

Russell Wilson details the weekly State of the Union he holds with the Broncos' offense

By Zac Stevens

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Near the beginning of every calendar year, the current President of the United States delivers their State of the Union Address, typically falling on a Tuesday.

Fittingly, Russell Wilson, who might as well be the president of the Broncos' offense, holds his own State of the Union with his side of the ball on Tuesdays. However, there are a few differences between Wilson's and the POTUS' addresses.

Instead of Wilson's being an annual address, it's a weekly one. Instead of it being an address to the rest of his team, it's more of a review session incorporating the entire offense. And instead of it being open for the world to see, it's a closed-door meeting.

"They do a great job; everybody is so wired in and so focused. A lot of the guys have watched the film already and they're prepared. I kind of call it—it's a review session rather than a dissertation," Wilson said, opening up about this meeting for the first time. "I want to know from those guys. 'Some of you guys have played these guys, some of you may not have.' Here's this. What do you see on film? It's great communication. The players do a great job of it, and there's so much great knowledge in the room with those guys."

It's not a coincidence the meeting falls on a Tuesday. And, no, it's not because that's when the President of the United States holds their address. It's because that's the players only off day during the season. Wilson said the meeting is voluntary, "but every guy usually comes in." When a future Hall-of-Fame quarterback has a meeting, it's important to show up. It's another example of how the nine-time Pro Bowler is changing the culture in Denver and getting complete buy-in from his teammates, despite the extra work.

The people that don't show up are the coaches and the defense as the meeting is player-led and only with the offensive players. Sorry Nathaniel Hackett, this meeting isn't for you.

"It's just offense. Every once in a while, you'll see a defensive player peak their head in. It's like, 'Hey, okay,' so that's always fun," Wilson joked on Wednesday.

Much like America's State of the Union, Wilson's meetings have been going on for quite some time, although not quite as long as the President's.

"I've been doing it since my rookie year," Wilson said, going all the way back to 2012. "It's been great. I think it's something I wanted to make sure I did every Tuesday—just to spend time with guys, make sure we go over the film, make sure we go over the personnel, making sure we know the fronts, making sure we know what their pressure looks are and who their pressure guys are. All that information—who the head coach is, where he comes from, what's his discipleship and where the defensive coordinator is from. All that information is important."

Wilson and his teammates have preached the past few months how important it is that players take initiative and have their own meetings without coaches. The weekly State of the Union is a perfect example of that.

On a typical week, players won't officially start looking at their next opponent until Wednesday, when they return from their Tuesday off day. However, the Broncos' offense gets a one day head start thanks to their leader's weekly State of the Union.

As for if there are hard copies of the meetings, well, that's top-secret.

"That might be confidential information," Wilson said with a laugh.

Baseball helped Russell Wilson cleanse defeat quickly and move forward

By Mike Klis

KUSA

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The visiting locker room was dejected after losing a game it should have won, but its star player walked in and instantly changed the mood.

Russell Wilson has won way more than he has lost in his 11 years as an NFL quarterback, and one of the keys seems to be his ability to quickly wash away the losses. This was one game, was Wilson's message to his team in so many words. This wasn't the Super Bowl. The Super Bowl is still out there for the team.

Wilson was asked about his ability to cleanse defeat and look forward to the next chance to win mentality. He answered with an inspirational lecture.

"You realize you don't win it all on one day," Wilson said Wednesday during the starting quarterback's weekly press conference. "One game. You win it through a journey and a process. You have to have amnesia playing this game. You have to remember the great moments but also forget them, too, in the midst of a game. You've got to be able to, after the game, postgame, you look at everything and see what went well, what didn't go well.

"I kind of have a process. I watch my film, for example, just my game. Then I watch the whole collective group. Then I watch it again to see what we could have done different. And I always grade it and I always think about simply, 'what did we do well? And what can we get better at?' And then from there you take that in objectively and you move forward.

"I think maybe it's the baseball in me. I don't know, maybe the Rockies, maybe dealing with the Yankees, I don't know, playing a lot of baseball back in the day."

Let us interrupt his sermon for some background. Wilson is not just a great athlete, he was once a two-sport athlete.

