

Jordan “Sunshine” Taylor proving he’s much more than the kid with the hair

By Nicki Jhabvala
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Since arriving in Colorado in the spring of 2015, Jordan Taylor has always been less famous than his hair. His blond locks earned him the nickname “Sunshine” from Peyton Manning, because of his resemblance to the long-haired quarterback in “Remember The Titans,” and they are now his proof of identification.

For better or worse.

“It’s awful. It’s terrible,” said Cody White, Taylor’s coach at Denison High School in Texas. “I make fun of him all the time, but he doesn’t listen to me anymore. He ought to get a shampoo contract out of it.”

The wide receiver is hard to miss, in part because of his lanky 6-foot-5 frame but mostly because of that hair that billows out from the base of his Broncos helmet and, on cue, requires a quick toss after every practice and game.

But over the past year — after a stint as Manning’s personal receiver a season ago, a memorable tale about a suit, and acrobatic catches strewn throughout training camp and the regular season — Taylor has forced many to remember the name on the back of his jersey, and not just the curly mane that shades it.

The undrafted wideout from Rice has not only made the improbable leap to an NFL roster, he continues to earn a bigger role with the defending Super Bowl champions.

“I think he’s becoming a really good player,” said Broncos coach Gary Kubiak. “Jordan was a bubble player for us, really (at the start of) the season. ... Our team has a lot of confidence in him. He’s earned that.”

NFL crash course

Manning is, in many ways, like football’s Oprah. His words have power. If he recounts a go route in a game 10 years ago, you hang on his every word. If he lauds a player you’ve never heard of, you will suddenly like that player.

The Peyton Effect is real, and Taylor is proof. He got at least three endorsements from Manning last year, none more cogent than the 17 words rattled off during the Hall of Fame-bound quarterback’s retirement speech in March:

“Jordan Taylor is going to surprise a lot of people for the Broncos next year, in my opinion,” Manning said that day.

Taylor had already vaulted to some degree of fame by then, when word got out about that navy suit he received for Super Bowl 50 week. Taylor didn't have a suit, so he asked Manning if he could borrow an old one.

"He's super, uh, what should I say ... frugal," White said. "His big deal last year was he was able to eat as many meals as he could at the facility."

Manning had Taylor custom-fitted for the suit, a thank you for helping Manning return to form after a foot injury last season.

That was when Taylor pulled triple duty at Broncos practices. He would arrive at 7:30 a.m. and, when other players dispersed to meetings, he'd saunter to the team's field house with Manning. For about an hour and 15 minutes, Taylor would run route after route, with Manning's vows of "one more" throw often turning into 10 more. And then Taylor would hit the fields with his other teammates, participating in receiver drills and helping on the scout team.

"I lost a little weight," Taylor said with a wide grin. "But it was a tremendous help for me, not only in speeding up my learning of the offense but also just with concepts, offensive schemes, route-running. He's very particular on that. If he tells you to be at a certain spot, you'd better be in that spot. So I kind of learned how critical that was in making an offense work."

The personal Manning Passing Academy gave Taylor a crash course in advanced football. Taylor says it was mere luck; the opportunity was his because no other receiver was available to help Manning.

Taylor's coaches and family knew he would say that.

"I look up to him for that, just the way he handles things," said Jordan's older brother, Ryan Taylor, a former UCLA offensive lineman and now a coach at Tyler (Texas) Junior College. "He's just always very calm about things, and very humble. And I thought it showed how much character Peyton had too. He's a good man for that, and if I could tell him thank you, I would."

The switch back

The irony in all of this is that Taylor was a quarterback. A very fine one, in fact. At Denison High School, about 80 miles north of Dallas, Taylor transitioned from receiver to starting quarterback as a sophomore.

For White, the tales of nine years ago have stuck.

He starts with one of his favorites, when Taylor scored three fourth-quarter touchdowns to lead Denison to a comeback win over rival Sherman in 2007.

And then there's the one from Taylor's junior year, when Denison won a district game against McKinney, led by Zach Lee, the Los Angeles Dodgers' first-round draft pick in 2010.

