

Broncos' T.J. Ward living up to his Tasmanian Devil nickname while playing best football of career

By Cameron Wolfe

Denver Post

October 31, 2016

Safety doesn't quite define all that T.J. Ward does for the Broncos. He's one of the NFL's best run stopping players at his position. He's a solid cover man against tight ends and running backs. And increasingly he's become a menace for opposing quarterbacks with his pass rush.

After his huge game Sunday in a 27-19 victory over San Diego, Ward joked that he's fine with a position name change if it comes with a few more dollars. No matter the position, he's playing the best football of his career at age 29.

"I'm just a smarter player. I'm at the peak of my career. I'm just playing really well," Ward said. "It's funny because early in the season I didn't think so. When you try to force things, it'll backfire. I didn't feel like I was making enough splash plays. But it happens like that. I stayed patient, and it's all coming now."

The splash plays are coming in bunches. Against the Chargers he had a sack, an interception, two quarterback hits and a pass breakup. He also led the team with 10 tackles. His bone-chilling hits and celebrations afterward are a huge source of energy for the Broncos defense.

"Like a Tasmanian Devil, that's what I call him. I call him Taz," cornerback Chris Harris said. "He's acting crazy on the field, so sometimes I have to calm him down a little bit. That's the type of fire we need."

Safety Darian Stewart, who also had an interception, had a similar description: "Dog, relentless, and just an aggressive player."

Ward's versatility allows the Broncos to place him in any area of need. Often times Sunday it was rushing the passer while rookie safety Will Parks dropped into coverage.

"The thing T.J. has done, that nobody understands, he really had to change his role. When we lost (safety Justin) Simmons, we had some things going on," Broncos coach Gary Kubiak said. "T.J. is a guy that had to play a lot of different spots. You ask certain guys to do special things and he is a special player. T.J. is a big leader. I'm really proud of him."

Ward had the last of the Broncos' three interceptions on a miscommunication between Chargers quarterback Philip Rivers and receiver Griff Whalen. Ward then unleashed a spin move on Whalen that made him reenact his running backs day before going out-of-bounds at the Chargers' 7-yard line.

The big difference in the game was the Broncos defensive backs catching the ball on their interception opportunities and the Chargers defensive backs, for the most part, dropping their chances. San Diego had one interception but missed several other chances to pick off a pass.

Ward's willingness to be a veteran teacher for Parks and fellow rookie safety Simmons has paid dividends. Simmons had his first career sack Sunday and Parks played a big role in the goal line stand that saved the game.

"He's been more than a mentor. He's been like a big brother to me," Parks said. "It's not even just on the field, it's off the field, too. He's always inviting me places, putting me around the right people when he don't really got to. That relationship is huge."

Ward hopes there are many more splash plays to come.

"When I come home I say, everybody eats. And everybody ate today," Ward said. "When you have three interceptions, one for a touchdown, it's hard to lose."

T.J. Ward hosts free youth football camp

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
June 5, 2016

Broncos safety T.J. Ward hosted his second annual Youth Skills Camp for Kids on Saturday at the Denver School of Science and Technology.

The camp, which was free for kids ages 8-13, focused on the basics of football, including non-contact passing, catching and running drills.

The event was sponsored by the T.J. Ward Foundation, which aims to empower young men and women in underprivileged communities across the nation.

"I like to give back, I like to be around the youth," Ward said. "I like to give them as much info as I can about my experiences and how [that can] benefit them. Things like this are an easy way."

Unlike some other player's camps across the country, Ward made sure he was not only present but participating in drills, as well. Ward being available and meeting the kids was "the whole purpose of doing something like this," he said.

Several of Ward's teammates in the 'No Fly Zone' joined him at the camp on Saturday, including cornerback Chris Harris Jr. and rookie safety Will Parks.

Harris, like Ward, participated in the drills and said he showed up to support his teammate. But more importantly, he wanted to give back to the kids in the community.

"It's always fun to be able to just line up against them and just let them have a chance to go against me," Harris said. "That's probably something they always dreamed about doing, and make it a little bit more fun for them. Something that when they get home tonight, they'll be like 'I lined up against Chris Harris.'"

Since giving back to the community was Ward's main focus, he decided price shouldn't play a role. Ward said he didn't want to push away families who would struggle to pay a fee, and so he made the camp free to all participants. Saturday's camp was "giving back for a reason," he said, and making a profit would detract from that sentiment. When Ward was a kid, he said he went to a lot of free camps, too. His event provided an opportunity to pay that forward.

"You don't realize how much of an impact you can have on a kid," Ward said, "The smallest thing or the smallest gesture, they remember for a long time. They might [it] remember their whole life. Just that one moment. If I can do that for a kid, I'm gonna do it anyway possible."

T.J. Ward's unlikely path to the NFL

By Aaron Matas

9 News

February 6, 2016

12 years.

"We probably were one of the most dominating teams in all of sports history," said Broncos safety T.J. Ward.

Domination might not do it justice.

So you never lost in high school?

"No," said Ward.

Not Once?

"Not one time."

T.J. Ward played at De La Salle High School in Concord, California, about an hour from where the Super Bowl will be played. He was part of a run, from 1992-2004, where the Spartans won 151 consecutive games.

"Everybody was worried about whether we were going to lose this game or that game. It wasn't that big of a focal point, it was more about executing," Ward told 9NEWS.

Ward is now an All-Pro safety in Denver, you would think he would have played a huge role for his high school team.

"His career here, he kind of labored in relative obscurity, it was a disappointing career here at De La Salle due to no fault of his own, due to injury," said Ward's former head coach Bob Ladouceur.

T.J. only started three games in high school. A knee injury ended his senior season early and prior to that he couldn't get on the field.

"It was hard for me, but that was just my personal experience," said Ward. "I developed later than others and sometimes that happens."

A late bloomer and ward really took off.

"He always had great feet. always a good athlete and he could always hit," said Ward's former defensive coordinator at De La Salle, Terry Eidson.

"For somebody to tell me he was going to be playing in the NFL, just looking at his career here at De La Salle, I would have said I don't think so. You're crazy," Ladouceur told 9NEWS.

He struggled to play in high school. was a walk-on in college. and now is the starting safety at the Super Bowl.

"He went against all odds," said Ladouceur. "Sheer will power."

The win streak, the experience. Ward says his time at De La Salle molded him in to the person he is today, even with the lack of playing time.

"Some guys catch fire a little bit later than others," said Ward.

Darian Stewart, T.J. Ward anchors of the Denver defense

By Cameron Wolfe
Denver Post
February 4, 2016

walked into a Broncos defense that was already built, talented and somewhat defined.

When fellow safety T.J. Ward first lined up next to Stewart in training camp, he didn't know what to expect. Ward has played with a lot of safeties during his NFL career but has jelled with only a few.

Ward was pleasantly surprised that Stewart was such a good fit.

"We had an immediate chemistry," Ward said. "I think that's us being in the league for six years and he plays with a chip on his shoulder just like me. We have that same mentality. It's easy to play with."

Stewart earned the Broncos' respect, then earned a starting job. He also ended up earning the role as quarterback of the defense.

The Broncos had a lot of talent before Stewart arrived, but what he brought from Baltimore was the "missing piece," he said, to make their defense an elite group.

Ward already was the enforcer. But since joining the Broncos as a free agent during the offseason, Stewart has brought even more aggressiveness to a defense loaded with athleticism.

Denver cornerback Aqib Talib likes to call Stewart and Ward the "farmers and bangers" of the team. It's his way of saying they do the dirty work and harass the wide receivers who venture across the middle.

"We're nasty dudes that love to play football, love to hit, love to be aggressive and smart too," Ward said.

Their intelligence is what sets them apart. In today's NFL, where big hits are becoming more criticized than celebrated, a safety needs to know when not to lower the boom.

While outside linebackers Von Miller and DeMarcus Ware and cornerbacks Talib and Chris Harris take home much-deserved recognition and honors, Stewart and Ward are the heart and soul of the Denver defense from their positions in the secondary.

"At safety, you have to speak with confidence. You can't whisper on the field because that'll mess everybody else up," Stewart said. "Me and T.J., we built that chemistry from Day One. We're real vocal on the field."

When the AFC champion Broncos struggled most this season, it came with Stewart or Ward battling injuries.

In the Denver defense's worst performance of the season, Dec. 20 at Pittsburgh, Steelers star Ben Roethlisberger took advantage of the wounded secondary and threw for 380 yards and three touchdowns. He was the only quarterback to throw for 300 yards against the Broncos this season.

Backup safeties Josh Bush, Shiloh Keo, David Bruton and Omar Bolden held their own but couldn't replace the starters' capability. In the regular season, the Broncos went 10-2 with Stewart and Ward playing and 2-2 when at least one was missing.

