

Even after successful season, Emmanuel Sanders striving for more

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
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The Broncos are moving forward.

That was Head Coach Gary Kubiak's message on Wednesday to the team, and it was his message again on Thursday to the media.

One of his Pro Bowl wide receivers, Emmanuel Sanders, has already taken it to heart.

Sanders racked up six touchdowns, 1135 yards and 14.9 yards per reception in 2015-16. By any measure – and especially when paired with Demaryius Thomas' totals – that output would be deemed successful. But Sanders said Thursday, after the first practice of 2016 training camp, that he doesn't feel like he gets the respect he deserves.

"I've still got a lot to prove," Sanders said. "A lot of people have been sleeping on me, and they're still sleeping on me. I still don't feel like I get the credit that's due. Even coming off a Super Bowl win, nobody is even talking about me. So I'm just going to keep going out there. Keep improving and keep showing the world, 'Hey, look at this No. 10 in Denver.'"

And so, Sanders is focused on moving toward an even better 2016.

That work began Thursday during practice and continued well after the day's first session had ended. Sanders was one of the final players off the field, as he stayed behind to catch more balls and get in some extra work.

Sanders can't prove himself if he's hurt, though, and he recognized Thursday that he has at times pushed himself too hard at training camp.

"It makes me want to pace myself," Sanders said. "I'm one of those guys that comes running out here fast and next thing you know I'm hurt during training camp, and I'm not back until the first game of the year. So I'm just really trying to pace myself. Sometimes I just overwork myself, and today, I just came in with a cool mindset of, 'Hey look, it's just one day at a time, knock out one bird at a time. Don't try to rush it. Just get yourself prepared for Carolina.'"

In addition to Sanders' goal of beating the Panthers, he also said he wants to get past the 1,000-yard mark in 2016.

"It was definitely a grind, but that's another goal," Sanders said. "Me and Demaryius are trying to be the best wide receiver group in the National Football League, and I think we've proven that the last two years."

Thomas said Wednesday he hopes to play alongside No. 10 for a number of years. The Broncos and Sanders' representation will continue to work until "both can say that's a fair deal." Executive Vice President of Football Operations and General Manager John Elway said at Wednesday's media barbecue that he hoped to get a deal done with the Pro Bowl wide receiver.

"I want to be here," said Sanders, reiterating a stance he's held all summer.

For now, he's more concerned with his on-field execution. Thomas and Sanders aren't quite sure who will emerge from the wide receiving corps as the third WR option, but Sanders said he "believes in these guys" and the talent spread among the group. As the Broncos begin training camp, however, most of Sanders' attention is focused on his own game.

"As far as me personally, I'm just coming in," Sanders said. "It's either one of two things, you're either getting better or you're getting worse.

"And I'm trying to get better. So I was out here busting my butt trying to improve."

For the Broncos' Emmanuel Sanders, focus on nutrition vital to staying on the field

By Nicki Jhabvala

Denver Post

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Emmanuel Sanders knows how to make it look easy. He can make the leaping catches seem routine and the quick footwork appear natural. But on the sideline, in the weight room, even in his backyard where he has a Jugs machine, his craft is honed and honed some more.

It's also honed in the kitchen, an aspect of his training regimen that became a focus when he was with the Pittsburgh Steelers and dealing with myriad injuries. Preventative measures are limited when you're a 5-foot-11, 180-pound wide receiver in the NFL. But improving his diet, he says, was one.

"Growing up, I was one of those kids that didn't even have to stretch before I went out and played a football game," Sanders said Friday during Gatorade's Beat the Heat program at Valor Christian High School. "But the older I get, I understand that taking care of your body is important for peak performance. And so that's what I'm trying to preach to these guys and giving them knowledge at a young age, so hopefully they can be in the National Football League and they can learn from my mistakes."

Sanders has little room for errors with Bryan Snyder, the Broncos' director of nutrition, keeping tabs on his weight. Snyder tailors meal plans to the players' size and production in coach Gary Kubiak's offense, among other things. During training camp, when the Broncos practice twice a day in the heat, Snyder weighs players before and after each practice to monitor their hydration. Some players, he says, shed a few pounds of water weight. Others drop as much as 12 pounds.

For Sanders, keeping weight on is a must.

"If he drops too much weight, he has a tendency to get injured, a little hamstring issue here or there, just based on how much weight he might be losing," Snyder said. "If he's not putting in enough calories, if he's not hydrating properly, he's going to get injured and that's one of the things that I do with him, that I have to stay on him constantly about is getting enough calories to keep his weight up."

During training camp, that's typically 6,000 to 6,500 calories a day for Sanders, spread among three meals and snacks. When the season begins and two-a-days are eliminated, it falls to about 4,000 to 4,500.

But while keeping on the pounds is vital to keeping Sanders on the field, he says he doesn't feel any added weight on his shoulders with talk off the field. Sanders has one year left on his contract, and his agent and the Broncos have begun negotiations on a new deal.

"I don't think it weighs on me," he said. "I think it weighs on other people and then they talk about and it's like, 'All right, you're trying to put the weight on me.' If I could just keep my ears closed and not listen to the noise, I wouldn't even know this is a contract year. ... For me, it's going to come. If it's meant for me, it's meant for me. But I'm going to keep playing ball because I love to do it."

Emmanuel Sanders reflects on his childhood struggles

By Brian Olson

9News

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Emmanuel Sanders' football career is at an all-time high. The Pro Bowl Denver Broncos receiver is coming off a World Championship, a new Super Bowl ring, a meeting with President Obama, and is on the verge of signing a contract extension.

It wasn't always this good for Sanders though. Growing up in Bellville, Texas, Sanders' childhood was far from glamorous. He talks about it in the video above.

He recalls hearing rats running through the ceiling and walls of his grandmother's double-wide trailer at night and being awakened by the loud snap of a sprung rat trap. He would then have to take the dead rats outside before returning to bed.

Getting enough food to eat was challenging as well. Mayonnaise and ketchup sandwiches or a can of corn was often the meal of the day.

"I wouldn't change that for the world because it made me who I am and made me appreciate everything I have right now," Sanders told 9NEWS.

Sanders was the first in his family to go to college and is now enjoying taking care of them.

"Those outcomes definitely made me strong," Sanders said.

Now it's time for Sanders to give back.

On July 11 and 12, he will be holding his football camp at Englewood High School. Four hundred kids have signed up for the camp which sold out in just a couple of days.

Twenty five percent of the attendees will not have to pay for the camp, something Sanders and his sponsors wanted to do for kids who maybe in the same situation Sanders was as a child.

"Ortho Colorado, Precious Child, and Give Sports have donated and sponsored over 100 kids coming to the camp," Sanders said.

Money isn't it between 'E' and 'AB'

By Rob Rossi

Pittsburgh Tribune-Review

January 14, 2016

A few days ago, E heard his phone buzz. AB had sent him a text.

Man, we (have) come a long way. It's crazy.

They have come a long way.

But it isn't crazy that Emmanuel Sanders and Antonio Brown have become two of the toughest to defend football players on the planet.

They practically arrived in the NFL that way.

Arrived together, too.

Couldn't get to where they wanted that way, though.

Can't get to where they both want to go back — the Super Bowl — without going through one another, either.

Six years later, there remains only that one bone for two members of the Steelers' former "Young Money Crew."

"Mike Tomlin came out with something called 'two dogs, one bone,' and it was pretty much saying, 'I've got two guys and one helmet,'" Sanders said Thursday.

A grin formed as he recalled that rookie season with the Steelers, those bond-building battles with Brown to earn a chance to play on Sundays in the fall of 2010.

Brown pushed Sanders. Sanders pushed Brown.

During the pushing, both presumed the senior member of their crew would push them out the door. No way the Steelers would let Mike Wallace walk.

There's always a way.

The Steelers are the Steelers because they let somebody like Wallace walk. The Broncos are the Broncos because they bring somebody like Sanders in.

But Brown is two seasons from unrestricted free agency. Sanders could hit the open market after next season.

So it's about to be that time again for these two from the "Young Money Crew."

But for now, it's all about Sunday, which is shaping up as their time to shine.

Unless you believe either Peyton Manning or Ben Roethlisberger have right arms healthy enough to throw way down the field on Sunday.

Don't count on it.

Do count on a lot of short passes, on runs after catches by Sanders and Brown.

And, yes, do count on Brown.

"I actually just talked to him the other day, just checking on him because of the concussion," Sanders said.

"If he's not in the game, I'll be highly surprised. If he is who I think he is — and he's built like me — he's going to give it his all to try and play in the game."

That sounded like a dig.

But then I remembered what truly brought Sanders and Brown together in the first place.

It wasn't the 2010 draft. It wasn't the Steelers. It wasn't Tomlin's "dogs and bone" analogy.

About a year ago, Sanders was told not to send text messages while recovering from a concussion. He knew the best way to deliver that message to Brown was to get it into print.

"I hope he's smart about it," Sanders said. "He's having a great career. I don't want him to risk it."

Never really was about the money with these two from "Young Money Crew."

Money can't buy what's between E and AB.

Under the lights: A day in the life of Emmanuel Sanders

By Ben Swanson

DenverBroncos.com

January 6, 2016

It's my lucky day, Emmanuel Sanders tells me. It's Wednesday, the busiest day of his week, and I've caught him in a cheery mood. You might guess it's hard to find him in anything but a positive disposition, but days like this can wear on him and turn him a bit introverted.

In the roughest parts of the season, when he's battling through injuries, Sanders' Wednesdays begin at 5:30 a.m., and really kick off an hour later when treatment at the UCHealth Training Center starts.

Sanders, with his small frame and penchant for acrobatic catches that leave him vulnerable in midair, still feels the lingering soreness from Sunday's games on Wednesday morning, and the next 90 minutes in the training room are vital to ensure he's fully healthy by Thursday, which is usually the case as he's missed just one game since joining the Broncos.

This is not a lax hour and a half, though.

"It goes anywhere from cold tub to hot tub. It's really like a strength and conditioning program," Sanders says. "You do a lot of weights, a lot of stability work, just trying to strengthen all the muscles around the injury that you have. So it's an hour-and-a-half workout, really."

Following treatment and a quick breakfast, Sanders and his teammates start their preparation for the upcoming game by installing the new game plan on the field and in the meeting rooms, which can sometimes last up to four hours.

"The reason why we meet for three or four hours on Wednesday is because it's a new game plan," Sanders says. "So you go in and talk about the run plays we're going to be running for that moment, then you talk about the pass plays we're going to go through, and we're breaking it down, play by play."

Prepared with a notebook, pens, pencils and highlighters, Sanders takes meticulous notes, just like he's back in a college classroom at Southern Methodist University, his alma mater. It's not a part of the game that many people are privy to, but it's the essential complement to the physical feats that draw gasps and elated cheers in the stadium.

"People don't understand that it's a lot that goes into being a National Football League player," Sanders surmises. "You've got to be smart, and you've got to be athletic, because it's a big playbook, and we go over it all every single Wednesday."

Then there's the on-field work, which is also lengthy because of the nature of implementing a new game plan and putting what they learned in the meeting room to practice.

Individually, one emphasis for the wide receivers is footwork. Wide Receivers Coach Tyke Tolbert often tells his group that technique will get them open more often than speed, and Sanders' tape attests to it.

You can just look to the last time he played Cincinnati in Week 16 of 2014 for examples of how Sanders finds space where others may find none. In the third quarter, Sanders created a big play with his acceleration and speed. When quarterback Peyton Manning released the ball, cornerback Terence

Newman matched Sanders step for step, but Sanders opened up and gained a couple feet on Newman, forcing him to hold Sanders' left arm. But Sanders only needed one arm, making a stunning catch in stride as he was taken to the ground. Three plays later, Manning targeted him on a screen and Sanders scored a touchdown

Later in the quarter, Sanders found the end zone for the second time, again in a short-yardage situation. Lined up outside to the right, he juked cornerback Dre Kirkpatrick into jumping for an out route at the goal line and instead cut inside behind safety Reggie Nelson for the score.

Sanders and the rest of the receivers do drills to keep their footwork sharp, but his skills have been honed over years of work and he puts particular attention on it during his offseason work.

"Footwork is extremely pivotal," Sanders says. "That's one of the reasons why when I'm back in Houston in the offseason, I work with a guy by the name of 'The Footwork King,' and I do all these footwork drills to make sure my foot speed is there, to make sure everything is there, because like Tyke says, technique gets you open."

Once practice ends, then it's off to the locker room to meet the media before heading back to the meeting room to break down more of the game plan.

That's where most players' days end, but not Sanders'. He puts on his suit and heads over to the Pat Bowlen Fieldhouse, where he tapes "Broncos Huddle" with 9News' Rod Mackey.

This is year two of the show, but he had experience on radio and television shows in Pittsburgh before coming to the Broncos.

He's polished and knowledgeable, and media seems like a natural fit for Sanders' personality.

"I wouldn't say that," he says with a smile. "I'm the quiet guy sitting in the corner. Nah, I'm just kidding. It's just one of those things where I guess people say I'm good at it, but I still don't notice how good I am, I guess. Even football, people say I'm a good football player, but I just try to work at it. Even when I get home, I go and review my shows and see what words I use and my body demeanor, because if I'm going to do it, I'm going to give it my all and do it."

That's right, football isn't the only tape he watches to improve himself. Sanders applies the same kind of dedication to whatever he puts his mind to, and when it comes to a potential post-playing career, he's eager to be the best he can be.

"When I was 15 years old, my uncle told me, 'What the first thing to look for every time you enter a building?' And I was like, 'What the heck is he talking about?'" Sanders said. "He said, 'Well, obviously, you've got to know where the exit sign is.' And someday I'm not going to be able to play this game of football, this game that I love, and you've always got to have a backup plan, and you've always got to have something after retirement."

The workday is long, ending around 6 p.m. more often than not, and sometimes when the grind feels tougher than usual, an exhausted Sanders turns inward and conserves his energy.

"I'm tired, but I know hopefully that all of this will pay off someday," Sanders says.

All his hard work has paid off so far. On the field, it's translated into a career-best season in 2014 with 1,404 receiving yards and nine touchdowns, resulting in his first Pro Bowl selection. This season, Sanders finished with 76 catches for 1,135 yards and 6 touchdowns in 15 games.

"This city has embraced me so much and I can't even thank everyone enough, starting from [Executive Vice President of Football Operations and General Manager John] Elway to everyone," Sanders says. "Everyone has embraced me so much and I'm so appreciative for it because it's everything that I've wanted. You work your butt off, you want all your hard work to pay off, and it's just good to see that [Nike] commercial and see my name pop up on the television. It's cool, coming from where I come from, the small town of Bellville, Texas. I know it's all a blessing within itself and it comes from a lot of hard work, so I've just got to continue what I've been doing."

Emmanuel Sanders shines in return to Pittsburgh

By Troy Renck

Denver Post

December 20, 2015

The locker room, a mix of anger, disappointment and puzzlement, began to empty slowly. The Broncos lost 34-27 to the Pittsburgh Steelers on Sunday, turning the chase for the AFC West title into a full-blown sprint to the finish.

Denver was an underdog, leaving the outcome hardly a shock. But the nature of the loss was staggering. The Broncos held a 27-13 lead at halftime. And wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders was enjoying the kind of day that made everything seem possible.

The Broncos stand a chance of not having an offensive player in the Pro Bowl for the first time since 2007.

Sanders provides a decent argument to make the team, and it was never louder or stronger than in the first half. Quarterback Brock Osweiler targeted him nine times. They connected on eight passes for 139 yards, including a 61-yard touchdown when Sanders was so open he waved for Osweiler to throw it to him.

Osweiler sought out the former Steeler after the game.

"I can only imagine how bad he's hurting right now. This is obviously where he started his career. He wanted to come in and get a win, as we all did," Osweiler said. "There are some things we need to get cleaned up. There are some things we need to get fixed, and we will get them fixed."

Held to 36 yards in his previous two games as he worked through an ankle injury, Sanders found his stride on his former home field. The Steelers tried a soft coverage in the first half, allowing Sanders to find space in the secondary. But the Steelers adjusted in the second half, blitzing more, taking away slants, playing tight coverage and limiting Osweiler to seven completions.

"I don't know. I don't have the answers to that," Sanders said. "All I know is that we have to continuously move on. We will get back in the lab starting Wednesday at practice. We have to figure out how to carry the first half into the second half."

Sanders was a solid performer for the Steelers but never the focus of their passing attack.

When he signed with Denver he called it was "wide receiver heaven." Sanders set career highs in receptions, yards and touchdowns last season. He also said quarterback Peyton Manning was a great leader. Sanders and Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger haven't talked since Sanders left as a free agent.

Returning to Pittsburgh brought back positive memories for Sanders beyond his final numbers: 10 catches, 181 yards.

"It felt good, obviously the city of Pittsburgh, the Rooneys, (Steelers coach) Mike Tomlin have been so good to me. They drafted me," Sanders said.

"I am forever thankful for that. It felt good to be back in front of Steelers Nation waving the towels. I just wish the final result would have been better."

Emmanuel Sanders' career night bittersweet

By Allie Raymond

DenverBroncos.com

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For 30 minutes, it seemed like everything was going Emmanuel Sanders' way.

He was back in his former city, playing against the team that selected him in the third round of the 2010 draft and he was having a night for the record books. In that half hour alone, Sanders had posted 163 yards from scrimmage (139 rec., 24 rush), the most by a Bronco through two quarters since at least 1991.

The Broncos were making the most of their red-zone chances, with quarterback Brock Osweiler converting on all seven of his third-down attempts and, despite a lost fumble in the opening drive, the Broncos looked like a new team.

But sometime between leaving the field at halftime and returning to it, Denver's spark wilted as both the defense and the offense struggled to fire on all cylinders throughout the second half. They watched their 17-point lead fade into their second-straight loss.

"That first half was fun," Sanders said. "We've got to figure out a way to carry that first half over to the second half. Like I said, we're a work in progress and we're going to continuously work."

Amid the loss and disappointment, Sanders remained a bright spot on an otherwise bleak night with a career-high 181 yards on 10 receptions (18.1 avg.), including a 61-yard touchdown. This was Sanders' 11th 100-yard receiving game in his career, which have all come from his time with the Broncos.

With 24 yards rushing on one attempt, Sanders tallied 205 yards from scrimmage, making him just the 25th Bronco in franchise history to top 200 yards and the first since wide receiver Demaryius Thomas racked up 226 receiving yards in 2014 against the Cardinals.

