

Broncos' Vance Walker talks Roman Reigns, WWE, Von Miller's dancing

By Joe Nguyen
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For a pair of former Georgia Tech defensive linemen, Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, Calif., played host to the biggest stage of their careers.

In February, Denver defensive lineman Vance Walker and the Broncos won Super Bowl 50, bringing home the franchise's third Lombardi Trophy.

On the same field 10 months earlier, his former Yellow Jackets linemate Joe Anoa'i — better known as WWE superstar Roman Reigns — had his own moment. Reigns battled Brock Lesnar for the WWE world heavyweight championship in the main event of WrestleMania 31.

While Reigns didn't get the fairytale ending Walker had — Seth Rollins ran in to cash in his Money in the Bank for an inpromptu title shot and came away with the belt — he stood center stage in pro wrestling's biggest showcase. On Sunday, he'll get another chance as he faces Triple H for the title at WrestleMania 32 in Arlington, Texas.

Walker recently talked to The Post about being a pro wrestling fan, playing football alongside Reigns in college and his thoughts on Von Miller on "Dancing with the Stars."

When did you start liking wrestling?

"Ever since I moved. I used to live in Ohio and I moved down to South Carolina when I was 11 years old. A lot of my friends, they watched it and they got me into it. That was back when The Rock, he was really big, and Stone Cold Steve Austin. I do love the characters and it was always bigger than life watching it."

Do you still keep up with it?

"Maybe not as much lately with football and work."

Have you been trying to catch up now that it's the offseason?

"I have. It's hard for me to catch because on Mondays is when it airs, and if I'm out of town and coming back, I usually catch the replay or whatnot. Ever since I realized my old teammate Joe Anoa'i was on there, I try to watch it as much as I can."

How crazy is it to see him main eventing WrestleMania again?

"It's crazy, but it doesn't surprise me. He's right where he needs to be. It's great knowing that I learned from him (in college), but at the same time it doesn't surprise me knowing who he is."

What was Roman Reigns like in college?

"The same way he is on the camera, he was the same exact way in college (laughs). He was always pretty funny. He had that leadership quality, you know? He was a funny guy, but he wanted to be successful and be the best. He'd always take care of the unit. We had the D-line and we were always pretty good because of him.

"He was a character. I've had some funny incidents with him. I was a rebel ... so we had some heart to hearts. He's a real good guy."

What's your plan for WrestleMania 32?

"I'll probably watch it at home. ... My nephew, he watches (regularly), so he always updates me. I always catch Joe when he's wrestling. A lot of the guys I used to watch, they don't wrestle anymore."

Who did you grow up watching?

"Growing up I liked The Rock, Stone Cold, Chris Jericho, Undertaker. Vince McMahon's always been hilarious to me. Even though he's the owner, every time he's on, I've got to watch it. I definitely liked The Dudley Boyz, they were really funny."

Did you ever want to be a wrestler when you were growing up?

"No. Actually, I was a super geek. I was into science and stuff. If you asked me 20 years ago, I didn't even want to play football. Growing up I watched wrestling more than I watched football."

What's the bigger deal: Being in the main event of WrestleMania or winning the Super Bowl?

"I think they're both even, they're both equal, they're both accomplishments. It takes a lot of hard work for both."

What does your nephew think of you playing alongside Roman?

"When I was at Tech, he was 5 years old or 6, and I take a lot of pictures with my teammates. I had pictures with (former Lions wide receiver) Calvin Johnson and Joe, obviously, with me and my mom and my nephew, so he'd be in the picture. We were like, 'You know, we took a picture with Roman that one time.'

"I think that's (Reigns) his favorite one (wrestler), to be honest."

I bet you weren't thinking you were going to be talking about wrestling in an interview today.

"This is one of my better interviews. This is one of my less stressful ones. At least you're not asking me about the Broncos' quarterback situation (laughs)."

One last question: What do you think about Von Miller on "Dancing with the Stars?"

