

# Baron Browning appears at home on the outside

By Mike Klis

KUSA

August 21, 2022

Baron Browning didn't rush to his interview as the Broncos' featured player of the week.

He first followed the 2 ½ hour practice by working against the levered arm pad contraption – coaches call it the “Sack Master” -- near a side field. Batting the pads with his left or right forearms, shifting his footwork around to the left or right. A good 15-minute workout after the 2 ½-hour practice.

This was good. Browning has all the skills to make the successful transition from inside linebacker, where plugging the run is priority No. 1, to outside linebacker, where sacking the quarterback is paramount. He is ideally put together, fast for his size, athletic with an ability to bend from the waist and still have the speed and power to beat a 300-pound offensive tackle.

He flashed all his skills in the Broncos' 17-7 preseason win last Saturday against the Dallas Cowboys in front of nearly 65,000 fans at Empower Field at Mile High. Browning made three tackles, broke up a pass downfield, and had a 12-yard sack.

But there is flashing a superb performance in a preseason opener and there is performing week after week in September, October and on through January.

Browning understands this.

“I think it's like what we did today, coming out and practicing hard,” he said in a sit-down interview with 9NEWS this week. “Taking advantage of the opportunity every day to get better. That's been my mindset every day, that when I step inside those white lines, nothing else matters. And just trying to maximize that day and get one percent better. If I can keep stacking small gains every day, it'll lead to a big gain.”

The next step toward consistent performance is Saturday when the Broncos play the Buffalo Bills and starting quarterback Josh Allen in preseason game No. 2 in Orchard Park, N.Y. (Kickoff at 11 a.m. MDT, Channel 20).

It may seem odd that Bills' coach Sean McDermott is playing his starters against mostly Broncos' backups -- until you remember the Broncos under Vic Fangio flipped this preseason script last year, playing starters against backups for the Vikings, Seahawks and Rams.

Besides, Browning is a backup who figures to play 25-30% of the defensive snaps this year if starters Randy Gregory and Bradley Chubb stay healthy. So bring on Josh Allen.

“I'm definitely looking forward to the opportunity,” Allen said. “Yes it's a game but it's really like another practice with people there. So just another opportunity to get better and work my skill set.”

He wants it. As Browning sat in his interview chair, he looked bigger. Bigger in the chest, arms and shoulders compared to the player 9NEWS had sit down for an interview as a rookie last year. All players get considerably stronger after their rookie years as they realize the pounding of 16 or 17 weeks of

professional football requires greater body protection than what they carried along in college. Browning had the added incentive of switching positions.

At one point, he said he put on 25-30 pounds of muscle from the 229 pounds he carried to his inside linebacker position last year.

“I had to,” he said. “Those tackles are big.”

He laughed. Browning has since lost several pounds the natural way through training camp practice. Still, he’s a bigger version of the Browning who was drafted out of Ohio State last year with the final pick in the third round.

“On the inside you have more on your plate, you have more responsibilities,” Browning said. “The hardest transition (to the outside) is you have to be very decisive, like quick. When I first got moved, especially early in OTAs, I was having trouble with coming off and trying to read: ‘Is it run, is it pass?’ Because I was so used to being on the inside where I had 3 to 5 yards off so I had time to balance my feet, diagnose it and then react. Versus on the edge, you’ve got to get off and then react.

“That was a little transition for me but it didn’t take me long to learn and having vets like Chubb, Malik Reed, Randy, just learning from those guys and my coaches and getting feedback, it helped fix my problem.”

It wasn’t a complete surprise Broncos general manager George Paton and head coach Nathaniel Hackett moved Browning from inside linebacker – where he started nine games as a rookie last year – to the outside where the team seems almost over-stacked with talented.

Considering Browning missed the entire 2021 offseason from a leg fracture near the knee, then was nicked up with various injuries here and there during the regular season, his play at inside linebacker was admirable.

“He did a nice job,” Paton said. “For a rookie linebacker, he had to wear the green dot (and relay the play calls to his teammates). He did a lot of nice things. Really athletic.

“But we wanted the best version of Baron. And we felt that would be on the outside on the edge, rushing the passer. You see his size, the length, the explosion, the freaky skills. You can see it. We’ve seen it every practice. So we think it’s the right position for Baron.”

NFL scouts and coaches debated this as he came out of Ohio State a year ago. Browning mostly played inside linebacker for the Buckeyes, but on third-and-long situations he would shift to an outside linebacker position in a 4-3 set. There was enough film for some to see him as an edge linebacker, but Fangio saw the athleticism better suited on the inside. Maybe because at the time the Broncos had a greater need at inside linebacker than outside.

