

Sylvester Williams went from working at Taco Bell to playing in Super Bowl

By Alex Marvez
FOXSports.com
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Although he will spend this week enjoying the trappings of the Bay Area as a Denver Broncos' Super Bowl starter, a part of Sylvester Williams will always remain in Jefferson City, Mo.

In fact, Williams admits he would still be there himself working in a radiator factory if not motivated to craft a different fate.

Of all the players who have taken improbable routes to Super Bowl 50, none may be stranger than the road traveled by Denver's nose tackle.

He started only one game in high school and struggled with academics, prompting Williams to enter the workforce immediately upon graduation. After part-time jobs at Taco Bell and Wal-Mart, Williams started at the same factory (Modine Manufacturing Co.) that employed his father.

"I knew the best way to make money was factory work," said Williams, who landed on the assembly line. "I was excited when I got the job. I was making like \$11 or \$12 an hour.

"After being there for a few months, I started to realize I wanted something different out of life. I started to look at my surroundings. There is nothing wrong with the factory at all, but I started to figure I had a different goal in life."

The goal: Getting a college education while playing football.

On the advice of his mentor, Williams drove five hours from his home to Coffeyville (Kansas) Community College to the only school that had shown interest in him coming out of high school.

Emphasis on shown.

"I remember getting there around 6 or 7 at night and going into (the coach's) office," Williams said. "He looked at me in my face and said, 'Who are you? What are you doing here?'"

As a walk-on, Williams not only ended up making the team but he shed 61 pounds from his 360-pound frame to become one of the nation's most highly recruited junior-college defensive linemen. Williams signed with the University of North Carolina -- where he graduated with a communications degree -- and flourished enough on the field to become Denver's 2013 first-round draft pick.

Williams has started to prove he was worth the investment. He posted career highs in tackles (25) and sacks (2.5) this season while serving as a key part of Denver's run-stuffing unit.

Williams said he still keeps in touch with factory workers in Jefferson City because they're his friends and it helps keep him grounded.

"I think about where I came from every day," Williams said. "It's a part of me. I never want to forget where I came from."

Or where he has gotten.

Sylvester Williams proving worthy to anchor Broncos' defense

By Cameron Wolfe
Denver Post
September 25, 2015

For Sylvester Williams, the pressure was building like an overfilled water balloon in the summertime. No more kid gloves. No more giving him time to adjust. No more talk of potential.

After two years of subpar-to-average play from their 2013 first-round pick, the Broncos took a leap of faith. They decided to let their mammoth nose tackle Terrance "Pot Roast" Knighton go in free agency and hand the torch to an unproven Williams.

The coaching staff admittedly was uneasy. They knew he had the talent, but could he put it all together on the field in a new system?

Through two games, the answer has been a resounding yes. Lost in the shuffle of the veteran-led, top-ranked defense has been Williams' play as the anchor in the middle.

It hasn't showed up much on the stat sheet, yet, but his value to the defense has been felt across the board.

"When we played 4-3 here last year, he was a little bit iffy on how to play and where he fits in the defense," outside linebacker DeMarcus Ware said. "But now he can use his athleticism to sort of push the pocket and get pressure on the quarterback."

Williams knows he cannot replace Knighton's personality or gobble up two or three linemen in the middle like Pot Roast. He's abandoned hopes of duplicating either.

Instead, Williams focuses on using his quickness and explosiveness to not just hold the line, but to break it.

"Obviously I want to keep the linebackers clean, but I also want to make some plays myself and show up on the highlight tape too," said Williams, who has four tackles through two games.

More specifically, he wants to redefine the nose tackle spot.

You wouldn't know it by looking at his 6-foot-2, 318-pound frame, but he's undersized for the spot. He added 12 pounds in the offseason just to get to his current weight, and he's far smaller than his predecessor.

After two disappointing seasons, Williams is treating 2015 as his breakout year.

He finally took Knighton's suggestion and stuck his head deep into they're going and you'll be ahead of the curve.

Another change was the addition of defensive line coach Bill Kollar, who wouldn't allow Williams to have another year of being hesitant and getting pushed around. Kollar demanded playmaking from the entire unit.

"He preaches that everyday," Williams said. "He keeps that fire under us."

The Ravens couldn't douse that fire in Week 1, rushing for only 73 yards (3.2 yards per carry average).

Kansas City running back Jamaal Charles got off for 125 rushing yards in Week 2, but defensive coordinator Wade Phillips said failure to contain the edge and missed tackles on the outside caused most of those problems.

Broncos defensive coaches give grades, plus or minus, on each play. For the first time in three years, Williams said, his grades are more positive than negative.

"He'll have a heck of a year. He's truly a hard worker," Phillips said. "He's got talent, but a lot of guys have talent and they don't work how he does."

Outside linebacker Von Miller isn't surprised when he see some of the moves Williams is doing in games.

"I'm the one telling him, 'You have to try some of this,' " Miller said. "It's exciting to start to see him develop into the type of player that we all know that he can be."

It wasn't long ago Ware and Miller were pushing Williams to perform better, to live up to his high draft status. Now, Williams is earning praise from two of the team's best players.

And he's the rock in the middle on defense.

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First time's the charm, a look at the Broncos recent success with that first selection

YEAR — NAME, POSITION, PICK NUMBER, CURRENT STATUS

2010 — Demaryius Thomas, WR, 22, All-Pro no. 1 receiver

2011 — Von Miller, OLB, 2, All-Pro elite pass rusher

2012 — Derek Wolfe, DE, 36, Starting defensive end

2013 — Sylvester Williams, NT, 28, Starting nose tackle

2014 — Bradley Roby, CB, 31, No. 3 cornerback behind two All-Pros

2015 — Shane Ray, OLB, 23, No. 3 outside linebacker behind two All-Pros

Sylvester Williams and nose tackles showing their strength in preseason

By Ben Swanson
DenverBroncos.com
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With 12 sacks by 11 players through two games, the Broncos have gotten to quarterbacks at a league-leading rate with sacks on 17.4 percent of their opponents' passing attempts. And not only that, the nose tackles are getting in on the action to a higher degree than any other position to this point. Sure the sample size is tiny, but the impact has been revealing.

But Sylvester Williams knows that he and his fellow men in the middle won't keep outpacing the edge rushers once they play at full strength when the regular season begins. After Saturday's game against the Texans in which Williams, Darius Kilgo and Chuka Ndulue combined for 2.5 sacks, Williams said with a laugh that he certainly won't be teasing Von Miller or DeMarcus Ware about it.

"We know when the regular season comes, we know where the shine is going to come from," Williams said Monday. "We just take our shine where we can."

The nose tackles had plenty of shine on Saturday getting so much pressure, and not just on the quarterback as they held the Texans to 71 yards rushing for a 3.0-yards-per-carry average. Williams' sack in the second quarter didn't come from the nose but the three-technique lineman position, but it kicked off the nose tackles' strong night. The depth has been on full display, especially with Kilgo leading the Broncos in sacks (2, tied with Shaquil Barrett) and in sack yards (20), and their ability to move around and play different positions allows the defense and the players within it to mix up the looks they give the opposing offensive lines.

"I think the versatility is going to help us out a lot and also we've got depth," Williams said. "We've got guys that could start almost anywhere in the league. We've got Vance, we've got Kilgo, we've got Kenny coming back early. So I think overall, we're going to be pretty good. And like I said, and the thing about us is all of us really can play all three positions on the defensive line, so I think that's going to help us out a lot."

Of course this is still just the preseason and two games is hardly a substantial sample size for big-scale conclusions, but Williams feels that the new defensive scheme that changes how the nose tackle works is a boon for him.

"I think it just more so that you can focus," Williams said of the change. "It's a one-gap scheme vs. playing two-gap. It's more of a one-gap scheme so you can kind of penetrate a little bit more and, like I said, play your gap better."

With the change to a 3-4 front, the base package puts five men on the line and leaves two inside linebackers at the second level, but Williams doesn't think that really changes the defense a whole lot.

"It's really pretty much the same defense we was kind of in; we just don't two-gap anymore," Williams said. "The biggest thing is that those guys are big-time players. Y'all seen how Brandon played last game."

I mean, the biggest thing is I think we're going to be all right up front. I really do. And like I said, we're going to continue to get better every day and make adjustments when needed."

In that sense, how the nose tackles attack the gaps makes them more aggressive players, and in his third season, Williams is eager to fulfill his potential as a former first-round pick. With the free-agent departure of nose tackle Terrance Knighton during the offseason, Williams has a new opportunity to be the main force holding down the interior of the defensive line.

"I'm excited about the opportunity that I was able to get this year after Terrance leaving," Williams said. "I just want to get better every day and hopefully I can fill the gap."

Sylvester Williams draws Broncos coaches' praise

By Troy Renck
DenverPost.com
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Sylvester Williams recalled the moment that explains how significantly his career has shifted over the past year. At the end of Saturday's practice, Broncos coach Gary Kubiak singled him out in front of the team for his relentless effort.

Williams' progress remains central to the defensive line. If the nose tackle reaches his potential it would echo across the front seven.

"To hear that (praise) meant a lot. They preach, 'Finish plays, be disruptive.' They want 100 percent," Williams said after Monday's practice. "I would say there were opportunities for me to get noticed (last season) if I played better, but obviously I wasn't meeting their expectations. It's a different year for me. Hopefully I can play up to their expectations and keep it going."