Even as veterans in the league, Stewart and Ward felt disrespected. For most of his career, Ward was labeled a "box" safety, suggesting he wasn't good in space against the passing game. During the AFC championship game Jan. 24 in Denver, Ward was the primary defensive player assigned to the New England Patriots' most dangerous weapon, tight end Rob Gronkowski, whenever Gronkowski was split out wide in a formation. For the most part, Ward did well.

Stewart was beginning to earn a journeyman title, heading to his third NFL team in six seasons. He signed a two-year, \$4.25 million contract last March, a deal that is turning out to be a bargain even though he probably will receive another \$1.75 million in incentives based on playing time.

Sunday in Super Bowl 50, Ward and Stewart will have a huge challenge trying to slow the Carolina Panthers' passing game. Tight end Greg Olsen creates matchup issues.

Stewart (sprained right knee) and Ward (sprained left ankle) are dealing with injuries, but they participated in practice Thursday.

"It's a close-knit group," Denver coach Gary Kubiak said of his defense. "I'm glad they're all together for Sunday because it's been a tough ride, especially at the safety position."

How the murder of T.J. Ward's high school friend drives him for Super Bowl

By Mark Kiszla
Denver Post
February 4, 2016

Viewed now, the snapshot is symbolic, a reminder of friendship, fun and football.

At legendary De La Salle High School in Concord, Calif., coaches permit the players to take a single customized picture on team photo day. The Amigos — T.J. Ward, cousin Maurice Jones-Drew, Terrance Kelly, Jackie Bates, Willie Glasper, Cameron Colvin, DeMontae Fitzgerald, Damon Jenkins and Eric Love — stood tall, reflecting the confidence and innocence of youth. No one thought about the cruel way lives can change and meld through tragedy.

On Aug. 12, 2004, Kelly, just hours before he was supposed to head to summer practices at Oregon for his freshman season, was murdered. When Ward arrived at De La Salle, Kelly treated him like a little brother. Or as Ward's father, Terrell, said Wednesday, "He was his guardian angel."

Ward internalized his grief. It remains one of the worst moments of his life, a pain that frames his Super Bowl 50 experience. Ward honored Kelly, who died in Richmond, two hours from Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, with a tattoo of an angel on his right arm.

"I got it because it keeps T.K. with me at all times," Ward said of his friend who was long shielded from violence by a protective grandmother. "T.K. goes where I go. They see me, they see him."

Ward arrives at the apex of his career with an important role. He is a three-level player, integral to coverage of Carolina tight end Greg Olsen, on run support against Jonathan Stewart, and in a few well-timed, sprinkled-in blitzes. The Broncos continue to be asked how they are going to stop quarterback Cam Newton, not what Newton will do against the league's top-ranked defense.

"That's what the question should be," Ward said.

Ward "brings the boom," as Broncos linebacker Von Miller says. Ward inspires fear with big hits. And cornerback Aqib Talib provides the running soundtrack. The pair forms the attitude of the defense.

"T.J. plays with his hair on fire," Talib said. "He's our Tasmanian Devil."

Photos in the Ward family scrapbooks reveal a long history of swagger and intensity. When T.J. was little, he wore No. 44 on his Antioch youth team, same as his father's jersey at San Diego State. He began playing tackle football at age 8, weighing 60 pounds.

"The coaches didn't think he would make the team because he was so small," said his mother LaNeita Ward, decked out in Broncos gear at the couple's home. "But he had heart."

Coaches and opponents couldn't break Ward. He learned toughness and work ethic from his father, who played defensive back in the NFL for the Philadelphia Eagles. Terrell broke out the chalkboard in the living room and taught 9-year-old T.J. and 7-year-old Terron, a running back for the Atlanta Falcons, how

to read a playbook. The boys went through circuit training, joined by Jones-Drew, a longtime NFL star, featuring sit-ups, curls and hill training.

The idea that her son is playing in the country's biggest sporting event creates pause for LaNeita. But when she thinks about T.J. running out of the tunnel, she remembers the days in Pop Warner.

"He was little, and going against the archrival San Leandro Crusaders. He played both sides of the ball and dominated them," she said. "And after the game, he changed his clothes and put on his glasses, and all the opposing coaches were asking, 'Where is the kid that ran us over?'^"

Ward's personality belies his persona on it. He plays angry. Yet he remains quiet when in company of strangers. Even as T.J.'s secondary coach in high school, Terrell wasn't sure what the future held for his son. Ironically, it was when T.J. wasn't playing that the father realized how much football meant to him.

"His junior year he was standing next to me on the sidelines and I asked him if he was OK. And he looked at me with a glare that said, 'No I am not.' He was (really upset)," Terrell said. "He wanted to be out there so badly."

After waiting his turn, Ward began his senior year at De La Salle with a flurry of interceptions. Then, he injured the patella tendon in his knee, leaving his friends, including Colvin, to carry him to his parents' Honda SUV.

"T.J. was always a fiery player when we were little. He made himself known on the football field," said Colvin, who sang in the church choir with Ward. "He had worked so hard for his chance. But I knew he would overcome it somehow. He was always so focused on his goal."

After taking a year to recover, Ward walked on at Oregon, joining a crew of De La Salle players. It wasn't long before he landed in the starting lineup and his parents began making the 8-hour drive to every home game for four years. The memories of those days tumble out quickly: Ward's crushing tackle of Ohio State quarterback Terrelle Pryor in the Rose Bowl, his 15 stops in three quarters against Boise State, his breathtaking hits on helpless Cal receivers.

"There are times I will ask him after the game, 'Do you have to hit so hard?'" said LaNeita, with a smile.

Ward can't help himself. Football is a tough game played by tough men. This Sunday has been 29 years in the making, ever since a 6-month T.J. laid on his father's chest as dad read a story about De La Salle High School.

And it's an opportunity he will share with his family, friends, and TK.

"I think about him everyday. ... I mean everyday," Ward said. "And I know he will have an eye in the sky on me on Sunday."

T.J. Ward honors friend with tattoo of an angel on his right arm

By Troy Renck
Denver Post
February 3, 2016

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T.J. Ward, the biggest boss

By Christine Williamson

DenverBroncos.com

November 6, 2015

There's an ongoing conversation in hip-hop lyrics about being the biggest boss. Rick Ross believes that he's "the biggest boss that we've seen thus far." Drake says, "Besides Ricky Ross, I'm the biggest boss here."

But when you ask T.J. "Boss" Ward whether he's a bigger boss than Rick Ross, he believes it's all relative.

"It depends on who you ask," Ward said.

The nickname "Boss Ward" was given to him while he was a football player at Oregon and it's a nickname that he believes fits perfectly.

"I got the name in college from some teammates and, after making it my video gamertag, other people just started to call me 'Boss,'" Ward said. "Now I just feel like it's the way I carry myself on the field and off the field. In every aspect, I'm a boss."

For Ward, being a boss requires more than just balling out on the football field. He also keeps his pinkies and neck iced out with jewelry to emphasize his boss status.

"If you ask Aqib [Talib] whether or not I have a lot of jewelry, he would probably say no," Ward said. "Actually I don't know we might have about the same. I like to stay iced out, though."

Even though he got his nickname while at Oregon, it can be said that Ward has been a boss since he was growing up in the Bay Area. While he was a star on the football field, he also grew to love basketball and became a loyal fan of his hometown basketball team, the Golden State Warriors.

His favorite player, and arguably the biggest boss of the NBA, Steph Curry, absolutely dominated against the Pelicans in their third regular-season matchup. Last season's MVP dropped 53 points in the Warriors' 134-120 win in New Orleans -- 28 of them in the second half.

"Oh yeah, my boy went off," Ward said, who has a Warriors tattoo inked on his rib cage. "I think we're going to win another championship and Steph Curry is going to repeat MVP, as long as he stays healthy."

Ward's love of his hometown isn't only engraved in his skin, it's also evident in the way he talks. If you scroll through the two-time Pro Bowler's Instagram feed, there is a wealth of Bay Area lingo that goes beyond any person that isn't East Bay savvy.

On a picture of him in an olive green suit and fedora he says, "I'm dipped when you see me!" So, what does that mean?

“That means fresh. Kind of like sauced, like, I’m dipped in butter,” Ward said. “Mac Dre has a song that says, ‘I’m dipped when you see me.’ So, when you say that you’re dipped or dipped in sauce or dipped in butter that’s what it means. You can be dipped in whatever you want to dip in.”

Tartar sauce?

“Nah. That stuff stinks. You have to be dipped in something smooth like ranch or Italian dressing,” he said. “Actually, just say sauce or butter.”

Broncos Q&A: T.J. Ward talks Cleveland return, 'fresh' wardrobe, more

By Nicki Jhabvala
Denver Post
October 15, 2015

For the first time since he signed with the Broncos in March 2014, T.J. Ward will return to the place his NFL career started when the Broncos play the Browns at Cleveland on Sunday.

But he doesn't expect a warm welcoming — not as a key piece of Denver's league-leading defense (278 yards allowed per game).