The position uncertainty may have been why the former 5-star high school recruit out of Fort Worth, Texas fell to pick No. 105 in the draft.

“Yeah, just because people weren’t sure where I would be suited,” Browning said. “I always thought it was outside but I can only control what I can control.”

Now that he has his preference, Browning is calling on all available resources to make sure he stays on the outside. One of his favorite new teachers is Dom Capers, the Broncos senior defensive assistant who just turned 72 and is in his 35th NFL season as coach. Browning was spotted chatting with Capers during a break in the practice action Thursday.

“Sometimes we talk about my pad level, what I can do better in the run game,” Browning said. “Or things I can even do better in my pass-rush game to maybe set up another move I might want to do later.

“A variety of things we talk about but I definitely have learned a lot from coach Capers and glad we have him on board because just having someone with that much knowledge who has seen it all and has been around so many great pass rushers is huge for someone like myself who’s going into his first year at an edge position.”

Browning also pays attention whenever the Twin \$14 Million Men who are ahead of him on the depth chart, Chubb and Gregory, have something to say.

“I’m so grateful – I say it to myself all the time – I feel so blessed to be in a room with so much talent and vets like Chubb, Randy, Malik Reed,” Browning said. “I just learned a lot from those guys. Watching film with them. Picking their brains on, ‘What did you see in order for you to do this move?’ Whatever the case might be.

“And coming from a school like Ohio State, it’s the best of the best. You’re competing every day so I’m not bothered by coming here and competing every day. I enjoy it and I look forward to it because it allows me the opportunity to get better every day.”

When Fangio was the coach, edge rushers Chubb and Von Miller sometimes played better than 85% of the snaps. That’s not how Paton has it set up for the Broncos this year. With Patrick Mahomes, Justin Herbert and Derek Carr the opposing quarterbacks inside the AFC West, Paton has compiled six edge rushers – Gregory and Chubb, Reed and Browning, second-round draft pick Nik Bonitto and last year’s rookie surprise Jonathon Cooper.

“Real good quarterbacks,” Paton said. “Those offenses like to throw the ball. And run the ball -- we feel like our guys can do everything. But we like a wave of rushers throughout a game. Hopefully we’ll have some leads late in games with our offense and our defense can close games. Last year we didn’t do a good job of closing games.”

So far, so good for Browning. He put on a pretty good dance move after his sack of Cooper Rush late in the first half last week. The dance, of course, is another edge-rusher requirement.

“It was really kind of spontaneous,” Browning said. “It wasn’t planned.”

Now he has to do it again and again and again into early January.

“Everything I was able to do in the game I feel like it came from the work I put in during the offseason and throughout training camp and leading into the first preseason game,” Browning said. “I’m definitely enjoying it. I’m comfortable there. Definitely feel like I’m at home at this position.”

# Keeler: Broncos LB Baron Browning unleashed his inner Von Miller on Dallas Cowboys. And there's more where that came from.

By Sean Keeler  
Denver Post  
August 15, 2022

Looked an awful lot like Von Miller, didn't he? Baron Browning was an orange machete against the Dallas Cowboys on Saturday night, slicing through blockers and the pouring rain.

It was *all* there in the Broncos' soggy preseason victory. The lightning first step. The bend. The release. The burst that transforms left tackles into sad, slow, meaty turnstiles.

"I didn't feel like I was thinking at all, just playing," Browning told me after he'd racked up three tackles, a sack, a QB hit, a tackle for loss, a pass deflection and (for good measure) a special-team assist in Denver's 17-7 victory.

"I'm really not worried about all the things that sometimes can kind of get on your brain when you're going into a game. Especially when you get a new position. And I just felt like I was at ease and relaxed."

It showed. In his first competitive game since being moved from inside to outside linebacker, the second-year pro turned on the jets in the second quarter, blowing past Cowboys left tackle Josh Ball, raising a big right arm and swatting backup quarterback Cooper Rush's pass straight back into his mug.

Which was only a teaser for the fun to come. With the Broncos up 14-0 and Rush dialing up the Cowboys' 2-minute drill, Browning put the kibosh on America's Team on second-and-10 from the Denver 41, sacking the Dallas signal-caller for a 13-yard loss.

"I had beaten (them) the same way before," Browning explained later. "So I already knew what move I was going to do next. And thankfully, Nik (Bonitto), he went inside ... so Nik flushed (Rush) out. And then when I (spun), he was right there. It was really just a team effort."