Entering his third season, Williams relishes change, embraces the pressure. He weighs 318 pounds after, on orders, adding weight over the past month. He remains in the middle, but the switch to the 3-4 defense revised his job description. He no longer is asked to hold the line. He is asked to move it.

"Penetrate. Get up the field and make plays, that is what coach (Bill Kollar) talks about all the time," Williams said. "I think it's helping me out a lot. I love to get off the ball."

Williams' ability to reach the backfield stood out at North Carolina, convincing the Broncos to select him with the 28th pick in 2013. He barely played as a rookie, but started 13 games last season. Terrance Knighton, who remains a close friend, predicted Williams' would "break out" last season, and helped him learn to dissect film and recognize blocking nuances. Williams grew mentally, but physically the 4-3 failed to bring out Williams' talent, leaving him a first-down player with 18 tackles. In the 3-4, Williams provides versatility, a bear of a man capable of moving up and down the line. Williams remained active Monday as the defensive line produced its first tipped passes in padded 11-on-11 drills.

Williams has no desire to leave the field, and continues to push toward that goal by leaving everything on the field.

"At the end of his practice he was at his best," Kubiak said. "He has responded to Kollar's way of coaching and what Bill is trying to get him to do. He has been an impressive player. Not only through what little bit we've seen in camp, but he did it through the offseason, too."

Williams will be counted on to slow the run. But he won't be typecast. He is looking to do damage after playing tentatively last season, afraid any mistake would land him on the bench.

"I am able to do some of the things again that I was good at in college," Williams said. "I will get some double teams. If I get a one-on-one matchup, I feel like I can make a play."

The Broncos defense boasts five returning Pro Bowlers, and added Shane Ray, a top-10 rookie talent, to help rush the passer. The only question lingers up front. Great teams build from the inside out, and Williams appears determined to reverse the perception of him and the unit he's been trusted to anchor.

"This is the hardest working group I have been around since I've been here," Williams said. "We have guys who can play all positions. It gives a chance to stay fresh. We are not focused on numbers. We are focused on getting better. And I am doing everything I can to show the coaches they can believe in me."

Tackling the competition

The Broncos continue to praise the progress of nose tackle Sylvester Williams, an early star in camp. NFL reporter Troy E. Renck examines how he ranks in production among the first 10 tackles drafted in 2013:

Player, pick	Team	Career tackles	Career sacks
Sheldon Richardson (13)	Jets	84	11.5
Bennie Logan (67)	Eagles	69	2
Star Lotulelei (14)	Panthers	55	5
Kawann Short (44)	Panthers	41	5
Johnathan Hankins (49)	Giants	39	7
Sharrif Floyd (23)	Vikings	38	7
John Jenkins (82)	Saints	38	1
Sylvester Williams (28)	Broncos	32	2
Brandon Williams (94)	Ravens	32	1.5
Jordan Hill (87)	Seahawks	19	7

Sylvester Williams' focus and conditioning standing out at training camp

By Allie Raymond
DenverBroncos.com
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At the end of the second day of training camp, Head Coach Gary Kubiak told the media that he instructed his players to watch their training camp film backwards. It was maybe an odd instruction, but Kubiak had a specific reason.

"Probably the majority of the mistakes we made, with the mistakes we made in practice, most of them are at the end of practice," Kubiak said. "That tells you you're making mistakes when you're tired."

Of the 90 players on the Broncos roster, one in particular stood out to Kubiak among the masses.

"A guy jumped out at me: Sly [Sylvester Williams]," Kubiak said. "I'm looking at one-on-one at the end of practice, and Sly looks like he had one heck of a period over there. So that's what you looking for. You're looking for guys making plays when they're dog-tired. That's what you have to do in the league—make them in the third, fourth quarter when the game is on the line."

Williams, a third-year nose tackle, has seen plenty of face time on the Broncos starting line up since he was drafted in 2013, but this training camp he's been a standout on the defensive line and deserving of praise from the head coach.

"I think the main thing is that I can hold down the middle of the defense, be slotted in the middle and make some plays, as well as make the plays that come my way," Williams said of his goals for training camp. "Also [I wanted to] just show them that overall that I'm ready to be the player that they want me to be. I think that was my goal overall."

One aspect of Williams success this year is his work with newly appointed Defensive Line Coach Bill Kollar. Williams says that Kollar has changed his game and has "brought the best out" in him.

"He's a great guy," Williams said. "The biggest thing about him is if you give him all you have, he's a pretty laid-back type of guy. He just really wants guys that work and go out there and make plays. He expects that from us."

Williams says he feels more comfortable in this defense than last year, which is a good sign for the Broncos. Considering last season, Williams started 13-of-16 games and totaled 21 tackles for the league's second-ranked run defense that allowed the fewest rushing yards per game (79.8) in franchise history. It seems Williams can only go up from here.

Sylvester Williams making strong impressions at nose tackle

By Ben Swanson
DenverBroncos.com
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With the conclusion of minicamp, Sylvester Williams has impressed coaches and teammates alike, taking ownership of the nose tackle position in the new 3-4 defense that's being installed.

Perhaps no one has been more impressed than Defensive Coordinator Wade Phillips, who said that Williams has really taken advantage of his offseason as he tries to prove himself to a new coaching staff.

"I think Sly has done an exceptional job," Phillips noted on Thursday following practice. "I feel real good about him. About four of the guys are really, I think they're moving forward really well. I think we've got a group that can come in and play and do some good things for us and Sly has been exceptional. I think he's really taken over the nose guard position. ... I'm really pleased with where he is."

Head Coach Gary Kubiak agreed, and said that Williams and the defensive line have responded well to the coaching of defensive line coach Bill Kollar, who has a great reputation for getting the most out of his players.

"We had a little concern about the nose position, how we're going to go about it, but I think [Vance] Walker's made a lot of progress. I think Sly has had a really good offseason," Kubiak said. "Marvin [Austin]'s been nicked a little bit and has missed some time. So there's been a little concern of how we're going to do that, but the good news is that Wade has played with the big nose, he's played with the small guys, he's played with all of them. I like the way Bill works and they've responded to Bill and I think they've done a good job."

Williams, though he had not played in a 3-4 prior to this offseason, told DenverBroncos.com in March that he was eager to face a new challenge and the pressure that it brings as he goes into his third season.

"There's a lot of pressure on me, but to be honest, I'm happy to have that pressure," he told us at the time. "I'm just excited that the coaches really believe in me in giving me a shot to prove myself."

DeMarcus Ware said on Tuesday that he's noticed Williams' confidence building this offseason, which falls right in line with Phillips' observations.

"He's getting that confidence of being that guy in the middle you're going to have to count on," Ware said. "I can see that confidence, especially in the pass rush. Also, with coach teaching him so many things—and the whole defensive line—those guys are really coming together as a conglomerate group."

Broncos to look to Sylvester Williams to be one of the men in the middle

ESPN.com

Jeff Legwold

Thursday, February 26, 2015

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. -- From the moment the Denver Broncos hired Wade Phillips as the team's defensive coordinator, the move to a 3-4 scheme on defense has been a given.

Even Phillips, when he was formally introduced to his new job, said "I think everybody knows we're going to a 3-4."

Over the last four seasons with John Fox as head coach the team played with 3-4 principles on defense, so given how the defense was built, this isn't some from-the-ground up transition. The Broncos have linemen -- Malik Jackson, Sylvester Williams and Derek Wolfe -- already in house who should transition nicely.

They have edge-rushers, two of which went to the Pro Bowl in Von Miller and DeMarcus Ware. They have an inside linebacker to play the middle in Brandon Marshall, who led the team in tackles last season. Should Danny Trevathan return -- as the Broncos' hope -- from the three separate left leg injuries suffered last season, they'll have the weak-side, inside linebacker they'll need.

They have three players under contract in the secondary who went to the Pro Bowl in Chris Harris Jr., Aqib Talib and T.J. Ward to go with growing expectations for where Bradley Roby can go in Year 2.

The player with the biggest jump to make is Williams. Start with the position he plays.

Joe Collier, who knows a thing or three or 9,000 about the 3-4 defense -- New England Patriots coach Bill Belichick has publicly said he learned the 3-4 from Collier -- has always said the most important position in the defense is the nose tackle, the big guy in the middle of the defensive line. Collier has said "if you don't have that guy you can't play the defense ... or play the defense like you need to play it."

And right now that guy would be Williams. As coach Gary Kubiak has pointed out in recent days, Phillips has adjusted to personnel through the years, lining up a mammoth nose tackle directly over the center or using a slightly smaller (relative

term) player lined up slightly to one shoulder of the center. Williams, at 313 pounds, would be considered one of the "smaller" types.

"Wade has played with both, Wade has had the huge guy and ... Wade has played with the small guy -- Earl Mitchell in Houston," Kubiak said. "Wade has adjusted to both kinds of nose guard."

Kubiak also scored a bonus when Houston Texans coach Bill O'Brien allowed defensive line coach Bill Kollar, who has family in Colorado, to accept a position on Kubiak's staff. Kollar is one of the most respected position coaches in the league and the players will find he is waiting to prod them plenty toward better things.

When the topic of Williams came up at the scouting combine last week, executive vice president of football operations/general manager John Elway said: "Sylvester's going to tested, going to get pushed."