To add to the bittersweet night, Sanders' career game came in front of his former fans at Heinz Field in a town he called home for four seasons.

"It felt good," Sanders said of his return. "Obviously, the city of Pittsburgh, the Rooney's, [Steelers head coach] Mike Tomlin -- they've been so good to me. They drafted me in the third round [and] I'm forever thankful for that opportunity. It felt good to be back doing it in front of Steeler Nation waving the towels, but I wish the result would've ended a lot better."

While the Broncos may have faced another setback in the hunt for a playoff spot, Sanders firmly believes the team hasn't lost sight of its goals.

"We're a team. We're going to go through a lot. We're going to get tested. But one thing is, we still have all of our goals out there to attain. We can still make the playoffs. We can still win the Super Bowl. So, everything is still alright."

Emmanuel Sanders' production has soared since leaving Steelers for Broncos

By Cameron Wolfe
Denver Post
December 18, 2015

For many Broncos players, Pittsburgh is unfamiliar. Denver hasn't played in Pittsburgh since 2006. None of the current Broncos were on the team at that time.

But Heinz Field is somewhat of a second home to Broncos wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders, who has played 30 games there. Sanders returns there Sunday for the first time since leaving the Steelers via free agency after the 2013 season. He has many memories about his four years with the Steelers, but he is prepared to begin new ones as a visitor.

"It's unique. The whole stadium is yellow. You have people waving those 'terrible towels' everywhere. They love their team. They love their city," Sanders said.

A homecoming is always a special game. Players often downplay the significance of playing against the team that drafted them, but make no doubt, Sunday's game in Pittsburgh means a little bit more for Sanders. He said he has a number of close friends still with the Steelers and talks with them often. A wry smile emerged on his face at the mention of Steelers wide receiver Antonio Brown.

Pittsburgh drafted both in 2010 — Sanders going in the third round, Brown in the sixth.

"We are similar players," Sanders said. "Quick, explosive, good with the ball after the catch, playmakers, punt returners."

Yet both were slighted coming into the league by their lack of size and questions about whether their skills would transfer from a smaller college to the NFL. They have proven all of their critics wrong by vastly outplaying their draft status. (Sanders went to SMU, Brown attended Central Michigan.)

Sanders started slowly in Pittsburgh. In his first two seasons he had a total of 50 catches for 664 yards and four touchdowns. He played a secondary role to Brown and Mike Wallace.

"The offense was completely different," Sanders said. "We had Mike and A.B. I was the No. 3 (receiver) and they weren't slinging it around like they are now."

Moving on to Denver took Sanders' career to the next level.

In his first year with the Broncos, he nearly doubled his best year with the Steelers. Last season he caught 101 balls for 1,404 yards and nine touchdowns. For the first time in his career, he was a full-time starter for all 16 games. Sanders became half the main attraction, forming a dynamic duo with Demaryius Thomas.

Sanders calls Thomas "Batman" and happily welcomes his role of "Robin." He said he is thankful for Pittsburgh coach Mike Tomlin, the Rooneys and the Steelers' fans for supporting him early in his career, but he's exactly where he wants to be.

"I'm just so happy and proud of him and just to see the growth in him over the years," said Tomlin, who played a hand in drafting Sanders. "Not only to become the player that he has become — a Pro Bowl-caliber player — but just a top-notch guy, husband and father. I'm really happy for Emmanuel."

Mile-high boost

Emmanuel Sanders always had the talent to excel in the NFL, but it wasn't until the wide receiver came to Denver that he began to be fully utilized. A look:

SEASON	TEAM	GAMES	STARTS	CATCHES	YARDS	TDs
2010	PITT	13	1	28	376	2
2011	PITT	11	1	22	288	2
2012	PITT	16	7	44	626	1
2013	PITT	16	10	67	740	6
2014	DEN	16	16	101	1,404	9
2015*	DEN	12	12	57	788	4

**2015 statistics through 13 games*

Sanders talks Broncos' resurgence under Osweiler, playoffs and more

By Don Banks

SI.com

December 1, 2015

Brock the Bronco is all the rage in the Rockies. You can't climb into a cab (or Uber) in Denver without being immediately engaged in conversation about the Broncos' newest quarterbacking star, Brock Osweiler.

In Denver's dramatic 30–24 overtime upset of New England in the snow Sunday night at Sports Authority Field, the impressively poised Osweiler threw for 270 yards and led a five-play, 83-yard go-ahead touchdown drive in the final minutes, then capped his big night by calling the correct run audible on C.J. Anderson's game-winning 48-yard touchdown burst in overtime.

And sixth-year Broncos receiver Emmanuel Sanders not only had a front-row view of Osweiler's smashing home starting debut, but his fingerprints were all over the Broncos' win, with a team-high six receptions for 113 yards (18.8 average), including a crucial 39-yard reception on the go-ahead scoring drive late in regulation. No matter if it's Peyton Manning or Osweiler at quarterback, Sanders has been the Broncos' big-play target this season, leading the team in both receiving touchdowns (four) and yards-per-reception (14.5), while ranking second on the team in both catches (52) and yards (752).

The Broncos have won both of Osweiler's starts since Manning left the lineup due to a partially torn plantar fascia in his left heel, and at 9–2 are in position to vie with the Patriots (10–1) and Bengals (9–2) for one of the AFC's two first-round playoff byes. Hours after Denver ended New England's bid for a second perfect regular season in nine years, I spoke with the always entertaining Sanders at the Broncos' team complex, touching on all things Brock-mania, the team's transition from the Manning era, Denver's playoff chances going forward and his big night in the Broncos' signature win of the season:

Don Banks: Is it an overlooked part of the Brock Osweiler story that he benefited greatly from waiting and watching for so long behind Peyton Manning? That he didn't have to be rushed in there and play right away, but was deep into his fourth season before he was asked to lead this team?

Emmanuel Sanders: He definitely benefited from watching. It's that whole Aaron Rodgers-Brett Favre story. And obviously Brock's still got a long way to reach Aaron Rodgers's accolades, but still it's the same theme. Aaron Rodgers sat behind Brett Favre and waited and waited and waited, and sometimes being patient, you learn a lot.

You get acclimated with the NFL lifestyle. I think a lot of people don't understand that the NFL lifestyle is totally different from college. You're a college kid, and now you're getting a lot of money and you've got to learn how to balance off the field and on the field. So when you get opportunities to sit back and not have to play right away, you get to figure out how to have your life balanced.

Obviously him being behind Peyton has also helped—just learning how Peyton goes about his business and seeing a guy who handles himself in a first-class manner and knows what it takes to win ballgames. To have an opportunity to be groomed by him is big, and you've obviously seen the benefit on the field already.

DB: We love overnight sensations in the NFL, but this one has been four years in the making, hasn't it? Even though some think it's a two-week story. We're missing that part of it, aren't we?

ES: The thing is, what'd Brock play, two years at Arizona State? [Actually parts of three.] So nobody really knew about him, and we took him in the second round (57th overall in 2012). So [Denver GM/executive vice president John] Elway and those guys knew his potential. He's definitely prepared for this shot and it has shown out there on the field.

DB: What did Sunday night's comeback win over the then-undefeated Patriots tell you about this team that maybe you didn't know before?

ES: One thing about [Sunday] night was we came back to win, but we killed ourselves early in that ballgame. I think it just gives us confidence that hey, once we really get to clicking, we can be a dangerous. You look at that game against the Patriots and we didn't lead until late in the fourth quarter, because we just kept killing ourselves. I feel like if we put together a full game, I don't think there's anyone in the NFL that can stop us.

DB: You had an electrifying game Sunday night. The crowd really came alive when you had the ball in your hands. With the snow, the prime time setting, the undefeated Patriots as the opponent, was that the kind of stage you crave?

ES: I just pride myself on, as Deion (Sanders) used to always say, big-time players make big-time plays in big-time games. And that leads to big-time winning. And I pride myself on that. I live for that. I live for those moments.

DB: Did you catch Brock in the post-game on NBC, when he said I'm not 2-0, this team is 2-0 (when he starts)? That's a pretty veteran thought for a guy who just knocked off Tom Brady.

ES: He's prepared. He's so prepared. And one thing about it it is, it's not as if he's acting like someone he isn't. That's who Brock is. And that's why he gets all the respect in the locker room.

DB: How long did it take you to see that 'it' factor a quarterback needs?

ES: Last year was my first year here, but Brock has always been waiting on his opportunity and I think everybody started to take notice this preseason when when he got his opportunity. Peyton didn't play the majority of the preseason games, and Brock came on and was just balling in every single preseason game he played in. We knew that he was ready from that point on.

DB: You said Sunday night in the post-game that you think Denver has found its long-term guy at quarterback. But this is a very delicate time of transition for this team, going from a Hall of Fame-bound quarterback like Manning to the future and current starter in Osweiler. How do you think everyone involved has handled the situation so far?

ES: I think everybody has handled it well, because at the end of the day we've got one goal and one goal only, and it doesn't matter who gets the glory or who's in there (at quarterback). I think this organization, it's No. 1 goal is to hoist that Lombardi trophy. And as long as we keep our eyes on that, everybody keeps their ego at the door, I think it'll be good, and I think everybody has done that.

DB: Are there any subtle stylistic differences between Peyton and Brock in how they lead this team, or is it night and day in how they approach things? Is it a case of not wanting to disappoint Peyton or let him

down, because he's such a well-known perfectionist and a long-time veteran, while Brock is said to be more like everyone's good friend?

ES: That's the outside looking in perspective. But to me, Peyton is my brother. Both of them are my brothers, so I don't see any differences. Brock is a young quarterback, and Peyton has been in the National Football League a long time and he's seen a lot of football. From the outside looking in, people say Peyton Manning and their eyes get big. But in this locker room he's one of the guys. He talks with me, texts with me all the time, so I don't get that vibe (being intimidated). Just like Brock texts me.

DB: Denver's formula of running game, strong defense and quality quarterbacking has come together to produce two close wins the past two weeks. That has been the goal all along this season, but is it a case of now it's finally happening?

ES: That's a championship formula and a championship mentality. And we've got to keep it going. It feels good to call a run play and look back and see C.J. Anderson or Ronnie Hillman springing it for a 15 or 20-yard gain. When you run the football and you get a big-time gain, it's like a confidence booster on offense. It feels good. (Sunday) night, even in the first quarter, we were running the football well.

DB: You've still got some very tough games, at Pittsburgh in Week 15, then home against Cincinnati in Week 16. But Sunday night's win put Denver back in the race for a first-round bye and playing at home in the divisional round. How important is that playoff positioning for this team?

ES: It's extremely important. That's what we're chasing right now. Obviously you're chasing a Lombardi, but we want the easiest road possible to get there. We don't want to make it hard on ourselves. We've got a tough schedule still to get through, but we've just got to focus on right now, and that's (at) San Diego this week.

DB: Tell me one thing about Brock that I couldn't possibly know.

ES: Brock, he's got a big personality. He's one of the good guys. He's not going to kill nothing, and he's not going to let anything die. He's one of the good guys.

DB: If the window is closing for Manning here in Denver at the end of this year, do you know yet whether he still wants to play somewhere else in 2016?

ES: I don't know anything. I'm not focused on Peyton. I know the media wants to depict Peyton and Brock, but I'm not even going to go there and or give my opinion on whatever I think. That's nothing that concerns this team. That is an element that doesn't matter.

DB: If it is over for him here, and Manning doesn't return to the lineup this year, do you expect him and the team to handle this transition smoothly, and with class?

ES: Of course. Of course.

Emmanuel Sanders uses JUGS Machine in backyard to stay sharp

By Arnie Stapleton
Associated Press
November 25, 2015

Pro Bowl receiver Emmanuel Sanders considers it the best \$2,200 he's ever spent.

The Denver Broncos' speedster is following up his first Pro Bowl season with another big year despite a spate of ailments. He credits some of that to the offseason work he put in at his Houston home, where his wife feeds him footballs before breakfast on the JUGS Machine in his backyard.

"At my position, the most important thing is catching a football, so why wouldn't I work on that?" said Sanders, whose four TD grabs lead the Broncos (8-2) heading into their Sunday night showdown against the unbeaten New England Patriots (10-0).

"In the offseason, I would probably catch 100 to 200 balls a day," Sanders said. "Catch them all different type of ways. Sometimes I'd wake up in the morning I'd have my wife shoot me a couple balls. I just like catching passes."

Every NFL team has the JUGS machines at their facilities to save quarterbacks' arms and kickers' legs and ensure accuracy when working on offensive, defensive and special teams drills.

Players at skill positions — receivers, running backs, tight ends, defensive backs and returners — especially benefit from the devices, which evolved from the baseball one-arm action lever-pitching contraptions of the 1970s to the advanced machines where footballs are fed between two white tires spinning at different speeds.

Several NFL players have them at their offseason homes, including Pittsburgh's Antonio Brown, Denver's Demaryius Thomas and Sanders, who sets his machine at 30 mph and lines up 20 yards away.

"I treat it like games, so I'll say I'm catching a 5-yard out, I'm catching an 18-yard dig. I'm catching a slant now. I just try to get it the same eye level as if I was running a route, how I'm going to catch it in the game," Sanders said. "I'll have my back turned and when I hear the JUGS machine go off, I'll turn and try to locate the ball."

Sometimes, he dons his gloves and does the one-handed grabs you see on commercials "just to have fun."

Tennessee Titans receivers coach Shawn Jefferson, who played 13 seasons in the NFL, said every receiver should have a throwing machine in his backyard like Sanders.

"Absolutely. It's repetition. The road to success is paved with repetition. The more you do it, the more it becomes like second nature to your body," Jefferson said. "... It's called habit-forming muscle memorization. You're training your body to do it."

Some Major League Baseball players have pitching machines at their homes, but the batting cages, netting and everything else that goes with it can run into the tens of thousands of dollars.

The football machines from JUGS, the Oregon-based industry leader that was founded in 1971, run between \$2,200 and \$2,600 and are endorsed by Hall of Fame wide receiver Cris Carter.

In a testimonial on the company's website, Carter says: "It's hard to practice at an elite level if you can't get consistent balls and that's what the JUGS Machine does for you."

Titans wide receiver Harry Douglas said he's thought of getting a JUGS Machine next offseason.

"Yes, I have," he said. "You know, it's a tax write-off."

Emmanuel Sanders' maniacal work ethic, drive has been years in the making

By Nicki Jhabvala
Denver Post
September 26, 2015

Emmanuel Sanders awoke in his downtown Kansas City hotel room the morning of Sept. 17 knowing the day would be trying and tear-filled. Just as the past three Sept. 17s have been.

He said his prayers, then pulled on the focused but jovial expression he has worn so well in difficult times. Just as he has the past three Sept. 17s.

But this one — this one was different.

Stephanie Ann Sanders, his mother who died in her sleep in 2011, would have turned 45 on the night her son was playing in a nationally televised NFL game.

"It's always tough," the Denver wide receiver said. "But I just said hopefully I can go out and have a good game on 'Thursday Night Football' and at least be able to wish her a happy birthday."

Sanders' wish came true against the Chiefs. He pulled in eight passes for 87 yards and two touchdowns, the last one capping a game-tying drive late in the fourth quarter before Bradley Roby produced the Broncos' winning TD with a scoop-and-score fumble return.

When the final whistle blew, Sanders walked onto the set of NFL Network to tell of his feats then onto a plane, bound for Texas, to celebrate and shed more tears with family as they remembered his mother and their life together in Bellville.

It was a fitting tribute to the woman described as tender and tough, who helped to instill a competitive spirit that Sanders carries today.

One that, in his sixth NFL season and second with the Broncos, has helped him become Peyton Manning's leading target and the league's leading receiver on third down (11 catches for 117 yards and two touchdowns).

And one that, over the years, has been refined and enhanced to reach a level few in the NFL can match — or tame.

Brawls in Bellville

Josh Bryant knew that he and his cousin were wired differently when their friendly games as kids turned into brawls. There was that time Sanders smashed his cousin's head into a goalpost during a soccer game. And the time Bryant smashed a baseball bat across the head of Sanders, leaving a scar above his left temple that now glistens in the camera lights.

"I don't know what happened," Bryant said. "I probably lost and he probably bragged about it, so I hit him with a bat."

Bryant and Sanders, born a month apart, grew up as brothers in Bellville, a small town northwest of Houston. They, and nearly four generations of their family, shared a one-bedroom home where money was tight but the living was good. The two spent their early years idolizing their twin uncles who were bull riders before their other uncle, Josh's father, Howard Bryant, turned them on to baseball and football.

"He was the one who told us, 'Nobody owes you (expletive),' " Josh said. "We were out there at 6 a.m. hitting balls and my dad was like, 'If you want it, you gotta earn it.' "

Sanders believed as early as 12 that football was his ticket out of Bellville, a place he's proud to call home but where few ever leave. In high school, the possibility of playing in college became real, and he and Josh started taking campus tours and attending camps, including one at the University of Houston.

"There was this one play where Emmanuel was running a go route and the quarterback overthrew the ball really bad," Josh said. "Emmanuel ran out of bounds and dove onto the surrounding track. He knew if he did well, he might get offered a scholarship and he would be the first one in his family to go to college."

Houston would offer Sanders that chance. So would Southern Methodist, a school four hours away, in Dallas. Too far for his mother.

So one morning, with the help of Josh, Sanders disconnected the battery from his Pontiac Sunfire, pushed the car down the street and out of earshot from his sleeping mother, reconnected it and drove off, bound for his official visit before his mother could stop him.

"He came back and was like, 'I'm going to SMU,' " said Bryant, who would join him as his teammate and roommate a year later. "That was all she wrote."

"No stopping him"

In their two seasons together at SMU, Jeff Reinebold was a witness to Sanders' evolution from a raw receiver into a school record-holder who thrived in coach June Jones' run-and-shoot offense.

"We had a drill where we caught tennis balls and he wanted to beat the record every day," said Reinebold, who was the Mustangs' wide receivers coach from 2008-11. "Every competition was the most fierce. Once he learned how to harness that, there was no stopping him."

At 8 a.m. every Sunday, Sanders would join Reinebold in the film room, breaking down his routes and reads. In a system that required receivers to react to defenses, Sanders learned pieces of many pro schemes years before he would enter the NFL.

"Emmanuel wanted to be coached and he wanted to be coached hard," Reinebold said. "His expectation of himself was greatness. Not average. Whatever we asked, he would do."

They told him to get stronger, so he could stand up to the NFL defensive backs. So he worked with SMU's strength coach in the weight room. They told him to improve his pass blocking, so he honed his technique.

