

Broncos' Corliss Waitman named AFC Special Teams Player of the Week

By Richard Cote

KUSA

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Denver Broncos punter, Corliss Waitman, has been named the AFC Special Teams Player of the Week following a strong performance in week 3 against the San Francisco 49ers.

Waitman had 10 punts in last week's game, averaging 47.6 yards per punt and six of them downed within the 20-yard line, a franchise single-game record.

Waitman was the first punter in more than three years to have at least six punts downed inside the 20-yard line without a touchback.

Two punts pinned San Francisco inside the 5-yard line, including one in the 3rd quarter that lead to a safety for the Broncos.

"[The safety] really started watching Corliss," Head Coach Nathaniel Hackett said after the game. "Corliss punting that ball back there, pinning them back continually throughout the game, giving them such a long field."

The last Broncos player to earn the AFC Special Teams Player of the Week was Brandon McManus in week 14 of last season.

Broncos' Corliss Waitman named AFC Special Teams Player of Week

By Troy Renck

KMGH

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Corliss Waitman won the Broncos' punting job with booming kicks during training camp, besting veteran Sam Martin.

However, the first two weeks doubt surfaced whether he was the right choice. He kicked those to the curb last Sunday night with a net average of 43.6 yards on 10 punts. The 27-year-old pinned the 49ers inside the 20-yard line six times, his accuracy needed in a low-scoring 11-10 brawl.

Waitman received a game ball from coach Nathaniel Hackett, the first of his career. And the recognition continued Wednesday as Waitman was named the AFC Special Teams Player of the Week.

This is a rare feat, and welcome by a franchise that has been plagued by special teams issues since winning Super Bowl 50 in 2015. Waitman joins Todd Sauerbrun (2005), Micah Knorr (2004) and Tom Rouen (2001) as the only punters in franchise history to garner the honor.

With the offense posting eight three-and-outs — a single-game worst for quarterback Russell Wilson — Waitman stepped up. His six kicks inside the 20 represent a franchise single-game record. He is the first punter for any team to pull it off since 2019.

For Waitman, it felt good to rebound after special teams coach Dwayne Stukes called the first two weeks "sickening." Waitman improved when it was needed most.

"Punters are very important, especially when it comes to field position. I just try to do my job and put my team in the best position I can put them in," Waitman said. "This was my first one (game ball), so I'm very grateful for it. I'm grateful for my teammates, my coaches and the organization. It's a blessing. God is good."

Broncos punter Corliss Waitman named AFC Special Teams Player of the Week

By George Stoia

The Gazette

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Broncos punter Corliss Waitman was named the AFC's Special Teams Player of the Week Wednesday, thanks to his efforts Sunday against the 49ers.

Waitman was sensational against San Francisco, punting a franchise-record 10 times with six of those landing inside the 20-yard-line and two inside the five.

"It's awesome," Waitman said Wednesday. "It's my first real-deal award. It's definitely surreal. My teammates helped me, of course — keeping those (balls) outside the endzone. It feels good."

Waitman was signed from the Steelers this past offseason to compete with veteran Sam Martin, whom Waitman beat out in training camp and the preseason. Few expected Waitman to not only win the job, but to be as good as he's been through three games.

"It's still surreal," Waitman said. "I walk into the stadium every day and I'm like, 'This can't be my life.' I'm very grateful for this. It's surreal to me every single day."

Punter Corliss Waitman named AFC Special Teams Player of the Week

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
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Following an impressive performance that was critical in the Broncos' 11-10 win over the 49ers, punter Corliss Waitman has been named the AFC Special Teams Player of the Week, the NFL announced Wednesday.

In Denver's Week 3 win, Waitman punted 10 times, averaged 47.6 gross yards per punt and had six punts downed inside the 20-yard line. Waitman was the first punter in more than three years to have at least six punts downed inside the 20-yard line without a touchback.

Waitman's six punts downed inside the 20 were also a franchise single-game record.

Two of Waitman's punts pinned the 49ers inside the 5-yard line, and his effort in the third quarter led to a safety for the Broncos.

"[The safety] really started watching Corliss," Head Coach Nathaniel Hackett said after the game. "Corliss punting that ball back there, pinning them back continually throughout the game, giving them such a long field."

Waitman earned a game ball for his performance, which kept the 49ers backed up and on their own side of the field. As the Broncos' offense struggled to find its footing, Waitman helped ensure San Francisco's average starting point was its own 22-yard line.

The Broncos' new punter's performance was also somewhat historic. Denver was the first team to win a game while punting 10 times since the Broncos accomplished the feat in 2016 against the Jaguars in 2016.

Waitman is the first Broncos player to be named AFC Special Teams Player of the Week since Brandon McManus earned the honor in Week 14 last season. This week's award marks the 32nd time in franchise history that a Bronco has garnered AFC Special Teams Player of the Week honors. Waitman is just the fourth punter to earn the honor for the Broncos.

Corliss Waitman goes from Europe to Broncos' starting punter

By Mike Klis

KUSA

September 2, 2022

New Denver Broncos punter Corliss Waitman can thank his fellow left-footers for finally helping him land a full-time NFL gig.

In recent seasons, whenever a team was about to go up against a lefty punter like Tress Way, Kevin Huber, Corey Bojorquez, Dustin Colquitt or Michael Palardy, an out-of-work lefty punter was often brought in on Friday before the game to give the returner a look at the reverse spin on the ball. Even the NFL's all-time best punt returners like Devin Hester and Dante Hall would speak about the tricky nature of a left-footed struck ball.