Football, you know about it. And baseball, too, when he was a minor-league second baseman in 2011 and 2012 for the Colorado Rockies' organization. Baseball is a sport where if you fail two times of three as a batter, and do it over a long time, you go to the Hall of Fame. The greatest of the greats may go 0 for 4 once or twice a week.

Wilson hit .229 with 118 strikeouts in 379 minor-league at-bats at the Class A level for the Rockies. (He later spent six days in spring training with the 2018 Yankees).

Possibly the most positive, optimistic person who ever wore a Broncos uniform, Wilson understood how to cope with failure. And he coped by saying, "I'll get 'em next time." Back to his answer.

"I think a lot of it is you have to be able to focus on the next pitch, the next moment," Wilson said. "And if you sit back and think about the past, think about a past play or whatever it may be – you learn from

moments. I'm not saying you don't learn from them. But I think what you're able to do is you're able to move forward from them and grow from them.

"And I think this game is all about growth. You're either growing or you're not. I always want to be on that constant elevator of growth, I guess."

And so Wilson is in the midst of preparing for the Houston Texans, whom the Broncos will play six days after their 17-16 loss Monday night against his former Seahawks. The game ended with Wilson and the Broncos' offense getting pulled off the field by coach Nathaniel Hackett on fourth-and-5 from the Seattle 46 so Brandon McManus could attempt a 64-yard field goal. McManus missed wide left.

Hackett said Tuesday if he had to do it over again, he would have gone for it on fourth and 5. Wilson was asked Wednesday if he agreed with the coach changing his mind a day later.

"Look I think ... Yeah," Wilson said with a smile. "I think any time you get a chance to win the game and solidify it and try and make a play – I believe in always having the ball and everything else. But also we have a great kicker and we're going to believe in our kicker again."

For a few seconds there, after running back Javonte Williams gained 9 yards off a swing pass that set up fourth and 5, Wilson stayed on the field and was calling a play to his offensive teammates. But then McManus and the field goal unit came on and Wilson and company trotted off.

"I was at the line of scrimmage ready to go for it," Wilson said. "I was calling a play. We were ready to go, but that's what we decided and we went with it. We missed by, I don't know, a yard, maybe. Maybe half a yard, so it was close."

Wilson said it was a pass play he was calling, but otherwise didn't go into detail.

And so he moves forward, and during a walkthrough Wednesday morning, he was motivating his teammates to join him.

"I was telling the guys, the thing about great teams is, they always respond," Wilson said. "If you want to be a championship team you've got to respond. So how are we going to respond today?"

The power of positive thinking and preparation: Broncos quarterback Russell Wilson leans on lessons from late friend

By Ryan O'Halloran
Denver Post
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Looking to assist his client ahead of the 2012 NFL draft, Mark Rodgers recommended a meeting between Russell Wilson and Trevor Moawad, a sports psychologist whom Rodgers had met in baseball circles.

Wilson was training at the IMG Academy in Bradenton, Fla., where Moawad was a mental conditioning coach. After a successful college football career at N.C. State and Wisconsin and seasoned in handling life adversity (the death of his father) and career struggles (.229 minor-league batting average), did Wilson really need another voice in his head?

"I knew I wanted it," Wilson said during an interview with The Denver Post. "I don't know if needed it or not, but I know I wanted it and I've always believed in the mental side of things. That's really a critical part and a separator for me."

Those initial meetings were the start of a tight-knit relationship both personal and professional. Wilson and Moawad would talk nearly every day on the phone. Moawad would travel to Seattle for Wilson's Seahawks games. And in 2019, along with Wilson's brother, Harry, they launched Limited Minds, which brings competitive thinking to the corporate workspace.

The conversations — covering any topic at any time — continued during Moawad's two-year battle with cancer, which took his life last September. Since Wilson was traded to the Broncos in March, his new teammates have seen and heard first-hand how positivity is page No. 1 in No. 3's playbook.

"It's such a natural positivity because it's coming from a place of being prepared and of being able to know he can go out and have success because he's prepared to have it," receiver Courtland Sutton said.

