

Broncos defensive coordinator Ejiro Evero embracing previous scheme but with nuances

By Ryan O'Halloran

Denver Post

September 4, 2022

As he walked around the practice fields during training camp last month, the voice of Broncos defensive coordinator Ejiro Evero could rarely be heard.

Evero would observe an individual drill and pat nose tackle Mike Purcell on the helmet after what he judged to be a good rep. He would confer with head coach Nathaniel Hackett, the latter far more animated. And during teamwork, he would be focused on his call sheet and jot down an occasional note.

But the light timber of his voice resonated well.

"Very energetic, very passionate, very direct, very clear and concise with his message," defensive backs coach Christian Parker said. "And you can feel his passion for the game."

Evero's passion was fueled during his playing days at UC-Davis, where Hackett was a teammate, and a coaching career that has included three stints in the state of California sandwiched by jobs in Florida and Wisconsin. He has worked for Vic Fangio, Dom Capers, Monte Kiffin and Wade Phillips, among others. Defensive play-calling luminaries, all of them. Now in his 15th NFL season, Evero gets his first chance as a coordinator starting Monday night in Seattle.

Evero, 41, is intent on taking advantage.

"I've been really impressed with him and just his demeanor and edge," general manager George Paton said. "No one is as confident as (Evero). Really impressive in the room. Great command and presence and a way about him on the field."

What's been missing?

The Broncos' defense gained a reputation last year that was equal parts true and concerning.

True: They would beat up on teams with young quarterbacks or inferior rosters, teams such as Jacksonville and Detroit, the New York Jets and Giants. Those were stat-padding games. Six of their seven wins were by double digits.

Concerning: They didn't have the goods to beat teams like Kansas City and Las Vegas, Philadelphia and Cincinnati. Those were alarm bell-ringing games. There was never a confident feeling that the defense could make a stop and give the offense a final chance; never a belief externally they could create a turnover to provide a short field.

The Broncos finished eighth in fewest yards and third in fewest points allowed ... but 28th on third down, tied for 21st in takeaways and tied for 17th in sacks.

The Broncos need to stop the run better on early downs, so they signed D.J. Jones from San Francisco. It's on him and defensive end Dre'Mont Jones to set the tone on defense. And the Broncos needed a better pass-rushing presence, so they signed Randy Gregory from Dallas. It's on him and Bradley Chubb to close the deal on defense.

Evero believes being better against the run will lead to being better on third down.

Despite the struggles of the past six years (no playoff appearances) and many of the same players in place, Evero wanted to have a soft transition. He is keeping many of the same tenets of the Fangio scheme. But he is aware of what needs to improve, and he has added his own stamp.

"As teachers and coaches, we want to make it as easy as possible for the guys," Evero said. "We want them to play fast. There are a lot of things terminology-wise that are similar and there are things that are different."

Said Parker, the only position coach on defense retained by Evero: "The foundation is definitely Vic, but there are a lot of variations of what we want to do, both on a very small and major scale."

Those nuances and variations will debut against the Seahawks. More pressure looks? More man coverage? More moving around of the personnel? All to be determined.

What Evero knew at the time of his hiring is he had players to build around. Dre'Mont Jones is in a contract year and had 5 1/2 sacks last year. Chubb is also in a contract year and finally healthy. Safety Justin Simmons is an all-areas-of-the-field playmaker. And cornerback Pat Surtain II should be a breakout player candidate.

But the Broncos need to make more plays. More first-down run stops. More sacks. And get more interceptions.

"We have to take the ball away more," Parker said.

"A true pro"

During defensive staff meetings, Evero is collaborative. He wants to hear other opinions, even if they aren't completely aligned with his view. Quiet is the enemy.

Outside linebackers coach Bert Watts: "He's a true pro. You see it in his preparation and how he carries the meetings. One of the tough things is when you're working with someone and you're not sure what's going to happen. That's not the case with E. Every day, we're prepared."

Defensive line coach Marcus Dixon, who followed Evero from the Los Angeles Rams: "He's been around this for so long and been around some great coaches who have shown him the way. And he's teaching us how to do it."

Inside linebackers coach Peter Hansen: "His 14 years of experience in the NFL shines through all the time. I've been impressed with how he runs the staff and players meetings."

Two years ago, Evero was on a Rams staff whose defense was led by first-time coordinator Brandon Staley. The Rams led the league in fewest points allowed and Staley was hired as the Chargers' coach. But first things

first for Evero — building a defense that can compete in the AFC West and help break the Broncos' six-year playoff drought.

