with Broncos strength coach who helped him set combine record

By Nicki Jhabvala  
Denver Post  
November 4, 2015

The memorable blur of Vernon Davis took shape in a warehouse in Tempe, Ariz., in January 2006.

The University of Maryland tight end was one of many at his position that year hoping to gain notice from NFL scouts at the combine. With the help of Luke Richesson, then a trainer at Athletes Performance Institute (now EXOS), Davis packed on pounds of muscle. He developed his core and he improved his stability. He put in hours of work to add inches to his vertical leap and shed time off his 40-yard dash.

The next month at Lucas Oil Stadium, where cameras and scouts homed in on the 6-foot-3, 254-pound kid with braids, Davis clocked 4.38 seconds, still the fastest time by a tight end at the combine.

Davis, a two-time Pro Bowler who was acquired by the Broncos in a trade with San Francisco on Monday, has in recent seasons shown signs of a player with more than nine years of pro football wear and tear on his body. But the speed hasn't dissipated, and it's one of the many reasons Broncos general manager John Elway brought Davis to Denver, where he is reunited with Richesson and where he is expected to bolster an offense in transition.

"He's always been a guy that's — maybe two or three years ago he had 13 touchdown (catches) and is a guy that can really stretch the field, has tremendous speed and athletic ability," Elway said. "He's one of those guys at tight end that really catches your eye all the time."

Elway got a closer look at Davis when the Broncos hosted the 49ers in two joint practices before a preseason game this year. He saw what scouts saw in 2006, confirming that the 31-year-old could help fill a void on Denver's roster.

Through the first seven games of the season, the Broncos boasted an impressive defense and a shaky offense, with production from their tight ends seemingly nonexistent. After losing tight ends Julius Thomas and Jacob Tamme in free agency in March, the Broncos signed Owen Daniels and re-signed Virgil Green. They drafted the young but athletic Jeff Heurman in the third round, but the hope of using his speed and athleticism was quickly dashed by a season-ending knee injury during minicamp.

The team with no Plan B had to find one.

The addition of Daniels and the blocking of Green wasn't enough — especially through the first six games of the season when the two combined for only 123 receiving yards and three touchdowns. And especially in Gary Kubiak's offense, which relies heavily on tight ends and often features two- and three-tight-end packages.

"We were surviving with Owen and Virgil," Kubiak said. Then Owen gets hurt in Cleveland, so we had a little problem on our hands. If anything, (signing Davis) settles us down."

For the past two seasons, after his second 13-touchdown year in 2013, Davis's performance tailed off with the 49ers, a symptom, he says, of poor play from the team as a whole. It's been 19 games since he caught a touchdown pass. In six games this season, he's caught 18 of 30 passes targeted for him for 194 yards (10.8 avg.).

But the speed, the vision of that 4.38 time flashing across the time clock at Lucas Oil Stadium in 2006, hasn't been forgotten. On Sunday, when the Broncos face the Colts at Indianapolis, Davis will return to the place where it all began, with Richesson on the sideline.

"I did some great things with him," Davis said. "He helped me to prepare myself for the combine and I went out there and gave it my all. It's good to see him again and be back with him again. I know that he's going to help me continue to grow.

"It feels like I'm a rookie all over again."

#### Davis facts

An inside look at the two-time Pro Bowl tight end Vernon Davis, who was traded from San Francisco to Denver on Monday:

- His 4.38 40-yard dash at the 2006 NFL combine still is tops among tight end prospects.
- Had 13 receiving touchdown catches in both 2009, 2013
- One of his brothers is Colts cornerback Vontae Davis.
- Davis majored in studio art at the University of Maryland.
- He started the Vernon Davis Foundation for the Arts to promote art education among disadvantaged youth.
- He's passionate about acting, which he has said he hopes to pursue after football.
- Davis has been the honorary captain for the U.S. curling teams in two Winter Olympics.
- He's been dreaming of playing with Peyton Manning since he left college.

# Richesson Strength Coach of the Year

Gray Caldwell  
DenverBroncos.com  
February 20, 2014

**ENGLEWOOD, Colo.** -- Luke Richesson, the Broncos' strength and conditioning coach, has been named the NFL's 2013 Strength and Conditioning Coach of the Year.

The honor was given by Samson Equipment -- the nation's top supplier of weight training equipment -- and American Football Monthly -- the leading educational resource for coaches.

The 2013 season was Richesson's fifth in the NFL and second with the Broncos. He came to Denver after three seasons with the Jacksonville Jaguars under current Broncos Defensive Coordinator Jack Del Rio.