Ward recently spoke with The Denver Post about his expectations for the game, his "fresh" wardrobe and how he's helped his younger brother, Terron Ward, a former Oregon State running back who signed with the Falcons as an undrafted rookie this year, get acclimated to the NFL.

Q: You've been asked a lot about your acrimonious exit from Cleveland. But what were some of the good memories of your time there?

A: Just getting drafted there. Coming in, being my first experience in the NFL, the guys I came in with from that class — I don't think too many are left. I think only (cornerback) Joe (Haden) is the only one left from the guys who got drafted with us. But it's going to be good playing in front of the fans again, seeing how they accept me or not — it doesn't matter. I'm there to do a job.

Q: Are you expecting boos?

A: I'm definitely expecting boos. For sure. Especially when we play well. What are they going to do, cheer for us when we start making plays? Nah, I'm expecting boos. I'm expecting everything. You don't really hear too much of that when you're on the field anyway.

Q: How much does that year difference make for the secondary, just in terms of being more comfortable playing alongside each other?

A: It definitely makes a difference. It's another year. You should get better with time. It's your craft. I think that we've been playing some pretty good football right now, and it's because of time put together away from here, as well.

Q: How much planning do you put into selecting your outfits for road games? Especially with the leopard shoes last weekend.

A: Hey, believe it or not, that was a throw-together. I put that together at the last minute. But I usually do it the night before.

Q: So should we expect something big for your trip back to Cleveland?

A: I'm pretty fresh every week. You can expect that.

Q: What's it been like having a sibling in the league?

A: I talk to him every week. We're both very busy because, you know, NFL workdays are pretty hectic. But it's been great watching him play and seeing what he did after if I don't get to watch him play, and just talking to him about the week and how he prepared. It's great. Last year I was watching him on Saturdays, so I was anxious to see what he did. Now he's playing on the same level as me.

Q: Does he ever seek your advice, from a defensive perspective?

A: Yeah, I try to give him as much advice as I can, not just on the game, but also off the field — things you can expect from other people and just how to go about it as a pro. But I've been giving him advice since he started football. Especially with him being a running back and me being a defensive player, I try to give him the mind of a safety or linebacker or whatever.

TJ Ward looking forward to making Browns fans jeer him

By Arnie Stapleton
Associated Press
October 15, 2015

Cheers are the last thing T.J. Ward wants to hear when he returns to Cleveland.

"I'm definitely expecting boos. What are they going to do, cheer for us when we make big plays?" Denver's star strong safety said.

Big plays have defined Denver's season.

Despite a sputtering hybrid offense that's more fuel efficient than high octane as it's been in years past, the Broncos (5-0) are unbeaten behind the league's top defense thanks to 22 sacks and 14 takeaways as they head into Sunday's game against the Browns (2-3).

The tone-setter is Ward, who played his first four NFL seasons in Cleveland, where he earned Pro Bowl status in 2013, making 129 tackles after two injury-marred seasons.

With all the change going on in Cleveland after that season, Ward found a change of scenery in Colorado, where general manager John Elway wanted to add toughness to his secondary. Ward signed a front-loaded, four-year, \$22.5 million deal and earned another Pro Bowl berth last year while playing in Jack Del Rio's conservative 4-3 defense.

He's blossomed in Wade Phillips' aggressive 3-4 scheme this season. Despite missing a game because of suspension, he's third on the team with 26 tackles and also has two sacks and two forced fumbles.

His last-minute sack-strip of Teddy Bridgewater sealed Denver's win over Minnesota two weeks ago and earned him AFC player of the week honors. He followed with a seven-tackle performance in helping the Broncos escape his hometown of Oakland with another defensive-driven win Sunday.

"Yeah, it's definitely some of the best football I've played," said Ward, who also plays linebacker in some specialty looks. "But it all goes back to what we're doing as a whole. It allows me to make more plays, allows everybody else to make more plays. I think you're seeing a lot of guys making plays because we can expect what's coming, we know what's coming. We're very smart on the back end, the defense as a whole, really."

Now he's preparing for another homecoming.

"It's definitely going to be some feelings there for sure, being on the other side and being familiar with the team, the city the players," Ward said. "I don't really know what to expect, but I hope it's a little bit of open arms, but I know I'm going to get some boos when I start making plays."

Ward said he wanted to stay in Cleveland back in 2014 but didn't get the sense the feeling was mutual. Given his history with the Browns, he said he's sure going to play with a chip on his shoulder Sunday.

"I'm trying to make this my next big game," he said.

T.J. Ward readies for another homecoming

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
October 14, 2015

Sunday's game will be the first in Cleveland for T.J. Ward since he signed with the Broncos as an unrestricted free agent in March 2014.

"It's going to be different when I get there," he said. "I haven't played there, so it's going to be different."

But while it will be his first game at FirstEnergy Stadium in a road team's uniform, the trip to northeast Ohio won't be the first one back there for the ex-Browns standout, who spent four seasons with the team after being drafted in the second round five years ago.

"It's like a second home," Ward said. "I still talk to a lot of people back there. I went back this summer. It was still like I've been there the whole time.

"The people are great. Cleveland has a great fan base and a great support system back there. I'm looking forward to it."

Ward left Cleveland as a Pro Bowler and returns with that same status, having played in the league's all-star game for a second time last January.

"He's playing at a high level," said Browns head coach Mike Pettine, who had been on the job for just over a month when Ward jumped to the Broncos in free agency. "He's very much a complete safety. When you talk about guys that are free or strong [safety], he can really do both. That makes it tough on offense, when it's hard to identify what he's playing because some teams that have a true free or strong, you can gather a lot more information pre-snap.

"They do a good job moving him around, and then they have a package where he comes down and essentially plays linebacker in a dime grouping.

"You can see he's in a good place. He plays with great effort, great energy, and he's extremely productive."

Broncos' T.J. Ward announces 'Boss of the Month' program to encourage leadership

By Nicki Jhabvala
Denver Post
October 9, 2015

Broncos Pro Bowl safety T.J. "Boss" Ward announced on Friday his "Boss of the Month" campaign that encourages fans to be leaders in their communities.

The program asks fans to post on social media examples of them "stepping up and being a leader in their own community" using the hashtag #BossUp. On Oct. 31, Ward will select one winner and award them two tickets to a Broncos home game and an autographed photo.

Ward, who recently started the T.J. Ward Foundation to provide resources to young men and women in underprivileged communities, has been involved with organizations, including Purpose2Play, Boys & Girls Clubs of America and the Rocky Mountain Hospital for Children.

A second-round draft pick (No. 38) by the Browns in 2010, Ward was selected to his second Pro Bowl last season. On Wednesday he was named the AFC's Defensive Player of the Week, the first such honor of his career, after recording two sacks and six tackles in the Broncos' home victory over the Vikings.

He returns to his hometown this Sunday to face his former defensive coordinator, Jack Del Rio, in a Week 5 matchup with the Raiders.

@BossWard43

So fans...let's see your leadership in your community and #Bossup! For more information check out our website <http://www.tjward43.com/bossup>

8:38 AM - 9 Oct 2015

Whatever you ask, T.J. Ward delivers

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
October 8, 2015

With every game he plays, T.J. Ward becomes more and more the Swiss Army knife of the Broncos defense.

Drop into deep coverage? Check.

Blitz off the edge? Check, and double check, because it was his two sacks on blitzes Sunday that made him the AFC's Defensive Player of the Week.

A delayed blitz up an A- or B-gap? Check.

Short coverage on a tight end in the flat? Check; he helped neutralize Minnesota tight end Kyle Rudolph.

Line up in the slot against a tight end or a big wide receiver? Check.

Attack the run from the box? Few safeties have done it better in recent years, and that's one of the reasons why the Broncos targeted him in free agency 19 months ago.

Ward handled all of those responsibilities on the first two plays against the Minnesota Vikings last Sunday.

With fellow safety David Bruton Jr. also capable of such versatility, Defensive Coordinator Wade Phillips has only scratched the surface with the permutations of his secondary.

"Both those guys, you can move them around and do what you want to do with them," Phillips said last week. "Both of them can blitz, both of them can cover and both of them are smart. It's given us a lot of variables. It's hard for the offense to pick up who's doing what."

Last year, Ward had two sacks all season. He's matched that total in four games.

"Coach knows he's a great blitzer, so blitz him. That's what he's doing. He's calling his name, and they can't block him. It's something that we saw last year, but we didn't get him a lot of blitzes last year. We're starting to get him going, and you see what he did."

In 2014, Ward was involved in the pass rush once every 18.29 times he was involved in pass defense, according to ProFootballFocus.com, which charted him with 657 plays of coverage responsibility and 38 pass rushes. So far this year, it's once every 13.1 times, based on 10 pass rushes and 121 plays of responsibility in coverage.

"Coach Wade has been putting great game plans together. He's using me exactly how I wish to be used," Ward said, "so I'll just keep listening to [Defensive Backs Coach] Joe Woods and Coach Wade."

"That's what we can do. We have a lot of guys that can come in and rush -- like me and T.J. are great blitzers," added Harris.