The Broncos will look hard at interior defensive linemen in the draft as well, and there is also the matter of Terrance Knighton. Knighton, too, would fit the nose tackle role for the Broncos, but he's also an unrestricted free agent.

Elway has said the Broncos will talk to Knighton's representatives, but also added the team had to see "where the market is," which often can mean the player will find bigger offers elsewhere.

It all pushes Williams, the Broncos first-round pick in the 2013 draft, to the front of the line.

John Elway believes Sylvester Williams has barely scratched surface of potential

By Troy E. Renck
The Denver Post
Feb. 20, 2015

INDIANAPOLIS — With the Broncos willing to let the open market set the value for free agent Terrance Knighton, there exists a chance he won't be back. Knighton has earned a big payday, perhaps as much as \$7 million per season. If the Broncos deem that beyond their price point to make other pieces of the puzzle fit, the onus falls on Sylvester Williams to take on a bigger role.

Williams, a first-round draft choice in 2013, showed improvement last season, ranking 32nd against the run by Pro Football Focus among defensive tackles. However, he finished with a positive overall grade in only five games. Which leads me to John Elway's answer about Williams' role next season. He believes Williams can play better, and thinks new defensive line coach Bill Kollar will help him reach this goal.

"We still like Sylvester, we think there's still a lot of potential there, and we are not sure that he's scratched it yet. If there's any guy that can get it out of our players it's our new defensive line coach Bill Kollar," Elway said. "So Sylvester is going to get tested, and will get pushed. And I think it will be a good thing for Sylvester."

In a 3-4 alignment, defensive coordinator Wade Phillips could use a monstrous run stuffer or a smaller player capable of working the gaps through shading and stunts. The Broncos could go in multiple directions with the 28th pick in the first round, the same spot where they nabbed Williams from North Carolina. Some of the top defensive tackles who could be available at that spot include Oregon's Arik Armstead and Texas' Malcom Brown, who met the media on Friday.

"I just try to go at a high motor (speed). Try to be real disruptive. Get to where I am supposed to be as fast as I can," said Brown, who has talked with the Dallas Cowboys this week.

Williams' history, father drive him

By Lauren Giudice
denverbroncos.com
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ENGLEWOOD, Colo. – Sylvester Williams' father takes no credit for the successes of his son.

Sylvester Sr. still lives in Missouri and watches his son play football for the Broncos every Sunday on television. As Williams grew in St. Louis and Jefferson City, Sylvester Sr. watched his son struggle through high school, accept a job at a manufacturing plant when he was 19 and follow in his footsteps.

While it went against the status quo and was completely unexpected, his father supported him when he made the decision to go to school and get his degree. No one would have minded if Williams remained a factory worker his whole life. While Williams has the utmost respect and admiration of his father, Williams did not want to live the same life as him.

When Williams first got the job at the Modine Manufacturing Company building radiator parts for large trucks, he was elated to earn \$11.50 an hour, making him a wealthy 19-year-old. His job wasn't the hardest at the plant as he put the tubes inside the radiators, but he worked seemingly endless hours, standing up all night doing the same monotonous task over and over. He looked around at his fellow workers, questioning if this was the right path for him.

"I just kind of started to look at myself and wonder if this is what I wanted to do because my pops did this his whole life," Williams said. "Just talking to some other people but I made up my mind that I was just ready to move on and go to school."

Williams always admired his father and always respected him, both for his parenting and his work ethic. Sylvester Sr. taught his son the importance of respect, discipline and hard work. All three of these characteristics came to fruition when Williams enrolled in school and tried out for the Coffeyville Community College football team and made it.

His father drove him to the tryout. Though Williams was overweight and unskilled, Sylvester Sr. was resolute in his confidence in his son.

"When I was in school, I was an athlete," Sylvester Sr. said. "I didn't have a father, I didn't have anybody pushing me. I know my son had the skills because he had everything I had. I told him, all you have to do is put your heart into it. If you put your heart into it you're going to go to the top."

Williams quit his job and went to school. As he put it, "I knew when I put all my eggs in that basket, it had to work out."

It did work out. After playing just one season of high school football and basketball, he rose through the junior college ranks and was named a four-star prospect by Scout.com while racking up 49 tackles, 11.5 tackles for loss and two sacks in 2010. He earned honorable mention All-America honors and was named first-team All-Kansas Jayhawk Community College Conference that season.

"My mindset was totally different because at that point I was a man, so I knew in order to get where I needed to get I needed to outwork everybody," Williams said. "So my mindset wasn't that of a walk-on. I just looked at each individual guy and I wanted to outwork that guy. I knew that if I wanted to outwork all these people, I had a chance. These guys were All-Americans and Division I commits so I knew that I had to work hard to overcome them. That's pretty much what I did."

"I had a mindset that I was just not going to be outworked by nobody and that's what I did."

Georgia, USC, Auburn and numerous other schools came calling. While football was important to him, education was his ultimate goal so he went with the school that emphasized that the most: North Carolina. He felt at home on the campus and comfortable with the coaches.

"It just felt right."

Williams went from a player who was ineligible to play sports until his senior year of high school due to disciplinary reasons to starting every game in his two seasons for the Tar Heels. His first season there, 2011, he was the recipient of the team's award given to the most outstanding first-year player for the defense. In his senior season, when he had six sacks, he was named a first-team All-American and was an All-ACC selection.

With the 28th overall pick of the 2013 NFL Draft, the Broncos selected Williams.

After waiting impatiently in his living room with his family for what seemed like an eternity, he only heard Roger Goodell say the first part of his name before his family began screaming, making the rest of the announcement inaudible.

"He was telling me he was happy for me and I said 'I'm happy for you because you made it happen,'" Sylvester Sr. said. "He put his heart into it."

"It was an emotional day and a day that I will probably never in my life forget," Williams said.

Fast forward nearly two years – Williams has started 15 regular season and three postseason games for the Broncos, including the Super Bowl, and has been a consistent threat on the team’s defensive line. The line is one of the best in the NFL, deep and dominant, helping the Broncos sit at No. 2 in the NFL in rushing yards allowed.

Just as his path to the NFL wasn’t easy, neither was his rise to the starting role. After starting every game at North Carolina, Williams sat patiently on the sideline hoping for his chance to make an impact on his new team, testing his fortitude. In fact, he was inactive for three of the Broncos games as a rookie and had just seven tackles through the Broncos’ first 11 matchups.

While the world of the NFL is vastly different from that of Coffeyville Community College, he approached it the same way: outwork everybody.

“Really for me it was probably the first time I had a reality check my whole career since I started college because I had been a starter all four years: both years in junior college and both years in Chapel Hill,” Williams said. “I was always the guy, so coming here and having to ride the bench and not be the guy, it was a struggle at first and then I realized it was bigger than me and it was about the team. I kind of just started to become a role player and cherish my role and do what I could to help the team win. Just believing that my time come I just have to take the opportunity.”

His time arrived after an injury to starting defensive tackle Kevin Vickerson forced Williams into the spotlight and starting spot. He started the last four games of the regular season and all three playoff games.

“It’s just a dream – watching him play,” Sylvester Sr. said.

While his father and determination to be the best has always inspired Williams, he has a new motivation. That motivation was born on March 27, 2013 and shares the name of his father and grandfather.

Sylvester III changed Williams’ life for the better. Luckily for Williams, he has a great father to emulate.

“To me it changed my life because having him, I’m able to see myself through my own eyes and it’s just like watching him grow and be able to be a part of his life and being able to provide for him is big for me,” Williams said. “One day I hope he grows up and says he’s proud of me because I’m proud of him.”

As Sylvester works to be the best he can be for his team, he also has another goal: to be an even better father than his father.

While Williams isn't the disciplinarian to 19-month-old Sylvester III that Sylvester Sr. was to him, he will instill the same values in his son that his father taught him.

"That's one of those things he would preach: Look out for your brothers and sisters," Williams said. "That's the thing he would preach the most. He was big on respect towards himself and towards others. Just doing the right thing and that's why I really respect him a lot. One thing my pops, he never changed. He was always the same guy. He was a tough guy to deal with at times. He demanded respect, from everybody, not just his kids. That's the type of person he was.

"Growing up with him in my life and having a father figure that I had, I say that I will never let my son down. I can never fail as a father when I had such a great father in my life."

The lessons of respect, discipline and hard work that Williams learned from his father translate to every facet of his life, from football to fatherhood. And after Sunday's game against the Bills, like he does following every game, he will call his father.

"I knew he was going to go to the top," Sylvester Sr. said. "It was what he had to go through to get there."

Broncos' Sylvester Williams sacked long odds in journey to NFL stardom

By Troy E. Renck
The Denver Post
September 5, 2014

It is impossible to think about Sylvester Williams as anything but a defensive tackle. His hands double as bear paws. He moves with a low center of gravity. His body is a tugboat with arms.

At 6-foot-2, 310 pounds, he is a defensive tackle straight out of central casting. There is irony in this because his journey to the Broncos' starting lineup Sunday night reads like a Hollywood script.

Williams never dreamed of playing college football. Surviving occupied his thoughts. He grew up poor in Jefferson City, Mo. The family patched together a house. It burned down. They fixed up a car, and not long after, it was stolen.

Williams needed money, and had to make a living. He took a job at Modine Manufacturing after high school, piecing together radiators for diesels. It paid \$400 a week, an honest wage for a kid who admittedly wasn't a good student or a dedicated athlete in high school.