"Von's always been a good dancer, just seeing him at practice. He's got a lot to learn as far as the different styles. One thing I've liked about the show — I've never watched it before until he got on it — he's got a lot of promise. He might win another championship, you know?"

Through My Eyes: Vance Walker leads by example

By Vance Walker

DenverBroncos.com

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This isn't my first conference championship, but there's no doubt in my seven seasons in the NFL, this experience is different because of my team.

When I was with the Kansas City Chiefs last season, I played with some really good guys, but it's just a different family vibe here. That's nothing against the talent they've got there. It's just that we're a lot closer. We have fun.

We've got a lot of cool, good guys that don't let the game get any bigger than what it's supposed to be. Everybody's focused, zeroing in on what we've got to do to be successful. But it's always been a good, funny vibe. You've still got people playing pranks and laughing, which I think adds to our success this season.

Heading into the AFC Championship this Sunday, there's no doubt there's pressure. My first championship was with the Falcons and there was definitely pressure because I was a rookie. I didn't know how to handle those things.

But now, it's football. I've learned the fundamentals don't change. More people are watching, there's a lot more at stake. Of course you want to give 100 percent in every play, but it doesn't change the fundamentals. Your preparation needs to be top notch. We're still tackling. We're still shedding blocks, still getting pressure. It doesn't change any of those things. You have to do your routine, believe in what you've believed the entire season, but don't let it shake you up, the greatness of it all.

People always talk about how different the game is in the playoffs, but if you've got a guy who's saving it for the playoffs, he hasn't been doing it right. You're supposed to be putting it out there 100 percent all the time. I think there is more urgency for everybody as a team to get it together. You win now or you go home.

When we played the Patriots in Week 12 and won, we left some plays out there. There are things that we can do better as a defense and that's what we're aiming for.

Tom Brady is a great quarterback. He makes great throws, ones that most people would think were improbable. Regardless of how good they are, you've always got to be in the quarterbacks face with pressure up the middle or on the edge. You've got to make him uncomfortable and get him off his game.

Now we've just got to play as a team. Block all the outside noise out. There's going to be ups and downs in the game, but such is life. We've just got to keep pushing and focusing on being the best during our preparation, and the game. We do that and stay together as a team, I know we'll be successful.

Vance Walker brings value, versatility in attempt to rebound with Broncos

By Troy Renck
DenverPost.com
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Vance Walker found obscurity in Kansas City.

It wasn't supposed to happen this way. The Chiefs chased Walker in free agency last March, turning him into their prized offseason acquisition, and almost immediately he became lost on their depth chart.

Walker played well. If he played. He started twice and logged more than 20 snaps in only three games. Seen as a catalyst to an evolving defensive line mix, he turned into a casualty, released after one year.

"I dealt with that when it happened. It's an unfortunate situation. I can complain about it, but I've let it go months ago," Walker said last week.

For the Broncos, Walker's inability to crack the Chiefs' rotation might be the best thing to happen for them. He remained a productive, if sparingly-used player, last season. The Chiefs guaranteed Walker \$3.75 million on a three-year, \$13.75-million contract. The Broncos kept him from signing with the Seattle Seahawks when he agreed to a two-year, \$4-million contract with a \$1.5-million signing bonus.

Value and versatility make Walker an intriguing offseason addition in the highly anticipated switch to a 3-4 defense that, nonetheless, features uncertainty along the defensive line.

"It's obviously a priority as we move forward, and we'll play a lot of people," coach Gary Kubiak said.

Walker, 28, didn't produce as expected in Kansas City, unable to supplant Allen Bailey or Jaye Howard. The Chiefs saved \$1.7 million in salary cap space by cutting ties. Their desire to move on doesn't mean Walker can't move blockers. Insert a DVD from last season, and you will see the 6-foot-2, 305-pound Walker line up from end to nose and everywhere in between on multiple series.