“Jordan hit the ground pretty hard hurdling a guy and got tackled hard,” White said. “He wanted to keep playing and we couldn’t tell if anything was really wrong. He scored the two-point conversion at the end to win it 65-64. He ran the ball and ran over a couple guys.

“Come to find out, his collarbone was broken. He’s a tough kid.”

The rise of Sunshine

Taylor has this habit of believing all these moments are simply fortuitous. He just happened to be there, in the right spot at the right time. But he might have a solid argument for one, when he switched to receiver as a freshman at Rice. He arrived as a quarterback, but the team needed help at receiver.

Enter Taylor, the kid with the hair, who quickly became Rice’s leading receiver. He finished his collegiate career with 175 catches for 2,585 yards and 20 touchdowns. With him for most of the ride was fellow receiver Klein Kubiak, one of Gary’s three sons. Klein joined the Broncos’ personnel department in 2014 and now scouts for the team.

Taylor had hopes he would be drafted in 2015, but the Broncos got him as a free agent.

“I was talking to him the whole time and said, ‘Look, you need to come here. We can sign you, you can have a chance to make the team,’ ” said Tyke Tolbert, the Broncos’ wide receivers coach. “A lot of it is because of his hard work. He’s a smart guy too.”

The most noticeable improvement, Tolbert said, is in Taylor’s feet. In college, Taylor relied heavily on his long frame, sneaky speed and strong hands to beat defenders on a lot of go routes.

But details matter in the pros. Speed alone won’t shake defenders.

“Getting out of his breaks and having really good footwork — we worked on that tremendously,” Tolbert said. “His catching radius has always been really good and he’s always had good hands. But if you can’t get open in this league, it’s hard to display that.”

But it was on display as early as training camp, with Taylor’s Odell Beckham-like, one-handed grab that went viral. It was on display again in the preseason, when his two touchdowns at Arizona all but solidified his spot on the roster this year. And it was most recently on display at New Orleans, where Taylor caught his first touchdown pass as a pro, a 14-yard leaping grab in the right corner of the end zone.

The CBS announcers failed to mention his name as the play unfolded. But they soon figured it out.

He is Jordan “Sunshine” Taylor. The guy with the hair.

Jordan Taylor, WR

Height: 6-foot-5

Weight: 210 pounds

Age: 24

Hometown: Denison, Texas

College: Rice

Acquired: Undrafted free agent, 2015

- Spent rookie season on practice squad, helped Peyton Manning rehab from foot injury
- Signed to active roster after impressive 2016 training camp, preseason
- Made regular-season debut Sept. 8 vs. Carolina
- Caught first career pass (20 yards) in win vs. Colts on Sept. 18
- Scored first career touchdown (14 yards) in win at New Orleans on Nov. 13
- Had 175 catches for 2,585 yards and 20 TDs after converting from QB to WR at Rice
- As QB at Denison (Texas) High, threw for 3,766 yards and 40 TDs, and ran for 2,500 yards and 39 TDs

Practice squad WR Jordan Taylor helped Peyton Manning get his game back

By Elizabeth Merrill

ESPN.com

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With about 2½ hours to go before kickoff, Peyton Manning and Jordan Taylor met on the field for one last catch. They warmed up for 30 minutes, and then Manning walked up to Taylor and thanked him for everything.

"One more game and you've got it," Taylor told him. Manning, locked in and unemotional, agreed.

Maybe late Sunday night, when Taylor planned to put on his new suit and celebrate at the Broncos' after-party, the rookie receiver would stop and reflect on this crazy dream of a year. In May, he went undrafted; by June, he was standing on a practice field during offseason workouts, waiting for Peyton Manning to throw to him, nervously telling himself, "Don't drop the ball."

Taylor is a 23-year-old practice-squad player, he didn't even suit up Sunday, but no one in the Broncos' locker room would argue his value in helping Denver win its first Super Bowl since 1999. The rookie from Sherman, Texas, helped Manning get back on the field.