One game changed his life. His former high school teacher, Andre Solomon, whom he still talks to daily, took Williams to see Kansas play Texas Tech. Williams gazed onto the field and, for the first time, wondered why he was watching rather than playing.

"It opened my eyes to a whole new world," Williams said Thursday.

Williams quit his job. He enrolled at Coffeyville (Kan.) Community College. After playing just one season in high school, Williams, then weighing 360 pounds, walked onto the football team. He dropped weight and sank quarterbacks. A kid who months before spent eight-hour shifts on his feet lining up parts had college coaches standing at attention. He saved his first recruiting letter and offer from Oklahoma State. Dozens more poured in over his two-year junior college career before he finally chose North Carolina.

"When he came in on his recruiting visit I got a chance to know him. We are cut from the same cloth," said the Broncos' Marvin Austin. "It's a great story. To have a testimony, you have to have a test."

Denver grabbed Williams with its first pick in the 2013 draft. He was everything the Broncos expected but also unrefined. Williams spent the bulk of last season as a sponge soaking up advice from Terrance Knighton and Kevin Vickerson.

"The game is real fast as a rookie. There were things I struggled with, like not knowing how to watch film. Not really knowing what the offense was doing against me," said Williams, who contributed late last season and into the playoffs. "You have to have technique."

He could no longer bully opponents at the point of the attack. Knighton watched Williams' growth. Lining up beside Williams now, Knighton predicts a breakout season.

"With Sly, it had nothing to do with his athleticism or physical tools. It was all mental. Now he's playing the game fast," Knighton said. "He will be dominant this year, you watch. Nobody is talking about him because of the season I had last year and the signing of DeMarcus (Ware). Sly is going to be disruptive. "

Defensive tackle is an odd position. It has been compared to fighting in a phone booth. Quick burst is required to get to the backfield, but size must accompany the speed to stop running backs. Williams believes the Broncos "can be one of, if not the best defensive line in football." He did his part, dropping to 310 pounds from 320 last year to be more agile.

"You're looking at a guy now that understands a little better what we're asking him to do, the techniques he'll need to master, the fact that maybe some of those 'I'm just better than the guy across from me' moments that you had in college are few and far between in the NFL," defensive coordinator Jack Del Rio said. "He was mature. And he always worked hard, worked the right way."

Just as he did assembling radiators. He chose another path, rolling up his sleeves and changing his life.

"Sometimes you can't look back," Williams said, "when you need to keep moving forward."

Tackling the odds

Sylvester Williams will start his first season opener Sunday night against the Indianapolis Colts, part of a remarkable journey to the NFL that included several highlights:

- Played one year of high school football in Jefferson City, Mo.
- Worked at Modine Manufacturing, building radiators.

- Dropped nearly 50 pounds and walked onto Coffeyville Community College team.
- Earned All-American honors at North Carolina, where he graduated with a degree in communications.
- 28th pick in 2013 draft, played 13 games, netting 19 tackles and two sacks.

Williams Gaining Experience, Confidence

By Lauren Giudice
DenverBroncos.com
July 26, 2014

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. -- It's not often that a defensive tackle makes the play of the day. On Friday during practice, Sylvester Williams did just that.

He saw that quarterback Peyton Manning was getting ready to throw the ball. So he put his arms up and jumped, tipped the ball and intercepted it. His teammates in white on the sideline went crazy.

"It felt good," Williams said. "It was just one of those things where it was like, 'Wow, it was right there' and I jumped up and tipped it and then I was able to intercept it."

Unfortunately, Williams attempted to pitch it to safety Quinton Carter, who couldn't control it. But Williams recovered the fumble.

"I was the one that pitched it," Williams said laughing. "I had to go get it back."

Though the lateral wasn't well-executed and Williams admits he likely threw it too hard, the impressive interception exemplified Williams' mindset going into his second year in the NFL. He feels more comfortable with the defense and in his understanding of what the offense is running.

He feels that he is better both mentally and physically than he was last season. During camp thus far he feels more aware and at last year's camp he "didn't have a very good understanding of what was going on."

"I'm able to work through the kinks and able to read my keys," Williams said. "Pre-snap I'm able to get off the ball and I'm able to read blocks better than I did last year."

Not only does Williams have more experience on his side, but he also has linemates who "all fit together." He uses them to help him as he develops.

"You talk about guys that are big time playmakers in this league," Williams said. "Terrance Knighton, DeMarcus Ware. Those guys are big time playmakers so I learn from those guys a lot to help me get through the hard times and if I don't know something I just ask them because they pretty much have the answer to everything."

Specifically, Williams said Ware is a future Hall of Famer who keeps the defense motivated and teaches them. While Williams is more confident in his individual potential than he was last year, he is also excited about the defense's potential.

Williams' only interception of his career was in 2011 when he was in college at North Carolina. He's hoping he can get some NFL interceptions under his belt this season. For now, he said he is just focused on improving now and not looking to the season. But, he certainly did enjoy his pick during practice.

According to teammate T.J. Ward, "That was a SportsCenter Top Ten."

Broncos DT Sylvester Williams makes most of playing time

By Joan Niesen
The Denver Post
December 8, 2013

Broncos rookie Sylvester Williams had a long road to the NFL, one that included only a year of high school football, another year of working odd jobs and then two years at junior college. Although the defensive tackle was the Broncos' first-round pick last spring, he has had just as slow a go of it trying to crack his way into the team's rotation at defensive tackle. With Kevin Vickerson out for the year, though, Williams got 36 and then 22 defensive snaps in the team's past two games, and he might have stumbled into his best chance to prove himself.

Off the field, Williams is softspoken, although once you get him talking, the Missouri native has plenty to say. Here's a bit more about who he is, where he came from and where you can find him when he's not in his Broncos uniform.

Q: What are your hobbies?

A: I really just like to relax, play video games, go to the movies, go to the mall and shop, stuff like that.

Q: Which video games?

A: Call of Duty 2K.

Q: And what about movies? What have you seen lately?

A: I've seen "The Best Man Holiday" and "The Butler." Those are two pretty good movies I've seen lately. "The Butler" was a really good movie. I liked that a lot. I don't see everything, but I try to. I don't get a chance to get to everything, but I at least try. I go on Tuesdays, sometimes Fridays, just to get my mind away (from things) for a while.

Q: What's your favorite movie?

A: "Love and Basketball."

Q: So rewind a little bit. I know you had kind of a strange path to the NFL and that you didn't play football until you were older. What convinced you to start playing?

A: My senior year, my coaches, I was a big guy, and one of the coaches asked why I wasn't playing, and did I want to play? I said yes, and I gave it a shot.

Q: Why weren't you playing?

A: I just always liked basketball. I was a big basketball player. I played power forward. That was my first love. Plus, I was having problems staying eligible in school too.

Q: So were you the tall kid in school?

A: I was tall, early on. But then everybody started catching me. I kind of stayed at 6-foot-2 for a while. (He's listed at 6-2.)

Q: So even though you were a big guy, aren't being a big guy and being a good football player two different things?

A: Right. It was definitely tough (to get in shape). I just had to transition from basketball to football too. Football's a physical sport, so at first I was rusty, didn't use my hands. I just went out there and fought myself into shape.

Q: How much did you weigh back then?

A: I weighed like 225, and then my senior year I gained some weight.

Q: And now you're listed at 313 pounds. What on earth do you eat to maintain that kind of weight?

A: I eat a lot of chicken. I love chicken and pasta. Stuff like that. I'll sneak around sometimes and eat a hamburger. I can't eat what I want, because I've got to keep a certain weight. We (defensive linemen) have slow metabolisms, so if we eat a lot, we gain a lot of weight. I try to avoid fried food, potato chips, candy, sweet stuff like that.

Editor's note: Each Sunday, The Denver Post's Broncos reporters help readers get to know the players on a more personal level.

About Williams

2007: Played one season of football, his senior year, at Jefferson City High School in Missouri, where he underwhelmed.

2008: After graduating from high school, Williams worked odd jobs, including at a factory, with no intention of furthering his football career.

2009-10: Played at Coffeyville (Kan.) Community College. He logged 52 tackles, 12½ tackles for loss, two sacks and five blocked kicks in 2010.

2011-12: Played at North Carolina, where he logged 42 tackles and six sacks in his senior season, 2012.

2013: Selected by the Broncos 28th overall in the NFL draft. In his rookie season, it has taken him time to crack into the rotation on the defensive line, but he'll get playing time in Kevin Vickerson's absence.

Sylvester Williams ready to go in place of injured Kevin Vickerson

By Mike Klis

The Denver Post

November 28, 2013

Playing second string as a high school senior didn't stop Sylvester Williams from reaching the NFL.

Menial post-school jobs at Taco Bell, Walmart and a radiator factory couldn't block the hulking defensive tackle from becoming the Broncos' first-round pick in the NFL draft.

Surely, all those life challenges helped Williams endure a little bench time through the bulk of his rookie season with the Broncos.

"No, it didn't help me," Williams said. "This is a different level, a different situation. I just want to get back out there and help my brothers and help my team."

Ready or not, Williams will be out there Sunday afternoon when the Broncos play the Kansas City Chiefs at Arrowhead Stadium. Both teams are 9-2 and tied for the AFC West lead. A victory would give the Broncos a series sweep over the Chiefs and essentially a two-game lead with four to play.