Prior to his time in Jacksonville, he was the performance team director at Athletes' Performance in Tempe, Ariz., from 2001 to 2008, implementing programs to help elite college football prospects prepare for the NFL Scouting Combine as well as assisting NFL veterans in their training during the offseason.

In those eight years with Athletes' Performance, Richesson trained 52 first-round picks -- including four No. 1 overall selections -- and more than 250 draftees overall.

The University of Kansas graduate is responsible for the Broncos' year-round strength and conditioning program.

Richesson is one of eight strength and conditioning coaches honored by Samson Equipment and American Football Monthly.

In addition, the awards include three college strength and conditioning coach of the year winners and four high school regional coaches of the year.

"This is the 11th year that we've recognized the nation's best strength and conditioning coaches at the professional, college, and high school level," said Scott Schroeder, Samson's Director of Sales and Marketing. "Strength and conditioning programs have become a top priority at all levels across the country. The March issue of AFM profiles all eight winners."

# Richesson Hosts Broncos Boot Camp

Broncos Strength and Conditioning Coach Luke Richesson hosted Broncos Boot Camp, a strength and fitness program for women, on Tuesday evening at the Broncos' training facility and weight room.

Mike Morris  
DenverBroncos.com  
Jul 16, 2013

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. -- It's no secret that the Denver Broncos training facility and weight room is where players like Von Miller and Demaryius Thomas toil and train their bodies for the rigors of an NFL season.

But over the past five weeks, the facility has also hosted a slightly different audience of fitness gurus – dozens of women who have trained with Strength and Conditioning Coach Luke Richesson as part of the Broncos Boot Camp program.

"It's been great having the gals here," Richesson said on Tuesday evening, noting that 50-75 women have come to each session. "We don't get to have the majority of the team for a month, so to be able to have all the gals come in here, it's been good for us."

The women, all of whom are Crush Fan Club for Women members, are led by Richesson in exercises that focus on fundamental stretching and core strength techniques.

"I think a lot of people wonder what goes on behind the scenes, with this unique equipment," Richesson said. "I think the message for our staff to give to the gals was that you don't need fancy equipment. With your body weight and the right mindset, you can really get after it and change your body. I think they've grasped that concept."

Richesson noted that the sessions have lasted between an hour and 90 minutes long and that there has been a 60 percent return rate of participants each week.

And while there's no mistaking that the ladies participating are diehard Broncos fans, Richesson said that his campers have come to each session with a strong focus on training.

"I think a lot of things have changed over the past 15 years with regards to training and they've just come in here with open minds and have just embraced it,"

Richesson said. "If you can get them to understand the proper technique from A-Z, it sets them up for success."

# Q&A With Strength and Conditioning Coach Luke Richesson

Strength and Conditioning Coach Luke Richesson talks about getting the team ready for the 2013 campaign.

Stuart Zaas  
DenverBroncos.com  
Jul 9, 2013

Editor's note: DenverBroncos.com sat down with the assistant coaches to talk about their position groups before the coaches left Dove Valley for vacations in mid-June.

Last year was your strength and condition program's first year. Is more efficient this year now that you don't have to install your system from scratch?

"For sure. I think the big thing is that guys understand the methodology. They understand the mindset, they understand the expectations. Although we add to the blueprint, the foundation is still the same. Absolutely, it was a good, clean transition into year two."

Were you happy with how the first year went?

"Overall, yes. If you look at just the realm of strength and conditioning, I thought it went well. Obviously, there are areas of improvement that we'll be looking to target. I think understanding the expectations of how to train in-season – I think that's a big area that I think most teams are looking to improve. I think our guys did an excellent job of working all the way up until the end."

How was it working with Peyton Manning last year as he was coming back from an injury?

"I think the big thing for Peyton last year was that we were all getting to know each other and understanding, with his injury to his neck, what he was physically incapable of doing. If you look at last year to this year, it's really not even the same guy. If you had to put a term to our level of training, he was at a lot of foundation-type work, almost physical therapy-type rehab exercise. Whereas this year, there's no limitations. He's full-blown training, and it shows in his strength. His strength is significantly up from last year."

Ronnie Hillman's weight is significantly up from the end of last season. How did you and your staff help with that?

"Well, that was a goal throughout the year, and I think a big part of it was understanding nutrition. Again, he was a younger guy who had never played professional football. He was the youngest player in the NFL last year – and still is one of the youngest. At the end of the year, he was high 170s. He showed up in

April at 184. He just clocked out at the end of minicamp at 195 pounds. The exciting thing is that you can tell there's been a mentality switch of what it takes to be a pro. I don't think the weight issue will be an issue moving forward. He grasps it, he understands that you have to eat breakfast, lunch and dinner every day. You can't miss meals. It's a full-time job and he's done a very nice job of addressing that so far."