And he'll do it his way with a lean toward his previous experiences.

"He won't be giving, 'The Any Given Sunday' speech," said Parker, referring to the Al Pacino character in the 1999 movie. "But in terms of what he's trying to emphasize and what he wants us to be about defensively, he does a great job of delivering that message."

Ejiro Evero brings competitive drive, connection to players as defensive boss

By Troy Renck
KMGH
August 9, 2022

Ejiro Evero operates with a slow heart beat. Talk to him at a press conference or in a side conversation about his recent vacation, and he never seems in a rush.

Preparedness prevents panic. Evero was born in England, grew up in Southern California, starred as a defensive back at University of California-Davis, received a cup of coffee in Raiders camp and became a pro coach almost by accident.

He met former Tampa Bay Buccaneers defensive coordinator Monte Kiffin while visiting a friend, and the next thing he knew he was in the business. In his first 14 seasons, he has reached the playoffs nine times and won a Super Bowl ring last February with the Rams.

He has helped out on offense, defense and special teams. One thing he hasn't done is lead a defense. That changes this season as he is in charge of a Broncos unit that is expected to remain stingy in yielding points, while improving dramatically in takeaways and sacks.

So how is it going for Evero?

"He's doing great. It's funny just watching his competitiveness out there. We had a good showing in our competition period with the offense, and just watching how angry he was that they had lost one was pretty great. Everything about him is competitive," said head coach Nathaniel Hackett, who was roommates with Evero in college. "Every since we have known each other we have competed at anything and everything. It's great to be on the same team now, but out here we naturally get competitive. I love that about him."

Hackett is the frosted side of life's Mini Wheats. Evero is not gregarious, but don't confuse his calm demeanor with a lack of energy. He is detailed and smart while creating trust among players. Broncos nose tackle Mike Purcell first crossed paths with Evero in 2014 when the two were together in San Francisco.

Nose guard Mike Purcell says has 'all the faith in him'

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"He's confident. He knows his stuff. I have known him since San Francisco with (defensive coordinator) Vic (Fangio)," Purcell said. "So to see him grow into what he is now, it's been amazing. I have all the faith in him."

Broncos nose tackle D.J. Jones watched Evero in the 49ers' matchups against the Rams. Now in his defense, Jones remains impressed.

"Skilled. He's in-depth in what he teaches us," said Jones, who returned to practice and worked on the side, saying his back feels great. "He's just a player's coach and that's a plus."

Optimism envelopes the Broncos and this training camp. Squinting is not required to see this team reaching the playoffs. However, the Broncos play in arguably the toughest division in football — as many as three AFC West teams could reach the postseason — and they boast a first-time head coach and coordinators. Evero is embracing the challenge of working for his good friend and leading the defense.

"We go way back in terms of competing in video games and weight lifting," Evero said of Hackett. "I think it's a healthy deal and it brings out the best in each other... I don't think there's anything I'm trying to find out about myself (in this role) so much as you don't know until you experience it. It's more so just getting into the moment, and it's our operation. As much blame or credit that the coordinators get, it's a collaborative effort in terms of getting the game plan ready and the execution and delivery of the calls to the players in game. All that stuff, we're all working on."

Footnotes:

The best pass of training camp came with a cost. Russell Wilson connected on a deep touchdown to a leaping Courtland Sutton on Monday, but cornerback Ronald Darby landed awkwardly on his left shoulder

on the play. There was no injury update after practice, and Darby exited early to the locker room under his own power. The Broncos can ill-afford to lose Darby as they are thin at the cornerback position.

D.J. Jones became a father recently as his wife, Kayla, gave birth to their daughter, Avi.

Rookie tight end Greg Dulcich continues to deal with a hamstring issue. After a couple of days of practicing, he returned to the side field for work.

Randy Gregory did pass rush hand work on Saturday and is continuing to make progress from shoulder surgery as he aims to play in the season opener.

Nickelback K'Waun Williams (knee) returned to practice, but did not participate in 11-on-11 work as the team is exercising caution.

Evero made it sound like some of the top players will not play in the preseason, though that has not been decided yet.

Trusting the ‘process’: Here’s how Ejiro Evero plans to be consistent in how he runs the Denver Broncos defense

By Andrew Mason

DNVR.com

February 26, 2022

No player better understands the type of process-based coaching that Broncos defensive coordinator Ejiro Evero wants to bring to Denver than future Hall of Fame Von Miller.