"[Phillips] is able to send us. But I haven't been sent yet!"

Maybe that's coming. After all, Phillips has a mental library filled with ideas and concepts culled over nearly four decades in the NFL. There's little that he hasn't used, and with versatile components like Ward that he can move around, Phillips can use him to set others up, too.

Phillips' defensive garage is filled with well-constructed tools. But there are none quite like Ward, who is six tools in one.

Broncos safety T.J. Ward named AFC's Defensive Player of the Week

By Nicki Jhabvala
Denver Post
October 7, 2015

Another week, another honor for the Broncos' defense.

Safety T.J. Ward was named the AFC's Defensive Player of the Week for his six-tackle, two-sack performance in Denver's 23-20 victory over the Vikings on Sunday. The honor is the first of Ward's career.

"He deserves it," coach Gary Kubiak said. "He works hard, he's a great practice player, he prepares to play well on Sundays. Very proud of him."

Ward, who recorded the game's first sack 1:37 into the first quarter, finished with a strip sack in the final 35 seconds that was recovered by Von Miller to seal the win.

Ward, who leads all defensive backs with 18 tackles for loss since 2013, joined former Broncos safety John Lynch as the only defensive back in team history to have two sacks and a forced fumble in the same game; Lynch did it at San Diego on Dec. 31, 2005.

The Broncos' defense, which leads the NFL with the fewest yards allowed (295.5 per game) and most sacks (18), continues to rack up awards for its play in Wade Phillips' 3-4 this season. Ward is the second Broncos player to win player of the week honors this season. Cornerback Aqib Talib was named the conference's top defensive player in Week 1. And outside linebacker DeMarcus Ware, the league's leader in sacks (4.5), was named the AFC Defensive Player of the Month in September, the first such honor of his career.

T.J. Ward creates danger from safety in Broncos' 3-4 defense

By Troy Renck
Denver Post
October 5, 2015

Safety seems incongruous. When T.J. Ward blitzes, he should come with a warning label. He morphs into a hybrid: part linebacker, part defensive back, full on rage.

Facing a potential upset, clock ticking toward its death, Ward bolted from the left side Sunday, sacking Minnesota's Teddy Bridgewater, stripping the ball and protecting the Broncos' undefeated record.

Ward celebrated with his right hand in the air followed by a mudwalk celebration toward the sideline. For the second consecutive week, the coaches voted Ward the Broncos' defensive player of the game. He leads NFL defensive backs with two sacks. He has made three tackles for losses.

"Heck yeah it does matter. It means more to me now than ever before," Ward said of the staff's recognition. "You are playing with so many great players, guys like (DeMarcus Ware) DWare, Von (Miller), Aqib (Talib), Chris (Harris), for me to have the most plays made, that means a lot."

When the Broncos signed Ward to a four-year, \$22.5-million contract, this is the player they sought. A thumper, a playmaker.

"I wasn't allowed to be that guy last year," Ward said Monday.

Ward carried out his role last season for defensive coordinator Jack Del Rio, exercising restraint, following the plan. It turned him into an undersized linebacker rather than a disruptive safety. Del Rio left to become the coach of the Oakland Raiders, this Sunday's opponent, and took his 4-3 defense with him. Defensive coordinator Wade Phillips installed a 3-4 alignment, emphasizing pressure.

It caffeinated Ward.

"Why do I like blitzing? Because I am good at it," said Ward.

Teammates witnessed it early in the offseason. They recognized in practice that Phillips' philosophy would increase Ward's impact.

"T.J. can blitz, man. That's what he do," cornerback Aqib Talib said. "He plays around that box (with the linebackers). Wade knows what he can do, and he puts him in position to do what he does best. We definitely knew this was coming."

The strategy appears to be working. Ward owns 19 tackles, 13 solo, in three games. At 5-foot-11, 200 pounds, Ward brings a physical presence. But his intelligence sets him apart. What might look like freelancing is controlled chaos. On the Vikings' final snap, Ward crept toward the line of scrimmage next to outside linebacker Von Miller.

Ward refused to reveal too much to Bridgewater. He stood opposite of the tight end, creating the impression he was in man coverage. On the snap, Ward read running back Adrian Peterson. Once he fanned out for a pass, Ward finished like Mariano Rivera, bringing closure to another nervy Sunday.

"It's all about timing and anticipating who is going to block you, and beating the block," Ward said. "I thought I had a chance to get loose. I knew that Adrian Peterson was going to block me. Once he went out on the route, I knew I was free."

Ward earned Pro Bowl honors last season but wasn't himself. His personality fits the current defense's aggression and expectations. The Broncos lead the NFL with 18 sacks by 11 players. And Ward remains convinced they've left meat on the bone.

"We are trying to get more. Yes, more. I am telling you we have missed a bunch of sacks," Ward said. "We missed about seven on Sunday."

This season began in a way inconceivable to Ward. He was suspended one game for violating the personal conduct policy for an incident 15 months prior when he was charged with misdemeanor assault and disturbing the peace. The charges were dropped in a plea deal. Ward took responsibility for his actions. Missing the opener — he was "miserable" watching the Baltimore Ravens from home — sprinkled kerosene on his fire this season.

"His level of leadership, his passion for the game, it's obvious," free safety Darian Stewart said. "What he brings is big for us. It's what we need. We feed off it."

Darian Stewart and T.J. Ward: From the NFL Combine to the Mile High City

By Allie Raymond
DenverBroncos.com
August 12, 2015

Just a few months into his tenure with the Broncos, safety Darian Stewart is already fitting right in with Denver's Pro Bowl-laden secondary.

But one defensive back in particular that Stewart has been clicking with isn't a new acquaintance. Safety T.J. Ward and Stewart go back five years to the 2010 NFL Combine where both up-and-coming safeties met and became fast friends.

"We actually came in together," Stewart said of their first meeting. "I met T.J. at the combine. When we play each other, we actually chop it up here and there, but the relationship is good. It's good chemistry."

"It's been good," Ward said of teaming up with Stewart. "I remember D. Stew from when we came in together at the combine. We even talked and hung out a little bit at the Combine. So I knew when we signed him it would be a good fit for us. He's been playing very well. I think we're getting closer to that cohesion and chemistry."

Now five years since they first met, both Stewart and Ward have both found a home in Denver as they each prepare for the start of their sixth season in the NFL. But unlike other seasons, this year the friends will line up next to each other in the orange and blue with Stewart at free safety and Ward at strong safety.

"I'll tell you what, it's cool, man. You never know," Stewart said. "Meeting new people and to actually work with them, I think that it's good."

Stewart joins a proficient secondary that is backed by a trio of Pro Bowlers in Ward and cornerbacks Chris Harris Jr. and Aqib Talib, all of whom were stout defensive forces for the Broncos last season. The three of them already work well together, but Ward isn't worried about Stewart fitting in with them.

"I think it's kind of working," Ward said. "We're all working together. Because me, Chris and Talib have only really had one year, so we're still kind of learning each other and feeling each other and how guys play. [We're] trying to have that nonverbal communication where you already know what they're going to do. So it's almost like he's just coming in and we're still learning together."

Time will only help the defensive backs find cohesion. In Ward's words, "That's only going to come with games," but they'll give the first glimpse of their progress on Friday when the Broncos head to Seattle for their first preseason game of the year.

"I think that we're there and it's only going to get better," Stewart said. "I feel like I have been doing a good job with making sure that the communication is there and getting everyone lined up. It's only going to get better as the season goes. I think that these preseason games will help us a lot."

T.J. Ward envisions defense leading NFL in takeaways

By Ben Swanson

DenverBroncos.com

August 1, 2015

In certain regards, the Broncos defense will have a tough time improving from its impressive marks in 2014. The secondary allowed a franchise-record low in average yardage per completion and the rushing defense allowed 79.8 yards per game, second-best in the NFL last year.

However, where the defense wants to make its mark in 2015 is in takeaways. Last year the Broncos forced 25 turnovers, 13th in the league and tied with six other teams. This year, they want more.

"I want [us] to lead the league in interceptions," safety T.J. Ward began. "I want to lead the league in sacks from the secondary. I want to lead the league in turnovers. And if we do that, we'll be pretty good."

Where that can stem from is Defensive Coordinator Wade Phillips' defensive philosophy to unleash defensive players' natural aggression.

"Sacks, interceptions, getting to the quarterback, pressuring the offense, making them play your style of football instead of playing theirs," Ward said of how the turnover goals reconcile with the new defensive mindset.

"I'd like us to take advantage of the interception opportunities we had," Ward said. "I think we dropped some interceptions last year. I'd like to see us have more forced fumbles. I don't think we had many forced fumbles last year. I just want to see us score on defense. Big plays, turnovers. That's what we want and that's what we can improve on from last year."

Getting to the quarterback or flushing him out of the pocket to force mistakes are imperative ways to get those takeaways, as are using disguises or simply employing "flat out good coverage."