"He never saw SMU as his end point," Reinebold said. "There's a lot of guys who talk about that, but there aren't a lot who can be about it. He was about it every day."

Highs and lows in NFL

Sanders got a taste of pro success early after Pittsburgh selected him in the third round of the 2010 NFL draft. It was sweet at first, but it quickly turned sour.

A trip to the Super Bowl in 2011, in the Dallas area no less, ended in the second quarter because of a fractured foot. Surgery the next day was followed by another two months later and then one on his knee, in November. His time in rehab meant more time for Antonio Brown, a sixth-round draft pick, to become Antonio Brown, the Steelers' top receiver.

In the middle of it all, Sanders' mother passed away, not long after one of his uncles had died.

"When we lost his mom and our uncle, we talked about football more," Bryant said. "Friday nights before a game, when most guys go out to the club, we're talking about the first play of that Sunday's game."

The losses, the notion that football and life could be stripped from under him at any time with no warning, put Sanders into overdrive. His career season and first Pro Bowl in 2014 wasn't enough.

May never be enough.

This past summer, Sanders purchased a Jugs passing machine to spit out footballs when Denver coaches couldn't. Hours he spent, fielding catch after catch after catch, contorting his body every which way as the beat of the machine echoed like a metronome.

"Doesn't surprise me," said Broncos wide receivers coach Tyke Tolbert. "He loves to play and he loves to practice football."

After practices, Sanders is the last one off the field, often staying an extra 20 minutes, sometimes 40, fielding more passes to improve his technique. In meetings, he sits next to Tolbert, filling his notebook with his position coach's every word.

Emmanuel Sanders is always on.

"He's had the taste of success," Bryant said. "And success heals a lot of things."

Emmanuel Sanders is Broncos' first option on third down, leads league

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

September 23, 2015

It's not an illusion, nor a statistical anomaly. Most every time the Denver Broncos have needed a third-down play in their first two games, Emmanuel Sanders has been the guy who ended up with the ball in his hands.

He has been quarterback Peyton Manning's first look in those situations, and after two games Sanders leads the NFL with 11 third-down catches – three ahead of his former teammate with the Pittsburgh Steelers, Antonio Brown, and five more than the No. 3 player on the list, New York Giants wide receiver Odell Beckham Jr. Sanders' two touchdown receptions this season – both in the Broncos' win over the Kansas City Chiefs – came on third down.

Sanders had six of his eight receptions last Thursday against the Chiefs on third down and converted three first downs in addition to two of the team's three offensive touchdowns in the game, which includes a 19-yard scoring pass with 36 seconds remaining that tied the game at 24-24.

"It's tough to get your hands on him if you bump him," said Broncos coach Gary Kubiak. "His quickness, and I love his energy to play. He really loves to play. ... The route he ran on the last [offensive] play of the game was a tremendous route."

Overall, 68.8 percent of Sanders' catches for the season – 11 of his 16 – have come on third down.

Through my eyes: Emmanuel Sanders takes it one play at a time

Emmanuel Sanders
DenverBroncos.com
September 22, 2015

I'm a firm believer that you gain confidence through preparation. So in every pregame I've got to catch at least 100 balls.

Nothing would actually happen if I didn't — it's all in my head — but it's all about keeping my focus, which is what I did in the days of preparation for the Chiefs game.

My assignment has been very detailed, making preparation and attention to my technique important in order to know my opponent and their weaknesses.

There aren't any 'gimmies' in the NFL, making each game difficult in its own way. Against Kansas City, we were definitely in a battle.

Our last opponent, Baltimore, plays more off-coverage. Kansas City plays more press, so it felt like you had to work for those yards even harder. Despite all that hard work, the Chiefs were the first to get up on the board in the second quarter, leaving us trailing.

But in less than two minutes, we found the end zone twice to tie the game heading into halftime.

In the second half there was some back and forth. After coming back to tie the game, we ended up trailing by one touchdown in the final quarter, leaving us one final drive to prove to the doubters that the Broncos could get things done.

Jogging onto the field, I knew this was the moment I'd been waiting on. I got an opportunity to tie the ball game up. I knew it was a big game. Thursday Night Football, I know a lot of people are watching. I knew a lot of people were watching and waiting to see what Peyton Manning can do down this last stretch.

We marched to the Chiefs' red zone, our goal well within our grasp. But the Chiefs' defense stepped up and it was suddenly third-and-10.

All I was thinking about before that snap was running a perfect route. We've done it over and over, and I knew if I ran my route and I sold it that I would be wide open.

It couldn't have worked out any better — besides the celebration. I was so excited I was getting ready to run into the stands of Kansas City fans.

I know people are hard on my teammates and are hard on my quarterbacks. It was just good to go down and score to tie that game up and give us the opportunity to stay in the game.

After, I went to the sideline to talk to Peyton and we were discussing going down and scoring in overtime if we win the coin toss. And then I look on the screen and I see Bradley Roby run into the end zone and I'm wondering, "What is going on?"

It was one of those plays that are too good to be true. I was like, All right, I know he didn't just fumble that ball and I know they didn't just run it. But then you realize that it did happen and we just won the game.

The locker room was loud after the win and there was plenty of celebration, but we still have a lot of season left to play and the Detroit Lions are next.

Every game is going to be tough. Detroit has wide receivers Golden Tate and Calvin Johnson. On defense they had the No. 1 defense in the National Football League last year — and we're going on the road on Sunday Night Football. They're going to be excited. It's their first home game so we definitely have to mind our P's and Q's. We've got to go out there and handle our business.

Despite everything that goes on, I never worry about the outcome. I just go and try to take it one game at a time and just try to be perfect. How you are perfect on the field is by taking it one play at a time. You can't think about the next play or the play after that or the game after that. You've just got to lock in and try to run the best route that you can possibly run, catch the ball and then move on.

Q&A: Emmanuel Sanders talks Broncos, baseball, more

By Nicki Jhabvala

Denver Post

September 15, 2015

Emmanuel Sanders has a way of making his presence known, whether its with his pregame Mile High Salute or his post-touchdown leap into the stands. After playing four seasons in Pittsburgh, he signed with the Broncos as a free agent in March 2014 and quickly became one of Peyton Manning's favorite targets. Last year he racked up 1,404 receiving yards and nine touchdowns on 101 catches to earn his first Pro Bowl selection and a spot among the top 100 players in the league, as voted by his peers.

This year, as the Broncos transition to new coaches and a new offense, Sanders' outsized personality has remained a constant. It's hard to miss the 5-foot-11 receiver — on the field and on social media. Sanders recently teamed with CenturyLink on #FastDash to give away Broncos tickets, autographed items and more to fans through his Twitter (@ESanders_10) and Instagram accounts every Tuesday.

As he prepares for Thursday's game at Kansas City, Sanders spoke with The Post about his experiences in the league, his days a baseball player and much more:

Q: What's the best lesson you've learned since you've come in the league?

A: Definitely to take care of your body. If you don't take care of your body, it won't take care of you. When I broke my foot (in 2011), it set me back a little, it made me realize that I have to take care of my body.

Q: Who has had the biggest influence on your career?

A: My uncle. He taught me hard work. He was pretty much my coach ever since I was 6 years old in every sport — basketball, football, baseball.

Q: How were you in basketball and baseball?

A: I was all right in basketball. I really couldn't make a layup. I was an effort guy. I played defense. And baseball, I loved baseball. It was my favorite sport, and the first sport I ever played. But it kind of got boring. As I got into high school, football was more physical and more violent and more fun to play.

Q: What positions did you play?

A: I played center field in baseball, and I batted first. I got tired of bunting. "We want you to bunt since you're fast." I'm like, "That's boring. I want to hit a home run." In basketball, I was a point guard.

Q: When did the focus shift to football?

A: Really when I got to college. All the way up to my senior year (of high school), I played every sport. I ran track and played baseball, but I started getting college offers for football, then I knew that was the path I was going to go. But I still ran track. I ran track not really for the competition but to get in football shape. And I played baseball just to play, because I knew my time playing would come to an end.

Q: Which players did you idolize growing up?

A: Deion Sanders. Barry Sanders. Bob Sanders. Anybody who had Sanders on the back of their jersey. They showed me that a Sanders can definitely make it, and everytime I suited up and I saw Sanders on the back, it made me feel like I was putting on the Superman cape.

Q: What's one thing people may not know about you?

A: That I'm a home body. When I'm at my house, I'm quiet and just myself.

Q: What you're not playing football, what do you like to do?

A: Really just sit at home and watch movies. I never go anywhere. I sit at home and watch movies and play FIFA on my PS4.

Q: Who is the toughest player to go against?

A: (Jets cornerback) Darrelle Revis. Every time I've played against him it's been a battle.

Q: What's your favorite stadium to play on the road?

A: Cowboys Stadium. That stadium really makes you feel like you're in the National Football League.

Q: What has been your best moment as a Bronco so far?

A: I guess it'd have to be my first touchdown as a Bronco (against Houston, in the 2014 preseason). Even though it was preseason I knew I had arrived in Denver when I caught a 67-yard pass. It let Broncos fans know what I can bring to the city and what I can bring to the table.

Denver Broncos' duo leads our rankings of NFL wide receivers as season begins

By Lorenzo Reyes

USA Today

September 12, 2015

Had Packers receiver Jordy Nelson not suffered a torn anterior cruciate ligament this preseason, he and teammate Randall Cobb would top the list of the league's top receiving tandems. With that said, here's a look at the five best wide receiver duos in the NFL entering the 2015 season.

1. Broncos

Demaryius Thomas (111 catches, 1,619 yards, 11 TDs in 16 games) and Emmanuel Sanders (101 catches, 1,404 yards, nine TDs in 16 games)

Sure, it helps to play with Peyton Manning, but both Thomas and Sanders have shown they have the tools needed to be considered one of the elite groups in the NFL. Thomas is explosive and sure-handed. Sanders is a crisp route runner, crafty and speedy. The result was the only tandem in the NFL in 2014 with two players to each catch at least 100 passes. Their 3,023 combined passing yards led the NFL and was 217 yards more than the next closest pair.

2. Lions

Calvin Johnson (71 catches, 1,077 yards, eight TDs in 13 games) and Golden Tate (99 catches, 1,331 yards, four TDs in 16 games)

Johnson and Tate are truly different talents who make up a lethal combination. Johnson, entering his ninth season in the NFL is still the prototype at the position with his 6-foot-5, 236-pound frame built with speed and power. Tate blossomed last season when Johnson was forced out with ankle and elbow injuries and is a relentless target always fighting for position.

3. Falcons

Julio Jones (104 catches, 1,593 yards, six TDs in 15 games) and Roddy White (80 catches, 921 yards, 7 TDs in 14 games)

Arguably no other receiver in the NFL makes big plays look so effortless. Jones is just a natural at the position and he seems to be getting better. This duo would be higher if White was a few years younger. But make no mistake, even though he's 33 years old and entering his 11th season in the league, White is still an above-average wideout who has big plays left in him.

4. Giants

Odell Beckham Jr. (91 catches, 1,305 yards, 12 TDs in 12 games) and Victor Cruz (23 catches, 337 yards, one TD in six games)

After a monster rookie season, it became clear that Beckham is one of the few players in the NFL that is capable of ripping off a touchdown on any given play. Expectations are now through the roof, and if he

can avoid nagging hamstring injuries, he should continue his ascent. For Cruz, meanwhile, it's all about seeking his old form after a torn patellar tendon sidelined him for most of last season. If both can stay on the field, fourth may be too low for this pair by season's end.

5. Cowboys

Dez Bryant (88 catches, 1,320 yards, 16 TDs in 16 games) and Terrance Williams (37 catches, 621 yards, eight TDs in 16 games)

Bryant is arguably the best wideout in the league and without question one of the most competitive. This duo is featured on this list, based on the potential Williams has. He's entering his third season in the league and has the size (6-foot-2, 208 pounds) and speed to build on a solid 2014. If Williams can take the next step in 2015, Dallas' duo could compete for the top spot on this list by next season.

Emmanuel Sanders on being the Denver Broncos punt returner: 'Why not?'

By Jeff Legwold
ESPN.com
September 8, 2015

At the moment Denver Broncos wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders is at that spot where supply and demand have converged.

The Broncos need, as in really, really need, someone to return punts -- so, hence the demand. And as Sunday's regular-season opener against the Baltimore Ravens approaches, the roster's supply is essentially one guy who the Broncos believe can do the job to their satisfaction.

And that's Emmanuel Sanders, who had a 101-catch season in 2014 and, along with Demaryius Thomas, is one of the Broncos' starting receivers. In an offseason when the Broncos tried a host of candidates for the job, including virtually every wide receiver who was in training camp, they have settled on the player who was essentially their insurance policy all along.

"We've never had any doubt that he could do that," said Broncos coach Gary Kubiak. "We're going to continue to work (safety) Omar (Bolden) and we'll continue to work all the guys that have been working there. ... In punt return you have a chance to make some plays. I'm looking forward to watching (Sanders) do it."

Five players caught 100 passes in the league last season and two of them -- Sanders and Pittsburgh Steelers' wide receiver Antonio Brown -- returned punts. Sanders returned just one punt, for 11 yards, while Brown returned 30 punts as he went on to lead the league with 129 catches.

"That's another guy that I look at and I say, 'shoot, he's a No. 1 and he's returned a punt, so why can't I do it?'" Sanders said. "I'm looking forward to the opportunity at hand."

Sanders missed most of the preseason with a hamstring injury he suffered early in training camp, but the possibility of Sanders being the Broncos' punt returner has been on the table for months. So, as more and more of the candidates to return punts struggled in practice and in the team's preseason games, the Broncos kept looking at Sanders as the last, best hope.

Kubiak, too, believes it is another way to get the ball into the hands of one of his best playmakers, well on the right side of the risk-reward scale.

"I also think that you look in touches," Kubiak said. "That's the most important thing. When you have a dynamic player like that, if there's any other way to get him a touch on the field and he's not a guy that, to me, needs a lot of work doing it. He's very natural doing it."

It's no small item for the Broncos, who continue to look for ways to improve field position when possible. They were one of the league's least impactful teams on punt returns last season, one of just four that did not have a punt return longer than 22 yards all season.

The Broncos have not had a player finish a season among the league's top five in punt return average since 2001 when Deltha O'Neal was fourth at 13.1 yards per return. Eddie Royal finished sixth (2010)

and seventh (2009) in punt return average during his Broncos' tenure while Trindon Holliday was sixth in 2012 and Rod Smith was tied for seventh in 2004.

"Why not? It's an opportunity to get the ball in my hands and it's an opportunity to make plays, so I'm excited about it. I'm just looking forward to the opportunity."

Why Emmanuel Sanders will return punts

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
September 7, 2015

Seven different players tried their hands at punt returning during the preseason for the Broncos, but as the regular season begins, not one of them is atop the depth chart at the position.

Instead, it's Emmanuel Sanders. Blink-and-you'll-miss-him wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders. Pro Bowler Emmanuel Sanders. One-hundred-and-one-catch-man Emmanuel Sanders.

Players with that sort of pedigree don't usually end up as the full-time punt returner. They make cameo appearances in high-leverage situations, such as when the punt is expected to drop inside the 10-yard-line; the Broncos have a long legacy of this, with Rod Smith, Wes Welker and Eric Decker all fielding punts at times over the years.

But none of them were the primary punt returner, as Sanders is now slated to be.

"Why not? It's an opportunity for me to get the ball in my hands. It's an opportunity to make plays, to make more plays," he said. "So I'm excited about it."

The last time Sanders was a full-time punt returner, Sanders had a horse on his helmet. Of course, it was the red mustang of SMU, and not the white-and-orange-maned horse that the Broncos' helmet has brandished since 1997.

Sanders averaged 13.75 yards on 20 punt returns in 2009, his senior year with the Mustangs. In five NFL seasons -- including four with the Steelers -- his chances were sparse; he returned 17 punts for 186 yards, but has just one return for 11 yards the last two seasons.

Despite that, he jumped at the opportunity -- which wasn't entirely his idea, but not entirely the team's, either.

"I think it was a little bit of both of us," Sanders said. "I want to be back there. I feel like I can do really good back there, so I'm looking forward to it."

He's often worked on the JUGS machine catching punts at practices, but that's a bit different than waiting the football with anywhere from five to 10 coverage men bearing down on him.

"Well, right now, on my punt returns, it's just catch the ball," Sanders said. "But I know myself: the more and more comfortable I get with it, I'm going to be trying to score. If I'm going to be doing it, I want to be the best."

"I just have to get that feel back," he added later, "and it takes place out there on the practice field."

Sanders dismissed the idea that working as the punt returner would open himself up to a greater risk of injury.

"No. I think every play that you're out there, obviously, you're putting yourself at risk," he said. "Punt returns, it's dangerous, but at the same time, you've just got to be very cautious, and don't make stupid mistakes. Don't try to catch everything."

"You've got guys running down that are trying to knock your head off, so you've got to play it smart, and that's what I'm going to do."

But Head Coach Gary Kubiak would not put Sanders out there unless there was the potential for some spectacular, explosive punt returns that the Broncos have lacked since Trindon Holliday left in free agency after the 2013 season.

To Kubiak, the risk-reward ratio is right.

"You look [at] touches. That's the most important thing," Kubiak said. "When you have a dynamic player like that, if there's any other way to get him a touch on the field and he's not a guy that, to me, needs a lot of work doing it, [you do it]. He's very natural doing it."

And while Sanders will look for the breakaway return, his goal is reasonable.

"My mindset as a punt returner is just to try to get a first down. Anything after that is all positive," he said. "But I just try to get a first down -- that means 10 yards -- and whatever happens after that, happens."

Emmanuel Sanders' pride can help drive Denver Broncos

By Paul Klee
Colorado Springs Gazette
August 13, 2015

He's not even the most famous Emmanuel in Colorado. He's been asked more questions during this training camp about the Broncos' No. 3 wide receiver, Cody Latimer, than himself, the No. 2 wide receiver. That makes little sense, considering one caught two passes last season, the other over 100.

Emmanuel Sanders, the forgotten man? If he were any more so, he'd be a ghost in cleats. And the lack of headlines seems to bother him zero.

"You've got to understand: When I was playing in Pittsburgh, I felt like I was in prison," Sanders said as he left the practice field at Dove Valley prior to Friday's preseason game at Seattle. "I was injured, but I never really hit my peak out there. There were (his own) jerseys out there, but it wasn't how I wanted it to be.