Denver traded Miller to the Los Angeles Rams on Nov. 1. Evero was in the midst of his fifth season as a Rams assistant, and in his first press conference as a Broncos coordinator, vowed to bring a process-based approach to his role — one that was based more on long-term consistency rather than short-term reaction to the inevitable ebb and flow of an NFL season.

What Miller saw in Los Angeles from a staff that included Evero could not have been more different than his recent experience with the Broncos.

“We (the Rams) have been so even-keeled and so consistent with things that we do, how we prepare,” Miller said prior to Week 18.

“When I was with the Denver Broncos, when we lose, it’s time to double down on something. It’s time to go harder, it’s time to do something differently. It’s time to watch more film, practice a little bit harder, lift a little bit harder. And these guys, they just got a formula. We come in, we do our stuff, we go home. And we trust our guys. We trust the stars on the team.

“We trust the foundational players. We trust the coaches. And honestly, we just come in and we do the exact same thing. When we we’re losing, we were doing the exact same thing.”

That’s exactly what Evero and his fellow assistant coaches intended for the Rams in recent years — and what he wants to see in Denver.

“The process has got to be consistent,” Evero said Feb. 22. “I think when the players feel that the coaches are consistent, their teaching methods are the same, our flow as we go through the week as the same, our approach, whether it’s a high or a low, a win or loss is the same.

“We’re about correcting, we’re about demanding and we’re about teaching. Once they feel that and see that on a consistent basis, then we’re going to know how we’re going to operate. I think the process is the biggest thing. You’ve got to develop the process. Then as the players witness it, they’ve got to trust that you’re going to stay consistent with it. When they trust you, then you got it.”

But it’s easy to trust the process when you’re doing well — or when there is a track record of past success to support it. The latter was the case in Los Angeles; because the Rams have never had a losing season since Sean McVay became their head coach, a three-game November losing streak wasn’t going to result in a dramatic pivot or any kind of panic.

So, how can the Broncos’ new coaches avoid falling into the same trap as the old regime?

“You’ve got to put the blinders on,” Evero said. “You’ve got to have belief in what you’re doing, and you’ve got to stay the course.”

“If your process is right — which I believe it’s going to be here — the people are right, and you stay the course, you’re going to have the results you want.”

And that will be the test of the strength of the Broncos’ process. It’s not whether it can withstand the good times. It’s whether it — and their coaches — can maintain that consistency during rough stretches.

If they can, they will succeed where the last regime failed..

'He's been huge for us': Ejiro Evero prepping for 2022 season, setting tone as Broncos' new defensive coordinator

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
April 27, 2022

The offseason is valuable for more than just the Broncos' players.

As Ejiro Evero begins his tenure as the Broncos' defensive coordinator, each day and each practice is an opportunity to install his defense and prepare himself for his first year as an NFL play caller.

"Just like players, I think it's important for coaches to practice what they're going to be doing on game day," Evero said Tuesday. "It's important for me, and that's what I'm taking these practices as, as examples to really get used to using the mic and communicating and not only just getting the call to the players on the huddle, but also giving them tips and [down and distance] reminders and things like that. I'm trying to hone my skills, as well."

Evero, who said he will call plays from the sideline, is in the midst of installing a scheme similar to the one the Broncos ran under Vic Fangio during the previous three seasons. While the terminology has changed, many of the principles will remain in place. And as he helps with the install, he's already left an impression on veteran safety Kareem Jackson.

"He's very vocal," Jackson said. "He's very detailed as well. I think defensively, I think that's huge for us and definitely for the younger guys, the detail in every aspect of the game. Just pointing out little things and getting guys to realize that. He's been huge for us just in these couple days we've been on the field. I think him preaching that and us kind of preaching the same thing, I think it will definitely help us."

Across the league, there's little doubt Evero will succeed in his first stint as an NFL defensive coordinator.

"He's got a great steadiness about him," Rams head coach Sean McVay said in March. "He's so smart, he's so self-assured, but he's a great collaborator. I think one of the things I really enjoyed watching with [Rams defensive coordinator] Raheem [Morris] and 'E' was their ability to work in coordination, figure out the best ways for our defense to be able to operate. He's got such a clear vision of what he wants it to look like. He's been around great coaches that he's been able to learn from and I'm really fired up for 'E' and I know he's going to do a great job. He's been somebody that I've worked with for such a long period of time, and you just watch the growth that he's had as a coach. He'll do a great job connecting and really help make guys better players. He'll be able to adjust and adapt accordingly — he'll do a great job for the Broncos."