"As good as we were last year, we can be, I feel, a lot better," Ward said. "I feel we can be a lot better this year, and that's the plan and that's the goal."

T.J. Ward's first charity golf outing offers fun to help home communities

By Ben Swanson
DenverBroncos.com
July 13, 2015

Darian Stewart went golfing for the first time in his life on Monday, taking the golf clubs his wife bought him for his birthday last year to Blackstone Country Club for T.J. Ward's first charity golf tournament.

Stewart may not have dominated the links but he did help contribute to T.J. Ward's foundation that focuses on helping underprivileged children in communities from Oakland to Cleveland to Denver through education, physical fitness and healthy nutrition.

"It's a great feeling that everyone came out in full support," Ward said. "I think we have 108 golfers and 30 sponsors. It's a great turnout. I'm very pleased and grateful and thankful for everyone's support."

The day started with a putting contest between the golfers who registered and the special guests before the groups split off to start golfing. Among the guest athletes were Ward's Broncos teammates Aqib Talib, David Bruton Jr., Jordan Norwood, Stewart, Browns defensive Back Joe Haden and more.

But it all came back to the mission of the event, which is to give back to the communities that have helped him throughout his life.

"First off, it's been stressed upon me since [I was a] young kid the importance of giving back, helping people and supporting in your community, like I've gotten support in my communities," Ward said. "I just want to give that back to the kids coming up. Kids are the future. I mean, I hate to sound like cliché but it's true."

Golfing gave the registered guests an opportunity to meet and spend time golfing with some of the best football players on the planet, even if the sport can offer as much frustration as fun at times for players, especially those new to the game.

"I think it's just a great way to get a bunch of people together, get to mingle and have fun. It's a little relaxed environment and it's a fun day. Golf is fun, right? Sometimes," he said with a laugh.

T.J. Ward's charity endeavors include golf tournament

By Nicki Jhabvala

DenverPost.com

July 2, 2015

His first full season with the Broncos behind him, T.J. Ward has stepped it up — on the field, but especially off.

The two-time Pro Bowl safety has made a point to embed himself in the community more than ever before.

Late last month, in partnership with USA Football, Ward hosted a free one-day camp for youth football players at the Denver School of Science and Technology. Also this year, he partnered with Purpose 2 Play to give teenagers at the Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro Denver an opportunity to participate in a six-week sports journalism program.

Through the T.J. Ward Foundation, which he started in 2010, he has worked to support area programs that help underprivileged children in communities across the nation.

"As far as giving back, that's very important," Ward said. "We've all come from somewhere and we've all had people who have helped us along the way, a community that has supported us."

As the Broncos take a five-week break from practices before training camp opens at Dove Valley team headquarters, Ward's foundation is gearing up for its biggest undertaking yet: the T.J. Ward Celebrity Golf Tournament.

The event, July 13 at Blackstone Country Club in Aurora, will feature 16 current and former professional athletes — including Broncos cornerback Aqib Talib and wide receiver Emmanuel Sanders and New England Patriots wide receiver Julian Edelman.

It's a star-studded tournament with participation and sponsorship costs to match: \$500 for individual golfers and \$350 to \$10,000 for sponsors, with unlimited food and beverages and an invitation to the after party.

To Ward, though, it's worth much more.

"It's always great to give back to the community that has given to you," he said. "That's all I want to do."

T. J. Ward hosts football camp

By Christine Williamson

DenverBroncos.com

June 27, 2015

Broncos safety T. J. Ward held his first football skills camp on Saturday. In partnership with USA Football, the free camp hosted over 100 children ages 10-13 and taught them the fundamentals of the game. Ward himself grew up playing football and felt one of the most beneficial things for his development as a player was participating in camps like this one.

"I went to a couple things like this [as a kid] - not many, but that's why I'm doing it: because I would have loved to have the opportunity when I was younger," said Ward.

USA Football's tackling curriculum differs greatly from what Ward learned growing up. A number of the coaches at the camp were what USA Football calls Heads Up Certified, allowing campers to learn how to play the game in the safest way possible.

"The coaches are doing a great job," said Ward. "I was just at one of the tackling drills and they were teaching head up, chest up and all of the things that we're still kind of learning as pros.

"When I played it wasn't even about tackling, it was more about hitting drills... it was more about just being physical and dominating. We did a lot of hitting drills when I was growing up playing so it's a lot different now."

The camp definitely taught Ward a few things have changed since he was that age, including the fact that a number of his campers are female.

"I saw a bunch of girls [out here]," said Ward. "You know, hopefully one day we'll get the first female player in the NFL."

T.J. Ward skips OTA session for Game Five of NBA Finals

By Mike Florio
Pro Football Talk
June 15, 2015

Broncos safety T.J. Ward, a Bay Area native, loves the Golden State Warriors. He loves them so much he married them, sort of, with a huge tattoo of the team's logo on his left side/back.

He also loves them enough to skip a day of OTA practice to watch Steph Curry and company win Game Five of the NBA Finals. But during a Monday meeting with the media, Kubiak didn't know Ward missed practice to attend a basketball game.

Said a reporter: "T.J. Ward was spotted at Game Five yesterday —"

Kubiak interrupted with a little smile, "Was he? That's where he was?"

"That's where he was, and not spotted out here," the reporter said. "Any issues there?"

"No. he wasn't here," Kubiak replied. "It's voluntary, like I said."

Yes, it's voluntary. And coaches can get in trouble if they say anything to suggest it isn't voluntary. But no head coach worth his whistle would be happy about a player not giving an appropriate head's up regarding the decision not to attend an offseason practice, or regarding the reason for his absence.

Ultimately, it's Ward call regarding whether he does or doesn't attend. But at some point he'll be required to show up, and there's a way to handle things that minimizes the chances of the head coach finding a way to make his point without inviting scrutiny from the NFL Players Association.

Ward's Finals focus is on Warriors

By Allie Raymond
DenverBroncos.com
June 4, 2015

While Denver and cities alike buzz with anticipation for Thursday night's Game 1 of the NBA Finals, one Bronco in particular has been waiting for this day his whole life.

A native of the Bay Area, safety T.J. Ward has been a Golden State Warriors fan for as long as he can remember and has attended games since he was eight years old.

"I remember being able to go to the arena, walking right up and buying the ticket for like \$15," said Ward.

But Ward isn't just a typical Golden State fan. This May, he permanently showed his support for the team by inking a tattoo of the Warrior's logo with 'Golden State Warrior' written around.

The tattoo not only supports his hometown NBA squad but also represents how he sees himself.

"The mascot alone exemplifies how I like to play - my mentality as a Warrior," said Ward. "It's just to show my hometown some love, representing where I'm from."

So it goes without saying that Ward was on cloud nine when his local team topped the Houston Rockets in Game 5 of the Western Conference semifinals, earning their first Finals berth in nearly half a century.

"Oh, I was ecstatic," said Ward. "This organization hasn't been to the finals in 40 years. It's huge for the city, it's huge for the entire Bay Area, and I'm very proud. I'm proud of what they're doing this year."

When asked to weigh in on the matchup of Golden State's Stephen Curry and Cleveland's LeBron James, Ward was neutral, appreciating both Curry's and James' talent on the floor.

"I think you can't stop either one of them," said Ward. "They're going to get their points, so it's pretty much going to be up to what the other eight players on the floor are doing."

One subject Ward is willing to indulge in is Curry's young daughter, Riley, who captured the hearts of fans across the nation (and on the internet) with her post-game media antics.

"I saw the postgame interviews — she's adorable!" said Ward. "She definitely has a lot of personality."

The Warriors are set to host Game 2 of the Finals on Sunday and Ward hopes to be there to support his team. But just because he's behind his team bringing a championship to the Bay Area doesn't mean he's lost sight of his own championship in Denver.

"I'll be happy about it, but I've got a championship that I'm trying to win right now," said Ward. "It's going to be all great, don't get me wrong, but I'm looking forward to this season and winning a home championship."

Broncos, Nuggets team up for "Christmas ReWard's"

By David DeChant
denverbroncos.com
December 4, 2014

AURORA, Colo. -- With the help of Santa and one of Santa's helpers, T.J. Ward, Kenneth Faried and Ty Lawson delivered an early Christmas to 31 kids from North Middle School on Wednesday night, taking them on a \$100 shopping spree at Target.

The "Christmas ReWard's event with friends" program is in its fourth year and its first in Denver. Ward started it in Cleveland and brought it with him when he joined the Broncos.

"Whoever I play for, the community is always the reason why I can have the success I can have and the teams can have the success they have," Ward said. "So it's definitely important to give back to the people who are surrounding you and support what you do."

Ward teamed up with Lawson and Faried from the Denver Nuggets to put on the event and also brought along Broncos teammates. Terrance Knighton, Brandon Marshall and Kayvon Webster joined Ward, Lawson and Faried in the aisles of Target, helping kids pick out gifts. The kids were chosen primarily on the basis of financial need.