The Broncos have embraced Wilson's modus operandi of staying positive and neutral, trying to get better each day, entering Monday night's opener against the Seahawks.

"When you hear Russell talk about much he loves the process and loves pushing all the guys and the coaches, it's awesome because it's inspiring to a coach," Broncos coach Nathaniel Hackett said. "It's something that makes you feel really good about your chance to be able to get where we want to get."

Every-day talks

Moawad, who was 48 when he died, worked with teams such as the NBA's Memphis Grizzlies and college football programs at Alabama, Michigan State, Florida State and Michigan, connecting with coaches like Nick Saban, Kirby Smart, Jimbo Fisher and Mel Tucker. He was also close with Los Angeles Clippers executive Lawrence Frank and tennis player Taylor Dent.

Wilson wrote the foreword for Moawad's 2020 book, "It Takes What It Takes," and the postscript of this year's, "Getting To Neutral," which was released posthumously.

Moawad's first book was about "neutral thinking," which he described as a "method of making decisions that requires us to strip away our biases and focus on facts. ... Neutral thinking asks you to focus on the next set of steps in order to move forward."

The second book, which included a foreword from Wilson's wife, Ciara, centered on overcoming negative feelings amid chaos. Moawad described six levels of competence and incompetence and Wilson checks the box of unconscious competence — "You've succeeded the task so many times, you can do it successfully without even thinking about it" — and conscious competence — "You know the steps required for success and you can repeat them."

"We would talk almost every day," Wilson said. "We didn't change up the message, we may have changed the story. The message was, keep the main thing the main thing, stay neutral, you don't have to be sick to get better — just reminders and little nuggets."

Wilson now self-delivers those reminders and little nuggets. Throw a first-drive interception that wasn't his fault? Pick up the offense. Score a touchdown to regain momentum? Go tell the defense to get the football back. Off the field issues? There is only one way to approach it in Wilson's mind.

"I believe in the midst of chaos, you have to remain neutral because if people are going through COVID, losing a child, injury, bad relationship, whatever it may be, it's hard to be positive in the midst of a storm," he said. "The critical part is learning how to be neutral. On top of the mountain? How to know how you got there and keep going. Lowest part of the mountain? How to keep going."

In his second book, Moawad wrote of Wilson: "As I watched Russell operate through the years, it was obvious he didn't allow his feelings to overtake his decision-making processes in moments of high stress or rousing success."

In a 2020 TED talk, Wilson said: "It's OK to have emotions, but don't be emotional."

Exhibit A was this offseason when Wilson, whose Seahawks contract had a no-trade clause, considered starting a new chapter with the Broncos or another team. It wasn't the time for a knee-jerk reaction. He dug into the Broncos' 2021 game video to see if he would be joining a viable roster (he concluded he would be). Once in the locker room, the offense and, heck, entire organization, rallied to him.

"I've been in a lot of locker rooms and on a lot of teams and you lean on your experience and what you know," Wilson said in building a rapport.

No information withheld

In the spring of 2021, Moawad sent Wilson a message: "First you form your habits, then they form you."

Wilson's habit is to arrive early at the Broncos' facility and when the game week begins, he walks through the doors with one thought.

"Go win," he said. "Keep it simple and go win the football game. That's the thought."

Wilson has only won since entering the NFL — eight playoffs in 10 years and 104 regular season wins. The Broncos, meanwhile, have been mired in irrelevance since winning the Super Bowl in 2015. Wilson will be their fifth different Week 1 quarterback in as many years and the six-season postseason drought is the franchise's longest since 1976.

This is a roster with little winning memories much less playoff appearances. On offense, among the projected starters, only Wilson, running back Melvin Gordon and right tackle Billy Turner have notable postseason experience. Wilson has needed to instill the belief that things will be different.

“What I’ve learned is, the more experience and success you have, the more you can give,” Wilson told The Post. “I don’t withhold information. I want to pour it all out because I want this team to know as much ball as possible and that’s my responsibility.”

Said Sutton: “He tries to bleed his preparation over to the rest of the team and have us understand, ‘You can have confidence and positivity if you prepare yourself.’”