"When I got out here and saw my jersey in every single store, I saw how the city had embraced me, how they love the Denver Broncos. I started seeing my dream come true. I knew this was my home."

In a literal home, Sanders' teammates would be the straight-A class president bound for Harvard, the all-state southpaw with a 96-mph fastball, the Homecoming king. With all the star power lighting up the Broncos' roster, it's easy to forget Sanders last year had a career-high 1,404 receiving yards. Only four in the NFL had more.

The names ahead of him read like the first round of a fantasy football draft: Antonio Brown, Demaryius Thomas, Julio Jones, Jordy Nelson — and then Sanders, a few spots ahead of Dez Bryant and Calvin Johnson. Yet you'd get a better buzz from a six-pack of O'Douls than reading about Sanders heading into his second season in Denver.

"Everybody likes attention. I'd be lying if I said I was different," the 28-year-old Texas native said. "But it's like I told DT when I got here: 'Look, man. You're Batman. I'm Robin. I'm not here to say I'm No. 1. I'm going to play my role. When the ball comes my way, I'm going to make the plays. I'm going to take the pressure off you.'"

Coming off a playoff loss to Indianapolis so lopsided it could have doubled as a Ronda Rousey fight, the Broncos as a whole should feel the pressure.

It's up to guys like Sanders to make sure that doesn't happen again. While the 2014 Broncos introduced a string of new players and personalities, the key figures on this Broncos team are largely the same as last year. They all witnessed and lived the embarrassment that summoned John Elway's plea for more "kicking and screaming" in the scrum. The 24-13 loss was so emotionless for the home team, it's fair to wonder if the Broncos should value competitive spirit over Pro Bowls and measurables during the next free agency period.

When the Broncos invested big bucks in their free agent splurge, it was in response to the Super Bowl beatdown handed to them by Seattle, their first opponent of the preseason. For all the athleticism and sheer ability that lines the Seahawks' roster, Seattle's greatest attribute remains an intangible: Pride.

When Sanders said "sometimes I drive myself crazy because I'm so competitive," he perfectly articulates what the Broncos need. They need more than another 1,400-yard season from him.

They need him — and others who lived the January meltdown — to be a voice in the locker room that isn't afraid of speaking the truth, or stepping on anyone's ego. Why was Sanders, who's been slowed by a hamstring injury and probably will join Peyton Manning as a healthy scratch Friday night, begging coaches to let him practice on Wednesday, only to be rebuked multiple times?

"That's simple. I look into the future and I know someday I'm going to miss this game tremendously. I have to take advantage of it," he said. "That's probably why today I tried to practice and they wouldn't let me go. I embrace everything about this game. I love this game. I don't just play it for the money. I love it. I love playing in front of 60,000 screaming fans. That, to me, is as good as it gets."

The arrival of Emmanuel Mudiay, if only for the name, scribbles another footnote into Sanders' role as the forgotten man. In a 2014 free agent class that featured DeMarcus Ware, Aqib Talib and T.J. Ward, Sanders was basically an afterthought. But in the playoffs Sanders had almost as many catches (seven) as the defensive trio had tackles (10). He's the best value of the Elway era, by far.

Once he was freed from Pittsburgh, Sanders earned immediate attention for his tireless workout routines. There's a touch of Manning to his game: Practice isn't necessarily over when the horn blows twice. Plus, there's the this-could-be-gone-at-any-moment factor. Manning returned from a bunch of neck surgeries; Sanders plays with a screw in each foot.

"Peyton works his butt off. That man works. That's why he's the best," Sanders said. "It reminds me of something my buddy Antonio Brown says the best: How are you going to be the G.O.A.T. if you don't eat the grass?"

It's not monster stats or Pro Bowl decorations these Broncos need. Elway made certain the amount of talent necessary for a championship is in place.

"You don't come across this assembly of talent very often," Broncos Ring of Famer and two-time champion Rod Smith said after watching a recent practice session. "They're going to cut some guys that are going to start for other teams."

What these Broncos need is a bad-man's attitude. You know the Seahawks will put theirs on display — preseason or not — in their first game since giving away the Super Bowl in February.

Do the Broncos this season have the right personalities to give their teammates a swift kick in the pants after they messed their own in the playoffs?

Sanders should be a louder voice. He's no longer the new guy. Despite his weighing 180 pounds in a league of giants, he offered enough proof last season that he's one of their baddest dudes, that he should let his voice be heard.

"DT said he's going to catch 2,000 yards," Sanders said. "Well, I'm going over 1,500. So I guess that means we're going over 3,500. Let's do it."

"DT said he's going to catch 2,000 yards," Sanders said. "Well, I'm going over 1,500. So I guess that means we're going over 3,500. Let's do it."

Emmanuel Sanders takes on leadership role with Broncos

By Nicki Jhabvala
DenverPost.com
August 6, 2015

Watch Emmanuel Sanders closely throughout a Broncos practice and one thing is immediately clear: He cannot stop.

One minute he's hauling in an over-the-shoulder catch in the far corner of the end zone. The next he's roaming the sideline, tossing a football to himself, discussing a play with a coach or advising a younger receiver.

"He's always about football," Broncos receivers coach Tyke Tolbert said. "If everybody who comes on the practice field works like Emmanuel, we'll have a great team, because he really loves the work."

That part didn't change after a career year when he made 101 catches for 1,404 yards and nine touchdowns, and earned his first Pro Bowl selection. And it didn't change when Broncos top wide receiver Demaryius Thomas held out of offseason workouts because of contract negotiations.

But something is different about Sanders this season. He has taken on a new role. Or a few.

At practices and in meetings, Sanders has taken on more of a leadership role to younger receivers, working with them on the little things, like training their eyes to pull in the big-play catches Sanders has become known for. Or helping them with their routes and footwork.

"I remember when I was coming in as a young guy, I had Hines Ward as a leader," said Sanders, who signed with Denver in March 2014 after four seasons with Pittsburgh. "He took me and Antonio Brown under his wing and just taught us everything he knew. It ended up paying off for me, so why wouldn't I give back?"

Sanders left Thursday's practice early after tweaking his hamstring during an 11-of-11 drill. Broncos coach Gary Kubiak said Sanders would be evaluated, but coaches plan to be cautious with his return.

The Broncos' loss of slot receiver Wes Welker to free agency means more work, but more opportunity for Sanders. He has to be more than just 1-A to Thomas; he has to be 1-A-plus.

When the Broncos employ three-wideout sets, Sanders has said he will move to the slot, and Cody Latimer will move to the outside. During offseason workouts, Sanders also was in the mix for a third job, on punt returns, but that's been limited in training camp.

"Whereas most guys have to know one position, here I am having to know two or three different positions," he said. "It's kind of tough, but I take pride in it because it's how I get open."

Kubiak's offense emphasizes the run game, which would logically bring down a receiver's numbers. But perhaps the obvious is being overlooked.

"There are a lot of big plays in this offense to be made," Tolbert said. "Because of the run, you get the safeties to come up more, and you have more single coverage outside. If you're single with Emmanuel, I'm taking Emmanuel every time."

Thomas announced last month, after signing his new five-year contract, that he wanted to set NFL single-season receiving records. Some were skeptical. Others applauded the ambition.

Sanders shares the mindset. He, too, wants to shatter records, but not as a competitor to Thomas.

"When I got here, I looked him in his eyes and I said, 'Hey, listen, you're a bad man. And I'm going to be the best Robin you ever had,' " he said. "I know my role and I'm going to play it to the best of my ability."

This is the 2015 Sanders — a little more comfortable, a little more vocal. Same mindset.

"He's not satisfied with having an 100-yard, two-touchdown game," Tolbert said. "He wants to have a 200-yard, four-touchdown game. He's hungry every week to get better."

The year of sanders

A look at Emmanuel Sanders' career season in 2014, his first as a Bronco:

Catches: 101 (No. 5 in NFL)

Receiving yards: 1,404 (5)

Receiving TDs: 9 (T-16)

Had 16 catches of 25-plus yards (2)

First career Pro Bowl Selection

Ranked No. 95 on NFL Top 100

Combined with Thomas as a duo for most receiving yards with 3,023 and tied for most receptions with 212

Fiery Sanders expands his role with Denver Broncos

By Arnie Stapleton

Associated Press

August 4, 2015

Emmanuel Sanders is so wired to win that he considers his competitive streak both a blessing and a burden.

Sure, it helped him make the Pro Bowl for the first time in 2014, but the Denver Broncos' speedy wide receiver said he usually can't dial it down enough to enjoy a friendly video game or a round of poker.

"Sometimes I hate that I'm so competitive," he said. "But it ended up paying off when it comes to playing a sport."

Sanders was so eager to impress his new team and build a rapport with Peyton Manning last year that he overdid it, strained a quad and missed much of training camp. Then he went out and had a career year with 101 receptions for 1,404 yards and nine TDs.

Asked about teammate and fellow Pro Bowler Demaryius Thomas's stated goal of breaking Calvin Johnson's receiving record of 1,964 yards this season, Sanders smiled and pushed in all his chips.

"I want to be the best wide receiver in the National Football League this year," Sanders declared. "That's MY goal."

It's clear that Sanders wasn't in John Elway's crosshairs when Denver's general manager, in parting ways with coach John Fox last winter, lamented the Broncos' failure to go down "kicking and screaming" in the playoffs.

"I think that that's my mindset, regardless," Sanders said. "So it's not one of those things where I have to turn my engine on just to hear that. That's me. Every play, I want to give it my all, whether it's blocking, whether it's catching a pass, whether it's doing whatever I got to do, I love doing it. I'm competitive as all outdoors."

Sanders capitalized on Wes Welker's departure and Thomas's absence from the offseason program in a contract stalemate to build a better rapport with his quarterback and become more of a locker room leader, tutoring young receivers such as Cody Latimer and Isaiah Burse.

"First off, you wish Demaryius (had been) out there," coach Gary Kubiak said. "But yeah, he's got a lot of guys looking at him and he's a hard worker. He pushes himself, makes a great play at the end of practice, made a great play on the fourth-and-4 drill that we had going. But I'm very impressed with him. He loves to play, has a lot of fun out here. He's got a lot of confidence, which good players do."

And a competitive streak to match.

KICKING IT: The Broncos had to carry kickoff specialist Brandon McManus last year when they made the switch to Connor Barth for field goals.

They're hoping to keep just one punter (Britton Colquitt or Karl Schmitz) and one kicker this season with either of them also handling kickoffs.

Barth, who made 15 of 16 field goals last year but was 0 for 8 on touchbacks before the Broncos brought back McManus to handle kickoffs, said he spent his offseason working with kicking coach Dan Orner in Charlotte, North Carolina, to get more oomph on his kickoffs.

"He's working at it," special teams coordinator Joe DeCamillis said. "He's going to have to."

Barth is just 11 of 164 on touchbacks in his career.

Hitching a ride with Emmanuel Sanders to training camp

By Rod Mackey

9 News Sport

July 31, 2015

The juices are always flowing for day one of training camp. This is the sixth one for Emmanuel Sanders, but just his second as a Bronco.

"I'm fortunate and blessed, but also kind of nervous," said Sanders.

Making training camp even more exciting is the way Sanders got to it. The same way he gets to all of his workouts with the Broncos, in his Lamborghini.

"It was one of those things growing up that I said someday I want a Lamborghini."

Sanders had a lot different dreams and now many of them have been coming true. The Broncos wide receiver was spectacular in his Denver debut last season and now this season he's hoping to prove it was no fluke. Sanders had some big numbers but didn't get a ring. This year he said he wants both.

Sanders, like all of the players, were busy getting better in the off season, but he knows training camp is where it really starts, something he reiterated upon his arrival at Broncos headquarters.

"First day of training camp. Start of something good."

And with that, the 2015 Broncos season officially began.

Sanders surprises kids at Ed McCaffrey football camp

By Allie Raymond

DenverBroncos.com

June 25, 2015

Wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders put smiles on the faces of youth football campers when he made a surprise appearance at Ed McCaffrey's 14th annual football camp Thursday afternoon at Valor Christian High School.

Sanders' unexpected appearance incited gasps and cheers from the participants, ranging from ages 8-15 of all skill levels.

"...walking up to the stadium here, and hearing kids scream my name and they start running to the fence, and I'm like, 'Wow. That's unique. That's special,'" said Sanders. "That's why I play this game: for that love right there, to inspire children and inspire people and it definitely felt good to be out here today."

Led by McCaffrey, a former Bronco and three-time Super Bowl Champion, and a staff of coaches and former NFL players, including former Broncos fullback Kyle Johnson, the camp features more than just football drills, with guest speakers and coaches helping build on and off the field life skills.

"...I think that's the life lesson that football teaches you: how to work with other people who might be different than yourself, to get something done and be part of something bigger than yourself," said McCaffrey. "You learn about overcoming adversity, hard work, teamwork, sportsmanship, and we try to relay that message — probably the same message that parents try to instill in their kids — but sometimes when a former NFL player or somebody that they recognize, they've seen on television, and tells them, maybe it means more than what their parents say or their teacher says."

In addition to signing autographs for the kids, Sanders answered questions from the campers and emphasized his formula for success in life and on the field.

"It's all about hard work and dedication, and it's not only based off football, it's based on education, it's based off anything," said Sanders. "I firmly believe that if you walk up every single day and you work hard, that doesn't mean that you'll be successful. The dedication part is the most important thing about that formula... Dedicating yourself to your craft."

Sanders and the Broncos are currently in the midst of a five-week break before training camp starts on July 31. While he says he's enjoying the break and is planning on taking a vacation soon, he's also excited about camp, putting the pads back on and piecing together the offense.

"...I like the offense," said Sanders. "The more and more of the offense we put in, throughout OTAs, I got more comfortable. Obviously [without pads on] it's tough to really see what the offense is about because it's predicated off the play-action pass, and Aqib Talib and T.J. Ward they weren't biting on the play action so obviously I spoke with [Head Coach Gary] Kubiak and he said to just wait. When we get those pads on and the running game gets going, it's going to be a lot of opportunities for playmaking abilities. I'm looking forward to it."

Emmanuel Sanders had leading role in Broncos' offseason workouts

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

June 17, 2015

A year ago wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders had fingers-crossed potential for the Denver Broncos. Sanders was the fourth of four high-profile signings the team made in its March 2014 free-agency binge, signing four days after Aqib Talib, DeMarcus Ware and T.J. Ward.

Sanders is Denver's Alpha receiver this offseason though, as Demaryius Thomas and his representatives sit out while trying to hammer out a long-term deal with the Broncos.

"That's the business side of things," Sanders said. "D.T., I feel like he'll be back, they'll end up working it out. Obviously when money is involved it's a tough situation, but both parties realize in order for us to make a Super Bowl run we definitely need Demaryius. But going through the offseason, it feels good to know the coaches were looking to me to make the plays and that I was able to make them."

The Broncos didn't re-sign wide receiver Wes Welker this offseason and saw tight end Julius Thomas leave for Jacksonville in free agency. That made Sanders the most familiar pass catcher for quarterback Peyton Manning as the Broncos worked to install a new offense. And Sanders said Wednesday following the team's final on-field practice of the offseason program that he has "no doubt whatsoever" that his breakout work of last season -- which saw career-bests in catches (101), receiving yards (1,404) and touchdowns (nine) -- can be a launching pad for this one.

He had 34 receptions and 664 yards more than his previous season-high in Pittsburgh. His touchdown total was just two fewer than he had in his four Pittsburgh seasons combined.

"I always knew I was good, it was just a matter of opportunities," Sanders said. "...I gained a lot of confidence in games because the ball was coming my way eight to 10 times a game. I've asked myself why did I catch all those balls that came my way? Why was I able to fly past those defensive backs? I feel like the same blueprint I had last year, I want to use this year and hopefully get the same results."

As for the notion Sanders might have even surprised the Broncos with what he did in '14, he added with a smile; "That's the rumor. That's what everyone is saying. But I know that's just one year. Doing it again would definitely implant in people's minds that I'm a Pro Bowl player, that I can go out and make plays versus any DB."

Broncos coach Gary Kubiak has consistently lauded Sanders' work in the Broncos' offseason program. And earlier this week, with three wide receivers sitting out of Monday's practice with sore hamstrings, Sanders was the only wide receiver on the practice field who had started more than five games in an NFL season.

"[Sanders] has already shown he understands what we're trying to do, how things will work," Kubiak said. "We saw what kind of player he was looking at what he did last year and there are only more great

things to come ... but we have a lot of young guys out there and he's been kind of that player Peyton can look to when he needs something on a play."

Sanders has conceded that Kubiak's vow for the Broncos to run the ball more this season could impact how 2015 will look for him statistically. But in terms of winning games, Sanders said he likes the idea of quarterback Peyton Manning using play-action to throw over the top of a defense that is aligned to slow down the run game.

"It's still [No.] 18 back there, still Peyton Manning with the ball in his hands," Sanders said. "There's no reason to think he won't be helped by an offense that can run the ball better. Defenses have to defend everything ... we look for big things. I'm forever grateful the Pittsburgh Steelers drafted me, but at the same time I was so excited to get here to Denver and play with Peyton Manning and just show what I could do because nobody knew anything about me. And I'm just as excited now to see what we can do."

Emmanuel Sanders: No title in 2015 would be 'bust season' for Broncos

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

April 13, 2015

The Denver Broncos have a new coaching staff and plenty of new faces on their roster.

But when coach Gary Kubiak addressed the team Monday -- the first day of the Broncos' offseason program -- it was clear the championship expectations the team has carried over much of the last three seasons are still around.

"The message was definitely world championship from the start," Broncos wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders said Monday. "That's what [executive vice president of football operations/general manager John] Elway wants. The focus is bringing a world championship to this city.

"We want to get back there and we want to win it. The main focus of this group is to win a Super Bowl. That's the expectation. If we don't bring a Super Bowl to this city this year, then it's a bust season."

Monday was the first chance for Kubiak to meet with the players as a group since he was hired this past January. And, as he did when Elway formally introduced him as the team's new coach three months ago, Kubiak took the opportunity to remind Broncos players he won't be stepping back from the championship expectations.

The Broncos have won four consecutive AFC West titles and spent much of Peyton Manning's tenure at quarterback as one of the AFC's front-runners for the Super Bowl. But a 12-4 finish as well as two 13-3 finishes have not resulted in a title, and the Broncos' appearance in Super Bowl XLVIII to close out the 2013 season ended in a 35-point loss to the Seattle Seahawks.

Kubiak also showed the team a 10-minute video that included impact plays from the last 20 Super Bowls.