But it's the individual tools in Browning's arsenal that remind you of a young 58 coming off the edge. Like the Vonster, Browning checks in at 6-foot-3, but has the reach, with a 6-7 wingspan, to play bigger than his frame.

"I think y'all saw it," first-year Broncos coach Nathaniel Hackett said of Browning, grinning like he'd just found a winning scratch ticket on the curb. "He was around the quarterback quite a bit, (he) got a sack, a couple tackles. (A) pass breakup. I mean, his acceleration (off) the ball, the ability to bend on the edges, is really good to see. And he came out and played free. I thought it was awesome to see."

So awesome, in fact, that the only complaint from Broncos fans as a desultory game progressed through an August shower, was that Browning was on a sloppy field for *too* darn long — chasing Cowboys into the fourth quarter well after an outcome that didn't really matter had long since been decided.

“Coach (had) said we were going to rotate,” Browning said later, “but I was surprised. I didn’t ask him questions. I didn’t want to be that guy. I just want to keep doing my job and just keep going, and whatever he told me, I was doing.”

And that knock you took on special teams?

“I was fine,” Browning replied. “I just want to be smart ... just to get a little stretch, take it easy, give it a few plays, and then just go back out there.”

Wherever Hackett tells him to play in Buffalo on Saturday — the Broncos’ depth at inside ‘backer took a hit early in the Cowboys tilt when Jonas Griffith left with an injury — he’s more than game to answer the bell.

“I was happy to be moved outside,” Browning said. “I wanted to be there last year. I’m glad things worked out the way they did.”

Join the club, kid. Because once you’ve gotten a chance to release your inner Vonster in front of Broncos Country, once you’ve seen the fear in the quarterback’s eyes, it’s awfully hard to stuff that genie back inside the bottle. Miles left on those legs. Miles and magic.

# New position? No problem: Denver Broncos believe in Baron Browning as a pass-rusher

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

June 27, 2022

When Denver Broncos linebacker Baron Browning closed out his rookie season in 2021, he was considered one of the bright spots on an otherwise fairly gloomy sixth consecutive playoff miss.

The third-round pick had rebounded from some offseason injuries -- he suffered a right leg injury in rookie minicamp -- to start nine games at inside linebacker. He played more snaps on defense than any other linebacker save Malik Reed.

And then -- despite all of the potential displayed as a rookie -- the Broncos' new coaching staff moved him outside to be an edge rusher this offseason. Teammates say the move has worked.

"It's crazy when it comes to Baron," said Broncos outside linebacker Bradley Chubb. "The natural skills he has for the position, it's amazing. You'll see him go out there and he just throws his shoulder down. To him it feels like he's doing just that, but on film, it looks like the craziest thing ever."

When the Broncos closed out their offseason program last month, Browning had already done enough to move past the hey-that-guy-is-pretty-raw stage of a position move. When they return in July, Browning will be at the front of a wave of pass-rushers general manager George Paton has sought this offseason.

Chubb, who missed nine games last season after left ankle surgery, closed out the team's offseason work healthy and says he believes he's poised for a big year. He is in the final year of his rookie deal.

The Broncos signed Randy Gregory to a \$70 million deal -- the team's biggest offseason move outside of the trade for quarterback Russell Wilson -- with the intention of pairing Gregory with Chubb as the primary outside rushers. But Chubb hasn't played a full season's worth of games since his rookie year in 2018 and Gregory has never played every game in a season.

It's why the Broncos used a second-round pick on outside linebacker Nik Bonitto and moved Browning. It's why Browning, who would have entered the season in line to push for the starting inside linebacker job once again, said he wasn't worried about what a position move could mean for his potential playing time.

"I kind of wanted to make the move, but they felt the same way, Browning said. "... I didn't have any concern at all. I'm just focused on competing every day and that's my mindset. ... I'll worry about training camp when I get there."

"He's somebody that we saw a couple of things on tape last year, that [being a pass-rusher] could potentially be something that he can do," said Broncos coach Nathaniel Hackett. "His ability to bend and lower his hips and round that tackle is something that stood out on tape."

Hackett doesn't see Browning as a hybrid player who would work both as a pass-rusher as well as at inside linebacker. He said the team's defensive coaches want to focus on Browning's new role with the intention of refining those skills.

And by all accounts he showed enough on the field, especially when it comes to his flexibility and keeping his balance and leverage as he works off the offensive tackle's outside shoulder. Former Broncos outside linebacker Von Miller routinely talked about the importance of "bend," to get under a tackle's shoulder and arm, while keeping speed and leverage.