Opportunity came for Williams when starting defensive tackle Kevin Vickerson, who had played his best games the previous two weeks, suffered a dislocated hip Sunday, an injury that ended his season.

"If it was up to me I would still have him here," Williams said. "He's done a lot for me. He's helped me out a lot. I think he's helped me become a better player, and he's been involved personally in me. I want to play for him. This team is going to play for him."

Is Williams ready to play?

"I think so," said Jack Del Rio, the Broncos' defensive coordinator and interim head coach. "We'll see. The great thing about sports is you prepare yourself and then at some point you get your opportunity and then it's what you do with it. He certainly is going to get plenty of opportunity.

"You get an idea based on how they work, how they prepare, how they practice, how they take care of themselves, how they conduct themselves in meetings. But

until he goes from playing 20 snaps to 40 or 50 snaps you don't know how he'll respond to the additional workload. It might be real good to him."

Selected as the No. 28 pick in the draft, Williams got decent playing time in the Broncos' first two games against the Baltimore Ravens and New York Giants. Just enough for the Broncos' coaching staff to judge he wasn't quite ready for much more.

The problem wasn't work ethic or mental toughness. Like most young DTs, Williams had to learn the technique of using his hands.

"That may be true, but I've got a lot to work on," Williams said. "Obviously, I didn't do a good enough job to play early in the year."

In all, Williams was a healthy scratch from three games this year. A thoughtful sort, Williams was plenty bothered. Did he call dad for a pick-me-up? Confide in defensive tackle veterans such as Vickerson, Terrance Knighton and Mitch Unrein?

"I didn't talk to anybody," Williams said. "That was probably my biggest mistake. I was frustrated in myself. I was upset. I was embarrassed about not being able to play. I knew I was better than that. But I did keep practicing hard. I did keep learning from the vets. This is a huge opportunity for me."

Broncos first-round pick Sylvester Williams adjusts to new level

By Mike Chambers
The Denver Post
August 15, 2013

Sylvester Williams is in the final week of his first NFL training camp, but unlike many of his Broncos teammates, the rookie defensive tackle hasn't been counting down the days.

This isn't drudgery for the former teenage Missouri factory worker who molded radiator lids before molding himself into a first-round draft pick. Being paid to sweat and play a game is much better than sweating about going nowhere.

"Best decision I ever made in my life was to finish high school, and then get that factory job," Williams said about what he did during a six-month span in 2008 near Jefferson City, Mo. "Without that factory job, I don't believe I would be here today. I realized how tough the work was and the load I had on my back every day. I saw my life go nowhere."

Williams, 24, indeed took a highly unusual route to the NFL, particularly as the 28th overall selection in the draft. He played only one year of high school football, making just one start, and was never eligible to play for the Jefferson City High School basketball team because of poor grades. He rallied, however, to graduate with his class by taking difficult credit recovery classes with the support of counselors and friends.

"Through the grace of God, I was able to graduate and walk with my class," he said.

Williams used his diploma to attend Coffeyville (Kan.) Community College after realizing the factory didn't have to be his future. He turned heads in two years of playing football at the junior college and ultimately transferred to North Carolina, where he was a starter in each of his 45 games with the Tar Heels.

Williams, 6-foot-2 and 313 pounds, is listed as the Broncos' backup nose tackle, behind five-year veteran Terrance Knighton. But Williams recently overcame a hyperextended knee and could become the season-opening starter.

"I feel myself getting better. I'm adjusted (to the altitude and rigors of training camp), and now I can think while I'm tired,"

said Williams, who was not credited with a tackle last week in the Broncos' preseason opener, a 10-6 victory at San Francisco. "It's a blessing to be out there, and the biggest thing I'm learning is, it's a dominant game up front."

Williams lived with his oldest sister in high school and didn't realize he had big-league potential until after he rallied to graduate. He remembers attending a University of Kansas football game in 2008 while he was employed at the factory. The Jayhawks were playing Texas Tech and Williams realized he was as big and agile as anyone on the field.

"I told myself, 'I can play.' That day gave me a lot of hope. I saw it. I had the size, and I knew I was athletic. I just had to put it all together," he said. "I wanted to go back to school and better my life. At the time, it was just about education, but with football, I started to get better and began working hard, and it landed me here."

Denver got a seasoned person in the first round.

"He's been through a lot, and I think he's mature beyond his years, and at the end of the day he's a good football player," Broncos coach John Fox said of Williams. "The road he went on is not that well-traveled. He realized he had to adjust what he wanted to do in life and he had to be a self-made guy at that point. He wasn't going to have recruiters knocking his door down. It's a tribute to him on figuring out how to do that on a small budget and get to where he's got."

"That will wake you up to, 'You know, this is a pretty good gig.' "

Training camp isn't exactly a breeze for Williams, but it sure beats working with fire in a factory with no breeze.

Broncos rookie DT Sylvester Williams looking to unleash his inner Warren Sapp

By Christopher Dempsey
The Denver Post
August 6, 2013

Growing up, Sylvester Williams just knew he'd be a basketball star.

"As a kid I thought I was going to be Shaquille O'Neal," Williams said, then chuckled. "I'm lacking a few inches."

His next goal?

"My next goal was to be Warren Sapp."

And so Williams, the Broncos' first round draft pick out of North Carolina (28th overall), gets his first chance on Thursday in the preseason opener at San Francisco to begin his journey to be Warren Sapp, a heckuva dominant defensive tackle who was just inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

"As a kid I always wanted to do something great," Williams said. "This is my opportunity to be great."

As it turned out, in the days leading up to the NFL Draft, Sapp already thought Williams had potential to be great. He was among those who asked Williams to participate in an NFL Network series called 'Game Changers,' taped in early April. Williams ate up the opportunity to be in the same space with his boyhood idol and get this piece of advice/info from him:

"Pretty much as a defensive tackle, you've got to hunt the quarterback," Williams said. "Don't just be one of those guys that says 'I'm a run stopper.' He preached getting up the field and get to the quarterback, don't dance at the line of scrimmage. He told us to penetrate, get up field and get to the quarterback. He said he hunted the quarterback for 13 years."

And so Williams pledges to do the same. A small knee injury kept him out of a few practices early in camp, but he insists he's 100 percent now and ready to get on the field – which he will on Thursday at San Francisco – and show what he can do.

"I'm excited," Williams said. "I can't wait to get out there. This is my first time playing in the NFL against another team. ... They brought me here as a first round pick, so they've got a lot of expectations for me and I want to fill those expectations."

Wait Ends for 'Emotional' Williams

Sylvester Williams said he was nearly brought to tears when he signed his rookie contract. Now he's ready to get to work.

Gray Caldwell Editor
DenverBroncos.com
July 25, 2013

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. -- When Sylvester Williams finally put pen to paper Thursday evening, he was overcome with emotion.

He was officially a professional football player -- light years away from his time making radiators in a Missouri factory.

"When I signed the contract, I thought about the factory," Williams said. "When I was back at home a few weeks ago, I actually drove by the factory just to see where it all started. For me, that was a starting point because I realized that was a point in my life that I didn't want to return to."

He won't have to.

"Most of my family was crying because it is a life-changing moment for us," Williams said. "The biggest thing is that I've been given the money, now I've got to earn this, so I'm looking forward to being out here every day and getting better every day."

The first-round pick said he was disappointed to miss the club's opening practice of training camp Thursday morning, so he was happy to be back on the field, even if it was just for a walkthrough Thursday evening.

He said he's ready to take in his first full training camp practice Friday, as feels comfortable with his knowledge of the defense. He feels he's in good shape, as well -- he even got a workout in while the rest of his teammates practiced Thursday morning.

He's just ready to get to work, and now he has that chance.

"When I signed that contract it was an emotional moment and it was a dream come true," Williams said. "I'm playing for a great organization, great coaching staff, so being able to get in here and get that deal done and get to work as soon as possible was a big deal for me."

Now that the deal's done, Williams said he doesn't have any elaborate plans for his first big purchase.

"I'm not a flashy person, so I can say the biggest thing for me is I just want to make sure that my father is OK," Williams said. "I mean, I have a vehicle right now that runs good so I'm pretty much satisfied with my life right now. So just make sure my father's straight and put my money away and see how far this football thing will take me."

Broncos' Sylvester Williams just wants "to impress my teammates and coaches"

Jeff Legwold
The Denver Post
July 25, 2013

Sylvester Williams, the Broncos' first round pick in this past April's draft, took part in his first training camp practice Thursday night — a 90-minute walk-through at the Broncos' Dove Valley complex.

Williams signed a four-year, \$7.6 million contract earlier Thursday, a deal that includes \$6.1 million guaranteed. It also became a remember-when moment in a long, winding journey to the NFL for Williams that included time on the assembly line at Modine Manufacturing building parts for truck radiators and walking on to the football team in junior college.

"Most of my family, they cried because it is a life-changing moment for us," Williams said following the practice. "The biggest thing I can say is I've been given the money now I have to earn it ... (I'm a) long way from the factory ... When I signed the contract, I thought about the factory. When I was back at home I drove by the factory just to see where it all started."

The 6-foot-2, 313-pound Williams will take part in his first full practice Friday morning and is expected to begin his time with the second-team defense. The Broncos expect him to push for time with the defensive starters who could play, early on, in passing situations.

"I just want to impress my teammates and my coaches," Williams said. " ... I just want to impress the people who brought me here, the people who believed in me enough to draft me in the first round."

