

# Denver Broncos RB Melvin Gordon III won't 'lay down' in battle for carries with Javonte Williams

By Jeff Legwold

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Denver Broncos running back Melvin Gordon III believes most people have already designated Javonte Williams as the team's top back, but Gordon said Monday he isn't ready, or willing, to surrender his chance at the job.

"I told [Broncos general manager George Paton] when I was at the [negotiating] table, I'm not going to lay down, I'm not going to lay down," Gordon said. "... I've always got that mindset that I've got to go get it every year.

"I know a lot of people want me to take the backseat and I get it," Gordon added. "It's been like that for a while, it was like that with the Chargers -- everybody wanted Austin [Ekeler] to start. I just come out here and do my thing. Thanks for the motivation everybody, I appreciate y'all."

Monday was the first day of the Broncos' mandatory minicamp, so it was also the first time Gordon had practiced with his teammates. Gordon has not attended any of the voluntary portions of the team's offseason program, including a voluntary minicamp the Broncos had last month -- teams with new coaching staffs are allowed to have an extra minicamp in their offseason.

Gordon signed a one-year deal to return to the Broncos just before the NFL draft in April. He had said when the 2021 season drew to a close he hoped to find potentially a bigger workload with another team in free agency.

Last season, Gordon and Williams each had 203 carries and Gordon led the team with 918 yards rushing to Williams' 903 yards. Gordon battled hip, shoulder and thumb injuries down the stretch, but missed just one game this past season -- the Broncos' Week 13 loss to the Kansas City Chiefs.

And after waiting it out over a month in free agency, he opted to return to the Broncos, with Williams and fellow running back Mike Boone in the new coaching staff's plans as well.

"I put my best foot forward every time I go out there and see what happens," Gordon said. "The goal is to make them want to play me ... Me and [Williams] are going to do it. I don't know how they're going to do the reps and all that ... I don't care how old people think I'm getting, I feel good. I've been sharing the ball since I got in the league, so this is nothing new."

Williams, who had worked at the No. 1 back in most of the team's on-field work thus far in the offseason, was the Broncos' second-round pick in the 2021 draft and was named to the league's All-Rookie team following the season.

Williams said earlier this offseason he has consistently kept in touch with Gordon and that "if I have to split carries, or if I'm the starter, it doesn't matter. Whatever it is, I'm just trying to win the Super Bowl."

Gordon said he arrived back in Denver last week and did spend some time in the team's facility, but did not participate in any of the on-field work before Monday's practice.

Gordon said the Broncos' trade to acquire quarterback Russell Wilson was "a game-changer" in his decision to re-sign with the Broncos without any guarantees about playing time. He also called coach Nathaniel Hackett "a cool dude ... he's really changed the atmosphere around here."

"We're excited to put him in there and watch him roll," Hackett said Monday. " ... He's a spectacular running back, he's been a great running back in this league for a long time and you can't have too many running backs."

Gordon has rushed for 6,144 yards and 53 touchdowns and has 284 receptions for 2,244 yards and 14 touchdowns in seven seasons.

# 'That's going to make us better': Why Melvin Gordon III is 'not going to lay down' amid RB competition

By Ben Swanson  
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As a free agent, Melvin Gordon III could have picked his new home.

In past years, Gordon has been part of several exceptional and largely balanced running back tandems, and if he so chose, he could have looked for a place where he'd be the unquestioned top runner. Instead, he chose to return to Denver, where he'll reunite with Javonte Williams.

In 2021, the two was the league's most productive tandem, as they were the only teammates to each rush for more than 900 yards on the season, splitting carries evenly at 203 apiece. In 2022, there's no guarantee that dynamic will remain divided the same way, but regardless, Gordon says his mindset will be the same as it's always been.

"I'm not going to lay down," Gordon said Monday. "I've always had that mindset that I've got to go get it, that they're bringing someone in here to take your job and, like I said, I know a lot of people who wanted me to take the backseat. I get it. It's been like that for a while. It's been like that when I was with the Chargers. ... I just come out here and do my thing. Thanks for the motivation, everybody. I appreciate y'all. That's extra motivation, and I need it. I need it."

The competition clearly worked a year ago, and while it can be seen as battling against one another, the way Gordon sees it, it creates a net benefit for the team.

"I'm going to just do what's best for the squad," Gordon said. "I put my best foot forward every time I go out there, and then I'll see what happens. The goal is to make them want to play me. I know we're going to do our thing; me and 'Vonte gonna do it. I don't really know how we're going to do the reps or things like that. The goal right now is really to master the playbook and let things play out. But I'm going to definitely be ready to battle.

"That's what it is that's going to make us better. It did last year, and I'm going to continue to do that. I don't care how old people think I'm getting. I feel good, I've been sharing the ball since I got in the league at running back. So this is nothing new. I've been battling for a while."

Melvin Gordon III: Broncos Country 'definitely going to be happy' with Russell Wilson at QB  
Williams, who has also effectively shared the load at running back for the entirety of his playing career, from high school through college and into the pros, has not deviated from his mindset from his rookie season either.

"The way that we were last year, I think that we'll be the same way this year," Williams said on May 26. "Everything will be good, and we're just trying to win games. ... If I've got to split carries [or] if I'm the starter, it don't matter. Whatever it is, I'm trying to win a Super Bowl."

The team's plan to divvy up touches will likely not be made clear until closer to the season or perhaps when the season begins and it unfolds on the field. In late April, Offensive Coordinator Justin Outten said that "there's not necessarily a one and two right now."

"With him being in the system, it's going to be another opportunity for us to get another guy back there to run the outside zone in third-down situations," Outten said on April 27. "[It's about] having that 1-2 punch. ...

"It's kind of almost by the feel of the game. It's kind of a similar situation to what we had in Green Bay with a speedier guy and a downhill guy. You want to utilize those guys because it is a long season. You don't want to bang them up. You want to be smart with them, use their strengths, put them out on the field, and make them work. We're excited to have both those guys."

Like Outten, Head Coach Nathaniel Hackett looked to that history as an example.

"I just look all throughout my past," Hackett said on April 29. "You need to have a stable of running backs. You want to hand the ball off, that's what protects the quarterback, that's what helps the play[-action] pass, that's what helps the threat of being able to go downfield. You have two guys like that, and then you throw [RB Mike] Boone in there, that's another change-up guy. It's a really good group. He just made that whole thing stronger. Whoever's hot — that's who we want to feed. That's kind of the beauty of it. They all believe in each other. They've been together this past year. They did a lot of good stuff last year, and we have to keep that going."