In December, when Manning was rehabbing from a foot injury, Taylor became his throwing partner. They would meet at 9 o'clock in the morning, at least three times a week, before the Broncos' afternoon practice. It made for a busy winter.

First, Manning is known for his intense workouts, in which he admittedly asks too many times for one more post or comeback route that becomes three or four. Taylor also simulates the opponent's best receiver during practice and plays free safety on the scout team.

"He went out there and basically had a full practice with Peyton," Broncos tight end Owen Daniels said, "and then he had to come out and play both ways. It's extremely hard. It's hard enough to play one way, let alone get run into the ground on scout team and then having to play scout-team defense as well."

They bonded over the summer, when Manning invited Taylor to a U2 concert. To this day, Taylor has no idea why the future Hall of Famer asked a long-haired kid from Rice to hang out with him. He wonders if it was because he was the last one in the locker room that day.

Months passed, and then Manning suffered a partially torn plantar fascia in his foot. One night, Manning texted Taylor and asked if he'd catch for him.

"What are you going to do, tell Peyton Manning no?" Taylor said.

Though he didn't get drafted, the 6-foot-5 receiver did have a number of teams calling. Denver was appealing to him because he played college football with coach Gary Kubiak's son Klein, but also because of Manning. He knew he probably wouldn't be catching passes from him as a rookie, but thought he could be part of a special season with Manning.

Taylor had no idea he'd spend this much time with Manning. They grew so close that when Taylor recently found out he needed a suit for his trip to the Super Bowl, he asked Manning if he had an old suit lying around he could borrow. Shortly after that, the Broncos told Taylor to go into a room to do interviews. When he saw two very well-dressed men in the room, he knew they weren't reporters. They were tailors to fit him for a custom-made suit, courtesy of Manning. Needless to say, Taylor has never been to a tailor before.

The charcoal suit, he said, is by far the best piece of clothing he owns. He said the second-most expensive thing is probably a polo shirt. On Sunday night, as his teammates celebrated around him, Taylor quietly dressed in his locker, putting on a black T-shirt and gray jeans. He planned to go back to the team hotel and put on the suit for the Broncos' celebration.

"Been one heck of a year," he said. "I don't think any quarterback deserved this more than [Manning] did."

Manning has lobbied for the Broncos to keep Taylor next season, but the receiver knows he has to prove himself all over again. He already has proven himself to some of the most important people in the locker room.

"He's going to be a player," Daniels said late Sunday. "He's got good speed, great range. I think people underestimate him. I don't know why."

Peyton Manning found comeback aide in Jordan Taylor

By Lindsay Jones
USA Today
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Sorry, Demaryius. Move over Emmanuel.

Peyton Manning might have a new favorite wide receiver, and it's a player you likely have never heard of.

It's possible that no one on the Denver Broncos roster caught more passes from Manning this year or was more important to Manning's late-season return from a torn plantar fascia in his left foot than Jordan Taylor, a rookie from Rice and member of the practice squad.

When Manning needed a throwing partner for his early morning workouts in early December, when the rest of the team was practicing without him, he'd text Taylor, who would show up hours early for work to run through any route the quarterback wanted. It meant the equivalent of almost two full practices a day for Taylor.

When Manning put himself through a long pregame workout before the Week 17 season finale against the San Diego Chargers, the first game of Manning's NFL career in which he suited up as a backup, it was Taylor running through a series of different routes.

"I feel bad because I was running him into the ground and he hadn't even started practice yet," Manning said. "I have a bad habit of saying, just one more, and one more can turn into 10 more. I don't think I could have gotten through my rehab and gotten back if it had not been for him. I am very grateful for his help."

On Sunday, before Super Bowl 50, it will be Taylor on the field several hours before the game going through pregame warmups with Manning.

"It's a nice reminder of kind of where we've been this season, earlier in the year. I look forward to that," Manning said.

That will be Taylor's big Super Bowl moment, running routes on the field at Levi's Stadium hours before any of the television cameras turn on and the fans fill the stands. But it's already been a memorable week, one that started with his packing dilemma before the team left Denver.

