

# New Denver Broncos WR Jalen Virgil is one of the NFL's 'freakiest' athletes

By Zach Segars  
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In 18 of the past 19 years, the Denver Broncos have seen at least one rookie undrafted free agent make their initial 53-man roster, and this year, that honor belonged to Jalen Virgil, a wide receiver from Appalachian State.

That said, Virgil is not your typical undrafted free agent.

Oftentimes, undrafted free agents possess a glaring athletic deficiency. This can even be true of the very best UDFAs, such as Phillip Lindsay, who was considered undersized for the position and also had too much tread on his tires.

Virgil is the exception to that rule though, as he is one of the most remarkable athletes in this year's rookie class.

That's a bold claim to make, but thankfully, it's an equally easy claim to support, thanks to Bruce Feldman of The Athletic.

Feldman is one of, if not the most respected analyst in the world of college football, and every year he compiles a list of the best athletes across all walks of football in an article dubbed the 'freaks list.'

Virgil made the freaks list four consecutive years, which puts him in rare air.

Now, to make it four consecutive years, and to be listed among the top-four freakiest athletes in the country for two of those years, it requires more than simply being a burner. Yes, Virgil is wildly fast, but he's also got impressive size, strength and explosiveness in his game, which is what makes him so special.

Virgil made the freaks list in part for his speed, running a 10.29 100-meter dash for Appalachian State, but primarily for having that speed in spite of his size and the amount of muscle on his body.

He ran that 100-meter dash at 210 pounds, bench pressed 405 pounds, close-grip bench pressed 345 pounds, and did a sumo deadlift of 600 pounds.

He also showed off the hops, with a 40.5-inch vertical jump, and a 10-foot-11 broad jump.

Though, the better way to contextualize just how out-of-this-world Virgil is, might be to show how he compared to some of college football's greatest athletes that we're more familiar with.

In the 2021 edition of the list (Virgil's last mention before making the leap to the NFL), he ranks as the fourth-freakiest athlete in college football. He trails only Evan Neal, Aidan Hutchinson, and Kyle Hamilton — all of whom were selected in the top-15 of this year's draft — and finds himself listed just ahead of three more first-round picks, Devonte Wyatt, George Karlaftis and Derek Stingley Jr., as well as a 10.0 RAS athlete

(meaning he's arguably the most athletic player at a given position to ever test at the NFL combine) in Tariq Woolen.

In 2020, Virgil ranked third, ahead of Odafe Oweh (first-round pick), Boye Mafe (second-round pick), Tutu Atwell (second-round pick at wide receiver), Hamilton, Caleb Farley (first-round pick) and Micah Parsons.

Yes, you read that right. During Parsons' final collegiate season, the most knowledgeable college football analyst on the planet determined that, despite all of Parsons' absurd physical gifts, Virgil was even freakier.

Let's not overlook that.

So, how do the Denver Broncos go about utilizing this ridiculous athleticism?

It should be a pretty easy question to answer, considering Virgil's idyllic fit with the offense and the fact we've already seen the blueprint of how to utilize an athlete like Virgil alongside Russell Wilson.

Back in Green Bay, Nathaniel Hackett and the Packers loved running the ball out of 11 personnel, but doing so asked their slot-receiver to do a lot as a run-blocker. Allen Lazard was excellent at this, and Tim Patrick and Greg Dulcich projected to also be good at this, but now thanks to injury, the Broncos are going to have to look elsewhere.

How about the freakishly strong Jalen Virgil? Virgil could allow them to take run-blocking liabilities K.J. Hamler or Montrell Washington off the field, while keeping a vertical field-stretching speed threat out there. It could be a great early-down look for the Denver Broncos that keeps opposing defenses honest.

Plus, we know a player like Virgil can fit wonderfully with Wilson, because we just saw it the last few seasons with D.K. Metcalf in Seattle.

D.K. Metcalf's (former receiver of Denver Broncos quarterback Russell Wilson) Relative Athletic Score

Virgil has some notably important differences from Metcalf. Size is the most severe, as Metcalf is 2.25 inches taller than Virgil, but otherwise, their athletic profiles are very similar.

Denver Broncos WR Jalen Virgil's RASMetcalf is a little bigger, a little stronger, and a little faster, but Virgil closes the gap between the two by being the more agile and nimble one.

It's not a perfect one-to-one comparison of course, and considering his draft status, Virgil likely never becomes the offensive focal point that D.K. Metcalf is. This isn't a claim that Virgil is going to be the next Metcalf.

It's merely pointing out that they're athletically similar, and that's a positive, because we've already seen that type of athlete work really well with Wilson's aggressive, downfield quarterbacking style. With that in mind, the Denver Broncos should be excited about what could be in store.

# **‘I’m just so blessed to be here’: Undrafted free agent WR Jalen Virgil makes Broncos’ 53-man roster just weeks before expecting first child**

By Ellie Kinney  
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For the 18th time in the last 19 seasons, an undrafted free agent has earned a spot on the Broncos’ initial 53-man roster.