And when asked what his first purchase might be with his new deal in hand, Williams said;

"I'm not a flashy person so I can say the biggest thing for me is I just want to make sure my father is OK. I mean I've got vehicle right now that runs good so I'm satisfied with my life right now. Just make sure my father's straight and put my money away and see how far this football thing can take me."

Williams, Wolfe Bond Over Work Ethic

Rookie Sylvester Williams has been shadowing Derek Wolfe as he transitions to the pros, and Wolfe has been impressed with what he's seen.

Gray Caldwell
DenverBroncos.com
Jun 4, 2013

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. -- As soon as Sylvester Williams arrived in Denver, Defensive Coordinator Jack Del Rio already knew who the rookie defensive tackle reminded him of.

Last year, a young defensive lineman named Derek Wolfe stepped into Dove Valley and immediately made an impact. By the end of his rookie season, he had started every game and finished third on the team with six sacks.

"Both of these young men, you've watched them come in the building — they both have approached it very similarly," Del Rio said during the team's rookie minicamp. "Come in kind of determined, serious, mature in their approach. I think you're going to see Sylvester be able to come in and impact us in a similar way."

It only makes sense that the two linemen have bonded quickly.

Wolfe, who has taken it upon himself to step up as a leader in year two, said he has taken Williams under his wing as the former University of North Carolina Tar Heel makes the transition to the pros.

"He's got a ton of potential and he wants to learn," Wolfe said. "So I just tell him, 'Hey, just come with me.' When we're lifting he's with me and on the sidelines he comes over and he stands by me. He's really good at learning and he's doing a really good job."

Williams said Wolfe was a player he immediately knew he wanted to seek out once the rookies joined the veterans in the club's offseason conditioning program.

"When I first came in he was one of the guys that I kind of keyed in on as a guy that I was going to stick behind him because I knew he was going to do the right thing," he said.

The biggest lesson he's learning from his fellow lineman is the importance of hard work.

That's not a foreign concept to Williams, whose drive paved the way from factory worker to junior college standout to a key cog in the Carolina defense and eventually a first-round pick.

"The thing I take from him is play hard all the time," Williams said. "He's a hard-nosed type of guy and he gives 100 percent to everything he does. In the weight room, this is the kind of guy that's doing extra reps and some guys are struggling to get all the reps they're supposed to do."

The weight room is where Williams feels his work to step into the NFL game begins. He said his work with "Coach Luke" -- Strength and Conditioning Coach Luke Richesson -- has been one of the most important aspects of the OTA period.

Another is his work in the film room.

Defensive tackle Kevin Vickerson said Williams needs to work on his technique using his hands, because when he uses his hands, he can "dominate." The rookie has taken that advice to heart, "watching as much film as (he) can" to pick up on offensive keys so that he can simply react instead of hesitating to read the play before he gets his hands on the offensive linemen in front of him.

"I definitely see myself getting better every day," Williams said. "Every day I say, OK, something I didn't do as well the day before, I feel myself getting better. So it's a steady progress."

That work ethic isn't lost on Williams' teammates or his defensive coordinator.

"That is what I like about the way he's started here, that he's come in here very determined, very serious, very mature, very much about his business," Del Rio said. "That is good for all of us."

Tar Heels' Loss is Broncos' Gain

North Carolina Head Coach Larry Fedora said that while he's sad to lose Sylvester Williams, he knows Denver is getting a "special" player.

Brandon Moree
DenverBroncos.com
May 6, 2013

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. – The Broncos' first-round selection in the 2013 NFL Draft, defensive tackle Sylvester Williams, said he "freaked out" when he got the call. He was relieved. While his college teammates and coaches at the University of North Carolina were proud of him, they weren't quite as happy.

"I'm sad for us here in Chapel Hill," UNC Head Coach Larry Fedora said, "but I'm extremely excited for the people of Denver because you're getting a tremendous person on top of a tremendous football player."

Williams enrolled at North Carolina in the spring of 2011 after two seasons at Coffeyville Community College in Kansas. Before playing in junior college, he had played just one season in high school. Though the Coffeyville coach told him that they didn't need him when Williams first walked into the office, before his two years there were done he was an honorable mention for All-America.

In his first season as a Tar Heel, he was one of just four defensive players to start all 13 games en route to starting all 25 games in his two-year career. In his junior year he recorded 54 tackles, and while his tackle numbers dropped in his senior year, his tackles for loss nearly doubled and his sack tally more than doubled. In 2012, he was second on the team in sacks with 6.0.

"His best strength, he's a big guy but he can really pass rush," said Kareem Martin, Williams' roommate and teammate on the defensive line at UNC. "I think that surprised a lot of offensive linemen because he looks a lot more like a run stopper. He's capable of stopping the run, but I think where he surprises a lot of people is with his pass-rush ability. He has great feet and great hands and he's really quick and agile to be as big as he is."

Martin said that he appreciated playing with Williams especially when he would draw the double-team, making Martin's path to the backfield a little less crowded.

Fedora added that Williams has what he calls a great motor, which is high praise from the Red Bull-guzzling, high-energy, no-huddle offense orchestrator.

"He's got a great explosiveness, an initial burst off the line of scrimmage – he gets a great jump," Fedora said. "He's got great power and he's got a lot of power in his hips. And then he's got a great motor, which is extremely important for a defensive lineman."

Born in 1988, Williams was the oldest member of the Tar Heels' defensive line and a natural leader, but not just because of his age. Fedora complimented Williams' work ethic and said that when the two first met, Williams was 25 pounds above what Fedora wanted to be the defensive tackle's playing weight. By the time the season started, Williams had shed the weight.

Martin said that Williams is also a very caring person and very family-oriented. At times, that mentality carried over to the football field as Martin described Williams as a big brother to the defensive linemen.

"I think this past season he really stepped up vocally," Martin said, "and a lot of guys jumped on him – followed him – because he was being more vocal than he was in the past and he was playing well, so it was easy for guys to follow. I think him really stepping up vocally and on the field helped his leadership."

Williams was very aware of that leadership and mentioned that it was likely one of the reasons why the Broncos were interested in him in the first place. And even though he'll just be a rookie, he's got his sights set on a leadership role somewhere down the road.

"I'm the kind of guy that's going to do everything right," Williams told Broncos TV. "I'm not going to come to this program and bring any harm to it all. I mean from off the field to loafing in practice, anything, I'm going to do everything I can to help this team win. I'm going to be a great guy on the team a great guy in the locker room and I'm going to follow the veterans lead with the intent to become a leader myself."

Both Fedora and Martin seconded that opinion of Williams and had only good things to say about his personality and the qualities that made him a leader for the Tar Heels. He's genuine, kind, calm, caring, focused and has shown great perseverance, they said, as they both retold the story of how he worked in a factory making radiators before giving football another shot.

The only thing he's not good at, according to his roommate, is the video game Call of Duty.

"He's usually the reason we all die at the end," Martin said chuckling.

His dexterity, or lack thereof, with a video game controller aside, Williams certainly left his mark in Chapel Hill. His lack of football experience before playing in junior college and his stint in the factory working on radiators make his rise to becoming the anchor of North Carolina's defensive line and a first-round pick even more impressive.

And in addition to all of that, he has an unforgettable personality.

"The guy is a very, very special person," Fedora said. "He's going to be special to me the rest of my life, he just really is. He's a very unique man, he's very grateful for everything that happens in his life. He works extremely hard for everything that he achieves. He sets goals and he achieves them. He will be a first-rate citizen in Denver and I think he'll be a person the community puts their arms around and ends up loving in the long run."

Denver Broncos rookie Sylvester Williams took the slow lane to fame

Patrick Saunders
The Denver Post
April 28, 2013

As a raw, hulking senior at Jefferson City High School in central Missouri, Sylvester Williams weighed more than 300 pounds but couldn't crack the football team's starting lineup. Given that he was second-string defensive lineman playing his first season of organized football, no one expected what occurred during a routine fall practice.

Certainly not Jefferson City coach Ted LePage, who ran his practices with the precision of a Swiss watch.

"Suddenly, Sly came up to me and said, 'Coach, can you stop practice? I don't like how things are going. I want to talk to the guys,' " LePage recalled. "Now, I never stopped practice, not for anything. But I let him talk. And he gave the most passionate speech I've ever heard from a high school kid. Seriously, it brought tears to my eyes."

Fast forward to Friday afternoon, when the 315-pound defensive tackle was introduced as the Broncos' first-round pick in the NFL draft.

Asked about that speech, Williams said: "I'm a competitor, that's my biggest thing. I saw that we weren't giving it our all. I was just a backup, but I was giving it everything I had. I wanted this so much, and when I saw some guys who weren't giving everything, I had to say something. I finally had the guts to stand up and say something, but the guys respected me for that."

That speech came after some dark, confusing times.

In his first two years of high school, the classroom was an afterthought. Williams spent his time and energy working at Backyard Burgers and taking the late-night shift at Taco Bell, trying to make some money so he could buy a 1987 Cutlass Supreme. He eventually was kicked out of school, and off the basketball team, twice, for poor attendance.

LePage and defensive coordinator Mark Thomas convinced Williams to return to school and play football. Williams fell in love with the game, the physical contact and camaraderie.

But after his senior year, he didn't have enough self-confidence to believe he could go to college, earn a degree and keep playing football. So, the day after graduation, the 19-year-old Williams quit Taco Bell and began working at Walmart. Then he quit

Walmart and started working at the Modine Manufacturing Co., for \$400 a week.