It was Taylor's first road trip of the season, because practice squad players don't travel, and he realized he didn't own a suit suitable for the team's charter flight to San Jose.

So he texted Manning.

"Do you have any old suits?" Taylor asked.

Both Manning and Taylor are 6-foot-5, and though Manning is 20 pounds heavier, Taylor figured he could make do with a hand-me-down.

“He texts me back and all he said was, ‘I’ll get you set up,’” Taylor told USA TODAY Sports. “I didn’t know what that meant.”

What it meant was Taylor was about to receive his first custom suit. Manning’s suit guy showed up at the team facility in Englewood, Colo. the next day and took all of Taylor’s measurements. The suit and a pair of shirts and ties arrived in time for the team’s Sunday departure, and Taylor proudly wore the fitted gray suit – complete with an orange-and-blue tie and blue-and-white pocket square – on the team flight.

“He may have been one of the best dressed players on the team coming out here,” Manning said. “I just appreciate his help, and I’m excited about his career. He’s a tall receiver, maybe the Eddie McCaffrey, Eric Decker-type mold, and I really think he’s got a bright future ahead of him.”

At Super Bowl 50’s Opening Night on Monday, Taylor milled around the floor at the SAP Center in San Jose in his league-issued white pullover, his long curly blond hair pulled into a ponytail and tucked under a ball cap.

He kept gazing around the area, and up at the big screen to watch Broncos stars such as Manning and pass rusher DeMarcus Ware at their podiums.

It was just another surreal moment in what has been a unique rookie year, thanks in large part to Manning.

The bond between the 39-year-old future Hall of Fame quarterback and the 23-year-old undrafted wide receiver began last spring, when Manning invited Taylor to join him and some friends at a U2 concert. But it was cemented on the practice field, as Manning learned he could trust Taylor in practice nearly as much as star receivers Demaryius Thomas and Emmanuel Sanders.

And as much as Taylor helped Manning in those weeks Manning was sidelined, Taylor believes his game improved too, something that should help as he tries to make the Broncos’ 53-man roster in 2016.

“While he was rehabbing and trying to get himself better, he was critiquing my routes, my technique, my knowledge of the offense,” Taylor said. “He definitely helped me out.”

Practice squad receiver helped Manning get to Super Bowl 50

By Arnie Stapleton
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Jordan Taylor sauntered into the locker room, a spiffy custom-made charcoal suit slung over his right shoulder.

"Let me see it," Peyton Manning asked excitedly.

The Denver Broncos' practice squad receiver unzipped the white vinyl bag to reveal the three-piece ensemble as Manning admired the craftsmanship and choice of color.

The suit was a gift from Manning, his way of thanking Taylor for helping him regain his rhythm and reclaim his starting job in time to make this run to Super Bowl 50.

A 6-foot-5 rookie from Rice with runway model good looks and long, golden locks, Taylor served as Manning's personal practice partner when the five-time MVP began his comeback from a left foot injury in December.

"I don't think I could have gotten through my rehab and gotten back if it had not been for him," Manning said Tuesday. "I am very grateful for his help."

To show his appreciation, Manning sent Taylor to see his tailor.

"I bought him a suit, two shirts and two ties for the road trip — and he may have been one of the best dressed players on the team coming out here on Sunday," Manning said. "I just appreciate his help."

The workouts consisted of assistant equipment manager Mike "Harry" Harrington snapping to Manning and Taylor running himself ragged.

"We'd work from the right side first and run all of the route tree: curls, fades, hitches, slants, all that. We'd do 10 routes on the left side, 10 routes on the right side," Taylor said.

"And then he likes to get into two-minute mode hurrying up and calling things out. So, we would do that up and down the field three or four times. So, it was exhausting and then I'd have to go to practice later that afternoon."

Manning said he "felt bad because I was running him into the ground and he hadn't even started practice yet. I have a bad habit of saying, 'Just one more.' And one more can turn into 10 more."

Taylor's not just a practice squad receiver, but he also lines up as a scout team free safety, "so I lost a little weight" in what he called his very own two-a-days.