Von Miller is another guy who has said he wants to play a little bit heavier than he has in the past and he will come back before camp a little bit earlier to work out with you guys. What's your approach with him?

"Last year, during the downtime that he had for five weeks, he wanted to get away and do some things like yoga. I think he now understands that was not the way to prepare for an NFL season. I think the thing about Von is that he's still young himself and he's still raw in his development. By midseason or the latter part of the season, he got up around 250 and he found that he was more explosive and powerful. I think he likes that feeling, so getting his strength numbers up and addressing his lean mass – the amount that he carries – I think that's something he's keenly aware of. I'm excited that he's staying with us this summer so we can make that push for him."

What's the key for adding weight, but still maintaining speed and quickness, for guys like Von or Ronnie?

"It's a two-fold approach. One, the methodology. Some guys will go about putting size on and they'll do it with a bodybuilding program where they focus on arms and shoulders. For us, it's about where you're getting your wheelhouse, your power. For us, the front of your body is for show, the back of your body is for go. We put a lot of emphasis upon the hamstrings, the glutes, the lower back, the back, the triceps. They'll get the right training to make sure that they're going to address those needs. The second approach is nutrition. That means making sure that they understand what their body is going to respond well to, the timing of meals and how much they need to eat. It's not just focusing on the days they train, but also the weekends. What are they eating on the weekends? I think guys who have trouble maintaining weight, not eating enough on the weekends is a cause, so that'll be big for those two guys."

With the offense picking up the pace a little bit this year, a lot of players have talked about conditioning. Have you guys altered your program at all to help them get up to speed?

"With our altitude, with the tempo that we work at and the amount of volume that we do, a lot of it becomes managing fatigue. That means making sure we have in place regeneration protocols, the right soft-tissue, the right flexibility, and making sure that we're prescribing the right stability exercises. Also, power. Those would be the biggest things that we've addressed."

What kinds of programs do you put together for the guys over break between minicamp and training camp?

"Up to this point, we were strength and power based. We were really trying to get our guys as strong as we could and as powerful as possible. We had their conditioning at a level where they were healthy and could compete in OTAs, but the goal was not to have them ready to play four quarters of football. So now, we'll transition into more football conditioning. You'll see even better drops in body fat. We're making sure that they're ready to step into training camp and compete with everything they've got."

Do you create individual programs for this time or general guidelines?

"There are general guidelines. It's difficult because you don't know what guys are going to have access to. But within that, they do have individualized heart rate zones, individualized strength and power numbers for each exercise. For the most part, it's a general plan and it's something that can be easily repeated throughout different gyms."

How has having a full staff to work with the players helped with accomplishing results?

"With a staff of four people, I really hope that we're setting a trend in the NFL. Jason George, Anthony Lomando and Mike Eubanks have been with me for a while and really help us execute our program at the level we expect. We're able to provide quality training and make sure that everyone is doing the exercise correctly. Plus we're able to give more personalized and individualized attention to all the players. Without having Jason, Anthony and Mike, I don't think that the system would be the same."

# The impact of Luke Richesson

Doc Bear  
May 31, 2013

Most of us has been impressed with the level of innovation under John Elway, but the installation of Luke Richesson along with his equipment and staff may turn out to be one of the best of them all.

From Eric Decker on Wednesday:

We worked out at Duke in March or April and I definitely felt like he had more zip on the ball. I think he's come back stronger, he's come back with the program that we've got — it's unbelievable the amount of muscle mass and endurance that guys have and the cut-down of injuries that we had last year. I think that's a compliment to the strength and conditioning staff here and I think Peyton is one of those that took advantage of it and really got himself in good shape and is stronger and healthier this year.

Richesson counts two of his assistants, Mike Eubanks and Anthony Lombardo, as Corrective Exercise Specialists certified through the National Academy of Sports Medicine (NASM-CES). Lombardo also went on to earn a master's degree in rehabilitation sciences from California University of Pennsylvania in 2008.

The result, as Decker's points out, is that the whole team is now in better shape in terms of developing muscle mass and shortening recovery from injuries, as well as increasing endurance. The Broncos are at an even bigger advantage when running their new fast-paced offense for the ten (or more) games each year that are played at Mile High's altitude. The improvement that Decker sees in Manning was made possible in roughly equal parts by the skill and knowledge of the training staff and, of course, Manning's own exceptional work ethic.