The money was OK, but assembling radiators was not his life's dream. He felt that every time he stood on the line for an eight-hour shift.

"I saw people who had worked in the factory for 30 or 40 years," Williams said.

"There's nothing wrong with that, but I just couldn't see myself doing that for my whole life. I knew that was as high as I was going to go with just a high school diploma."

"I thought I'd give it a try"

Williams' father, Sylvester Williams Sr., who had played nose guard for Normandy High in St. Louis, desperately wanted more for his son.

"I just knew there was more possible in his life," his father said.

So did his son, but it wasn't until he was sitting on the couch watching college football on a Saturday morning the fall after he graduated from high school that

Williams realized how much he missed football. He started thinking that maybe he could compete at the next level.

"I was watching college football and some of the guys I would see were guys that were 6-3, 300 pounds, 6-2 or 6-1," he said. "I realized they were around the same size and height as me. I realized I had an opportunity to play and I thought I had the ability, so I thought I'd give it a try."

With the help of his father, and Andre Salmon, a teacher and confidant from high school, Williams decided to change his life. He made a five-hour drive from his Missouri home to Coffeyville (Kan.) Community College. He arrived out of the blue to talk to Coffeyville coach Darian Dulin, who was so unimpressed with game tape from Williams' one season of high school that he told him not to waste his time driving over.

Starring for the Tar Heels

Once on campus, Dulin became intrigued by Williams' size and allowed him to walk on. He had ballooned to 370 pounds by that time. Williams then went to work on earning a scholarship. Two years later, he was ranked the No. 12 junior college talent in America by SI.com — and offers from major-college programs came flooding in.

Williams choose North Carolina, even though the Tar Heels were returning four starters on their defensive line in 2011. But Williams, now an obsessive workout junkie, won a starting job as a junior.

"I think I worked harder than other guys because I had to go through so much to get there," Williams said.

He finished his junior season with 54 total tackles, seven tackles for loss, 2½ sacks, an interception, a fumble recovery and a forced fumble. NFL scouts suddenly were interested, but Williams decided to return for his senior season in Chapel Hill, to earn his degree as well as sharpen his football skills.

"Honestly, I didn't know much about him when I got there," said coach Larry Fedora, who took over the North Carolina program before the 2012 season. "He was contemplating going into the draft as a junior, but he decided to come back. I told him, 'It will be the toughest year of your life.' "

After Williams said he was coming back, Fedora told him to drop 20 pounds, from 335 to 315.

"He jumped into it with both feet," Fedora said. "I don't know if I've ever seen a kid work that hard. Plus, he was a tremendous leader. All of his hard work made him that way."

Last season, Williams produced six sacks and 13½ tackles for a loss in 12 games.

"There were points in our games when we needed something to happen and Sly would dig down deep and make that something happen," Fedora said. "But you know the thing that he's most proud of? It was earning his college degree in communications."

Williams, the former factory worker, the kid who was kicked out of high school because he couldn't wake up in time for class, was on top of the world. "For me, that was one of my goals in life, football or no football," he said. "When I got that sheet of paper in the mail, it was an unbelievable feeling. It warmed my heart because I knew I had done something special with my life. From Backyard Burger to a diploma from the University of North Carolina? When I left school, I could tell myself that I did everything I came here for."

Dad is the family's MVP

When he received a call from the Broncos on Thursday night, informing him that he had been selected with the 28th pick of the draft's first round, the first person he hugged was his dad.

"The biggest thing that motivates me is my father," Williams said. "My father is a guy who tried to raise four kids by himself. The biggest thing that motivates me today is my family."

Friday, the man who once pleaded with his son to get up in the morning and go to school, could barely express his feelings because he was so happy.

"I'm on a cloud," Williams Sr. said. "Just thinking about everything that came before, and everything he's done to get here, makes me very proud. That's my son who's got a college degree. That's my son who's going to play in the NFL."

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A long and winding road

Sylvester Williams' journey from Jefferson City, Mo., to first-round draft pick by the Broncos was full of twists and turns, highs and lows:

At Jefferson City High School, Williams was kicked off the basketball team twice and expelled from school for missing too many classes.

Played only one season of high school football, as a senior, starting just one game.

Walked on at Coffeyville (Kan.) Community College, won a scholarship and played two seasons, earning first team all-conference and first team all-region honors in 2010.

Received a scholarship to the University of North Carolina, where he had 96 tackles (20½ for loss) and 8½ sacks in the 2011 and 2012 seasons.

Williams' Long Journey Pays Off

From working in a factory to a first-round pick, Sylvester Williams plans to do everything he can to reward the Broncos for their belief in him.

Gray Caldwell
DenverBroncos.com
Apr 26, 2013

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. -- During eight-hour days at a radiator factory, Sylvester Williams had a different future in mind.

As he watched college football players excel on Saturdays, players similar to his 6-foot-3, 300-plus-pound frame, he started to believe more and more that he had what it took to continue his football career.

So he drove to Coffeyville Community College in Kansas to ask the coach for a spot on the team.

"That's when I told myself I was going to start a new life," he said.

He came to Coffeyville with a renewed focus on football and schoolwork, and eventually earned all-conference and honorable-mention All-America honors.

From there, he received a scholarship to the University of North Carolina and excelled in his two seasons as a Tar Heel, completing his path from a factory worker to a first-round draft pick.

"I've been trying to for the last 12 hours figure to out how I got to this point, but I think it's just all from dedication, hard work and working hard every day, which I'll continue to do," Williams said.

When he got the call from Executive Vice President of Football Operations John Elway and Head Coach John Fox that he was headed to Denver, Williams was overcome by emotion.

But the joy quickly turned to panic.

"I actually lost service, so I was asking for somebody to give me a phone because I wanted to call them back," he recalled. "I didn't want to not get picked because I couldn't answer the phone (laughs)."

But Williams' worries subsided when he saw NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell call his name from the podium in Radio City Music Hall. Next all he had to do was get out from under a celebratory pile of his family members to call the Broncos back.

"Coming here last week on my visit I knew that I had a really strong connection with these guys and its somewhere I wanted to be," he said. "So when the opportunity came and the Broncos took me, I couldn't even talk because I was so happy to be here."

"For me it was like, 'Wow, everything I've ever worked for, this is what it's (come) to.'"

Williams' journey will continue to inspire him every day, he said, along with his family -- particularly his father, who raised four children by himself.

"I'm going to continue to work hard every day and grind and continue to think about football every day," he said. "I eat, drink and sleep football, and I'm going to continue to do that. I want to come in right now and help this team any way I can. Anyway I can I want to help them win."

And the Broncos couldn't be happier.

"We've been looking for a young anchor on the inside for a long, long time and we really believe we have found him here with Sylvester Williams," Elway said.

KLEE: Sylvester Williams brings size — and a story — to Broncos

Paul Klee
The Gazette
April 26, 2013

ENGLEWOOD — With the No. 28 pick in the NFL draft, the Broncos selected an auto-parts specialist.

As Peyton Manning says in an commercial for automobiles: "How about that?" Sylvester Williams knows cars. In particular, he knows car radiators. He worked two years on an assembly line at Modine Manufacturing Co., an auto-parts factory in St. Louis.

His trench then was different than his trenches now.

"I think the guy maybe understands what a blessing this is," Broncos coach John Fox said late Thursday at Dove Valley.

Sylvester Williams is 6-foot-3, 313 pounds. "Sly" has the body and the position of a defensive tackle and the employment history of Tommy Boy.

Worst-case scenario for the Broncos: If Manning's Buick breaks down, all he must do is walk across the locker room to find his new mechanic.

Best-case scenario: The Broncos finally drafted the "anchor," as John Elway put it, of a defensive line with more moving parts than Modine Manufacturing's assembly line.

Good pick?

Bad pick?

Big Sly is both.

Good pick if you like athletes who have seen how the other side lives, and I do. They know what a real job is. They know where they will go if this pro-athlete thing doesn't work out:

Back to the assembly line.

When Manning says it's time to clock in, Williams knows exactly what that

Williams: 'Blessed' to Be a Bronco

Sam Davis
DenverBroncos.com
Apr 25, 2013

The newest Bronco's reaction to joining the team.

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. -- Broncos first-round pick Sylvester Williams once thought his football career was over. Now, it's just beginning.

The North Carolina graduate was out of high school and working in a factory as a teenager. Years later, he has earned a Denver Broncos uniform.

"I worked in that factory, and it showed me what hard work really is," Williams said after being drafted. "Being able to play football as a job is a blessing."

The 313-pound interior lineman started all 45 games in his collegiate career, which included two years at Coffeyville Community College in Kansas. As he tried to get his academic and athletic career back on track, his performance at Coffeyville garnered attention from D-I schools. Williams ultimately chose to spend his final two years in college as a North Carolina Tar Heel.

"(Going) to Coffeyville basically made my whole entire career," Williams said. "Because when I went to Coffeyville, I worked the (defensive) line and got to compete at a high level. It helped me to learn how to work hard."

Head Coach John Fox recognized the road that Williams has traveled to reach this point.

"I think that's a reason for his maturity," Fox said. "The guy kind of understands what a blessing it is to have that kind of ability. He's going to try to make the most of it from our phone conversation. I think he's mature for his age."