He has consistently done one thing well, making him a potential fit for defensive coordinator Wade Phillips, who looks "to put players in position to succeed."

Pressure Point

Vance Walker signed a two-year deal for \$4-million with the Broncos, choosing Denver over Seattle. He will be counted on to provide versatility along the defensive line. A look at how he stacks up against the Broncos' two remaining defensive tackles from last season, according to Pro Football Focus:

Defensive Lineman	QB Sacks	QB Hits	QB hurries	Snaps
Vance Walker	2	1	8	238
Sylvester Williams	0	3	13	468
Marvin Austin	0	1	5	299

Walker boasts pass-rushing skills. He posted 32 quarterback hurries in 2013 with Oakland, fifth best among 3-4 defensive tackles, and eight last season in 238 snaps, nearly half of which came in just two games.

"The nose has a lot of versatility in this system," Walker said. "The biggest thing is really getting after the quarterback. That's something that I like to do. I'm just looking forward to it."

Pressure up the middle defines strong defenses. In NFL parlance, it means moving the quarterback off his spot. A hand in the face or a push of the center, preventing the quarterback from planting to throw, can lead to turnovers. The Broncos delivered in many ways last season — their defense ranked first in franchise history in rushing yards allowed per game — but they were not consistently disruptive. Denver ranked 13th in turnovers produced at 25. Phillips' defense features interchangeable parts, aggressive schemes, and a focus on reaching the pocket with purpose. DeMarcus Ware spent four seasons with Phillips in Dallas, earning three first-team All-Pro berths, while averaging 15 sacks.

"The new guys, the guys already here, everybody's going to be able to thrive to a new level in this type of defense," Ware said. "The offenses really have to be keen on who's bringing the pressure because this is a pressure defense."

Walker, a teammate at Georgia Tech with Broncos receiver Demaryius Thomas and WWE star Roman Reigns, can help by providing impact and depth. The Broncos' want to use a rotation of players, but effectiveness is required to share snaps.

It didn't happen in Kansas City. That, Walker said, is over. Denver presents an unrivaled opportunity.

"We have super high expectations. Just to be the best. We've got a really good group of guys between the D-Line, the linebackers, the ends obviously, the cornerbacks and safeties. I don't think I've ever been on a team more talented," Walker said. "We have high expectations. We've just got to go out there and work every day to live up to those."

Broncos sign Vance Walker to play in defensive line

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN.com

March 12, 2015

The Denver Broncos continued work in the wake of the frenetic opening hours of free agency by signing defensive lineman Vance Walker Thursday.

Walker was in the Broncos' Dove Valley complex earlier in the day and formally signed his two-year, \$12 million deal early in the afternoon.

Walker, who will turn 28 next month, is set to enter his seventh NFL season. The Broncos have seen him plenty over the last two years since he played last season with the Kansas City Chiefs and in 2013 with the Oakland Raiders. He spent four seasons with the Atlanta Falcons as well, having been a seventh-round draft pick by the team in 2009. Walker was also a teammate of Broncos wide receiver Demaryius Thomas at Georgia Tech.

He's played at defensive end in the Chiefs' 3-4 defense and played at defensive tackle in a 4-3 defense with the Falcons. In all he's started 28 games and played in at least 15 games a season in five of his six seasons in the league.

The Broncos have been on the hunt for more depth on the defensive front, but the plan was to wait after they had cleared the opening hours of free agency to settle in.

"It just slows down, now you get out of the frenzy of everything and you can kind of get back to the reality, try to find some good football players," said general manager John Elway.

At the moment the Broncos plan to use Sylvester Williams and/or Marvin Austin Jr. at nose tackle in their new defensive scheme. However, Elway also said this week that the specific decisions about where players will line up for defensive coordinator Wade Phillips will be made after the offseason work begins on the field.

Elway had said on Wednesday that the Broncos would keep looking to add a player or two in the defensive line in advance of Walker's visit and included Broncos free agent Mitch Unrein among the possibilities as well.