"I try to give back to those who don't have it," Ward said. "I grew up in an area where there were a lot of kids like that and frankly, they need it more than anybody else."

Added Faried, "It's extremely important around the holiday, because every kid wants to have that big Christmas and that Christmas tree and Santa to bring them a massive amount of gifts."

"I just want to put smiles on kids' faces here for a couple hours and go shopping," Lawson said. "Kids love nice gifts."

Q&A with T.J. Ward

By David DeChant
DenverBroncos.com
November 25, 2014

Fifth-year veteran T.J. Ward has manned an important role on a very talented Broncos defense and is stuffing the stat sheet while playing all over the field. He's second on the team in total tackles (48) and has a sack, three tackles for loss, four QB hits and five passes defensed. We caught up with him to discuss his NFL-heavy family and how he's settled into the Mile High City.

T.J. stands for Terrell Jr., correct? What sort of influence has your dad had on you?

"I mean he's always been there, always been a coach, very supportive of all and everything that I would do."

Your dad was drafted in the NFL (a seventh-round pick of the Eagles in 1980), your brother plays at Oregon State and your cousin is Maurice Jones-Drew. That's a pretty athletic family.

"Yeah you could say that. Hard working. Not just athletic, but hard working."

Was there a lot of competition when you were younger?

"Yeah pretty competitive growing up. But I think that's just how we were raised. Always competing, always trying to be the best."

You've had the chance to face Jones-Drew three times now, including Week 10 in Oakland. Any big hits you've dished out?

"We played last year and I chopped him pretty good a couple times (laughs). But he's a hard guy to get a complete hit on. He's kind of solid and low to the ground, so it's tough."

What's it like knowing you guys came from the same family and get to compete on that stage?

"Yeah it's definitely a blessing. We've both been in the league for a while now so it's a great feeling, knowing that growing up, you played each other all your lives, and now you get to do it at the highest stage of football, which you've been working your whole life for. It's good that we both are able to experience that."

You've obviously got a very physical playing style. Is that where the "Boss" nickname came from?

"I don't know if it was just my physical style. I think it was just my play in general. I got it in college and just kind of stuck. I like it. It's more of a mentality."

How do you feel like you've settled in here in Denver?

"Time has flown by, actually. But I'm still getting adjusted. I'm still not completely – in one year, you can only do so much in one year. It takes time to learn things and get adjusted. But every teammate has helped me a lot. They're good guys."

You're part of a very talented secondary. How is that talent meshing with the different positions and styles?

"I think we've been working well together. Like I said, we still are learning as we go along, learning about each other, learning the system, how things fit. But yeah this is probably one of the most talented secondaries I've played in, for sure."

You've had the opportunity to play a lot of sub-package linebacker, which you also did in Cleveland. What do you like about that role?

"I definitely like it. I like to be at safety and then I just go down and play in the box a bit more. It's something that I'm good at and I like to do it. It gives us some freedom on defense as a whole. And I just like to be played at different places at different times so you can't count on me being in one area. And I like to blitz. It allows me to blitz a little bit more."

You nabbed your first pick as a Bronco in front of friends and family in Oakland (Ward is from San Francisco). What was that moment like?

"You know it was a great feeling, just to get a pick in general, my first one. Get that monkey off my back. And hopefully now I get to keep it going. But it definitely meant a little more to play and to get it in front of my family so they could see it and see me in person, because they're very supportive. So it was good to do that in front of them."

Your years in Cleveland didn't finish how you'd want them to – does it light a little extra fire to play on this team?

"Regardless of what we were doing in Cleveland, I always had high expectations for me and my team. It wasn't the best seasons record-wise, but I still had a great time there. I learned a lot. And just coming here, like you said, there are higher expectations as a whole and just a lot more expected from you I guess. But I always have high expectations for what I'm doing. So wherever I went, I had the same expectations."

"Absolutely, I love blitzing," Ward said. "Whenever I get an opportunity to put pressure on the quarterback and make third downs a little harder for them, that's where I'm most comfortable. Whatever Jack wants to call and feels is the best defense, I'm fine with that, too."

Defensive coordinator Jack Del Rio is the boss, a proven defensive mind. But the subtle subtext of Ward's final line there — "I'm fine with that, too" — caught my ear. Ward clearly wants to be a bigger part of the onslaught.

Ward plays "the most positions on the team," Moore explained, and we saw it Sunday. When asked about the defense allowing only 7 second-half rushing yards, Ward smiled after lauding the front of the defense, explaining that, "I was kind of part of that front, too."

Ward is as much a linebacker (in sub packages) and a safety (in base packages), a dynamic weapon when used properly. A lot of football is finding a fit and a stride — we saw it with Denver's offensive line Sunday, admirably blocking an oft-used run offense. And a "freer" T.J., Ward's words, allows him to attack.

Yes, T.J. made two dumb penalties Sunday — no excuses there. But he was also a hawk, deflecting two passes, forcing drops and occasionally blitzing like a boss.

"I'm pretty comfortable at linebacker," the safety said. "There are some nuances I do have to fix, because I can't be in two meetings at one time."

On Monday, fans will talk about Ward's interception, the one that ricocheted into his arms, essentially sealing the victory. But they should also laud and applaud Del Rio for utilizing Ward and allowing him to do — in addition to the aforementioned little things — big things.

Hochman: Turning loose T.J. Ward pays big dividends

By Benjamin Hochman
The Denver Post
November 23, 2014

He's now on the other side of a blitz, microphones coming from every which way. He's cool in the pocket, that T.J. Ward, the guy they call "Boss," a black fedora placed on his head just so. He's asked about the victory, about the interception. Then, after they retreat, he's asked about the real story of the defense — T.J. Ward finally being T.J. Ward again.

"How many times did you blitz today?"

"I think three," the Broncos safety said.

"In the other games, how many blitzes did you average per game?"

After a light chuckle, Ward said, "Probably 0.5, maybe one. There've been a few games where I didn't blitz at all. I think it's a great call — the blitz allows me to use my speed against bigger interior linemen, so I'm not running straight into them."

There were many game-changing plays Sunday, but the game-resetting play came from Ward, whose interception on a tipped ball late in the fourth quarter led to Denver's winning score.

On Miami's first drive, those Dolphins seemed to do whatever they wanted to, even allowing Larry Csonka to get a carry. But on the second Dolphins' drive, Denver defensive coordinator Jack Del Rio unleashed Ward on a third-and-8. No. 43 blitzed quarterback Ryan Tannehill, forcing the kid out of the pocket, resulting in an incomplete pass. This play exemplified his abilities, and, for a moment, justified why Denver paid big for a defensive shark who, after some quiet performances, was dubbed by a certain someone: "Shark Weak."

It took just a quick 11 weeks to do so. Yeah, Ward's close friend Rahim Moore said the public doesn't see the little things Ward has done this season to enhance the defense. Look, when Denver introduced Ward at a news conference, they didn't gush about the little things he does. They talked about the impact plays — the nasty. We finally saw it Sunday.

Does the "Boss" want to blitz more often?

Ward, Moore have long history

By Lauren Giudice
denverbroncos.com
September 26, 2014

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. – While Rahim Moore and T.J. Ward have been teammates for just over seven months, their relationship goes back much further than that.

The two have known each other since before they went off to college as Ward's sister was dating Moore's best friend. They are both well-acquainted with each other's families and have stayed close throughout the years.

While they went their separate ways in college, football remained a bonding agent that held them together as Ward headed north to Oregon and Moore committed to UCLA. The Pac-10 connection helped them as they discussed common opponents.

"We always used to share our knowledge in college," Moore said. "What USC was doing, what Arizona State was doing, what Arizona was doing. We always just talked football and we both respected each other."

Ward is three years older than Moore and began his career with the Ducks in 2005 as a walk-on and redshirted his freshman year. He worked his way up from a scout team member, a special teams standout to a starter. His junior year with the Ducks, Ward led the team in tackles and was extremely valuable to the team's defense his senior year despite missing nearly half the season with an ankle injury.

Moore watched Ward as he rose through the ranks at Oregon and describes his teammate as "the best in our conference" at the time.

"When he left, I kind of took over the torch a little bit."

While they played in separate states, the two would talk on the phone about football for "hours and hours." Watching each other on film, they worked through their mistakes together. It was a unique kind of friendship that allowed them to improve. Moore would call and ask Ward for advice on a consistent basis.

The friends faced off twice in college. During their first showdown, Moore had two solo tackles. Ward led both teams with 11 total tackles and laid a devastating hit on UCLA receiver Terrance Austin. On the play, the ball hit Ward's helmet and it was intercepted by his teammate. In 2009, in Pasadena, despite UCLA outgaining the Ducks in the air 145-82, Oregon prevailed again.

"They beat us every time. Every time," Moore said. "It wasn't good. He had a better game than me those two games, but I don't want to live in the past. It was ugly."

Both were drafted in the second round of their respective drafts. While they went to different professional teams, they kept in touch. Whenever their paths crossed and they were in the same city, they met up.