Gordon was Wilson’s teammate for a year at Wisconsin and reminds him of former teammate Von Miller. To a person, the Broncos believe with Wilson, they are in the contending mix. Finally.

“I try to find the positive in some things and sometimes, if (stuff) is negative, I’ll just say how I feel,” Gordon said. “Von thinks of the positive of any situation and that helped me a little bit and Russ is no different. If the defense is getting on us in practice, he’ll be like, ‘Hey, we’ve got two-minute. It’s our opportunity to come back.’ He’s always locked in. With him, it’s never over until there are all zeroes on the clock. We always have a chance.”

Adding to a legacy: Russell Wilson poised to continue impressive career in Denver

By Aric DiLalla

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The symbols of a player's legacy are hard to miss.

As you walk around Empower Field at Mile High on any game day, you can see reminders of the best players in Broncos history.

There's a navy John Elway jersey over there, an orange Peyton Manning jersey across the way.

Legends like Elway and Manning are even more entrenched. Their names are emblazoned along the fifth-level facade that displays the team's Ring of Fame, and their bronze pillars stand guard outside the south entrance of the stadium.

Towering over the south stands, their jersey numbers are displayed — and retired — opposite reminders of the three world championships they helped deliver to Denver.

Nearly 1,500 miles to the east, their legacy is even more prominently displayed in Canton, Ohio. In the Pro Football Hall of Fame, Elway and Manning — a pair of first-ballot inductees — have both their bronze busts and mementos from their careers inside the walls of the pro football's most sacred hall.

For the first time in quite a while, it seems realistic that Elway and Manning could some day have company.

As the Broncos enter the 2022 season with hopes of ending a six-year playoff drought and adding another Lombardi Trophy to their collection, they're led by a future Hall of Famer who is being called upon to transform both the Broncos' culture and restore their on-field prominence.

In a lineage of Broncos quarterbacks that is among the NFL's best, a question has emerged that seems increasingly fair to ask.

Is Russell Wilson next?

Some players shy away from grandiose questions about their legacy. They focus on the day-to-day process, deflecting big-picture hypotheticals.

Wilson isn't one of those players.

Perhaps because of his success — no quarterback in NFL history has as many wins through his first 10 seasons as Wilson — the Broncos' new starting quarterback leans into the responsibility and privilege of having a lasting legacy.

Wilson, whose unrelenting obsession with winning may be unmatched by his peers across the league, has long thought about how he wants his game to be remembered.

"I always do," Wilson says in August when asked if he considers the legacy he'll leave. "Every day I wake up, that's what I've always thought about. When I was a young kid, I thought about it. When I was watching Joe Montana, when I was watching Peyton Manning and Tom Brady and Drew Brees. Going to college, I always thought about it when I was at NC State and Wisconsin. My dad always used to tell me, 'You should play for this guy named Barry Alvarez one day.' I ended up going there [and] playing at Wisconsin.

"I went to Seattle, [and I] thought about it the day I got there and I was the third-string quarterback. The first day, I said, 'You know what? I'm going to win this job. I'm going to play here for a long time.' I was fortunate to be able to play an amazing decade there. What a great gift it is. And then to be able to hopefully play my last decade here, it would be a blessing.

"For me, every day I think about the legacy of it all."

During his first 10 years in the NFL, he certainly built the foundation of an indelible career. When Wilson arrived in Seattle, incumbent starter Tarvaris Jackson and prized free-agent addition Matt Flynn stood in the way of a starting job. Behind a strong preseason performance, Wilson surpassed both of them — and proceeded to lead the Seahawks to their third-highest win total of all time as a rookie. Wilson earned a Pro Bowl nod that season, as he would in nine of his first 10 years.

During Wilson's tenure, the Seahawks won fewer than 10 games just twice, and they finished with a losing record just once. Even in that campaign — which came last season as Wilson missed time with a finger injury — the electric quarterback threw for 25 touchdowns and just six interceptions in 14 games. A Super Bowl XLVIII champion, Wilson has thrown for more than 4,000 yards in four of his last six complete seasons, and he's thrown at least 30 touchdowns five times in that span. Wilson's quarterback rating has topped out over 100 in seven of his NFL seasons, and he's never posted a year with a quarterback rating below 92.6.