"I think [the coaches] have got to get a feel for them, either nose or [defensive end] on the back side," Elway said. " ... We're working on getting Unrein back and continue to look at the market."

Also Thursday the Broncos had safety Darian Stewart in for a visit. Stewart played the 2014 season with the Baltimore Ravens when Broncos coach Gary Kubiak was the offensive coordinator. The team also signed punter Karl Schmitz, who can also kick off, to a deal Thursday.

Schmitz, who graduated from Missouri-St. Louis in 2011, has an array of YouTube videos that show his work, including a 70-yard field goal using a kicking stand for the ball -- no snap, no hold. Schmitz will be an NFL rookie this season.

Vance Walker ready to play wherever the Broncos need him

By Jeff Legwold
ESPN.com
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Now that he has signed with the Denver Broncos, Vance Walker knows exactly what position he wants to play in the team's defense -- anywhere they want him to.

"I can play any position," Walker said Thursday shortly after signing his deal with the Broncos. "Really whatever they need me to do, whether it's D-end or nose (tackle) ... It's a penetrating type of defense, so really wherever they feel that I fit. I spoke with the coaches and they're pretty impressed that I can play all positions. It's really wherever they believe I fit." In John Elway's tenure as the team's top football decision-maker, the team has often looked for players after the initial signing frenzy of free agency subsides a bit, often signing those players to one- or two-year deals. Terrance Knighton and Wes Welker signed two-year deals in 2013, while Shaun Phillips was added on a one-year deal.

The Broncos signed a host of players to one-year contracts in 2012, including Brandon Stokley, Keith Brooking and Justin Bannan.

Walker, who is entering his seventh NFL season, signed a two-year, \$4 million deal. The Broncos have seen him plenty over the last two seasons, as Walker was with the Chiefs last season and the Raiders in 2013.

Walker figures to be a rotational player for the Broncos. Walker played fewer than 10 snaps on defense in seven games last season for the Chiefs. He played more than 20 snaps on defense in three, with a season-most 53 against the Raiders in December.

Walker's versatility was an attraction as the Broncos transition from a 4-3 scheme to a 3-4. With the Broncos having used up most of the workable salary cap space, Walker fits their on-field and budgetary needs.

"I really liked what Coach [Gary] Kubiak is doing, what he's building, and also [defensive Coordinator] Coach [Wade] Phillips," Walker said. "He's got a great defense. I studied him a good bit when he was coaching with the Texans, so I know a good bit about his game and am really excited to play for him."

The Broncos felt like they good depth in the defensive line on the roster to make the transition into Phillips' defense with Sylvester Williams, Marvin Austin Jr., Derek Wolfe and Malik Jackson.

But Elway said earlier this week the team was still looking hard at available defensive linemen, especially players that could potentially play more than one spot. Walker, who visited the Broncos Thursday, fit that profile. After meeting with the coaches, including defensive line coach Bill Kollar, the Broncos signed Walker.

"[Kollar] is very energetic," Walker said. "He knows his stuff though. He's very knowledgeable about a lot of things. He watched a good bit of film on me and gave me some feedback. We talked a lot about

football for a couple hours. I was just really impressed with him. He seems like a great coach to have. I'm excited to work with him."

Elway said the Broncos have an idea of where they think the players will fit in the defensive line, but those roles won't be fully determined until the coaches see the players in mini-camps and OTAs.

Broncos sign DE Vance Walker to two-year, \$4M contract

By Mike Klis
The Denver Post
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In a 3-4 defense, defensive tackles become ends, nose guards and, yes, defensive tackles.

Vance Walker has the type of versatility, which is why the Broncos secured the 305-pound former Kansas City Chief with a two-year, \$4 million contract.

He signed with the Broncos on Thursday after visiting with the Seattle Seahawks on Wednesday.