"We always communicated and stayed in touch with each other, and when he came here, it was like second nature," Moore said. "Like on the field, we're laughing between plays. Me and him I think rely on each other a lot. We always bag on each other, but then when the ball is snapped, it's all focus."

When the Broncos signed Ward in March, Moore immediately texted Ward telling him he wanted the two of them to be the best safety tandem the team has ever seen.

While years have gone by since their friendship began, they still enjoy poking fun at each other.

"I'm always talking trash, and so is he," Ward said. "So it doesn't just limit itself to the field. It's all day, pretty much with us."

Ward said there is never a dull moment in the defensive backs room and said his longtime relationship with Moore is "something we can build off of."

Moore is currently in his fourth NFL season and Ward in his fifth. There's no ego or pride as they work together and try to improve. Moore said the role of teacher and student can change by the day.

"So we love one another and we respect each other and we watch so much film together, and share each other's notes, it's not even funny," Moore said.

Broncos Q&A: T.J. Ward's hard work paying off big now

By Troy Renck
The Denver Post
September 21, 2014

T.J. Ward didn't start until his senior year of high school. Two games into his final season, he broke his leg, scaring away college recruiters. He walked on at Oregon, joining four teammates from California's De La Salle High School. Nothing about his story followed the script. Ward wondered if football was the right destination.

"I had long days where I didn't think I was going to play anymore. I remember times where I was like, 'I just want to make a team,' " Ward recalled last week. "Then I realized what kind of player I could be in college and the NFL. I made the Pro Bowl. Now it's about one thing: working, working, working."

Through two games as a Denver Bronco — he signed as a free agent for \$22.5 million over four years — Ward remains relentless. He has played every snap on defense.

"I didn't have the greatest first game. I felt like I had a better second game. I am still not at a point where I am playing like I should be playing," he said. "Every game is another opportunity for me to get better. I truly relish it. Anytime you have a chance to make a play, it's like a mini-celebration for me."

He sat down with The Denver Post last week to discuss his new team and his journey to the NFL:

Q: The defense enters this game after two wins but marred by penalties against the Chiefs. Are you concerned the unit couldn't get off the field on third down last week?

A: It was frustrating, definitely. It wasn't so much what they did but what we did to ourselves. That's a good and a bad thing. We did it. But at the same time, it can be easily corrected. A lot of times, I think it was conditioning, where guys are not as focused or as sharp. Or they were so eager to make plays, they made a mistake. Whatever it was, it has been addressed. We are looking forward to playing Seattle.

Q: You come from quite a sports family. Dad Terrell played in the NFL. Your brother Terron plays at Oregon State. Your sister Teirra ran hurdles at UCLA. How much football do you talk with Terron?

A: Every week, we are on the phone, and definitely before his games. I want to see what he's thinking, where his head's at, how many carries he might get. I give him pointers of how the defense might attack him. I love watching my brother play. He's done a great job. We have always been opposites. I played defense, and he was always a running back. I definitely think he has a chance to make it in the NFL. He has that defensive mind-set where he likes to break tackles.

Q: You remain close to your family. How much do you appreciate that your parents, Terrell and LeNeita, attend nearly all of your games?

A: It's great having them around. It's so much easier now that I am playing for Denver with them living in California. They can be there every week. We get a chance to spend time together after practice on Saturdays or after the game on Sunday. It means a lot.

Q: You grew up in Oakland, Calif., so why weren't the Raiders your favorite team?

A: That's because my favorite players were Deion Sanders and Jerry Rice. Why? Because they were the best, man. I was always a Niners fan, not Raiders. It's cool getting a chance to play in Oakland each season now. It's always good to play in front of people who saw me make this transition to the pros.

Q: What is your review of "When the Game Stands Tall," which depicts the De La Salle football program and coach?

A: It's cool seeing the story. But it was weird because having been there for part of it, there was some stuff that didn't happen that way. They had to do some stuff for Hollywood with some of the characters. Overall, I liked it.

Q: I know your favorite place to eat is Flemings. What do you like to do when not practicing and hanging out?

A: I just chill. I like to go golfing. I am not that good. I score around 90 to 100. I have days when I am at 110, and I just want to walk away. I noticed in the altitude that the ball carries a lot differently here. Hitting golf balls is good way to relax. It's a little stress relief.

Did you know?

--Didn't start until his senior year in high school, then broke his leg two games into the season.

--Walked on at Oregon. Earned scholarship, and moved from cornerback to safety, where he became big-time hitter. Clips of his best tackles can be found on YouTube

--Father Terrell played at San Diego State when John Fox was a graduate assistant.

--Signed a four-year deal with the Broncos, lured by a chance to win after never playing a prime time TV game with the Browns.

T.J. Ward's permanent tribute

By Ben Swanson
DenverBroncos.com
August 22, 2014

T.J. Ward's most powerful tattoo has 10 years of scar tissue.

The kneeling angel beneath the words "Tee Kay" in black ink memorializes Ward's close friend and high school football teammate Terrance Kelly, whose life was tragically cut short in a shooting in 2004.

T.K. and T.J. played football for De La Salle High School, notable at the time for its prestige as a football powerhouse holding the national record for consecutive wins, which ended after 151 straight victories.

A highly recruited linebacker, Kelly had committed to play football at the University of Oregon, joining a group of teammates who wanted to stick together.

Like tumbling dominoes, they decided to attend Oregon, unwilling to split up after four great years together. "After one guy committed, then two guys committed, and the final two — It was something that doesn't happen too often [...] and we took advantage of that," Ward said. "I didn't get a scholarship, but still wanted to be with the guys I spent the last four years together."

Kelly was one of Ward's best friends. "We spent a lot of time off the field together, me spending time with his family, him spending time with my family," Ward said. "He was just one of those types of guys that everybody clinged to."

They had planned one last workout together in their hometown of Richmond, Calif., but Kelly wasn't there. He was waiting in his car outside a friend's house to say goodbye two days before he was to leave for Oregon's fall training camp when he was shot and killed.

"It was devastating. I didn't believe it at first," Ward said. "My mom told me. She broke the news to me, and I kind of just froze."

Ward would walk on at Oregon and have a successful collegiate career, but neither him nor his friends could shake the feeling that Kelly should have been there, too. In his absence, they did what they could to honor him. Ward and Cameron Colvin got tattoos in his memory, and together they all tried to live their lives in the way Kelly would have.

"We try to do things for him and his family, and just progress the way he would have wanted us to progress and the way we know he would have," said Ward, who is confident his path to the NFL would have followed Kelly's.

Ward still talks to Kelly's father, Landrin, as well as his close friends who had played with him in high school and college.

Their stories, including Kelly's death, are depicted in the new film *When The Game Stands Tall*. Based on the book by the same name, the movie details the pressures and drama surrounding the renowned football team during its record-breaking winning streak.

Ward hasn't seen it yet, but he hopes it has an impact outside of just the emotions it instills in viewers.

"I hope it sheds a lot of light on who Terrance was and that it helps the foundation a lot," Ward said, referring to the Terrance Kelly Youth Foundation, a community outreach foundation founded by Terrance's father, Landrin.

Based in Richmond, the foundation aims to help children in impoverished communities achieve their potential to find a "positive future", as Ward put it. "It's about helping them, letting them know that there's goals ahead of them and there's things that can be done.

"You just have to work at it and focus like Terrance did, because he got out, and unfortunately someone took that from him."

T.J. Ward brings thump, attitude to Broncos defense

By Troy E. Renck
The Denver Post
July 25, 2014

The defense was to the Broncos last season what Ringo Starr was to the Beatles: overshadowed, overlooked, underwhelming.

John Elway was John, Peyton Manning was Paul, and the guys on the other side of the ball were acoustic. The Broncos believe their defense will rock this season, faith that begins with a man who looks like he could crack granite with his fist.

If pass rusher DeMarcus Ware raises expectations, safety T.J. Ward lowers the boom. He represents the identity the Broncos seek. And the transformation began on the first day of training camp.

"If we have a complete team and help each other, where one isn't better than the other, we can be a championship team," said Ward, who signed as a free agent after playing his first four seasons with the Cleveland Browns. "That's our goal. It has already started. Guys are hungry, eager, excited and it shows. We are communicating well. You can tell the vibe right now is very strong."

Ward brings to the Broncos a safety thumper, their first since Brian Dawkins in 2011. It's hard to find a successful Denver team that didn't have a force at the back line, beginning with Dennis Smith and running through Steve Atwater and John Lynch.

The Broncos want their defense to assume a new persona, preferably one with swag in the walk and froth on the mouth. Elway admitted as much Wednesday when he said the Broncos can't rely on Manning alone. It's unfair, if not unwise. The change has been jarring — counting the nickel back position, the Broncos could have eight different starters in their top 12 that faced the Seahawks in the Super Bowl.

"We want to have an attitude," defensive tackle Terrance Knighton said. "We want to be enforcers."