"[He said it's] going to take a special group of men to bring world championship to this city, but we have the guys to do it," Sanders said. "That's the focus.

"Every year, no matter what organization you play for, you want the standard to be world championship. If it's not a world championship, it's a bust."

Because Kubiak is a new coach, the Broncos are one of the teams allowed to open their offseason work early. They are currently in phase one, which is conditioning work only.

There was one notable absence, however: Wide receiver Demaryius Thomas, who led the team with 111 catches and 1,619 yards last season, was not at the Broncos' suburban Denver complex. Thomas said in recent weeks he will remain in Atlanta during the offseason program as his representatives and the team try to work out a new long-term deal.

Broncos' Emmanuel Sanders: It's world championship or bust

By Troy Renck
DenverPost.com
April 13, 2015

Gary Kubiak stood in front of his team for the first time Monday and raised expectations. He talked in terms of Super Bowl titles, not a honeymoon period or a methodical transition to a new coaching staff.

"If it's not a world championship, it's a bust," receiver Emmanuel Sanders said.

Even with similar goals to a year ago, the differences are striking. The Broncos will feature a more balanced offense centered on a zone-blocking running attack. Sanders recognizes that his role could change. He expects to play in the slot when the Broncos use a three-wide-receiver set.

"I am comfortable there. I did it a lot in Pittsburgh (with the Steelers) and in college," Sanders said.

Sanders, wearing a team-issued shirt featuring the "Iron Sharpens Iron" motto, said he will assert himself more in his second season in Denver. He looks forward to working with the younger players, "loosening them up and allowing them to know it's OK to have fun." The process began at Duke a few weeks ago when Sanders joined Peyton Manning, and the pair conspired to photoshop Demaryius Thomas into a tweeted picture.

"It was really beneficial. When you go out there with Peyton, it's definitely work. We are going two-a-days for an hour and a half. Peyton loves to throw," Sanders said. "And man, listen, we had to pick on (Thomas) a little bit, to let him know that we missed him and were thinking about him. It was a good laugh."

Pass rusher DeMarcus Ware followed Sanders to the podium on Monday. He said he hasn't stopped working out since the season ended. His sleeveless shirt explained his offseason before he opened his mouth as the 11-year veteran looked ripped. He benefited from not having to rehab an injury the last few months. While focus remains on Manning's career nearing the end, Ware can hear the second hand ticking in his head.

"There's a sense of urgency. The time is now," Ware said, repeating Kubiak's message to the team. "It's about guys being there for each other and taking care of all the small things."

Broncos' Emmanuel Sanders doesn't run from contact or candor

By Troy Renck
DenverPost.com
April 13, 2015

Emmanuel Sanders comes across as a paradox. He stands 5-foot-11 and weighs 186 pounds. Can the veteran who looks like a track star who could run away from anyone be the same receiver who loves contact and has no problem playing in the slot?

That is the NFL version of a human pinball.

"I am very comfortable doing it, because I played there in Pittsburgh and in college (at Southern Methodist)," said Sanders, who was told by Broncos' receivers coach Tyke Tolbert on Monday he will move there in three-wide receiver sets. "I'm looking forward to that."

Could the smiling, easy-with-a-quip, native Texan be the same guy who pops up from breathtaking hits by exhorting the crowd?

"It's always about bouncing up, and not letting the guy know he got you," Sanders said.

As a kid, he grew up with uncles who rode bulls and showed their grit in the rodeo arena. Sanders doesn't shy away from contact or cameras. He likes to volley with the press, and his candor surfaced again Monday as the Broncos began the first day of their offseason program.

The team met with new coach Gary Kubiak for the first time, and was challenged with the message "if it's not a Super Bowl championship, it's a bust." The Broncos will travel a different path in their attempt to reach that goal than they have in recent years, with Kubiak committed to running the ball more, even with Peyton Manning at quarterback.

It means Sanders is unlikely to approach the career-best 101 catches, 1,404 yards and nine touchdowns he posted in his first season in Denver.

"We're going to be able to run the football, and you've got Peyton Manning as your quarterback. I think you've got a combination that's a recipe for success," said Sanders. "My goal is to always try to have a 1,000-yard season. Whatever comes after that, that's a positive. As long we win ball games, I'm happy."

Tight end Julius Thomas' exit — he signed as a free agent with Jacksonville — could bring more opportunities. Monday's discussion, however, turned to a target still on the team, but not at Dove Valley: Demaryius Thomas, who has chosen not to report after having the franchise tag placed on him while he tries to work out a longterm deal.

Sanders knows how important Thomas is to the Broncos. But he's not above levity, leaving Sanders to take a good-natured dig at his friend two weeks ago, photoshopping Thomas' head onto a tweeted picture from Manning's private workouts at Duke.

"It's really beneficial. I enjoyed myself out there. When we go out there, it's definitely work. You talk about two-a-days in which you're going for an hour and a half. Peyton, he loves to throw it," Sanders said. "I know (Thomas) is working his butt off right now, and he's looking forward to getting back. It's business, but at the end of the day we miss him and we just wanted him to really know, 'Hey, look, we're thinking about you. We're going to put you in the team photo while you handle the business side.' I think it was just a good laugh, and he laughed about it."

Broncos Sanders, Anderson in demand at Pro Bowl

The Denver Post

Mike Klis

Monday, January 26, 2015

GLENDALE, Ariz. — As his career stat line looks now, a first-time reader might call Broncos wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders a one-year wonder.

In Sanders' first season with the Broncos, he had 101 catches for 1,404 yards and nine touchdowns. Compare that with his four previous years with the Pittsburgh Steelers, when he averaged 40 catches, 507 yards and three touchdowns.

Sanders earned his Pro Bowl honor for his career year. And then he gave it an exclamation point by coming up with two touchdown receptions in the Pro Bowl on Sunday night to help Team (Michael) Irvin rally past Team (Cris) Carter 32-28 at sold-out University of Phoenix Stadium.

"It does cap the year for me, although I wish I was capping it with a Super Bowl," Sanders said. "But I'll take it."

Much as Sanders' career spiked in 2014, he has been a model of long-term consistency next to teammate C.J. Anderson. A case can be made that the Denver running back is a half-year wonder.

"That's the good thing about it," Anderson said. "I know I still have a lot to prove."

Of the NFL-leading 11 Denver players who were named to the Pro Bowl this season, Sanders and Anderson were the last two.

Sanders, a first-alternate receiver who took the place of the injured Julio Jones, had five catches for 70 yards that included touchdowns of 1 and 10 yards.

"That's what he does, he's going to play no matter what's going on," Anderson said. "He got two touchdowns and he let everybody know what we're going to do. He's a weapon no matter what quarterback he plays with."

Anderson, a sixth alternate, didn't care how many running backs it took to bow out before he got the call.

"I said, 'Yeah,' no hesitation," the California product said before the Pro Bowl was played.

Anderson got the Pro Bowl nod after going from Denver's fourth-stringer in Game 4 of the regular season. He had just 82 yards rushing, four catches for 34 yards and zero touchdowns through the first half of the 2014 season.

In his final eight games, Anderson had 767 yards rushing, 30 catches for 290 yards and 10 touchdowns.

'I want to keep building on," Anderson said. "I want to be the best. I think our locker room presents that opportunity. Look at the Pro Bowlers that are here."

Other Broncos who played in the Pro Bowl were cornerbacks Chris Harris and Aqib Talib, offensive tackle Ryan Clady, linebacker Von Miller, defensive end DeMarcus Ware and safety T.J. Ward.

Three Denver Pro Bowlers didn't play because of injuries: quarterback Peyton Manning, wide receiver Demaryius Thomas and tight end Julius Thomas.

All indications are that Manning will return to play for the Broncos next season, but just in case, Sanders showed he doesn't need one of the best quarterbacks of all time to succeed. He scored the first touchdown of the game on a 10-yard pass drilled in by Detroit quarterback Matthew Stafford.

He also caught a 1-yard touchdown pass from Matt Ryan that drew Team Irvin within 28-25 of Team Carter late in the third quarter.

"You've got to take it seriously," Sanders said. "It was a unique experience for me. I had a good time out here, I'm not going to lie."

The Pro Bowl didn't go Anderson's way. He lost a yard on his first carry as he was met quickly by Buffalo defensive tackle Kyle Williams. Anderson never got what was supposed to be his second carry as he never got the exchange from Stafford. Houston defensive lineman J.J. Watt recovered the fumble.

Watt, who also intercepted Stafford deep in his own end, was named the Pro Bowl game's defensive MVP.

Stafford was the offensive MVP.

Anderson did have a 12-yard run and finished with 16 yards on five carries.

Bowling Broncos

The Broncos boasted an NFL-best eight participants in Sunday night's Pro Bowl in Glendale, Ariz. Broncos beat writer Troy E. Renck breaks down how they performed:

Team Irvin

WR Emmanuel Sanders: Started and made 10-yard diving catch from Lions QB Matthew Stafford for team's first touchdown. He bowed to the crowd.

RB C.J. Anderson: Entered in second quarter, and after a fumble, gained traction in the third quarter.

CB Chris Harris: Didn't yield a touchdown pass all season. Still hasn't. Which is saying something in Pro Bowl.

SS T.J. Ward: Roamed with intent. But a game without violence doesn't suit his skill set.

OLB Von Miller: Played with high motor, and led all players with four first-half tackles.

DE DeMarcus Ware: Rotated with the St. Louis Rams' Robert Quinn.

Team Carter

CB Aqib Talib: Started and looked comfortable in lime-green colors, which he and Ward wore to Friday practices this season.

OT Ryan Clady: Switched between both tackle spots on the offensive line. With no blitzing allowed, this is one game where the tackles actually have an advantage.

Emmanuel Sanders becomes 10th Bronco in Pro Bowl

By Mike Klis

The Denver Post

Jan. 15, 2015

Broncos receiver Emmanuel Sanders has been added to the Pro Bowl. He replaces Atlanta's Julio Jones, who is bypassing the game because of injury.

It's hardly a surprise that Sanders was next in line after he finished the season with 101 catches, 1,404 receiving yards and 9 touchdowns.

Sanders becomes the fourth of John Elway's four major free agent players signed in 2014 to make the Pro Bowl team, joining defensive end DeMarcus Ware, cornerback Aqib Talib and safety T.J. Ward.

In all, 10 Broncos are Pro Bowlers, tops in the NFL. The others: quarterback Peyton Manning, receiver Demaryius Thomas, tight end Julius Thomas, left tackle Ryan Clady, linebacker Von Miller and cornerback Chris Harris.

The Pro Bowl game will be played Sunday, Jan. 25 at the Super Bowl site of University of Phoenix Stadium in Glendale, Ariz. The two teams will be selected Wednesday, and the Pro Bowl practices will be Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

Emmanuel Sanders gives Broncos 10 Pro Bowl selections

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

Jan. 15, 2015

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. – Whoever the Denver Broncos hire as head coach, he could get a good look at some of the team's high-profile members in the Pro Bowl.

Wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders became the Broncos' 10th Pro Bowl selection Thursday, when he was added to game to replace Atlanta Falcons wide receiver Julio Jones. Sanders, who was part of the team's offseason free-agent haul, finished the season with career-bests in catches (101), receiving yards (1,404) and touchdowns (nine).

Sanders' catch total and yardage total were both fifth in the league. Sanders, who had not had a 100-yard receiving game in his four years with the Pittsburgh Steelers, had seven for the Broncos this season. Sanders has repeatedly called his signing in Denver as a career move "to wide receiver heaven."

Sanders now joins quarterback Peyton Manning, left tackle Ryan Clady, cornerback Chris Harris Jr., linebacker Von Miller, cornerback Aqib Talib, wide receiver Demaryius Thomas, tight end Julius Thomas, safety T.J. Ward and defensive end DeMarcus Ware as Pro Bowlers.

Sanders, Talib, Ware and Ward were all free-agent signings this past offseason, and only Ware is older than 28.

It is why when executive vice president of football operations/general manager John Elway described the Broncos' head coaching opening as being so attractive earlier this week.

"I feel real good about our roster," Elway said. "I think contrary to what everybody thinks we've got a good roster here. We've got a relatively young roster ... So I feel great about our football team."

Of the Broncos' Pro Bowl selections, most will be back with the team next season. Manning has yet to formally announce if he will be back -- Elway told him to take "five-six weeks" to make the decision -- while Demaryius Thomas and Julius Thomas are scheduled to be unrestricted free agents.

Elway has said he'd like to work on new deals for both players, but the Broncos figure to use a franchise player tag on Demaryius Thomas if a multi-year deal can't be worked out.

Broncos hope Emmanuel Sanders doesn't have to keep proving his toughness

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

December 12, 2014

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. -- Denver Broncos wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders likes the idea that people think he's a tough player.

He likes bouncing back up from a big hit, showing the defender he's ready to go, maybe taking a bow after one of those collisions, as he did this past Sunday against the Buffalo Bills.

But maybe he doesn't want to have so many chances to show that toughness.

"Obviously I take pride in being a tough guy, but I don't want to be a crazy guy saying, 'Yeah I like to get hit'," Sanders said. "No. I want to go into every game and not get hit, and score a lot of points and catch a lot of balls, but sometimes the game is a tough game, it's a physical game, and sometimes I get put in tough situations. I don't really care too much about that as long as I'm able to get back up and continue to play ball."

Sanders has been everything the Broncos had hoped he could be when they signed him as a free agent in March. He is second on the Broncos in both catches (86) and receiving yards (1,208), totals that are tied for fourth and sixth, respectively, in the league.

He has lined up outside and in the slot. Sanders has made plays down the field -- he has 20 of the Broncos' 53 receptions of at least 20 yards this season -- and in high-traffic areas in the middle of the field.

But of late, with defenses loading up the middle of the field in an attempt to keep the Broncos from connecting on crossing routes, Sanders has been on the receiving end of jarring hits by physical defensive backs.

"It's rare to see a guy like that, especially some of the hits he's taken to his lower body," Broncos offensive coordinator Adam Gase said. "He's not as big as D.T. [Demaryius Thomas]. Obviously when [Thomas] gets hit it's a little different. It's more of the defenders feeling it. [Sanders] has done a good job of making sure he's protecting himself for the most part, but when he's taken those tough hits, he's tough enough to bounce back. We'd not like him to take those hits like that,

especially the one last week. That one was pretty ugly. We'll try to avoid those."

"[Sanders] is very tough," Thomas said. "He'll get back up and he'll want to play. I'm glad I've got a man like him beside me playing every week because he's a tough guy and you've got to have tough guys to win football games."

Sanders took two huge hits against the Bills, first from safety Duke Williams on a 37-yard completion with 1:17 left in the first quarter, followed by another big hit on the following play, this time from safety Aaron Williams on an incomplection.

The Broncos are hopeful some of the congestion in the middle will dissipate a bit when tight end Julius Thomas returns to the lineup -- he's missed the last three games with a left ankle injury -- and if the Broncos can keep running the ball with some consistency.

"Julius Thomas is one of the top tight ends in the National Football League," Sanders said. "He's a mismatch. He's the guy that you can put out wide and defenses go crazy because they've got to figure out if they want to put a cornerback on him, which is a mismatch because of height, if they want to put a safety on him, which is a mismatch because of quickness, or a linebacker. So that brings another weapon to this offense and we're happy to get him back."

Demaryius Thomas also believes Julius Thomas' return will give both him and Sanders more room to work.

"We already have guys that go out and make plays now, and with Julius back and able to throw the ball and run the ball, the defense will never know what to expect," Demaryius Thomas said. "So I look forward to it."

Emmanuel Sanders: Hungry for more

By Ben Swanson
DenverBroncos.com
December 9, 2014

Hunger has always driven Emmanuel Sanders.

It was hunger for trust and respect that pushed his body to unfamiliar limits before the season began, and it was hunger that consistently drove him to where he is now near the top of the league as a receiver.

And when he was younger, he knew even hungrier days. Days when he spread mayonnaise and ketchup on slices of bread and called it a meal. Days when he rummaged through cabinets trying to scrounge together something to eat.

To this day, that hunger endures unabated, even as he's become one of the league's top receivers. It's no longer about food, but it's still about survival.

A small country boy from a small country town outside of Houston, Sanders is a product of his upbringing, which has allowed him to seamlessly integrate into a new offense.

Once you can understand Sanders' past, you can understand how he's burst upon the scene in his first season as a Bronco. His mindset is one of pure drive, and his devotion, passion and determination have paid off.

Bellville, Texas, is located about an hour west of Houston, and in Sanders' words, it is "a really country town."

With a population that eclipsed 4,000 people at the most recent census, that's probably a fair assessment.

Sanders had a firsthand look at country life, and the toughness it required. Two of his uncles are cowboys, one a bull rider and the other a calf roper. Football assuredly seems less daunting in comparison to trying to maintain stability atop a bucking 1,600-pound bull.

"It takes a lot of guts to ride a bull. It takes a lot of guts to calf-rope, to jump off a horse, flip a calf over and tie it up in a matter of 10 seconds," Sanders said. "So I mean, that within itself definitely gave me that edge to be tough, and that kind of made me tough."

He looks back on his childhood warmly, but it wasn't easy. The circumstances weren't the best, he acknowledges. Food was sometimes hard to come by with about a dozen people living under one roof.

"I wouldn't say that we were extremely poor, but there was times where I had to fix a mayonnaise and ketchup sandwich in order to eat, or I had to go into the cabinet and just try to make up some kind of food because I was that hungry," he said. "Obviously, you know, when you have a big family, it's first come, first serve in terms of the food. So sometimes we were struggling in terms of getting food."

Certainly, Sanders wanted to emerge from Bellville. He and his best friend in high school wanted to at least explore bigger pastures, venturing out to meet with Army recruiters in case he didn't get a scholarship to a school he preferred.

And though it now seems weird to think of Sanders going without a scholarship, exposure was hard to find for Sanders. Colleges didn't come calling until his senior year. Despite All-District honors and more accolades, he didn't know how good he was, and neither did many others. In fact, Rivals.com had him ranked as a two-star recruit.

So he took his best opportunity and committed to Southern Methodist University. Then he set their record books aflame, eventually setting more than a handful of school records, including single-season receiving yards, career receiving yards, single-game receptions, single-season receptions, career receptions and total career touchdown receptions.

He'd come a long way since Bellville, but he was still far from where he wanted to be and the next step toward that would be going to the NFL.

Sanders spent his first four years with the Steelers, eventually starting on a more consistent basis in his last year there. But he wanted more, and he knew he had what it takes to make a big leap.