Manning was no less demanding when he was hurt. If anything, his maniacal pursuit of perfection was only enhanced when he missed six weeks with the torn plantar fascia near his left heel.

And that's where Taylor benefited from his daily sessions with Manning.

"The crispness of my routes, my understanding of this offense, all better because he'll drill that into you for sure," Taylor said. "I mean, you could go back to the beginning of football and you still couldn't ask for anybody better."

It was like having Einstein tutor you in math or Picasso teach you to paint.

"Obviously, having a guy like Peyton come to you and ask you to help him out and ask you to do routes with him on Sundays before the game, it was an honor for me," Taylor said.

"Not only that, but once you get over the awe of it and actually get to work with him and grind with him, I mean, he's coaching me up on route depths, route techniques while he's trying to get better, too. So, it helped me to grow as a receiver."

Taylor had a better view of Manning's progress than even coach Gary Kubiak, who watched most of those indoor sessions on film.

Taylor saw the progress every day, and by the time the Broncos played their regular season finale against San Diego, Manning had progressed enough to suit up and serve as a backup for the first time since his freshman year at Tennessee.

Manning didn't expect to play that day, so he and Taylor worked up a good sweat well before kickoff.

While Taylor was settling in for the second half after grabbing a hot dog in the press box, Manning was entering the game late in the third quarter, his comeback helping Denver secure the top seed in the AFC, which proved crucial in getting to Sunday's showdown with the Carolina Panthers.

"I saw this coming," Taylor said.

And Manning sees good things ahead for Taylor, too.

"I'm looking forward to his career," Manning said. "He's a long, tall receiver, maybe the Eddie McCaffrey, Eric Decker-type mold. I really think he's got a bright future ahead of him."

Their work together isn't finished, either.

When Manning first got to Denver in 2012, he quit warming up on the field before games because he'd have to constantly stop to shake the hands of too many former teammates who were now coaching or broadcasting the game. So, he'd loosen up his arm in the locker room or the tunnel instead.

That changed last month when he and Taylor hit the field two hours before kickoff against San Diego.

"And we won, so I did it against Pittsburgh, and versus New England. So we'll be out there Super Bowl Sunday," Manning said. "It's a nice reminder of kind of where we've been this season. I look forward to that."

Taylor, too.

Jordan Taylor helps keep Peyton Manning sharp as his private receiver

By Nicki Jhabvala
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The request was put in early.

Broncos quarterback Peyton Manning, ever the stickler for game preparation, developed a plan for his return shortly after suffering a foot injury that would ultimately sideline him for six games this season.

Behind the scenes, Manning would slowly work his way back onto the field. And he would do so with a receiver he handpicked.

Jordan Taylor, a lanky 6-foot-5 practice-squad player who signed with the Broncos as an undrafted rookie from Rice last May, was his guy.

"He came to me a week and a half, two weeks after he was injured, when he was able to get back out there," Taylor recalled. "The first game he was back, against San Diego, he was like, 'Hey, I want to warm up with you before the game.' It's continued since then."

During the Broncos' regular-season finale, at home against San Diego, Manning returned in the second half to steady an offense in a comeback victory.

The Broncos, with Manning leading the offense, are back in the Super Bowl for the second time in three years. But a routine that started late in the season as part of Manning's recovery has since blossomed into a regular pregame sight.

"He'll always make sure in our meetings the night before that I'm aware we're going to be out there usually about two hours before the game, get a little work in," Taylor said. "We pretty much do the same thing every Sunday before the game. It's kind of a spinoff of the work we were doing when he was injured. I guess he just wanted to keep that going."

Shortly before kickoffs, Manning, wearing his usual all-navy Broncos sweat suit, saunters onto the field with assistant equipment manager Mike Harrington and Taylor. Harrington plays the role of center, and Taylor takes over for Manning's regular receivers, running routes and fielding pass after pass, first on the right side of the field, then on the left.

And in the days after, the routine continues, a little over an hour before the start of practices. Harrington snaps. Taylor runs. Manning throws.