Wide receiver Jalen Virgil, a rookie out of Appalachian State University, is the newest player to take up that mantle in Denver, joining an esteemed group that includes former Broncos stars like Chris Harris Jr. and C.J. Anderson and current teammates like Essang Bassey. Virgil turned heads throughout the preseason and has earned a roster spot despite not receiving a call on draft day, and on Tuesday, he became the lone rookie college free agent on Denver’s roster. The first thing Virgil did after learning he’d made the 53-man roster was FaceTime his entire family. His mom was crying, he said, and his sister and dad were smiling as he told them the good news.

“It’s a whole bunch of different emotions,” Virgil told DenverBroncos.com just over an hour after he found out he made the roster. “I’ve worked really hard for this my whole life, and I wouldn’t have had it happen any other way. I’ve always been an underdog throughout my whole career — high school, college, coming out of the draft — [but], like I said, I wouldn’t have it any other way. I’m just so blessed to be here.”

That underdog mentality has characterized Virgil’s career, but he has embraced it as a core aspect of his identity. When he did not receive a call during the 2022 NFL Draft, he did not let it faze him — he trusted his talent, believing that his opportunity would come in due time.

“I was always pretty confident that I would have the opportunity because I showed flashes in college of my potential, but I was just never able to reach my full potential in college,” Virgil said. “Obviously everybody wants to hear their name called on draft day, and I just so happened to not get my name called, but I knew that I was going to have some interest afterwards. ... I knew that if I came in and continued to work, I would eventually find my way to having those opportunities.”

He got a chance with the Broncos in May, and now his patience and hard work have paid off with a roster spot. The coaches and front office were impressed by Virgil’s playmaking ability throughout training camp and the preseason, highlighting his speed and ability to help the team in multiple ways.

“I think you need speed in this league, and Virgil obviously provides that,” General Manager George Paton said. “This guy, every game he made plays. He made plays every practice, he can cover kicks — he’s an interesting guy. He can return kicks, [he was] a really good returner in college. He just answered every test and aced it. And he’s got legit speed. ... We’re excited for him.”

The speedy wide receiver brings versatility to the Broncos, a trait that the coaching staff has continuously emphasized. Virgil showed that he can contribute on special teams as a gunner, on kickoff or as a returner if needed, and Special Teams Coordinator Dwayne Stukes praised his patience and vision on returns after

the game against the Bills. While fellow rookie Montrell Washington is expected to be the primary returner, Virgil adds depth to the unit.

Virgil was also one of Denver's standout young receivers throughout the preseason, logging nearly double the receiving yards of any other Bronco who saw the field. In three preseason games, he recorded nine catches for a whopping 180 yards — an average of 20 yards per reception.

The Broncos have an elite deep passer in Russell Wilson, and now the quarterback has a new downfield target. Virgil drew attention during training camp for hauling in some long balls in team drills, and he caught three passes of 30 yards or more during the preseason — including a 42-yard bomb from Brett Rypien against the Cowboys.

Jalen Virgil hauls in 42-yard pass from Brett Rypien | Broncos vs. Cowboys

"I think that I can be a guy who can take the top off the defense," Virgil said. "Obviously we have one of the best deep ball throwers — probably the best deep ball thrower — in the league, so working with Russ is going to be amazing."

Virgil noted that he has idolized Wilson throughout the veteran quarterback's career, and practicing with Wilson for the first time in the offseason was a moment he'll never forget.

"It doesn't even seem real," Virgil said of the possibility of catching deep balls from Wilson in an NFL game. "The first practice we had with the vets and I looked in and saw Russell throwing me the ball, I was like, 'Wow, this is just unreal.' And he's always been one of my favorite quarterbacks. Just getting to know him in person, I like him even more because he's such a great dude and such a great leader — so it's going to be amazing to go out there and catch balls from a future Hall of Famer."

Making this roster was no easy feat, as Virgil had to compete with several other talented young wide receivers who all made plays during the preseason. He beat out third-year receiver Kendall Hinton and second-year receiver Seth Williams in the battle to make the team, and he noted that he will keep fighting to keep his spot. Throughout the grueling months of competition, Virgil had some extra motivation that kept him going: the knowledge that he is going to become a father. He and his girlfriend, Maddie, are expecting their son in the next week or two, and Virgil now gets to experience these two milestones of his life concurrently.

"I figured out that I was going to have a baby in January, so that was kind of the whole start of my path towards the NFL," Virgil said. "At the beginning I was a little bit overwhelmed, just because there was a lot going on, and I'm like, 'Hey, this is a lot to handle,' but then I told myself I needed to look at it in a different way. ... This has always been two dreams of mine — to be a father and then to also be in the NFL. I had these two things that were waiting for me on the other side if I could just work for these next nine months. I just used it as motivation throughout this whole year to get to where I am. The fact that all this is happening at one time, and I could potentially have my son this week or next week, is just amazing."

Virgil's son is due on Sept. 9, but he hopes the baby will come a little early. Now as an official member of the Broncos' 53-man roster, he has a rather important business trip to Seattle on Sept. 12. He has defied the odds as an undrafted free agent, and now Virgil gets to embark on not one, but two, major journeys this year. In both football and fatherhood, he is thrilled to start the next chapter.

"It's such a blessing to be able to be where I am right now," Virgil said. "I can't wait to keep it going."