One of the key elements of Evero's system is the team's pass rush, and he emphasized the importance of getting to the opposing quarterback.

"We're excited about a lot of the guys — [both] exterior [and] interior pass rush," Evero said. "At the end of the day, we've got to generate pressure. We've got to do it with individual efforts, but we've also got

to do it with a team collective goal, the guys working together on the pass-rush games, being able to bring pressure and those types of things. We've got a lot of guys were counting on to get that done for us."

Evero and Co. will get plenty of practice in facing an elite offense as they go up against Russell Wilson and the Broncos' offense in practice.

"It's tremendous, because this Shanahan [offensive] scheme, it's going through the league, right?" Evero said. "... I think we're going to have one of the best run offenses in the league, and so practicing against that weekly and daily is going to be awesome. And then going against the quarterback, with all the keepers and stuff off of it, it's great work. And they're going to challenge us a lot with the formations, with the tempo and all those different types of things. It's going to be awesome in terms of getting us ready for the season."

Evero, though, said his unit cannot rely on Wilson and the team's offensive weapons to carry them to success.

"At the end of the day, winning football in the NFL's about winning as a team and winning collectively," Evero said. "And hey, maybe the offense is the strength of the team, but hey, the defense has got to be able to play off of that and the special teams has got to be able to play off of that. ... So obviously when you get a quarterback like the guy we have, it's going to open up opportunities, but at the end of the day, there's going to be times that we're going to have to come through, and that's important."

In the early days of the Broncos' 2022 preparation, Evero is making sure he's ready to meet that challenge.

Here's how Ejiro Evero is adjusting to his new role as Broncos defensive coordinator

By Andrew Mason

DNVR.com

April 27, 2022

Nathaniel Hackett isn't the only coach adjusting to a new role. His friend of two decades, new defensive coordinator Ejiro Evero, is still figuring out what to do and where to go without a specific position group on which to focus.

Unlike Hackett, whose focus during the open-to-media portion of practices is on the quarterbacks — and specifically Russell Wilson — Evero has tried to get a big-picture view of things, while also not micromanaging his position coaches. During the individual periods of the Broncos' voluntary-veteran minicamp sessions, Evero and senior defensive assistant Dom Capers are often watching and observing ... but not undermining the position coaches doing their work.

Capers knows all about this sort of role; he first became a defensive coordinator 30 years ago in Pittsburgh. But for Evero, it's brand new.

"I was telling someone today — I'm actually a little bored," Evero said. "I'm used to being with a position group and really grinding with them and stuff. We have such excellent coaches on the defense side. ... I just sit back and kind of watch and admire them and see these players getting better and these coaches are really pouring into them."

And these practices are just as important for the coaches as they are for the players.

"Just like players, I think it's very important for coaches to practice what they're going to be doing on gameday," Evero said. "It's important for me and that's what I'm taking these practices as, as examples of getting used to the mic and communicating, and not only getting the calls to the players on the huddle, but also giving them tips, [down and distance] reminders and things like that. So I'm trying to hone my skills in as well."

A significant part of those skills is in his communication with his players. Early on, Evero seems to be getting his message across.

While inside linebacker Josey Jewell pointed out that he felt Evero and previous defensive guru Vic Fangio are "both great coaches" with different sets of attributes, the fifth-year veteran noted that the interaction with Evero is a bit different.

"I've enjoyed 'E' a lot," Jewell said. "I love the energy. I love the meetings with him, picking our brain, we pick his brain. ... I've enjoyed him. I've enjoyed everything he's about so far."

And while the nomenclature installed by Evero is different, it's not a massive change.

“It’s like ‘whip’ to a ‘bull.’ One call used to be ‘whip,’ now it’s a ‘bull’ call,” Jewell said. “So, there’s just small verbiage, whether it be a box check or different stuff like that. Not very tough. Definitely something you have to get adjusted to right away.”

It’s a new adventure for Evero, but there is no one with whom he’d rather take it with than Hackett. The profound friendship the two men share goes back to their days at UC-Davis, and they maintained it even as their professional paths wound to different stops after a shared 2007 season with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers on then-coach Jon Gruden’s staff.

“We have those moments daily. Like, ‘Can you believe that we’re running a team? We’re here working together,’” Evero said. “But I can believe it because he’s so talented and so awesome.”

So is Evero, who has the benefit of having worked under perhaps the three defining defensive minds of 21st-century football: Fangio, Monte Kiffin and Wade Phillips. The knowledge he gleaned from all of them will serve him well as he adjusts to his biggest role yet.