Once he became a free agent, Sanders began meeting with teams, but the process alienated him a little bit with some teams playing around and not seeing eye-to-eye on his talent level.

The meeting with the Broncos went differently, and Sanders was impressed with the respect that Executive Vice President of Football Operations/General Manager Elway gave him and with the forthright nature of their discussions. Everything fell into place just like Sanders had hoped.

Naturally, the change would require an adjustment. The Steelers were a proud run-first team and now he was moving to what he calls "wide receiver heaven" with a quarterback and offense that spread the ball through the air to everyone.

"With Pittsburgh, [Sanders] was more of a run around, get open type of guy with Ben [Roethlisberger], you know, because he's not really a timing type quarterback like Peyton is," said T.J. Ward, the former Browns safety and then-AFC North opponent of Sanders.

Sanders was committed to making that transition as seamless as possible, and that chemistry between him and Manning would have to be born out of tireless work in the months before the season.

"When I got here I said, 'You know what? First and foremost, I want to earn the respect and the trust of Peyton Manning,'" Sanders said.

He knew what the changes would be: that Manning's effectiveness is based largely in anticipation and trust, that the ball might be in the air before you make your break, understanding the complexities of the offense. And so the adjustment would not only be physical, but mental as well.

"I ran a lot of routes in OTAs and then after practice we spent 10 to 15 minutes throwing. That doesn't seem like a long time but if you're going 10 to 15 minutes of routes and throwing, that's a lot of routes to run," Sanders said. "And not only that, but going over signs, because this is a complicated offense. You've got to know a lot. As much as we did physically on the field, we did mentally."

All the extra routes put extra strain on his body, but it has become increasingly clear that all his work paid dividends.

The first hint of what was to come was evident in the third game of the preseason. Sanders had yet to catch a pass in the preseason opener, and a minor thigh injury kept him out of the second game. But against the Texans, he exploded on the scene with five catches for 128 yards and two touchdowns.

Then the regular season began, and he started crushing his personal records. He recorded his first-ever 100-yard receiving game in Week 2, and then he got his second and third in the next two games. He would surpass his best season's total receiving yards in Week 9 of this season, and has the most touchdowns of his career in a season already.

And if you were expecting a slow start in a continuing adjustment period, it seems that Sanders had long been acclimated to all the offense's nuances by the time the season began. Manning went to Sanders early and often, and Sanders ended up leading the league in receptions through three weeks.

The only thing missing was a touchdown. He was leading the team in receiving yards, but going into their Week 7 matchup with the 49ers, he still didn't have a touchdown. Sanders scored early in that game, but it was the following week that he had his breakthrough game, putting everything together for a three-touchdown, 120-yard performance.

Sanders' style has become easy to identify. He has a burst of speed that torches corners in single coverage, great hands and a willingness to stretch out for any pass in his vicinity. All in all, that makes him "a hard guy to overthrow," as Manning put it, though he did add that he could take some pride in being able to overthrow Sanders.

The chemistry between Manning and Sanders has been a crucial component of the offense, and the trust between them is easy to see. Sanders leads the Broncos in first downs, and he's also fourth in the NFL in receiving yards. And with Demaryius Thomas leading the league in that category, "it's like there's two number one receivers," Ward said.

But perhaps the greatest part of watching Sanders play is how visually apparent his effort on the field is, and his willingness to exert his body to its limits.

"There's no lack of effort in anything he does. Everything is game speed, from the beginning of practice to the end of practice, and that's always been since we got him," Offensive Coordinator Adam Gase said. "For a guy who's not DT's size, he takes some big shots and he bounces right back up. The guy's got a toughness and a willingness about him that you don't see in every player."

That toughness and that energy is contagious for his teammates, which helps raise those around him, too.

"All the catches he makes and the bang-bang hits he gets and comes up with the ball and to be excited about it, it drives a team and it drives the guys around him," Thomas said. "I love it."

And that mentality that has been so notable in Sanders' career? It's the same one that he's had since back to those days in Bellville from the struggles he's overcome.

"That's where I developed a mindset that someday I'm going to go out, I'm going to make something of myself and I'm not going to live like this the rest of my life and I don't want my family to live like this the rest of their lives," he says. "That right there gave me the motivation, and still is giving me the motivation to continuously strive to be the best that I can be and try to bring up others while I'm at it."

So even though he's emerged as one of the league's best receivers and proved plenty of people wrong, don't expect his hunger to fade.

Life as the Broncos' 1-A has been better than good for Emmanuel Sanders

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

November 26, 2014

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. -- Emmanuel Sanders has been such a good find for the Denver Broncos that even when things don't quite work out, there is a silver lining in tow.

On Sunday, quarterback Peyton Manning tried and tried and tried to hit Sanders for the game-changer up the right sideline on the drive that bridged the third and fourth quarters. They never connected, but the Broncos eventually carved out a touchdown on the drive. Demaryius Thomas is the Broncos' Alpha receiver, but it's clear from that sequence that Sanders has been every bit the 1-A the Broncos had hoped he could be.

"I'm so glad we scored on that one drive I overthrew him three times in a row," Manning said. "He's a hard guy to overthrow so I take a little bit of pride in that. That means my arm must be hanging in there because it's late in the season. ... He's a great route runner. ... He has that deep threat, which is going to allow some of the shorter stuff and the crossing routes to be open."

Sanders already, with five regular-season games remaining, has single-season career-bests in catches (76), yards receiving (1,079) and touchdowns (seven). His dives, deep down the field with a cornerback often trying to close the gap, have become a signature, as have his jaunts into the high-traffic areas in the middle of the field. And as teams continue to rotate coverage to Demaryius Thomas and put cornerbacks on tight end Julius Thomas, Sanders has become the choice that consistently makes them pay.

Broncos head coach John Fox often says "they can't double everybody," and that often leaves Sanders running past single coverage to reel in another Manning pass. His 105 targets are only behind Demaryius Thomas' 124.

Not bad for a guy who had interest from several teams in free agency because many believed he could do more than he had done in the Pittsburgh Steelers offense during his first four seasons in the league. Still, Eric Decker, Golden Tate, DeSean Jackson, Julian Edelman and Andre Roberts all signed larger contracts than the three-year, \$15 million deal Sanders signed with the Broncos.

Sanders was the Broncos' top target because of his ability to line up and contribute in the formation, outside or in the slot. The Chiefs, the Broncos' opponent this week, were public in their belief they had a verbal agreement from Sanders to sign. Sanders has consistently maintained the Broncos were his top choice because of Manning's presence in the huddle and the playbook the Broncos use.

Asked if his best career season may have opened some eyes around the league, Sanders deferred.

"I don't look at it like that," Sanders said. "I just enjoy this game, I try to be passionate about it. I wanted to come here, in this offense, everybody knows what this offense can do, what they did before I was here and what it can do on a weekly basis. The best thing is any day can be your day because Peyton can put the ball so many places."

And while Demaryius Thomas' presence means Sanders will have a difficult time leading his own team in any of the major receiving categories. But only Thomas, the Steelers' Antonio Brown and the Colts' T.Y. Hilton have had more receiving yards than Sanders this season and only Thomas and Hilton have more catches.

"(Sanders) makes it hard on defenses," Demaryius Thomas said. "They can't really get right up on him because he's so quick, but if they give him room he can run by them. ... He fits in this offense like he's been here more than just this season."

Manning will always credit time and effort as the keys to success and Sanders has certainly put that in. Sanders regularly worked with Manning after practices in offseason workouts and in training camp. And on the rare occasion Sanders felt the on-field sting of a heat-of-the-moment dressing down from Manning, Sanders just kept grinding.

"You don't need any more proof for what Peyton can do for wide receivers," Sanders said. "If you're in the right spot, where he expects you to be, he will find you. Sometimes just put your hands up and the ball is there. As a wide receiver that's a dream situation, you can't ask for more than that so you don't leave anything undone."

Emmanuel Sanders becomes first option with big third-down catches

By Troy E. Renck
The Denver Post
November 23, 2014

Emmanuel Sanders appears to think he's bigger than he is. He willingly puts his body in harm's way, absorbing crushing hits. Somehow he shakes it off better than Taylor Swift, returning to drives, returning to highlight films with dives.

Sanders goes 5-foot-11, 180-pounds. Like his Lamborghini, he's built for speed. Yet he remains a sports car with chains on the tires, embracing the slippery roads, the mountainous terrain.

"We have a lot of guys on this team who are tough," linebacker Von Miller said. "But Emmanuel, man, he's a tough guy."

Trace it to playing high school football in Texas, connect it to his humble and hard working childhood. Whatever the case, when the Broncos' season was flashing before their eyes on Sunday, Sanders repeatedly delivered big catches.

Sanders finished with nine receptions for 125 yards, an accomplishment even more impressive given that he barely practiced last week as went through the league-mandated concussion protocol.

"It didn't matter what happened before. I don't ever go into a game thinking about the negatives or what could possibly go wrong," Sanders said. "Once I was OK to play, I was going to give my full effort."

The significance of Sanders' performance in the 39-36 victory over the Dolphins lies deeper in the numbers. He turned four third-down receptions into first downs. The damage began in the second quarter. After failing to catch a pass in the first 15 minutes, Sanders hauled in six before halftime.

With the Broncos trailing 14-3 and needing a sustained march, Sanders converted on third-and-4 with an 18-yard catch. It was the first of two on a touchdown drive that spared 76,987 agitated fans their fingernails for a few more hours.

"Sanders, I ain't got nothing to say about that dude," said Dolphins safety Jimmy Wilson, whom Sanders beat multiple times.

For Sanders, Sundays have become a series of wows.

Sanders' best grab came on the next possession. Denver faced a third-and-20 on its 42-yard line, momentum fizzling after a hands-to-the-face penalty on center Will Montgomery. Peyton Manning connected with Sanders on a 35-yarder, the receiver making the type of acrobatic play that has defined his first season in Denver on a stop-and-go move.

Did he have to dive?

Sanders answered, smirking: "Peyton gave me a hard time on that. It was a big time. I might have been able to run through the catch. I just wanted to secure it. We ended up scoring. It's all good."

Manning doesn't trust easily. Sanders gained his confidence early in the summer by playing through a calf injury and spending countless hours catching extra passes and working on Denver's audible language.

In 11 games with the Broncos, Sanders has eclipsed 100 yards receiving seven times. He didn't reach the total once in 56 regular-season games with Pittsburgh.

"They had an injury there with their other corner, so they were playing different guys, and Emmanuel was running good routes," Manning said. "And he has that deep threat, which is going to allow some of the shorter stuff and crossing routes to be open."

Manning pulled off the impossible, sailing the ball too long for Sanders three times.

"He's a hard guy to overthrow, so I take a little bit of pride in that - it means my arm might be hangin' in there this late in the season," Manning said.

Before the cameras arrived in the lockerroom Sunday night, Sanders slouched back into his chair. Broncos president Joe Ellis made his way through the locker room, personally congratulating the receiver. Sanders thanked him. He then turned and faced reporters, his engaging smile hiding his cold-blooded toughness.

"You aren't going to keep me down," Sanders said. "Not happening."

CHART: Emmanuel Sanders' career season triggering big-money bonuses

By Jason La Canfora
CBSSports.com
November 23, 2014

Emmanuel Sanders passed his concussion protocols after being knocked from the Rams game with a heavy hit last week and is on track to start Sunday for the Broncos. That puts him in line to continue cashing in on a series of 2015 salary escalators.

Sanders, who signed a three-year deal with Denver in the offseason after being pursued by several teams, has up to \$1 million in 2015 and 2016 tied into certain incentive thresholds, which could make his contract more lucrative. He quickly became a key cog and trusted weapon for Peyton Manning and is on pace for by far the best season of his career. Sanders' deal is worth a base of three-years, \$15 million, with \$6 million guaranteed. He has a base salary of \$4 million next season and \$5 million in 2016, but could make 25 percent more in 2015 and 20 percent above his 2016 compensation.

Here are how his escalators are triggered (this applies to his 2014 production, and then again, his 2015 production, which would kick in the additional compensation for 2016:

HOW EMMANUEL SANDERS ESCALATORS ARE TRIGGERED		
RECEPTIONS	TOUCHDOWNS	YARDS
50 - \$50,000	6 - \$50,000	800 - \$100,000
60 - \$100,000	8 - \$100,000	900 - \$200,000
70 - \$150,000	10 - \$150,000	1,000 - \$300,000
80 - \$200,000	12 - \$200,000	1,100 - \$400,000
90 - \$250,000	14 - \$250,000	1,200 - \$500,000

In addition, he also has a \$500,000 bonus per season that is achieved if he is named first-team All-Pro.

For the season, Sanders has 67 catches for 954 yards with seven touchdowns, guaranteeing at least \$350,000 (\$100K in receptions, \$50K in TDs and \$200K in yards) in escalators for 2015. If he catches at least three balls for 46 yards and one touchdown on Sunday, for instance, then he would trigger at least \$550,000 in escalators for next season. Sanders is currently on pace for 107 catches for 1,526 yards and 11 touchdowns, which could amount to \$800,000 in those statistical incentives (out of a possible \$1 million) and would also put him certainly in contention for an All-Pro selection.

The Broncos, who are very thin at running back and tight end (Pro Bowl tight end Julius Thomas is unlikely to play today with an ankle injury, sources said, while listed as questionable), have revolved around Sanders on offense some weeks, and with Wes Welker nearing the end of his career, a healthy Sanders will have a strong chance to continue to cash in, in the coming weeks.

Emmanuel Sanders on the art of the spectacular catch

By David DeChant
DenverBroncos.com
November 14, 2014

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. -- Yes, Emmanuel Sanders has blossomed into an incredibly productive target in his first season in Denver.

He is fourth in the NFL in receptions (62), sixth in receiving yards (852) and tied for 13th in receiving TDs (six).

But he's also near the lead league in a very crucial stat: drop rate.

Sanders has secured 62 of 63 catchable passes this season (according to Pro Football Focus), good for the second-lowest drop rate (1.59 percent) of any receiver with at least 50 targets. He has at least 14 more receptions than any player who PFF has not credited with a drop this season.

More impressive than that reliability as a pass catcher, though, is that it extends to throws that, for other receivers, might be deemed uncatchable – until Sanders proves otherwise.

Since his diving touchdown against the Texans in preseason, it seems like the fifth-year receiver has come down with a jaw-dropper on a weekly (or even twice weekly) basis. He's made so many gorgeous grabs this year that we can't break all of them down. So he walked us through four of his best.

Let's begin with the play that was part of an explosive introduction to Broncos Country, in Week 3 of the preseason:

PRESEASON WEEK 3: 29-YD TD VS. TEXANS

After going catchless in the preseason opener against Seattle and missing the next game with a nagging quad injury, Sanders and Peyton Manning hoped to connect against Houston so they wouldn't enter the regular season opener against the Colts without an in-game throw-and-catch together.

They accomplished that goal and then some early. Already with four catches for 99 yards and a score, Sanders ran a go route down the right side late in the first half.

Perhaps in a game that counts in the standings, the Broncos might be less aggressive with just 10 seconds on the clock. Either way, with a cornerback

underneath and a safety helping over the top, the execution had to be perfect. And it certainly was.

"In terms of the corner, he's playing low, and the safety is supposed to be right there but Peyton threw it in such a good spot where only I could catch it," Sanders said.

An excellent throw indeed, but the level of difficulty on Sanders' end was extremely high. He was fully extended, with the safety coming over for the hit, and had to secure the ball as he went to the ground.

"You've got to hurry up and catch it and get down, and that's one of the reasons I kind of dove for it and laid out, just to avoid the safety," Sanders said.

As for how he hung on while crashing to the ground with the safety diving at him: "You've just got to secure it. When I dive, especially in the end zone, I hold onto the ball for dear life like I'm riding a bull or something, just so I can make sure it doesn't bobble or pop out."

The magnificent catch was just the cherry on top of a clinic put on by the QB-WR tandem, and was only a preview of things to come.

WEEK 5: 30 YDS VS. CARDINALS

If anybody was looking for confirmation of how effective Sanders was from the get-go in Denver, look no further than Todd Bowles' defensive assignments in Week 5. Two-time All Pro cornerback Patrick Peterson shadowed Sanders all day while 30-year-old Antonio Cromartie drew Demaryius Thomas (which didn't go well either).

Sanders caught 7-of-9 targets for 101 yards on a banner day for the Broncos' offense, with this 30-yarder over Peterson as a standout moment.

With pressure in his face, Manning trusted Sanders enough to hurl a throw over Peterson as the receiver snuck between Peterson and safety Rashad Johnson before breaking toward the sideline. The pass cleared a leaping Peterson, but was still a good distance from Sanders, who fully extended to stop the ball before securing it despite a little bump off his facemask on his way to the turf.

"I'm a big believer in muscle memory," Sanders said. "I believe that if you do something over and over — just like every morning you wake up and brush your teeth — you create good habits and bad habits. This catch right here was definitely over the shoulder and it's something that I work on every single day at practice, so when I get into the game, it just becomes second nature."

Simply getting to and corralling the pass was impressive, but Sanders also had to hold it securely as he tumbled to the ground. We routinely see great catches go for

naught when the impact jars the ball free or causes it to move and scrape the grass. Not so with Sanders, who instinctively tucked the ball into his left arm (away from the ground) as he tumbled on his right shoulder.

"I try to really hold the ball against my stomach so it doesn't move," he said. "It's kind of like I'm putting pressure on it and squeezing the ball, rather than keeping it off in my hands and risking it."

"I don't know how I do it. Really I try to fall on my shoulder more than fall on my stomach so the ball won't pop out."

Even considering Thomas' spectacular game and a milestone (TD pass No. 500) for Manning, this acrobatic grab was play-of-the-day caliber.

WEEK 8: 38 YDS VS. CHARGERS

With a Thursday-night divisional game still scoreless late in the first quarter, the Broncos started their third possession with a bang. Off play-action, Manning fired downfield for Sanders, who was running a deep post with standout rookie Jason Verrett tracking him and former All-Pro Eric Weddle breaking from his safety position.

"I felt like the ball was going to be tipped by the DB, so I just tried to go up and high point it," Sanders said.

Because of great coverage from Verrett, who lined up with a healthy cushion at the snap, Sanders had to leave himself hanging in the air while fully extended just to reach the football, which nearly grazed the leaping corner's fingertips. Sanders somehow snatched the ball cleanly, but was still left open to a big hit.