Wilson's best statistical season came in 2020, as he led Seattle to 12 wins and completed a career-best 68.8 percent of his passes while throwing 40 touchdowns and just 13 interceptions.

And, as mentioned, Wilson's 113 wins, including in the postseason, are the most in NFL history through a quarterback's first 10 seasons. He has Manning beaten by a single win.

Wilson, though, knows that none of his success would come without the nearly unending effort that he's turned in throughout his career and early in his time in Denver.

"You have to do the work," Wilson says. "We're all definitely doing the work, and that's the fun part about it. That's the part that I enjoy. I enjoy the process more than the end result."

The Broncos didn't just want Wilson. They needed him.

Since Manning retired following Denver's Super Bowl 50 win, the team has cycled through a number of options at the game's most important position. They've tried homegrown players, free-agent additions and veteran trade acquisitions.

Though a couple of players have come close to leading Denver back to the playoffs, the Broncos have suffered through a stretch that compares only to the franchise's early days. Only the New York Jets currently have a longer streak without a playoff berth without the Broncos.

The lack of success does not stem from an inability to compete. The Broncos had a talented roster on the heels of their championship team, and General Manager George Paton constructed one of the league's best rosters in 2021. A season ago, the Broncos featured the NFL's third-ranked scoring defense, dynamic options at wide receiver and a couple of the league's top rookies in Pat Surtain II and Javonte Williams.

The Broncos, though, needed their final piece. And as the team entered the offseason armed with a new, offensive-minded head coach in Nathaniel Hackett, they quickly zeroed in on the game-changing option they wanted to be their new quarterback.

"Once we knew that Russell could be available, he was our No. 1 target — he was our priority for the offseason," Paton said at Wilson's introductory press conference. "We were going to do anything it took to get Russ. It's just unique that you can trade [for] a quarterback — a franchise quarterback — in his prime, and we just felt that we had to take that chance. ... He has elite arm strength, elite accuracy. We feel he has the best deep ball in the NFL. Then, you watch him off schedule — his eyes and his instincts and the play-making ability. The 'It' factor that all great quarterbacks have, Russ has. He's the best in the biggest moments. He's best at the end of the game — to win the game.

"... Here we are bringing him to a team that is talented, that is hungry, that just needs to learn how to win — and we feel like he is going to get us to where we need to go."

The next step in Wilson's career is to lead Denver's core group of players on that journey.

What better way to improve a legacy than to accomplish a feat that's been done by just a couple of players in NFL history?

In 2015, Manning became the first quarterback to lead two different franchises to Super Bowl titles. In 2020, Tom Brady matched the quarterback with whom he battled often during his career.

Wilson could be the third.

He also could be the third quarterback to find instant success in a new setting. Brady won a world championship in his first year with the Buccaneers, and Matthew Stafford earned a title in 2021 in Year 1 with the Rams.

Wilson admits the possibility of winning a title with a new team helps drive him as he begins the next chapter of his career.

"I think any day I get to play it's motivating, no matter what the circumstances are," Wilson said. "But definitely, it's inspiring to see guys that I know like Tom and obviously Peyton — who I have close relationships with — the success they've had and the careers they've had. Winning is a habit. We're creating those habits right now in the midst of it all."

As Wilson and the Broncos build the foundation for a successful season, Hackett can sense the energy that Wilson is carrying with him.

"I think any time you're with a team and then you go to another team, there's always that excitement," Hackett said in mid-August. "It's kind of like you never know what you have until it's gone. For us, we're just so excited to have somebody here like him. I think for us, it's just about letting Russ be Russ and watch him go out there and execute. [It's about] supporting him and being there for him so we can continually bring

that energy every day and that standard that he sets. I think he's reenergized. He's fired up, and we just want to keep feeding off that every day."

Facing a new opportunity, Wilson will look to carve out the next successful chapter of an already impressive career. He'll look to add to the Broncos' world championship total — and to a legacy that's not yet done being written.

The Broncos Will Be Good Because Russell Wilson Said So.

