

Broncos Q&A: Cornerback Marcus Rios has overcome more than most on path to NFL

By Nick Kosmider
Denver Post
December 22, 2017

Marcus Rios wasn't supposed to be on the field at Hard Rock Stadium in Miami earlier this month, making his NFL debut. He wasn't supposed to be soaking in the South Florida sun in a No. 38 Broncos jersey, living out a lifelong dream.

Just a few years ago, the undrafted rookie cornerback out of UCLA was left to wonder if he would even survive. During his sophomore season with the Bruins, Rios was diagnosed with a rare fungal infection that nearly took his life. He spent 28 days in the hospital and had three sinus surgeries as doctors strained to identify a culprit that had caused Rios to lose more than 50 pounds.

But Rios not only fought his way to survival. He walked out of the hospital in Los Angeles, returned to the field and carved a prominent role in the UCLA secondary that helped put him on the NFL radar. After signing with the Broncos as a college free agent, Rios impressed enough during training camp to earn a spot on the team's practice squad. The suspension of Aqib Talib offered Rios a chance to make his NFL debut Dec. 3, and he's been Denver's fourth cornerback in each of the last three games. Rios talked with the Denver Post this week about the journey he's taken to reach an NFL roster:

Q: What was the feeling when you made your debut in Miami?

A: It was something that has been expected of me since I came here. I came here to compete and work hard, and I came here to play. That's what coaches brought me here to do. I just came here and did what I was supposed to do. I had to wait a little bit, but my time was Miami, so I was prepared. I prepare every day like I am playing a game, so it really wasn't a shock to me. It was something more of being a team player and stepping up to do my job.

Q: When you got the word you'd be joining the active roster and playing in your first game, did you spend time reflecting on what you had been through to earn that shot?

A: Of course. Something like the life-changing event I had, I just thank God every day. I'm blessed that I am able to step back on the football field. I'm a hard worker and during times of adversity, I've learned to overcome bad situations.

Q: How much did surviving what you did change your outlook on life?

A: It definitely changed it. Being healthy one day and being sick the next — then having doctors tell you that you have a low chance of surviving, it's definitely a game-changer. I just look back and say that everything happens for a reason. It made me stronger, made me tougher. I realized that, shoot, any day can be your last. I've just got to take advantage of every day.

Q: Just how rare was the infection you had?

A: It was really rare. The doctors were telling me only a handful of people have ever had it in the world. I had doctors from all over the world come in and try to figure out what was going on with me. It was definitely really rare, but I'm just thankful to make it out.

Q: You had a strong start to training camp with an early interception, then had a groin injury that cost you some time. I'm guessing setbacks like that hardly give you pause these days?

A: That's what me and my family and my friends always joke around about. I've already been through pretty much the worst thing that could ever happen to me. Anything else, I'm able to overcome it.