The Broncos proved they can outscore teams during the regular season. The NFL playoffs, just like the NBA in June, slow down, rewarding teams that can defend and force offenses into empty possessions.

Ward represents the prototype, a fierce hitter who can double as a linebacker in subpackages, something he "loves to do." The Broncos will always be Peyton Manning's team as long as he's under center. But they might not be a championship team without better defenders.

"We can definitely set the tone in the preseason," Ward said. "There's no such thing as half speed once we get into the games."

Defense Learning From Ward's Toughness

By Lauren Giudice
DenverBroncos.com
July 26, 2014

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. -- Once the pads are on, that's when real football starts. It's a sentiment that so many players echo.

Saturday, the Broncos' first day donning pads in months, was like Christmas for hard-hitting T.J. Ward.

Ward's first victim of the day was former Pittsburgh Steeler Emmanuel Sanders. Ward, a former Cleveland Brown, said even though their former teams are division rivals, that they are fully teammates now and that bad blood is nonexistent.

Ward said getting hit is part of the game and even though Sanders was a little upset about the hit, Ward responded by telling him to "just get back to the huddle, we've got a long practice."

"We're complete teammates right now, there's no rivalry there," Ward said. "It's all competition. We're still in practice. I know how competitive he is, how competitive I am. It was just a play where I tried to get the ball out and he fell. It was just a bang-bang play. Nothing too serious. "

Ward always has a sense of eagerness and anticipation for the first hit of training camp. He compares hitting people to riding a bike. Adjusting to the added weight of pads and "getting your feet under you" takes a little time, but it's relatively simple for him to find his rhythm again.

But Ward thrived in practice today. The hit on Sanders got the defense riled up and later, in the second-to-last period, he got the best of Ronnie Hillman with a big hit in the backfield. Hillman couldn't get outside fast enough and Ward flew towards him and hit him for a loss.

Defensive Coordinator Jack Del Rio said he likes what Ward has shown him so far.

"He's going to bring some toughness to our defense, and we've got some tough guys on our defense so he'll fit right in with that," Del Rio said. "A welcomed addition."

Ward and fellow new defensive acquisition DeMarcus Ware are fostering a new, tougher mentality on the defense. Ward is known as one of the most physical players in the league and that's part of the reason the Broncos signed him.

When Ware first joined the team, he called the defense's additions "an investment in brutal nasty."

Linebacker Danny Trevathan said Ward will "come and get you."

"Those guys [Ward and Ware] are savages, man," Trevathan said. "Anything that's out there left to be picked up, they're going to go out there and clean it up and they're going to leave everything out there on that field. That's just the type I am too. I think they did a good job of filling in guys and bringing new guys in that fit within the type of scheme that we play."

Today was only the team's first day in pads and Ward does what he can to avoid hurting his new teammates. He said that, like in games, once you get the first hit, everything just "kind of flows evenly." Ward has always been the kind of player that doesn't hold back.

His big hits bring life and excitement to the defense, just like his energetic personality.

"Especially as a defense, we're like 'alright now we've got the pads on, let's see what you're going to do with the pads,'" Ward said. "You've seen some of those situations today where it wasn't the same like in OTAs or in the first couple of days of practice. As a defensive player, I know especially me, I'm eager to lay that first hit on whoever."

It's fun for him to get "a little bit of thud going on."

Edgy attitude arrives in Denver with safety T.J. Ward

By Terry Frei
The Denver Post
March 13, 2014

Nobody — not John Elway, not John Fox, not Jack Del Rio — has to ask new Denver strong safety T.J. Ward to be nasty, to contribute the sort of sharp-edged physical play the Broncos ran up against in the Super Bowl against the Seattle Seahawks.

"I think that's something that's just going to happen," Ward said Wednesday at the Broncos' Dove Valley headquarters. "It's not something I have to think about. It's just my style of play. It's what I bring to the table, and that's why they brought me here."

As the first unrestricted free agent Denver landed in the signing period that opened Tuesday, Ward signed a four-year, \$23 million deal and was the first of the newest Broncos to meet with the media at Dove Valley Wednesday. He said when he committed to Denver, he was given no assurances that additional major signings on defense — such as cornerback Aqib Talib and defensive end DeMarcus Ware — would follow.

"I was the first one, so I didn't hear about them until after I signed," said Ward, 27. "I had no idea. Those are two great players. I'm eager to get to work with them. I don't know them personally yet. I'm excited to get to meet them. I know what they can do on the field, and those are two players I admire and I think we'll work well together."

Ward said his decision to come to Denver involved "a mix of everything. It's a great organization, the money was right, but most important is the opportunity to win a championship. I felt I had the best opportunity to do that here."

In nine years, the 5-foot-10, 200-pound Ward has gone from a nonscholarship walk-on — albeit at an elite Oregon program — to cementing a reputation as one of the top safeties in the game after four seasons with the Cleveland Browns.

"We're extremely excited to have T.J. here," said Elway, the Broncos' general manager. "He's a guy that's going to bring an attitude and physical presence, and has been a tremendous player over his four-year career. He was a Pro Bowl and an all-pro selection last year, and we expect and hope and know that type of play is going to continue."

At De La Salle High School in Concord, Calif., Ward suffered a season-ending knee fracture in the third game of his senior year. "That scared schools away," he said.

After arriving at Oregon as a walk-on cornerback, he redshirted in 2005, was switched to safety and then placed on scholarship.

"I think they were surprised by what I did as a walk-on coming in there and actually competing for a starting spot," he said.

Ward ended up starring for Oregon and being selected by Cleveland in the second round of the NFL draft in 2010.

"It's been a long road," Ward said. "I'm truly blessed to be here today. I can say that I literally have surpassed most of my dreams. I couldn't tell you I'd be here. I really don't know how I got here. I'm just here now and excited to be here."

Ward Bringing Attitude, Versatility

By David DeChant
DenverBroncos.com
July 1, 2014

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. -- T.J. Ward is a man of few words.

Perhaps that's why he hasn't quite received spotlight treatment on par with the Broncos' other free agent signings like DeMarcus Ware and Aqib Talib. Those two have been in the league longer and are obviously very talented and accomplished. But Ward is anything but a background contributor, as NFL offenses could tell you.

He embodies his "Boss" nickname in both his image and style of play. At 5-10 and 200 pounds, Ward is a condensed collection of muscle that bulges out of the rolled-up sleeves of his practice jersey. If that image isn't daunting enough, there's his dark visor and bold facemask.

Less than two weeks removed from the end of offseason practices, the time to intimidate opposing receivers who've been assigned a crossing route is still a long way off. For now, Ward is just embracing the offseason preparation in an environment he hasn't experienced in the NFL. After 18 total victories in four years with the Browns, he joins a team that had 15 last season alone, which he noted was a big factor in signing with Denver.

"Nothing against Cleveland but this is a winning culture," Ward said at the end of OTAs. "They're used to winning and you treat all things the same way, period: with a preparation to win."

"That's how the coaches treat you and that's how the players treat each other. You expect everybody to know their job, do their job and do it the right way."

Like Ward, there are a few members of the Broncos' secondary who are learning new jobs in Denver, including Talib and rookie corner Bradley Roby. Ward has already developed good chemistry with fellow safety Rahim Moore, saying the two "vibed off each other's movements" during OTAs in May, and is working plenty with the other new acquisitions.

"We're all fresh to the secondary," Ward said. "That makes it a little better for all of us. We're all taking our bumps and bruises together."

A man who normally hands out the bruises, Ward has been learning a variety of positions in Denver's system, as he lined up all over the field during OTA and minicamp practices. Throughout the offseason, Defensive Coordinator Jack Del Rio mentioned Ward's ability to play back or as a sub-package linebacker, a role he featured in for Cleveland last year. That versatility could be a major piece of Del

Rio's "large library of thoughts and ideas" for the 2014 defense, and it's a role Ward embraces.

"I like to be everywhere," he said. "If it can change up my looks at different times and the offense doesn't see me in one spot all the time, it definitely helps us help the defense and that's what I want to do."

Having the freedom to roam prior to the snap and hover near the line of scrimmage certainly helped Ward stuff the stat sheet last year. His 112 tackles were the third-most of any safety in the league, and he also chipped in 1.5 sacks and five passes defended.

Even better, he found his way to the ball for impact plays on several occasions. His nine tackles for loss bettered the totals of many top defensive linemen and were only exceeded among defensive backs by the Chiefs' Eric Berry, with no others even coming close. As a cherry on top, Ward made two interceptions -- taking one back for a game-clinching touchdown against Buffalo -- and returned a fumble 51 yards for a touchdown against Chicago.

After capping 2013 with his first Pro Bowl appearance, Ward is ready to keep the production rolling.

"My teammates and coaches have welcomed me with open arms and the transition has been easy," he said. "I really like how things are going right now."

Not surprisingly, when asked about his goals for the season, Ward kept it short and sweet.

"We're just expecting to win," he said. "That's it. That's the only expectation."