"Being a lefty you get a lot of workouts," Waitman said Wednesday at his Broncos' locker. "I got like 12 last year. Every week, usually on Friday, that was my game day those workouts. I'd fly out to Jersey, Colorado, San Francisco. So that was my ... all those workouts. It worked out for sure."

After not punting in a real NFL game for two years out of South Alabama, Waitman finally got his chance with the Pittsburgh Steelers last year. Pressley Harvin III was out on bereavement leave and Waitman was brought in for two games.

He averaged a whopping 52.1 yards with his seven punts. There was a touchback and 47 yards worth of returns so his aim needed work. But the Broncos' brass were impressed with his potential. When Harvin returned and Waitman was waived by the Steelers at season's end, Broncos' general manager George Paton claimed himself a punter to compete with Sam Martin, who scheduled to make a non-guaranteed \$2.25 million.

Throughout the offseason, training camp and the preseason, the Broncos saw that Waitman, while raw with the nuances of NFL punting, kept getting better. He wasn't as consistent as the veteran Martin, who is one of the league's best at placement, particularly to the right sideline. But Waitman had a thunder leg that tantalized. And he was getting much better at hanging those inside-the-20 punts.

It remains to be seen whether the Broncos made the right decision keeping Waitman over Martin, who caught on quickly with the Super Bowl-contending Buffalo Bills. But between Waitman's lefty spin and Denver's home altitude factor – where one scientific study stated fly balls carry on average 9 percent further than at sea level – the Broncos couldn't let his booming potential walk out the door.

"It took me a minute," Waitman said. "It's been a long road and I'm grateful for it. Practice squads. Of course COVID (in 2020), no preseason games. It was tough for specialists to work through that. It was already hard to break through. I just trusted the process. I'm definitely going to get the most out of it, for sure."

Belgium born, Netherlands raised

In one way it took Waitman longer than most – he is 27, a year or two older than most young punters who get their first real NFL chance – and in another way it took hardly any time at all. His father, Jose Waitman,

was a star basketball player at Milton High School in the panhandle of Florida and played four years at South Alabama as a 6-foot-8, part-time starting forward from 1982-86.

After college, Jose Waitman played professionally overseas. It was in the Netherlands where Jose met his Dutch-speaking wife Aldofine and they were in Ghent, Belgium on July 21, 1995 when son Corliss was born. He grew up in the Netherlands playing soccer. When the Waitman family moved back to Jose's hometown of Milton, Fla., Corliss was 15 years old and starting a new life he never imagined.

"Europe, of course, soccer is the No. 1 sport," Waitman said. "I grew up playing soccer at a high level. Moving to America, especially north Florida, nobody cares about soccer. All the attention is on football."

But from the start, Corliss said he "kinda liked" football. The kicking aspect of the game appealed to him as a soccer player.

"I didn't really know how to go about it," he said. "My junior, senior year the high school coach needed a kicker. My uncle was good friends of the head high school coach at that time and he said, 'Hey man, why don't you go try and kick?' Worked out, got offers and it went pretty quickly. I only started for a year."

He attended his father's alma mater, South Alabama, where he punted four years although not regularly until his junior and senior seasons in 2017-18. He transferred to Mississippi State but the NCAA denied his hope for one more year of football eligibility.

He signed as an undrafted rookie with the Steelers in 2020, then bounced around. Naturally, New England coach Bill Belichick, who has shown a long affection for the nuances of lefty punters, brought him in for a practice squad look.

Stukes factor

After competing with Martin, the Broncos' two-year incumbent, during the offseason, new special teams coordinator Dwayne Stukes had Waitman take first-team special teams reps for the second training camp practice. That was the first sign the punting competition was on. Still, Martin was clearly more adept at ball placement, even if Waitman did occasionally pound the jaw-dropping bomb.

Did Waitman really think he had a chance to beat out a 10-year vet?

"As a specialist you learn to just come in and do your job and opportunities will unfold one day," he said. "Just keep working. Every team I went to I had that same mentality. Just work hard. Like a golfer focus on your swing. Focus on performing and doors will open eventually."

Just as the team experienced an embarrassing 42-15 drubbing from the Buffalo Bills in the second preseason game, the game was a turning point in two of the most intriguing roster competitions. Brett Rypien went 22 of 26 in the second half to put himself in front of the No. 2 quarterback competition that he would win a week later. And Martin suffered a sprained ankle in pregame warmups that gave Waitman the full-game opportunity.

Perhaps, more than his two punts for a 52.0 yard average – one of his boomers bounced into the end zone for a touchback – Waitman was the holder for Brandon McManus' three successful field goal attempts, including one from 55 into a tricky end zone wind.

Brandon McManus kicks a field goal as punter Corliss Waitman holds on Saturday, Aug. 27, 2022, in Denver. For the final preseason game, Martin returned but Stukes picked Waitman as the starter. Martin knew the deal from there. Even if Martin wasn't pleased with how it turned out, he had nothing but complimentary words for Waitman, who was always respectful.

"Sam's a great guy," Waitman said. "He called me and he said, 'You earned it, now go do your thing. I'm rooting for you.' I'm rooting for Sam as well. He's a true veteran and a true friend as well."

Martin signed Wednesday evening with the high-scoring Bills who are Super Bowl favorites thanks to quarterback Josh Allen. Waitman will punt for the Broncos whose playoff expectations were only enhanced late Wednesday night when the team reached a five-year, \$245 million extension agreement with quarterback Russell Wilson.

Maybe Martin and Waitman will go head to head in the AFC playoffs. Perhaps, the game will go in a way that neither will punt.