"I saw Weddle come over, but it doesn't matter," Sanders said. "I'm trying to make the play for my team. Right now the score is 0-0 so I'm just trying to provide that spark."

The 5-foot-11, 188-pound receiver absorbed the mid-air hit and tumbled to the turf without the football budging before popping up immediately for good measure. His post-play reaction accurately portrayed how he felt about the grab, which he calls "my best catch of the season."

"Those plays, those bang-bang plays are scary," he said. "It's like your adrenaline is going and you know you've got to go up and catch it, which a lot of people don't like to go up and get those kinds of balls – they shy away from it."

"But I try to take pride in playing this game with tenacity and catching every single thing that's thrown my way. So that was definitely a great catch."

Sanders capped the drive six plays later with a 2-yard TD and would finish with nine catches (on nine targets), 120 yards and three scores. Still, this was the play that shined brightest.

WEEK 10: 32-YD TD AT RAIDERS

If the late-half touchdown against the Texans displayed early chemistry between Manning and Sanders, this mirror-image masterpiece illustrated how the duo has developed a telepathic-like connection over the weeks since. Once again, late in the half (35 seconds left this time), Manning found Sanders between the safety and corner on a go route for the diving score.

But this time, pay attention to two things in the broadcast version of the play below: First, note where Sanders is relative to the cornerback when Manning decides to throw the pass. Second, watch the ball at the top of the frame (or its shadow, which is traveling through the sideline) and note where it is relative to Sanders when he turns to locate it.

Cornerback D.J. Hayden – who ran a sub-4.4 40-yard dash at his pro day in March of 2013 – had three-and-a-half yards on Sanders (who ran a 4.41 at the 2009 combine) when Manning hit his back foot, but Manning immediately fired down the right sideline. By the time Sanders looked up – now even with Hayden at the 12-yard line – to locate the pass, the ball was just six yards behind the receiver and well on its way down. No problem for Sanders, who pulled away from Hayden late and brought it in over his shoulder while plunging into the end zone ahead of the oncoming safety.

“Most of the time you see the ball, sometimes when Peyton releases it,” Sanders said. “But this time, I just heard the crowd yell, as if the ball was there, and I looked up and the ball was on its way down. So I just tried to extend my arms, catch the ball and secure the catch.

“It ended up being a really good throw by Peyton and he just trusts me. And that’s something that when I first got here, I said, ‘I want to earn this guy’s trust. I want him to know I’m going to try to catch every single thing that’s thrown my way.’”

After all the extra sessions the pair has put in, from workouts at Duke University in April through OTAs and training camp, their commitment to building chemistry is being handsomely rewarded. Likewise, Sanders’ dedication to his own technique – he catches “about 150 balls” in a typical practice – is producing the desired results.

“It just goes to show that hard work pays off when you get in the game,” Sanders said. “If you do it based off muscle memory every single day of practice, and looking that ball over the shoulder, once you get in the game, it’s all going to be second nature.”

Along with the satisfaction of his behind-the-scenes grind paying dividends on the big stage, this master of acrobatics often gets a little bonus: the chance to sit back and survey his artful handiwork.

Including the preseason, four of Sanders' plays have been reviewed (one by coach's challenge, three by post-scoring-play booth review) this season, with all four being ruled as receptions after further examination. Sanders, who usually lets his teammates know on the sidelines that he did indeed make the catch, certainly enjoys those moments.

"It gets to slow down the play," he said. "I know a lot of fans think that when you see a guy drop a pass, 'Oh I could have caught that,' but this game is moving 100 miles per hour. I know that's an exaggeration but these guys are fast, big and strong and they're moving extremely fast out there.

"Instant replay allows you to really slow it down and just enjoy the catch and the art of the game."

So far, so good for the Broncos' Picasso. Just nine games into his career in Denver, who knows what else he has up his sleeve.

6 Things We Learned About Emmanuel Sanders This Week

Denver.CBSlocal.com

October 21, 2014

DENVER (CBS4) – It was a big weekend for Denver Broncos quarterback Peyton Manning, the NFL's new touchdown passes king, but another Bronco also had a big day for the orange & blue: Emmanuel Sanders.

Here's what we learned about Sanders this week:

1. He can actually make touchdown catches

Well, we really already knew that from his days with the Steelers, but it was starting to look odd the way Sanders kept racking up the receiving yards in his first five games as a Bronco but never scored a touchdown. He finally found the endzone in the first quarter [👉](#) against the San Francisco 49ers on Sunday.

2. He didn't intentionally use the ref to block out his defender on his touchdown reception.

"It looked like the referee had ice skates on," Sanders told CBS4's Vic Lombardi on Xfinity Monday Live, when asked about the play. "He was trying to get out the way but he couldn't. So whoever that referee is I want to thank you for that — for getting me open."

3. He and his fellow receivers planned the game of keepaway with Peyton Manning's record football.

"It wasn't even about trying to surprise anyone. Really it was just about trying having fun [👉](#). Really, that's what it's about, just trying to lighten the mood. I think Peyton's one of those guys that when the talk is all about Peyton, Peyton, Peyton ... he wants to bring it back to the team."

4. The keepaway game may not have happened if the 49ers were ahead.

What if the Broncos were losing at the time that Manning broke the record? Would that silly, pre-planned keepaway game still have happened?

"We didn't think about that," Sanders said. "See, that's a negative mindset, and we try to avoid that."

5. He rode a mechanical bull over the summer.

Sanders says his ride lasted about 13 seconds.

6. He was raised by twin uncles.

Sanders also talked on Xfinity Monday Live about growing up northwest of Dallas in the small town of Belleview, Texas. He said his uncles, who were twins, injected him with an inner strength. "They raised me up to be tough, I mean, they were like my older brothers. If I said anything smart, I'd get punched in the chest."

In Broncos' win, Emmanuel Sanders worthy of salute

By Andrew Mason
denverbroncos.com
October 24, 2014

DENVER -- The Broncos have nothing but thoroughbreds in their stable of top pass catchers. Any of them could be the primary target at any time. And one could be asked to pick up the slack for another in the case of injury or a mistake.

That's teamwork. Wide receiver is the most individual of positions on offense; it's often you against one man. But the Broncos' receivers are a collective of stars, and with only one quarterback and one football, you're not always going to get the opportunities that others might find.

"We understand in this offense that it can be anyone's night at any moment," said wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders. "Every week, we don't know where the ball is going to go. We run pretty much the same plays, the defense really dictates (where the ball goes)."

In Thursday's 35-21 win over the San Diego Chargers, it was his. Sanders scored the Broncos' first three touchdowns, caught the game's first pass and all eight others thrown his way, accounted for two of the Broncos' three longest gains, notched a 6-yard run on a jet sweep for good measure, and added to his growing reputation as one of the league's most explosive targets.

Such performances are now routine for Sanders, who has four 100-yard games in the last six and is on pace for a year in which he could shatter every personal best he accomplished in Pittsburgh. With 107 yards in New England on Nov. 2, he will match his previous career high for yardage. He's two touchdowns away from his previous career high, and is on pace for 107 catches -- almost as many as he had in the last two seasons combined.

In four years in Pittsburgh, his physical gifts jumped off the film. But as Peyton Manning continues to learn, there was something more.

"I didn't know what kind of speed that he had," said Manning. "I asked a couple people that had coached him or that had played against him and tried to get a little scouting report just so you'd have an idea. The best way is just to get with him and start throwing passes to him."

"He was much faster than I anticipated and he's got that acceleration where he's a hard guy to overthrow."

With Manning firing passes, is this "wide receiver heaven," as Sanders declared this offseason? It might be, but it's still Colorado, with a record-breaking quarterback at the controls, the ability to leave opponents out of breath and so many quality targets that an opposing defense has no choice but to cross its fingers and take its chances on leaving its No. 4 cornerback in man coverage.

That's what the Chargers had at their disposal after Jason Verrett aggravated his shoulder injury Thursday, four days after Brandon Flowers suffered a concussion. That left veteran Richard Marshall to face Sanders.

Marshall lined up within two yards of the line of scrimmage, then could only turn and try to keep pace as Sanders accelerated past him and gained five feet of separation inside the 5-yard-line. That was more than enough to grab the well-placed pass from Manning for a 31-yard touchdown that put the Broncos in front to stay just before halftime.

"The go route was just pure speed on his part and he has that," said Manning.

Even before Verrett departed, Sanders beat the talented, first-round rookie. The game's longest play from scrimmage, a 38-yard post route in the first quarter, came at the expense of Verrett and safety Eric Weddle.

Verrett and Weddle offered proper coverage to Sanders' route. But Manning delivered a perfect throw, and Sanders made a fearless catch between the two defenders.

However, Sanders isn't perfect, and he and the Broncos got a reminder when Weddle punched the football from Sanders' grasp at the Denver 37-yard-line 5:34 into the fourth quarter.

That's where the teamwork part comes in. Wes Welker was on Sanders' side of the field. He hit fifth gear in a flash, and when San Diego defensive end Ricardo Mathews failed to corral the loose football, Welker was in position for the recovery.

"All I could do was get up and laugh," said Sanders. "I was just thankful for Wes, that was a great hustle play by him to recover that fumble because that could have been bad.": Broncos vs. Chargers

"I saw the guy (Weddle) kind of chasing him down, so you never know," Welker said.

But what Welker does know is awareness: you must watch everything and be engaged in the play, even when you're not the target. There will come a time when in some way, Sanders must pick up Welker.

And the fumble was a reminder of how far Sanders has to go. He's among the best, but he's imperfect. He's in "wide receiver heaven," but will work at a hellacious pace to improve -- starting next week, when he carries the green football given to players who fumble.

"All of them (teammates) walked up to me and said, 'Well, we know who is going to have the green football next week,'" said Sanders. "Obviously, I need it, but it's no big deal it's only going to make me better."

And if he's better, the receivers are better, the offense is better, and the team has a better chance of taking the step it failed to make last year. No thoroughbred wins all its races. But Sanders fits in well because, like Welker, Demaryius Thomas and Julius Thomas, he's capable of sprinting past everyone to hit the finish line -- or goal line -- first.

Emmanuel Sanders takes his turn for touchdowns

By Jeff Legwold
ESPN.com
October 24, 2014

DENVER -- It is a spinning wheel of fortune, a fast, powerful, migraine-inducing combination of choices for opposing defensive coordinators.

Because Denver Broncos quarterback Peyton Manning can drop back and pick a number, any number, and dial up touchdowns. And Thursday night, in a 35-21 victory over the San Diego Chargers at Sports Authority Field at Mile High, it was wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders' turn.

"I feel like on any given night it can be anybody's night," Manning said. " ... They're all running full-speed routes because they know the ball might be coming to them."

By the time they turned out the lights in the stadium, Sanders had finished with nine catches for 120 yards and three touchdowns. Each of those was a career best for Sanders, and the three touchdown receptions were more than he had in each of his first three seasons with the Pittsburgh Steelers.

"Definitely a great night to be a Bronco," Sanders said. " ... Obviously we understand in this offense it can be anybody's night at any moment."

Tight end Julius Thomas and now Sanders each have had three-touchdown games this season. Wide receiver Demaryius Thomas has had multiple two-score games.

When the Broncos swept up the wreckage from a 35-point Super Bowl loss, the overriding theme -- in both tweaks made to what was a record-setting offense and the retooling of the team's defense -- was an emphasis on speed. Executive vice president and general manager John Elway said he wanted a more athletic roster, "more speed across the board, at every position."

And when the Broncos ranked the offensive players they hoped to pursue in free agency, the guys they believed could come to the team and have real impact, Sanders was at the top of the list -- so much so that the Broncos let wide receiver Eric Decker go into free agency without making him an offer.

The attraction was mutual to be sure, as Sanders consistently has called the Broncos' offense "wide receiver heaven" since his arrival, even as he went through the first five games of the season without a touchdown catch. But with the Broncos having played two games in the abbreviated Sunday-Thursday week, Sanders scored four touchdowns in a five-day span.

"I'm just happy tonight was my night and as a team we got the win," Sanders said. " ... That's the reason why I came here. When I entered the free-agency process, I said I wanted to go to a team that's going to spread the football around, that's going to throw it. ... Every week we don't know where the ball is going to go. [Thursday] night was just my night."

There have been times in recent weeks when Broncos offensive coordinator Adam Gase has said he believes this season's offense could be better than the 2013 version, and it has often been met with a raised eyebrow or two, or three. The Broncos scored a single-season-record 606 points last season with five different players finishing with at least 10 touchdowns. No other team in league history has had more than three.

But Sanders' speed, his ability to dismantle press coverage with his quickness off the ball and to elevate and catch the ball in a crowd gives these Broncos a dimension they didn't have a season ago to complement Demaryius Thomas. Toss in running back Ronnie Hillman's athleticism, which has been increasingly on display since Montee Ball's injury (two 100-yard games to go with 4.9 yards per carry over his last three starts), and the Broncos are a ruthlessly efficient collection of matchup nightmares. It is an offense where a remember-when game could pop up most anywhere on the depth chart.

"[Thursday] 18 was looking, was just looking at me," Sanders said. "And it felt good."

"Gym rat" Emmanuel Sanders impresses his QB

By Troy E. Renck
The Denver Post
October 24, 2014

The three touchdowns on the stat sheet weren't necessary. The explanation for the best day of Emmanuel Sanders' career began in April, a routine he carried through this week.

As a free agent he sought the Broncos. The Kansas City Chiefs thought they had him signed, but when Sanders made it known he didn't need to match Eric Decker's contract with the Jets, Denver's ears perked up.

They moved quickly, securing the former Pittsburgh Steelers weapon. The Broncos figured they were getting a legitimate deep threat. They didn't realize they landed a football honors student. He stayed after practice daily, improving his timing with Peyton Manning.

"He's a gym rat," Manning said. "He really loves football."

On a sweltering day in July, Sanders stood at the goal line for 30 minutes, going over hand signals and audibles. It was football's version of wax-on, wax-off.

"You can never stop working," Sanders said, "or learning."

Which brings us to Wednesday. In a quiet moment after a battery of media interviews, he reached into his locker and grabbed his iPad. He watched San Diego coverages repeatedly, believing he could enjoy a big game. Manning targeted him nine times. Sanders caught every one for 120 yards.

"Eighteen (Manning) was just looking at me," Sanders said, "and it felt good."

Sanders provided an educated guess that the Chargers would focus on containing Julius Thomas, who leads the league with nine receiving touchdowns. It would create gaps in coverage. Those became chasms with San Diego missing top cornerback Brandon Flowers, who was sidelined with a concussion.

Sanders began the scoring on a play that reflected the Broncos' creativity. The Chargers braced for Thomas at the goal line. He stepped back as a blocker to seal off the back side. Manning rolled right, staring in that direction. The trick worked. He paused and fired a strike to Sanders, who wandered slyly across the end zone on a drag route.

The play wasn't new. The result was.

"We usually don't get to that option," offensive coordinator Adam Gase said.

The second touchdown amplified Flowers' absence and Sanders' athleticism. While Decker starred in the red zone, he couldn't stretch a defense like Sanders, who considers Denver "wide receiver heaven," admitting it reminded him of his run-and-shoot days at Southern Methodist University.

Sanders raced past the Chargers' Richard Marshall on a go route — "he's a hard guy to overthrow," Manning said — leaving vapors in his wake.

Sanders struggled with injuries in Pittsburgh, and his slight build doesn't lend itself to the meat grinder that is the slot receiver's routes.

But since a calf injury in preseason, his health has been impeccable. His ability has never been questioned.

"He's so fast and can jump," said rookie receiver Cody Latimer, who has learned from Sanders. "And he's tough."

Sanders' final touchdown, while short, blended together the elements that have helped Sanders post four 100-yard games this season.

The Chargers chose the right defense on the goal line. They doubled across the middle with Wes Welker. They bracketed Sanders, but his comfort level with Manning paid off. Sanders looked covered, the only open window requiring a jump. Manning trusted Sanders' leap, and he skied on a slant route, shielding the defender for the final score.

"I can just tell I am enjoying playing with him. He has a great work ethic. He really loves football. He brings that energy everyday," Manning said. "And I know he's wanted to get into the end zone."

Emmanuel Sanders quick to play star role with Denver Broncos

By Irv Moss
The Denver Post
October 10, 2014

Keeping things in perspective, Sunday's game at the Meadowlands is the Broncos versus the Jets, not Emmanuel Sanders versus Eric Decker.

Sure, Decker caught a lot passes and was one of the crowd favorites as a Bronco for four seasons. But he signed with the Jets this past offseason, leaving an opening with the Broncos that was filled by Sanders, a free agent who had been playing for the Steelers.

It's a good bet Broncos fans would take a trade of Decker for Sanders right now. Sanders is one of the top receivers in the NFL, while Decker has been battling injuries.

Sanders, though, isn't looking over his shoulder.

"I wasn't part of Eric Decker's era here," Sanders said after practice this week. "I'm here now, and he's in New York. The NFL is a business. I can't worry about outside factors. I don't see it as pressure. I'm not here to compete with anyone but myself."

Even as a veteran, there could have been anxiety over changing teams, but Sanders has made an incredibly smooth transition, making acrobatic highlight catches on a weekly basis. He's become a prime target for quarterback Peyton Manning, leading the Broncos in catches (32) and yards receiving (435).

"It's difficult, but I never felt that I needed to wonder if I could fit in," Sanders said. "It really just came down to showing I would be a great teammate and a contributor to the cause."

Sanders has tied a Denver record with three consecutive games of at least 100 yards receiving.

"I want to go to the Pro Bowl because I haven't been there before," Sanders said. "And, of course, I want to be on a team that wins the Super Bowl. I'm satisfied with what has happened so far this season. Being on the same team with Peyton Manning is an opportunity of a lifetime."

Denver's players discounted any idea of Sunday's game being Sanders versus Decker.

"Fans may look at it that way," receiver Andre Caldwell said. "Decker did a great job when he was here. Emmanuel is doing a great job filling in at that spot. He's a playmaker."

Safety David Bruton said the focus will be on Decker, but only as an opponent.

"Eric definitely is a good player, and he was a great teammate," Bruton said. "In this league, you lose friends all the time. He won't take it easy on us, and we won't take it easy on him. That's the way it is."

Decker, who caught 87 passes for 1,288 yards and 11 touchdowns in 2013, avoided any controversy in midweek statements from Jets headquarters.

"I haven't seen all of their games, but he is playing great," Decker said of Sanders. "He has a different skill set. It's hard not to have success with a quarterback like Peyton."