In his senior campaign at North Carolina, Williams racked up 13.5 tackles for loss and six sacks, reeling in All-ACC honors. The Jefferson City, Mo. native also netted an All-America first-team selection by Pro Football Weekly.

Broncos' brass had chances to trade the club's first-round pick in exchange for multiple later picks. But with a talent like Williams still on the board, Executive Vice President of Football Operations John Elway wasn't budging.

"We had an opportunity to go back," Elway said. "Once Sylvester was there we said, 'No this is the guy we want. We're going to stay here.' We did have an option to go back, but we didn't want to. We were thrilled that Sylvester was there and we didn't want to move."

Williams visited the team and its facilities at Dove Valley in mid-April and said he "felt right at home." He'll begin settling in shortly. The Broncos' rookie mini-camp is on May 10.

"When they called on me it was a blessing," the draftee recalled. "I'm going to be a Bronco, and I can't wait to give it everything I've got."

Williams Too Good to Pass Up

The Broncos had an opportunity to trade away the 28th pick, but with Sylvester Williams available, the team knew it needed to make the selection.

Gray Caldwell
DenverBroncos.com
Apr 25, 2013

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. -- This year's draft was almost a repeat of last season's event.

Holding onto a late first-round pick, the Broncos had an opportunity to trade back and accumulate extra assets for the second consecutive draft. But the player in front of them was too good to pass up.

"Once Sylvester (Williams) was there we said, 'No, this is the guy we want, we're going to stay here,'" Executive Vice President of Football Operations John Elway said. "We did have an option to go back, but we didn't want to. We were thrilled that Sylvester was there and we didn't want to move."

In fact, the Broncos entertained the idea of moving up in the draft to grab their coveted defensive tackle. But as the first round played out, "it started to look like we were going to get a pretty darn good football player at 28," Elway said.

What the Broncos got was a defensive tackle that excelled at bursting into opponents' backfields as a senior in 2012. According to ESPN Stats and Info, he led all defensive tackles in automatic-qualifier BCS conferences with 25 quarterback pressures. He finished his senior campaign at North Carolina with 13.5 tackles for loss, part of a career that included 20.5 tackles for loss and 8.5 sacks.

Elway pointed to Williams' size, quickness and ability to penetrate as traits that stood out to the Broncos throughout their evaluation of the lineman.

"He's got all the physical tools that you hope carries over to production," Head Coach John Fox said.

The club even invited Williams to Dove Valley for a pre-draft visit, and came away even more impressed.

"This kid was great at the Senior Bowl," Fox said. "We had some coaches that coached him there at that setting. He took a leadership role right away during that

week in preparation. So not only was he an excellent athlete in a need position, a position we have been looking for, for a while now, he's a fine young man."

At 6-foot-3, 313 pounds, Williams adds plenty of size to an interior defensive line that already includes 330-pound Terrance Knighton, 290-pound Kevin Vickerson, 291-pound Mitch Unrein and 307-pound Sealver Siliga.

That type of size is what Defensive Coordinator Jack Del Rio looks for in his defensive tackles, and Fox said it's "fair to say that he was very excited."

In preparing for the draft with numerous mocks, Elway said Williams never made it past Minnesota's two first-round picks to get to the Broncos. So when the draft played out as it did, the team was understandably ecstatic.

"You never know these rounds are going to fall, but we were extremely pleased that he was there when we got there," Elway said. "We had him very high on our board, so we were thrilled to get him."

As for day two of the draft, the Broncos are comfortable with where they stand -- holding onto the 58th and 90th overall selections.

"We are looking forward to it," Elway said. "We feel good about where the board is. It's about being patient. We'll have to see -- again, we are going to stick to the same philosophy we have been and that is to get the best player we can when we get to the second and third pick.

"We'll see how everything falls."

What Williams Brings to Broncos

Andrew Mason gives his take on the Broncos' selection of Sylvester Williams.

Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
Apr 25, 2013

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. -- Just because the Broncos made an early splash in free agency by re-signing Kevin Vickerson and adding Terrance Knighton didn't mean that defensive tackle ceased to be a priority headed into the draft.

And even if Vickerson and Knighton are the two starting tackles -- and 2012 second-round pick Derek Wolfe sees his share of work on the inside, assuming he mimics his hybrid end/tackle role from last year -- there's going to be plenty of playing time waiting for Sylvester Williams, who becomes the first defensive tackle taken by the Broncos in the first round since Trevor Pryce in 1997.

Unlike Wolfe, Williams isn't going to swing between the inside and the outside; at 313 pounds, he's purely limited to the two inside spots, and his size is ideal for what Head Coach John Fox and Defensive Coordinator Jack Del Rio want from their defensive tackles.

"He's got short-area quickness, he's got good size (and) excellent body control, which you're looking for," Fox said. "He's got decent-length arms, so he's got all the physical tools that takes. Hopefully that carries over into production."

Williams has untapped growth potential. He didn't take up football until his senior year at Jefferson City (Mo.) High School, spent time working at a factory making radiator parts for diesel engines and had to walk on at Coffeyville (Kan.) Community College in order to continue playing before finding his stride and eventually earning a scholarship to North Carolina.

Williams knew he had to work on his conditioning, so he was often seen in the football facility in the early-morning hours, working to round himself into shape. It was grueling, but it beat being on the factory floor.

"I worked in that factory, and it showed me what hard work is," he said. "Being able to play football as a job is a blessing."

Williams' work ethic mirrors that of Wolfe, last year's top Broncos pick. But another notable attribute for Williams relative to his availability at No. 28 was his arm length: 33 1/2 inches, about what you want for a defensive tackle.

One of the potential reasons for Sharrif Floyd's descent from a potential top-five selection to the No. 23 choice of the Vikings was his arm length, which is 1 3/4 inches shorter than that of Williams'. Another was his lack of pass-rush production; Floyd had just three sacks last year; Williams had twice as many in spite of playing on a sprained ankle.

Floyd's unexpected plummet played into the Broncos' hands. They expected the Vikings to take a defensive tackle with either the 23rd or 25th selection, knowing Minnesota's needs and penchant for building a defense from the inside out. They figured that defensive tackle would be Williams -- if he fell that far.

"We actually had (Williams) not getting past Minnesota," Executive Vice President of Football Operations John Elway said. "And we probably did three or four (mock drafts), and he didn't get that deep a couple of times, either. So, it really kind of fell a little bit different.

"I think when you look at it, the things when you look at this draft, with (cornerback D.J.) Hayden going as early as he did (No. 12 to Oakland), and Floyd falling to where he did, and obviously that was the pick at Minnesota, so if anything changed, it was Hayden moving up and Floyd sliding, which is what pushed Sylvester to us."

Williams wasn't the only target in the Broncos' sights as the first round progressed. By the time the Broncos' selection was three picks away, Elway saw Williams, UCLA defensive end Datone Jones and Florida State cornerback Xavier Rhodes still on the board.

Rhodes went to the Vikings at the 25th selection. Jones became a Packer one pick later.

"We knew we were going to get one of those; we didn't know who it was going to be," Elway said. "And then when Sylvester fell to us, like I said, we're thrilled to get him."

Broncos Select Williams in First Round

With the 28th pick in the 2013 NFL Draft, the Broncos selected North Carolina defensive tackle Sylvester Williams.

Gray Caldwell
DenverBroncos.com
Apr 25, 2013

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. -- The interior of the Broncos defensive line added another stout piece in the first round of the 2013 NFL Draft.

With the 28th overall pick, the club selected North Carolina defensive tackle Sylvester Williams, who led all defensive tackles in BCS conferences with 25 quarterback pressures in 2012.

"Thrilled to select DT Sylvester Williams from UNC," Executive Vice President of Football Operations John Elway tweeted.

Williams shed approximately 30 pounds before his final season with the Tar Heels, and used his newfound speed to often break through the offensive line into opposing backfields. He finished his senior campaign with 13.5 tackles for loss.

At 6-foot-3, 313 pounds, Williams adds plenty of size to the line, which also added 330-pound defensive tackle Terrance Knighton through free agency and re-signed 290-pound tackle Kevin Vickerson.

In his career, Williams notched 20.5 tackles for loss and 8.5 sacks.

"A defensive tackle has been a need for us for a long, long time," Elway told fans at the team's official draft party. "We didn't think we would have a chance to get Sylvester, but he did slide down to us. Now, he gives us an anchor, a young guy that plays hard and I think he will make everybody – all those Broncos fans included – proud of the way he plays the game. We are thrilled to have Sylvester."

Williams played just two seasons at North Carolina and graduated with a degree in communications after beginning his collegiate career at Coffeyville Community College, where he was named all-conference and honorable-mention All-America.

"When I was kicked out of high school my sophomore year, that's probably the lowest I've been to this point in my life," Williams said at the NFL Scouting Combine. "So to be able to go back and graduate with my class -- eventually I

worked at a factory for about six months before I went back to junior college. It's one of the best decisions I've made in my life because it ultimately led me to have an opportunity to be here today."

Working at the Modine Manufacturing Company, Williams said he had nothing but time to think about what he wanted to do with his life. It's part of what helped him get back to football after playing just one year in high school.

"I knew I wanted to do something great in my life, and it wasn't at that factory," Williams said. "I love the game to death. I eat, sleep and dream football. Every day I wake up, I think about football, and I go to sleep thinking about football. This is an opportunity to do something great with my life."