"I feel bad because I was running him into the ground and we hadn't even started practice yet," Manning said. "He was going out there and he plays receiver and free safety during practice, so we would go at about 9:30 and practice starts at 10:45. I have a bad habit of saying, 'Just one more, just one more.' One more can turn into about 10 more."

For Taylor, a player with no game experience in the NFL, the practice is invaluable.

For Manning, the preparation is as much religion as it is necessity. So the week before the Super Bowl 50, Manning paid for a fitted suit, two shirts and a pair of ties for Taylor to wear in San Francisco. It was a thank-you to the kid who helped him return to the field.

"I don't think I could have gotten through that rehab and kind of gotten back had it not been for him," Manning said. "I'm very grateful for his help. He may have been one of the best-dressed players on the team coming out here."

Zaire Anderson, Jordan Taylor among Broncos rookies looking to keep streak alive

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

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Most folks who get paid to evaluate personnel in the NFL will always say it doesn't matter where, or even if, a player is drafted when the roster decisions are made. That the decisions are made by what they see, by how the players play.

But the Denver Broncos mean it. They really, really mean it.

"You can't help but know the history," running back C.J. Anderson said. "You see it in the starting lineup here."

For the last 11 training camps at least one undrafted rookie has made the cut for the Broncos. A first-year player, who was bypassed in the draft, even by the Broncos themselves, has won the summer game of vocational survival and not been voted off the football island.

Anderson was the guy in 2013, Pro Bowl cornerback Chris Harris Jr. was the guy in 2011 and linebacker Wesley Woodyard, now in his second year with the Tennessee Titans after six seasons with the Broncos, was one of two who made it in 2008. But from cornerback Roc Alexander (2004) to wide receiver Isaiah Burse and running back Juwan Thompson (both in 2014), the streak lives on.

"I think it's something you want to be good at, you want to be good at all phases of the draft," Broncos' executive vice president of football operations/general manager John Elway said. "I think you always look at those names when the draft is over and you start making those calls and feel there are some guys in there who can help your football team. And when we're trying to get them to come here, we do make sure everybody knows the history."

The current streak, of 11 previous years, is tied for the third-highest in the league behind only Indianapolis (16 consecutive years) and Kansas City (12 consecutive years).

The Broncos currently have 11 undrafted rookies in training camp and as Friday's preseason opener in Seattle approaches, there are two who have made the biggest of impressions thus far. There is certainly plenty of football left to be played, plenty of game-speed opportunities that remain for somebody to catch the Broncos' collective eye, but Rice wide receiver Jordan Taylor and Nebraska linebacker Zaire Anderson have stood out over the last two weeks.

Both players put themselves squarely on the radar in the offseason workout and have taken the next step in camp's early going.

Anderson, at 220 pounds, was initially thought to be a high-motor, high-character player who might be slightly undersized to play inside linebacker in the team's 3-4 defense. Anderson has consistently put himself in position to make plays and some of the biggest hits of camp have been delivered by Anderson.

"Yeah ... he has flashed," Broncos coach Gary Kubiak said. "He flashes every day. He's small. You watch him stature-wise work out and you say, 'Can you play in there?' But there have been some great guys do that. ... He's a leader. He handles the huddle really well. He loves contact. [Linebackers coach] Reggie [Herring] done a good job with him, but you have to give the kid a lot of credit. He's come a long way."

Taylor, at 6-foot-5, has the catch radius the Broncos would like to add to the offense, and he had a 4.52-second clocking in the 40-yard dash at his pro day before this year's draft. He had three 50-catch seasons at Rice, and the Broncos do have room on the depth chart at receiver after Demaryius Thomas, Emmanuel Sanders and Cody Latimer.

"It's not a bad deal," Taylor said of going undrafted. "Nobody expects much from you, so coming in you can surprise a lot of people, continue to move up, try to make plays for the team and just find your spot here."