"They're two different players," Denver offensive coordinator Adam Gase said of Sanders and Decker. "We're using Emmanuel to his strengths — quickness off the ball, getting separation from the defender and catching the ball."

Sanders' career night helps offense click

By Ben Swanson

denverbroncos.com

September 22, 2014

SEATTLE — Many of the questions surrounding the offense in the past few weeks centered on the second half.

"What changed?" was the common query repeated by members of the media as they tried to get a feel for why the offense struggled to find its feet just a short while after they rolled through defenses in the first couple quarters of the first two games.

Sunday in Seattle, the team answered not only questions about their effectiveness in the second half, but they answered the Seahawks' offense.

Momentum began to swing starting with a relentless rush from the defensive line to force a safety and later with an interception by Chris Harris Jr. helped by a friendly tip from Aqib Talib. The offense, seemingly revitalized, pushed back against Seattle's highly touted defense. They turned the turnover into seven points on a shovel pass to Julius Thomas, thereby cutting the deficit to just five points.

They weren't yet satisfied, but their following 57-yard drive ended abruptly with an interception.

The Broncos' defense returned to the field and held Seattle to a field goal, keeping it a one-possession game and keeping them from eating up much of the clock.

The offense had to make like a microwave with just a minute in which to get hot.

And they did just that, marching 80 yards in just six plays and 35 seconds. Peyton Manning would connect with Jacob Tamme on a 26-yard toss, and Manning would convert a two-point conversion on a throw to Demaryius Thomas to send the game to overtime.

Unfortunately, the Seahawks' offense would get the chance to run away with the game, winning the coin toss and taking the ball to the end zone in the first possession of overtime on a 13-play drive.

Tough loss aside, the Broncos finally got over the hump of proving their offense wasn't getting stuck in a rut once halftime ended.

A major part of the offense's successes Sunday afternoon was once again wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders, who leads the league in receptions and is third overall in receiving yards as of Monday morning.

Coming off his first career 100-yard receiving game in Week 2, Sanders followed it with an even better performance. The speedy wideout caught 11 passes for 149 yards, including a 42-yard bomb on their last drive.

But Sanders was dejected in the locker room after the game. It was the best NFL performance of his young career—and against one of the best defenses in recent history, no less—but it was also a loss.

"It feels good to catch a lot of balls but at the end of the day that doesn't matter," Sanders said. "My personal achievements don't matter if we have an L in the loss column. I'm not happy about that and I know [Manning's] not."

The growing connection with Manning has been evident in the first three games. Manning has looked to Sanders from the get-go, and they connected often and early once again. After a Montee Ball fumble on the Broncos' first play from scrimmage, their next possession benefited from four Sanders catches for a total of 41 yards.

Sanders was Manning's favorite receiver in the game with 15 targets, six more than the next receiver. And even though he was too down in the dumps about the loss to fully enjoy his great game, he acknowledged that they're growing greater chemistry by the day. Sanders said that he's been finding his groove thanks to his work ethic.

"I go into every game not even thinking about anything, just knowing that I'm in the prime of my game," he said. "I feel confident in my game. That's all based off just me working my butt off in practice, just trying to get better. And I'm going to continue to try to get better."

He was also encouraged by the offense's second-half improvement and adjustments, which had been previously a point of difficulty in the first two games.

"Yeah, we started to figure them out. They do a good job. They run one coverage and one coverage only and they have mastered that coverage," Sanders said.

"Eventually I just feel like we started to understand what we needed to do and that was double moves and things of that sort that exploited the defense that they were running. [...] At some point the competitive nature in you has to take over. That's what happened towards the end. We saw that we were still in the game and we still had an opportunity and we just started competing even more and started wanting it even more, not saying we didn't at the beginning."

And so the Broncos began to find openings and turn the tide of momentum in their favor. Sanders felt like they were going to win the game, the way it was going in the last quarter.

"I think everyone on the sideline was thinking that," he said. "It was unfortunate they went down and scored. [...] We didn't get an opportunity that I think everyone on offense wanted."

Despite the sullen mood, Sanders still thinks there are plenty of positives to take away from this game, though he and plenty of other Broncos were quick to downplay any talk that this was a moral victory.

"It's sad we walk away with a loss, but at the same time it's still good to have adversity, it's still good to go through adversity," a glum Sanders said, also putting his finger on a positive to take from the game.

With the bye week ahead of them, Sanders and the Broncos can take the game and try to extract the lessons about what they did well and what they can improve upon, as Sanders said after the game.

"We take the positives that we came back, we answered the bell, scored a touchdown and then the two-point conversion. We kept the game alive and took it to overtime even though we were trailing the entire game. Throughout the season you're going to go through adversity. It's just a little bump in the road. It's something that we can overcome and we will overcome."

Sanders finding footing in offense

By Ben Swanson

DenverBroncos.com

September 14, 2014

DENVER —The way Emmanuel Sanders has been starting games, it's hard to tell that he's just been getting acclimated in the offense.

With a 48-yard bomb on the first play Sunday, it seems like the concerns about chemistry between Sanders and Peyton Manning can go a bit back by the wayside. In fact, with two catches in the first quarter for 55 total yards in the first three plays, and 21 yards on three catches in the first three plays of the opening game against Indianapolis, it looks like they're getting in rhythm quickly.

That was indeed a big question mark coming into the regular season. As the Broncos came into their third preseason game—the last chance for Sanders to get reps in with Manning before most of the starters would rest heading into the season—Sanders had yet to catch a pass from Manning outside of practice. Then he exploded for 128 yards and two touchdowns against the Texans, which quelled apprehension.

With his first 100-yard game of his career now under his belt, Sanders is feeling even more comfortable in the offense, he said after Sunday's 24-17 win against the Chiefs.

It's hard to not feel comfortable when you start the game on a play that stretches over half the playing field.

They had known the call since the night before when Offensive Coordinator Adam Gase and Manning had planned on using the play to look for him in the post.

"Gase and Peyton told me, 'Look, first play of the game we're going to take a post and try to go deep if the coverage dictates what we need.' It ended up working out for us really well," Sanders said. "And I tell you what, to start the game out like that on a big bomb was definitely fun, but of course being me, I was still like 'I should've scored. I should've scored.'"

Fortunately for the Broncos, it would finish in a score anyway. Julius Thomas cradled Manning's dart thrown with just enough softness into the corner of the end zone to cap the quick 3:36 drive.

The passing offense would find its stride easily in the first half, with three touchdowns, each to a different receiver.

Though Sanders didn't get one of those touchdowns, he can take solace in knowing that each of the Broncos' scoring drives got key contributions from Sanders.

Outside of scoring, Sanders got quite cozy with Manning in just moving the ball up the field. "I'm optimistic that I'm going to continue to get better and I think the chemistry between me and Peyton is going to get better and the mold of this offense is going to get better," Sanders said.

The mold of the offense certainly can hold plenty of benefits for the receiving corps with Manning under center. Sanders says he understands that and knows how vital it is to be able to make plays with other offensive weapons across the field.

"The good thing is I'm playing outside of Demaryius Thomas and Julius Thomas," Sanders said. "Those guys get so much attention because they're Pro Bowl players. My role is when the coverage rolls away from me, I've got to make plays, and that's what I did. Peyton is depending on me to continuously makes those plays and I'm going to continue to work my butt off so I can."

The air assault finds those who work hard to get open, and opposing defenses face difficult decisions if they try to focus on one side more than the other. In turn, that can leave players like Sanders or Jacob Tamme or Andre Caldwell in favorable situations. Sanders saw himself as a beneficiary Sunday with eight receptions for a total of 108 yards.

"This is why I wanted to be a Denver Bronco, because I knew they sling the ball all over the field and we've got a great offensive coordinator in Adam Gase, who always makes the right call for some reason," he said.

And though it wasn't an impeccable performance from the offense all afternoon, that just leaves them with room to improve. Sanders says they're just scratching the surface. "I think we've got a lot of weapons," he said. "We're still not happy about putting up 24 points. I feel like we've got a potent offense that can continuously do better, and I think that we will."

Demaryius Thomas said that's what makes Sanders a great threat as he gets more in tune with Manning and the offense. "He's a great player, and he's undoubtedly quick. Peyton sees him and he gets open, so it's a good thing as long as we have Peyton with a lot of targets wide open so it's better for the offense."

Sanders said he was happy hitting the 100-yard mark in a game for the first time, but he also noted that he's still looking to improve. He knows that he can improve his chemistry and timing with Manning, which can help the offense improve further by giving it other consistent weapons.

With that in mind, Emmanuel Sanders can put himself in position to be even happier after games as the season goes on.

Ramsey: Emmanuel Sanders travels from Texas poverty to Colorado riches

By David Ramsey
Colorado Springs Gazette
September 2, 2014

Emmanuel Sanders, in slight trouble while sitting in a stiff office chair, did not yet know he was special.

Huey Chancellor knew. The football coach at Bellville High School saw a blindingly bright future for this skinny freshman.

Sanders had been sent to Chancellor's office to discuss a minor infraction. Chancellor can't remember exactly what had gone wrong.

Both men remember the long, life-changing conversation that followed. Chancellor calmly confronted Sanders, asked him if he wanted to travel from good to dominating.

Sanders answered yes.

The conversation transported Sanders from poverty in Bellville, Texas, population 3,794, to a packed stadium on the edge of downtown Denver and a \$15 million contract. His role with the Broncos grew more crucial Wednesday after the suspension of Wes Welker.

I realize this poor-to-rich saga is an ancient tale in American sports. Babe Ruth wandered through his young life as an impoverished orphan in Baltimore. His life changed when he met Brother Matthias Boutlier, who taught The Babe to read and write and, more importantly, to throw and hit a baseball.

Floyd Paterson rampaged along as a young thief who struggled, and failed, to find reason to like himself. His life changed when he met Cus D'Amato, who turned a sad-eyed young man into the world's heavyweight champion in 1956.

Sanders met Chancellor, and his life changed, too. An old story, yes, but one that never gets old.

"I can't promise you anything," Chancellor told Sanders. "But if you take it seriously on the football field and if you work in that classroom, you're going to be somebody special and your dreams will come true."

Sanders remembered his talk with Chancellor as he sat on a stool in the Broncos spacious locker room on a happy Saturday night. He had caught two touchdowns in an exhibition game against the Texans.

He stared into his locker as he traveled back to Bellville.

"I didn't know that I was good," Sanders said. "And Coach kind of opened my eyes to doing the right things and to start thinking about the future in terms of making a living for my family."

Life in Bellville was not easy. He lived with a multitude of relatives in a tiny house on Fifth Street. His grandmother worked two jobs, and Sanders admires her deeply.

Still, Sanders knew he needed to be seated at the dinner table the minute food was served. Nothing was left for the tardy.

"If you don't get there when the food is out, good luck to you," Sanders said. "Some nights I cried myself to sleep because of starvation but I don't like to talk about that story because it makes it seem like bad parenting and my grandma was the best parent in the entire world. She busted her butt."

He took his hunger to the football field. Chancellor asked Sanders to give him everything, but even the coach was surprised by his star's fervor. Sanders was blessed with speed and quickness. He was not blessed with a bulky frame.

Didn't matter. Chancellor watched enemy defenders flying through the air after savage Sanders blocks. He admired his star's extreme versatility. Sanders played slotback and defensive back. He returned punts and kickoffs. He almost never left the field.

He never complained.

Sanders pushed past what he thought were his limits, and he did this each day.

"It's about hard work and, of course, dedication," Sanders said. "People forget about dedication. Because I can get out here and work hard one time doesn't mean I'm going to be successful. Dedication is when you do it over and over and over. Every day you're dedicated to coming out and working hard."

His labor was not in vain. He earned a scholarship to Southern Methodist and became a star. He rose from Steelers third-round pick to featured receiver. He caught the attention of John Elway, who pays him \$5 million per season to catch passes from Peyton Manning.

His climb was unlikely, and he knows it.

"I came from nowhere," he said, "and now I'm out here and there are people screaming and wanting my autograph."

In July, a few days before he reported for his first Broncos training camp, Sanders returned to Bellville to speak to the current Brahmas. They listened intently, as Sanders once did in that stiff office chair.

Brandon Swearingen plays receiver and safety for Bellville. He was surprised when he saw this normal-sized man talking about hard work.

"He looks a lot bigger when he's catching touchdowns," Swearingen said.

Sanders delivered a simple yet profound message. You can push yourself to destinations that will surprise you and everyone else.

The Brahmas listened, with good reason.

"He's an example of how dedication can get you somewhere," Swearingen said. "And he comes from the same town where I come from."

The man who helped place Sanders in the NFL has departed Bellville. Chancellor seeks to build a winner in Edna, Texas.

On a recent evening, he laughed as he remembered the skinny freshman who became the NFL starter.

"He did not grow up with a silver spoon his mouth, but he was a class kid," Chancellor said.

Chancellor looked around his office walls, where he's placed framed photos of the finest players from his 22-season coaching career.

He realized, to his surprise, he saw no framed photo of the best player he ever coached.

"Tell Emmanuel," Chancellor said, "to send me one."

Sanders gets a new opportunity with Broncos

By Eddie Pells
Associated Press
May 30, 2014

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. (AP) — The last time receiver Emmanuel Sanders spent the offseason aiming to get his team back to the Super Bowl, there was only so much he could do.

Surgery on his right foot, then his left foot, made him more of a bit player in Pittsburgh's bid to repeat as AFC champion in 2011.

Playing for the Denver Broncos now, Sanders is back to full health and embracing his role in the sport more than ever.

The injuries taught him to appreciate football. And, he said, he figures a spot on the field with Peyton Manning could give him a chance to finally realize his full potential.

"Anytime you get the opportunity to play with Peyton Manning, you've got to capitalize on that," Sanders said Friday, after the Broncos wrapped up their first round of offseason workouts. "To have the opportunity to come into a passing system with one of the greatest, if not the greatest, player to play the position, it's a blessing."

After the injuries limited him to 22 catches in 2011, Sanders got a starting role in Pittsburgh and caught 111 passes over the next two seasons. Decent stats, but not what he felt was his full potential — the byproduct of being in a run-first offense and paired outside opposite Antonio Brown, who has almost the exact same body and receiving style as Sanders.

Now, Sanders, at 5-foot-11, 186, will play opposite 6-3, 230-pound Demaryius Thomas.

"He's a big, physical receiver and I'm more a smaller, quick, faster receiver that can stretch the field," Sanders said. "It definitely gives our offensive coordinator the ability to go with matchups. I think Peyton likes that a lot better also."

Offensive coordinator Adam Gase said the Broncos, after parting ways with Eric Decker, were looking for a receiver who could run the deep routes.

"Just that quickness, top of the route, and that speed down the field, is something that we were very interested in to start with," Gase said. "And he's shown us that he's still got that."

Now that he's regained it after a couple years overcoming the foot injuries, Sanders isn't taking anything for granted.

After wrapping up his first week of work with the Broncos, he went around to his teammates and asked them, "Can you believe we're in the NFL?"

Some rookie-like enthusiasm from a player getting ready for his fifth year in the league.

"It's from sitting on the sidelines, saying, 'Will I ever run again?'" he said. "Now, I'm just coming back into my own. Not having to worry about whether I can cut on a dime. Not having to worry about when I cut, will my feet break. I have an appreciation of everything because of what I've been through with my feet."

Sanders Learning from New Teammates

By Lauren Giudice
DenverBroncos.com
May 30, 2014

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. -- On Thursday, wide receiver Demaryius Thomas called fellow receiver Emmanuel Sanders "too quick." Quarterback Peyton Manning and Offensive Coordinator Adam Gase have echoed similar compliments and noted his work ethic and talent.

Sanders, who joined the Broncos as an unrestricted free agent on March 16, appreciated the nods. But he knows that the work isn't close to being done.

"I still have a lot of work that I have to put in," Sanders said. "It's early. It's OTAs right now. I'd be lying to you if I told you that I know the playbook. My head is still spinning a little bit. But, I'll tell you what, I'm happy and excited to be a Denver Bronco."

Sanders and Manning both understand that creating chemistry between quarterback and receiver takes time, so the two are putting in extra work after every OTA practice so they can foster a strong connection. Thomas said Sanders is a quick learner so creating that chemistry will come in time.

"Now that you can put it together in team work with guys like Emmanuel, with guys like [WR Cody] Latimer when he gets out there, it's beneficial," Manning said. "You really couldn't have enough OTAs because the season opener will be here before you know it. Emmanuel's been here the entire time. He's worked hard. He's asking a lot questions ... but I appreciate his work ethic and he's certainly a talented player."

In addition to working with Manning, Sanders is leaning on all the players on the team to help him as he studies the playbook and the offense. He said it is the most difficult playbook that he has been a part of and he's still learning it, but during OTAs he's showing he can contribute to the offense.

"I've been very impressed," Gase said. "He's been exactly what we thought from watching him in Pittsburgh. His ability to get off versus the jam is very impressive. Just that quickness, top of the route, and that speed down the field is something that we were very interested in to start with, and he's shown us that he's still got that."

Sanders is learning a lot from teammates like Thomas and Wes Welker. With compatible sizes, Welker is a good model for Sanders to learn from and Sanders admires his knowledge of the game.

But Sanders appreciates Thomas for another reason.

"Me and Demaryius complement each other," Sanders said. "I'm not saying that me and Antonio Brown didn't complement each other, but I feel like we're too much of the same. DT is a big receiver. He's a big, physical receiver and I'm a more a smaller, quick, faster receiver that can stretch the field. It definitely gives our offensive coordinator the ability to go imagine. I think Peyton likes that a lot better also."

Sanders is excited to be part of an offense that spreads the ball around, setting an NFL record last season with five players, including three wide receivers, scoring 10 or more touchdowns. He said the wide receivers' numbers from last season, though the receptions were shared relatively evenly between receivers, were perfect for him.

During OTA practices, Sanders said he goes around and tells each of his new teammates how fortunate they are to play in the NFL. He tells them to take advantage of the opportunity to play and reminds them that one day they will tell their grandchildren about their days in the NFL.

Sanders' unique appreciation of the games stems from his experience when he broke his foot during his rookie year in 2010. He sat on the sidelines during the Steelers' Super Bowl loss.

"I missed out on practices and I remember those moments and I was sitting on the sideline questioning myself, would ever run again, because it felt like I would never run again with two foot surgeries," Sanders said.

After the difficulties he faced while recovering from his injuries, he is now enjoying being an NFL player more than ever. He is truly soaking in the opportunity to play, to learn from new teammates and to be a member of the Denver Broncos.