By Ben Shpigel
The New York Times
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Russell Wilson does not believe in balance. That word suggests that he in any way conserves energy, parceling it out among football and family, his fans and his business ventures, instead of investing every neuron of his being into whatever he is doing in the moment.

His first training-camp practice as the starting quarterback of the Denver Broncos offered a sun-drenched affirmation of Wilson's approach. Springing from the team's headquarters and onto the practice field that July morning, he bounded, over the next two or so hours, from One Most Important Thing to the next.

Wilson high-fived legions of new admirers thronging behind the end zones. He approached first-day drills as if they were postseason plays, barking cadences to his new teammates, evading rushers, tossing touchdowns. When he was done, after snapping selfies and signing autographs, he hustled over to embrace his wife, the singer Ciara, and their three children at midfield. All five wore Wilson's No. 3 Broncos jersey.

Wilson does believe in intentionality, in the power of deliberate language. No one in the N.F.L. peddles positivity quite like the 33-year-old Wilson, who amplifies the merry snapshots of his #blessed life on social media: football highlights, glimpses from his visits with sick children in hospitals, Christmas-card worthy photos of his family in coordinated outfits.

The Good Vibes Only aesthetic he conveys, all Bible verses and maxims, coupled with his arching deep passes and creative playmaking style, elevated him to football stardom in Seattle, where his charmed run over a decade included four division titles, two N.F.C. crowns and a Super Bowl victory.

But by last season, life in Seattle seemed less perfect, enough that Wilson's polished messaging shifted in a media blitz before the 2021 season. He asked for more say in personnel. He sought better protection up front. He wanted more control.

But Wilson broke a finger midway through the season and missed the three games, the first in his N.F.L. career, leaving him with less direct control on the team's success. He spent "19 or 20" hours a day rehabbing and rushed back to the field to win his final two starts, but he still wound up with the first losing season of his N.F.L. career.

Winning is central to the Wilson brand. The TVs in the weight area of his San Diego home blare just one word, without punctuation: win, which also happens to be the name of his youngest son.

To that end, Wilson employs a private performance team — personal trainers, physical therapists, masseuses, et al. — to optimize his physical and mental health. His longtime personal quarterbacks coach, Jake Heaps, even relocated to the Denver area from Seattle.

“It drives purpose, and our purpose is to win,” said Will O’Brien, Wilson’s former high-school strength trainer in Richmond, Va., and a member of the group for the past year and a half. “I think a lot of folks maybe are not brash about saying it openly. We are. Russ is.”

Wilson waived his no-trade clause to facilitate his arrival in Denver. The Broncos had presented the best opportunity for professional and personal satisfaction (offensive scheme, management, geography), as well as compensation that would appeal to the Seahawks.

“I wasn’t just going to go anywhere,” said Wilson, who was traded to the Broncos in March in a package that netted the Seahawks five draft picks and three additional players. “I felt like this team can be great.”

Soon after the deal, Wilson FaceTimed his new receivers and said he picked the Broncos — that he picked them — for a reason: He thought they could win the Super Bowl. Then Wilson added, that is what they are going to do.

The conditions for manifesting that outcome are favorable in Denver, where Wilson will finally play in a high-volume passing game helmed by an offense-minded head coach in Nathaniel Hackett. As they were early in his career in Seattle, Wilson’s efforts should be balanced by a strong defense. It’s all being financed by the Broncos’ new ownership group, the N.F.L.’s wealthiest, which earlier this month awarded him a five-year contract extension worth a guaranteed \$165 million.

His quest renews Monday night when the Broncos open the season against, coincidence of coincidences, the Seahawks in Seattle.

Since the trade, Wilson has not elaborated on either the good or the bad in his time there — the games won and lost, the relationships fostered and frayed, the semantics cloaking his departure. Seahawks Coach Pete Carroll, known for preaching mindfulness and visualization techniques, would say only that the team hadn’t been “spurned” by Wilson.

“It wasn’t like it happened to us,” Carroll said in an interview after a mid-August practice. “We were prepared to make it happen.”

It seemed telling that two men known for expounding on the power of positivity ended a successful era with such terse, and nebulous, statements.