Veteran Andre Caldwell has been reliable when asked to play and can serve as a returner, but the Broncos figure to keep five receiver, possibly six if compelled by somebody's play. So, for Taylor and the others at the position, their work in the offense in the preseason games, as well as special teams possibilities, will tell the tale.

"It's really not up to me," Taylor said. "It's up to my play on the field, how I do and the production that I have in these preseason games. Hopefully, I can do enough to where I catch the coach's eye, and make them want to do that ... Right now, it's all really about hustling. Knowing your assignment, first of all, and just giving as much effort as you possible can. Really it's up to the preseason games. You got to show that you'll be able to go out there and make a play."

Jordan Taylor stands out for Broncos as undrafted wideout

By Troy Renck
DenverPost.com
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Jordan Taylor runs down the sideline, long strides creating slight separation from the defender. The ball arcs into his hands as the largest crowd of training camp (4,787) erupts into cheers.

This is the intriguing twist of two-a-days, a reason for diehard fans to soak up 90-degree sun: The mystery player.

An undrafted college free agent has made the Broncos' 53-man roster in 11 consecutive seasons. Taylor represents a candidate to turn it into a dozen. The receiver continues to catch passes thrown his way, standing out as much as anyone can after five days of practice.

"You see him running past everybody. ... Jordan has such great length," offensive coordinator Rick Dennison said. "If you throw it in his zip code he seems to be able to come down with it."

Taylor remains hard to miss. He stands 6-foot-5 and weighs 210 pounds. He sports long blond hair, which earned him the nickname "Sunshine." Scouts love catch radius. In simple terms, Taylor possesses the wingspan of a pterodactyl.

"If he's covered, sometimes, he's not really covered," receivers coach Tyke Tolbert said.

Taylor exists as a longshot, but didn't land in Denver by accident.

Like many on this team, he owns Houston ties. Taylor played collegiately at Rice, teaming with Broncos coach Gary Kubiak's son Klein for four seasons. When the Broncos failed to draft a receiver, Taylor received their recruiting call with interest.

"Klein (a player personnel assistant with the Broncos) made a few calls. I knew him well and built a friendship with him in college. So yeah, he might have had a little input," Taylor said. "I thought it was a good fit. I am blessed to be in this position."

The Broncos landed Taylor with a \$7,500 signing bonus, second to lineman Dillon Day among undrafted free agents. The amount hinted of Taylor's opportunity, but guaranteed nothing. He began turning heads with his hands. He made a one-handed catch on a slant route Sunday, and consistently has used his height to his advantage. Tolbert said Taylor's smarts don't hurt either, admitting "he knows pretty much all of the offense right now."

"I am not as fast or quick as some of those smaller guys, so I have to use my size," Taylor said. "When you are undrafted, you want to prove you belong. It starts by getting in the playbook. In order to catch the coaches' eyes you have to know what you are doing so you can make plays."

Taylor defined consistency at Rice, catching 54, 55 and 57 passes his last three seasons. Part of the charm of the underdog is the path to the pros. Taylor signed with the Owls as a quarterback after setting every record at Denison High School in Texas. He earned 4A Region II player of the year honors, topping McKinney High's Zach Lee, who made his pitching debut for the Los Angeles Dodgers last month.

Taylor chose Rice hoping to play two sports. But he had to think outside of the batter's box once there, abandoning his career as a center fielder to focus on football. His experience as a quarterback has helped him as a receiver, having viewed plays through each side of the lens.

"I've always thought that could help an offensive player," Broncos quarterback Peyton Manning said.

Taylor, who has fielded punts before practice to increase his versatility, faces a tall order. The Broncos feature an experienced fourth receiver in Andre Caldwell, and a talented crew in Jordan Norwood, Solomon Patton, Nathan Palmer, Isaiah Burse and Bennie Fowler vying potentially for one spot.

All Taylor can control is his performance, while not forgetting to soak up this experience. He's a long way from Denison High.

"It was surreal that first time I was on the field with Manning," Taylor said. "You line up and see Peyton is about to throw you the ball, and I am thinking, 'I better not drop this pass.' Now he's a teammate and I am trying to learn anything I can from him."