After learning from Miller, Chubb is now passing along what he knows to Browning. Chubb knows something about changing positions, too. He played more as a defensive end in college, often rushing from a three-point stance, but was moved to outside linebacker with the Broncos, almost never in a three-point stance.

"He's come over to the house and asked me what I see from his play," Chubb said. "I'm trying to be there for him like Von and those guys were for me when I first came in and first moved to the position. It's been great to see the natural things he has already. Once he starts adding in those little, small details, it's going to be to over with."

The Broncos' division -- the AFC West -- is filled with proven quarterbacks and after an offseason flurry, high-end pass-rushers as well. The Broncos' signing of Gregory, the selection of Bonitto in the draft and Browning's crash course was their response.

"[Browning] displayed some things," Broncos defensive coordinator Ejiro Evero said. "... He has worked his butt off."

# Versatile Bronco Baron Browning moves to outside where he may be at his best

By Mike Klis

KUSA

June 3, 2022

Baron Browning went through this at Ohio State.

A freakish, 5-star athlete out of Fort Worth, Texas, Browning played four years without redshirting for the Buckeyes, who won the Big Ten and reached the NCAA Final Four all four years. Browning played in 43 games, at three positions, and started just 10 as he rotated in with the likes of Pete Werner and Tuf Borland at linebacker, and even occasionally behind current Bronco Jonathon Cooper at defensive end in Ohio State's 4-3 front.

"Sometimes his versatility has hurt him a little bit in his development," then Broncos' head coach and defensive play-caller Vic Fangio said minutes after Browning was the final pick in the third round last year.

"We'll figure out where we're going to put him first and see how he does there then make a final decision at some point. We like his speed, like his athleticism."

Although most NFL scouting reports said the 6-foot-3, 240-pound Browning projected best as an outside linebacker – mainly because that is where the greatest athleticism among the 11 defensive positions is most on display -- Fangio had more serious depth issues at inside linebacker. And Browning played well on the inside, too, starting nine games as a rookie last year and making at least five tackles in seven of them.

And he would have been better had he not suffered a hairline fracture in his leg in rookie minicamp that knocked him out of virtually the entire offseason and most of training camp.

"That's one thing that I wish I had last year, just being able to get a full offseason underneath my body," Browning said Wednesday after the Broncos' fifth of 10 OTA practices. "I was just coming right off a leg injury and was thrown right into the fire and had to just go, so that's kind of why I had the small injuries I had last year. I didn't really have the chance to callus my body, as some people would say, before the season."

A new coaching staff for the 2022 season brought renewed discussion regarding Browning between first-year head coach Nathaniel Hackett, first-year defensive coordinator Ejiro Evero and general manager George Paton. And while there still seems to be more depth issues at inside linebacker than the outside, getting the best out of Browning became the priority. He has been switched to outside linebacker, at least for this offseason. If it doesn't work out, he has a full NFL season at inside linebacker to fall back on.

"I kind of wanted to make the move, but they felt the same way," Browning said.

"He's somebody that we saw a couple of things on tape last year that could potentially be something that he can do," Hackett said this week. "His ability to bend and lower his hips and round that tackle is something that stood out on tape. That's another rusher on the outside, and he's doing a good job."



Browning is now one of six edge rushers of note on the Broncos' depth chart. That's one or two more than most teams. But in an AFC West that boasts such excellent quarterbacks as Patrick Mahomes II, Justin Herbert and Derek Carr, the new way of thinking is there's no such thing as having too many pass rushers.

There is Bradley Chubb and Randy Gregory as the Broncos' projected outside linebacker starters, Malik Reed and second-round rookie Nik Bonitto coming off the bench, and Cooper and Browning in the third wave. That's if everyone is healthy, which is not currently the case – Gregory (shoulder) and Cooper (finer) are rehabbing from surgeries -- and may never be over a 17-game season.

"I don't know if this is something for just this period for right now, but I'm just making the most of it and working on just perfecting my craft every day," Browning said.

His biggest adjustment to date?

"I would just say that it's different being up close on the line," Browning said "I felt like when I first started out, I was kind of trying to hesitate as far as trying to see whether it was a run or a pass. When you're inside, you have that time and distance to bounce your feet and really diagnose things. I would say that was probably the only small thing, but I really don't feel like there have been too many crazy challenges. I feel like I'm pretty comfortable there and I'm making a lot of progress."