Athletes’ challenges — injuries, personal tragedies, professional slights — tend to connect with fans as much as their triumphs. Wilson’s penchant for platitudes can obscure exactly how much adversity has shaped him, with the challenge seemingly revealed in his tears after a big win. The death of his father, Harrison, from diabetic complications in 2010. N.F.L. teams having passed on him in the draft because of his height. His infamous interception in the Super Bowl in the 2014 season that ended Seattle’s bid for back-to-back titles.

The trade wasn’t the only upheaval to Wilson’s life. Trevor Moawad, Wilson’s close friend and the architect of his mental approach, died of cancer in September 2021. They’d met as Wilson prepared for the 2012 draft, and Moawad moved into Wilson’s San Diego place the day after that Super Bowl interception and stayed for a month. Throughout their friendship, Wilson could depend on Moawad to say two things: that he believed in Wilson and that the best was ahead.

It was Moawad who had instilled in Wilson the power of what he called neutral thinking, acknowledging negativity but then moving on from it at once, which he appeared to apply to his friend's death.

"No, it wasn't difficult," Wilson said. "I've lost my dad. I lost a best friend, Trevor. You know they're going to a better place. Those memories live in me forever." He added, "Everybody can write what they want. I'm always having fun when I'm on the field, when I'm with my teammates."

Maybe so, but Wilson was definitely not enjoying himself in February 2021, when he simmered in a suite at the Super Bowl watching Tampa Bay beat Kansas City instead of playing in the game. With a new team built around his talent, Tom Brady got championship vengeance after being discarded by the Patriots the season before.

Robert Turbin, Wilson's close friend and a former N.F.L. running back, said Wilson reminded him of Michael Jordan and Stephen Curry, who funneled others' doubt, real or perceived, into motivation — and championships.

"He's all positive and love and Christ and all this kind of stuff," Turbin said. "But he is listening. He's watching. I can promise you that."

Soon after returning to his off-season home in San Diego, Wilson stayed up late watching Jordan's N.B.A. highlights before sending a middle-of-the-night Instagram message to Tim Grover, the trainer who worked with Jordan throughout his six championship runs and later, Kobe Bryant. Grover agreed to become a sort of efficiency expert for Wilson, organizing his daily training and adjusting Wilson's regimen after the trade to account for Denver's altitude.

"Everyone talks about the switch, how the greats know how to turn the switch on and off — the greats never turn the switch off," Grover said. "It's not. It's a dimmer. They never turn it all the way off."

Wilson has talked about studying legends in all sports, about wanting to be remembered, about what his legacy will be. Turbin speculated that the former Denver quarterbacks John Elway and Peyton Manning, two-time champions each, represented a standard for Wilson to match. But Wilson also opted to join a team in the A.F.C. West, in which two of the league's brilliant young quarterbacks — Justin Herbert and Patrick Mahomes — will challenge him.

"He's very calm, cool and collected, but you will never know what he's truly thinking," Tim Patrick, a Broncos receiver, said. "I've tried to get it out of him. I've pushed buttons every day — 'you're little, you can't do this' — just to see if I can get a reaction. Never. He just laughs at me. You can't get him out of what his goal is for that day."

Several people, including Turbin and the quarterbacks coach Klint Kubiak, have noted Wilson's joy in Denver, equating his enthusiasm with that of a rookie striving to prove himself.

"When I first got around him, I was like, 'This can't be real. This is going to last for a day or two,'" Broncos General Manager George Paton said. "This is him."

His happy intensity has spread urgency to a roster unacquainted with it. In huddles, Wilson asks to see his teammates' eyes so he can look directly into them, and at his urging, they now carry water jugs and test

their hydration levels before practice. Twice during the off-season, Wilson invited members of the offense to train at his property in San Diego.

“This dude wants us sweating,” the fourth-year offensive lineman Dalton Risner said. “He wants us taking the right steps. He wants us doing everything right. He lives out that championship lifestyle.”

Before Wilson came to Denver, Risner perceived walk-through practices as a respite, a time, he said, to put on a ball cap and chill. Not anymore.