"I really like what coach (Gary) Kubiak, I like what he's doing, what he's building," Walker said in a conference call while waiting for his plane at Denver International Airport to take off for his home in Atlanta. "And also coach (Wade) Phillips, he has a great defense. I studied him a good bit when he was coaching for the Texans so I know a good bit about the scheme."

Walker made \$3.75 million last season for the Chiefs, playing well but in a surprisingly limited role. He is making the rounds through the AFC West as he played for the Oakland Raiders in 2013.

He has some backfield penetration ability: He had 10.0 sacks in his last four seasons.

One of those sacks was against Broncos quarterback Peyton Manning in an early 2012 game.

"He's definitely the greatest quarterback I've seen play," Walker said of Manning. "I have a lot of faith in him. And not just him, the offense and the defense pulling together into a great team. I'm really excited and looking forward to what we're going to do this year."

Walker, who will turn 28 next month, was a college teammate of Broncos receiver Demaryius Thomas at Georgia Tech. Walker was a seventh-round draft pick of the Atlanta Falcons in 2009.

Walker will rotate with Derek Wolfe and Malik Jackson as defensive ends, and Sylvester Williams and Marvin Austin at the nose/tackle positions.

The Broncos now have five defensive linemen and need to find at least one more. They have expressed interest in re-signing Mitch Unrein.

What It Means: Broncos add DL Vance Walker

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
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Vance Walker's opportunities for the Chiefs last year were scarce, and nearly half of the 238 snaps in which he played in 2014 came in back-to-back games against the Cardinals and Raiders in December.

It wasn't a coincidence that those were the 27-year-old's best games, in which he was stout against the run, notched a tackle for a loss and was in on three hits of opposing quarterbacks.

When he started for the Chiefs against the Raiders in Week 15, Walker opened in a five-technique alignment and then shifted inside as a three-technique on second and third downs of what became a three-and-out.

For the rest of the game, he continued to shift between three- and five-technique positions, often drawing double teams. On one play, he shifted outside and worked as a 7-technique when the Raiders shifted into a jumbo package with two tight ends overloading the right side in front of an I-formation. As was frequently the case in this game, he drew a double-team.

Games like that one -- in which Walker played 53 snaps -- demonstrate his versatility. That will serve him well in Wade Phillips' 3-4 scheme, which sometimes functions like a 5-2.

"I can play any position -- really, whatever they want me to do, whether it's D-end, or nose, or a three-technique," Walker said. "It's a penetrating type of defense, so, really, wherever they feel I fit -- I spoke with the coaches and they're pretty impressed that I can play all the positions, so it's wherever they believe I can fit."

Last year was Walker's first in a 3-4 alignment after working in the 4-3 with Atlanta (2009-12) and Oakland (2013).

"I thought I did pretty well," Walker said. "It (Denver's scheme) is different from what Kansas City runs, and I think I did pretty well given the fact that I had never run that defense before.

"I graded out pretty well as far as my coaches were concerned."

Walker ranked 13th of 55 3-4 defensive ends league-wide (minimum 200 snaps) as a run defender according to ProFootballFocus.com, with a plus-6.8 rating in that area. It was a marked improvement for the 304-pounder -- and, in fairness, was aided by the presence of nose tackle Dontari Poe and edge rushers Justin Houston and Tamba Hali.

But Walker will have talented players around him in Denver, as well -- defensive ends Derek Wolfe and Malik Jackson, with whom he is expected to rotate snaps, and edge rushers DeMarcus Ware and Von Miller.

And he'll have one of the game's best teachers watching over him -- the Broncos' new defensive line coach, Bill Kollar.

"He's very energetic. He knows his stuff," Walker said. "He's very knowledgeable about a lot of things. He watched a good bit of film on me and gave me some feedback. We talked a lot of football for a couple of hours."

And there will be plenty of similar conversations in the months ahead after Walker signed a two-year contract Thursday. Kollar demands toughness, versatility and football intelligence, attributes that Walker possesses, and should serve him well.