A lot of the game of football consists of a series of one-on-one encounters in which the best trained player - in technique, strength, flexibility, and/or endurance - will win. A key example is the linebackers - including Danny Trevathan in the nickel package and Steven Johnson, who will compete for the starting MLB position - which are somewhat smaller and faster than the league average - maximizing their strength without sacrificing their speed makes them that much more effective.

The offensive line is now bigger than at any time in Broncos history, and players like Derek Wolfe, Malik Jackson, and even Robert Ayers have taken on both defensive end and tackle responsibilities - they're big and athletic enough to handle both. It's easy to see why such 'tweener players have to be at their own highest level of functional strength without sacrificing agility. The Broncos give them that opportunity.

Each time Manning completes a tough, long pass, or J.D. Walton or Zane Beadles

hold off a nose tackle who outweighs them by 20 lb or more, you're seeing the effects of Richesson's group in action. Being in that kind of shape will also let the team excel in the fourth quarters - those of individual games, and the all-important last quarter of the season. Richesson and his staff are one of the Broncos' secret weapons.

Innovation is becoming a way of life for the Broncos.

# Broncos strength coach Luke Richesson wants players to finish strong

By Jeff Legwold  
The Denver Post  
July 11, 2012

Even with all the cutting-edge equipment, scientific research and advances in technology that surround Luke Richesson in the Broncos' strength and conditioning center, there is still room for a little of the old-school approach.

There is still room for the idea that yes, eating breakfast matters. And lunch, dinner, two snacks and getting enough sleep.

"Some of what we do is based on the latest research, new ideas, but some of what we do isn't necessarily rooted in some grand scientific theory," said Richesson, in his first season as the Broncos' strength and conditioning coach. "It's 'Hey, did you eat breakfast today? Did you eat at regular intervals? Did you put the kind of food in you that will help you?'

"These guys are Ferraris. They are not work trucks. To be their best, they have to maintain themselves at all times. That's part of our message as we get our program going here to try to do our part to get this team where everybody wants it. And we know our challenges to do that."

Richesson said two of the biggest challenges are avoiding what has become a routine late-season swoon and finding ways to take advantage of playing at Denver's mile-high elevation. While playing at altitude has certainly helped the home team through the years — the Broncos have won 75 percent of their December home games in the franchise's history — Richesson believes there may be another side to the coin. He believes there is plenty of research, to go with his experiences as performance director at Athletes Performance Institute in Phoenix, a noted facility that has many current and future NFL players among its clients, that revealed living day-to-day at altitude has some impact as well.

"I think it's clear, the research is clear, it's more difficult to consistently maintain maximum performance, maximum output at altitude," Richesson said. "There's the build-up of (carbon dioxide) when you train that your body has to deal with, and we have less oxygen. So, to that end we have to make sure everything else in the program is in order. Even the simple things like meals, sleep, what we eat, take on a greater importance."

To that end Richesson has outfitted all of the Broncos players with heart monitors — they look like electronic harnesses — to wear during workouts. Richesson and his

staff can then track each player's heart rate, using a hand-held device, at any point during a workout. All of the information is also collated and stored on computer.

Richesson said the devices also enable his staff to measure a player's overall progress over time and to monitor his recovery times from each part of the workouts in real time.

"They know right away how you did two weeks ago and two minutes ago," Broncos defensive end Elvis Dumervil said. "Even one day to the next. They see what's going on with you while you're going through it."

"The numbers don't lie," Richesson said. "If you see significant changes with athletes of this caliber in one-minute recovery times, two-minute recovery times, you know something's up. In almost every case, when you ask after seeing the numbers dip, something has impacted their diet, sleep schedules or there is an injury issue. We want to know, to be able to compare and track heart-rate performance at every level."

Richesson said he also believes it is possible to overtrain, something you don't hear much about in an era in which the benefits of intense training are preached. Even with elite athletes, he said, there is a point of diminishing returns.

The Broncos have revamped their weight room in recent weeks, have incorporated additional activities into their workouts — some drills based on mixed martial arts — and removed some of the more traditional free weights to replace them with pneumatic machines, which use air pressure to create resistance.

The new machines also measure, and display, a player's output during workouts in real time. And all of that information can be stored for comparison over time too.

It's all part of an effort to reverse the fact the Broncos are 26-76 in December regular-season road games in their franchise's history — that's just a 25.5 percent winning percentage. In the last three seasons alone, the Broncos have gone 1-3, 1-6 and 0-4 overall down the stretch and not finished above 8-8 in any of those years even as they won the AFC West title in 2011.

"Our goal is to get our guys in position to finish the race," Richesson said. "We want to jump from the gate, and we want to have something left to finish the race."