“They ask me, ‘How many days off do you have?’ I just kind of laugh,” Wilson said after a mid-August practice. “How many days off do I get? I don’t take days off. Every day, 365 days, this is what I do, this is my lifestyle. Every day. For me, I get to play 20-plus years, that’s the vision, that’s the goal.” He added, “If you always worry about what’s ahead, you always pass up today. So you know what I stick to? I stick to joy. Just joy.”

Kiszla: Beneath sweet as cotton candy demeanor, Russell Wilson snarling to show Seattle he's still elite NFL quarterback

By Mark Kiszla

Denver Post

September 9, 2022

Rather than the sweet cotton candy Russell Wilson routinely spins when talking about everything from football to family, he spit nails Thursday to hammer home a point to any fool from Denver to Seattle who doubts his status as a truly elite NFL quarterback.

"I believe in my talent and who I am. I'm one of the best in the world. I don't worry about anything else," said Wilson, his body rocking with the competitive passion of a winner itching to not only prove he's on par with Patrick Mahomes and Aaron Rodgers, but also prove the Seahawks dead wrong.

As he prepares to play his first game for the Broncos since arriving from Seattle in a blockbuster trade, the plot has thickened and Wilson's upper lip has stiffened with resolve to show coach Pete Carroll and the Seahawks they were fools to ever doubt him.

A 33-year-old quarterback who returns to his old stomping grounds for the 2022 season-opener is washed up, if you believe the whispers coming out of the Pacific Northwest. I find it impossible to believe the Seahawks would have traded Wilson if they believed he was a top-five quarterback in the league worth the five-year, \$245 million extension recently given him by Denver.

And know what might be more insulting?

Despite the fact Wilson threw nearly 300 regular-season TD passes and led Seattle to a championship during a decade of Pro Bowl caliber work, the Seahawks seriously considered pushing him out the door long before Broncos general manager George Paton came calling earlier this year.

While trying to paint this reunion with the good fans of Seattle as a sweet trip down memory lane, something very close to a snarl protruded from Wilson's preternaturally sweet demeanor when he acknowledged Seattle explored trading him as far back as 2018.

Does it upset Wilson that the Seahawks considered trading him more than once?

"They tried to (make a trade) a couple times and tried to see what was out there. It's part of the business and it's part of being a professional and everything else," Wilson said. "Upset is probably the wrong word."

Hey, why waste energy getting mad when the scoreboard is there so you can get even?

While the Seahawks might doubt Wilson, I asked what his level of confidence is that he's still a truly elite NFL quarterback.

“I think every year, you have to prove that. I think every year you have to go out and show up every day,” Wilson said.

The ultimate statistical measure of a quarterback is his win-loss record. While Wilson’s 66.1 win percentage is impressive, it pales in comparison to the 76.9 success rate produced in regular-season games by Tom Brady.

“You want your career to be a reflection of being one of the best in the world. I think my first 10 years have been a positive reflection. But there’s more to do,” said Wilson, anxious to get the second act of his career started in Denver. “There’s a lot more to do, a lot more I want to do and a lot more we have to do as a team.”

With Wilson wearing blue and orange, the Broncos have returned to the championship conversation for the first time since Peyton Manning retired.

“When you’re in my position, everyone’s trying to get that franchise quarterback. And we have one under contract for seven years,” Paton told me on the day Wilson’s new deal with the Broncos was announced. “It’s tough to compete, especially in our division, if you don’t have that franchise quarterback. There’s very little room for error if you don’t have him.”

The divorce between the Seahawks and Wilson was messy, and more protracted than we originally realized. Yes, I suspect there will be fans at Lumen Field who will boo Wilson. But this is not Carmelo Anthony returning to play the Nuggets in Denver after forcing his way out of town. There is much about this reunion for Wilson and Seattle to celebrate.

“People are going to love you,” Wilson said, “and they are going to hate you sometimes, whatever it may be.”

Wilson firmly believes he can be one of the top quarterbacks on the planet for another decade. Paton bet the Broncos’ future that Wilson is correct.

The Seahawks, on the other hand, think Wilson is living in the past. Is Carroll delusional to believe he can make the playoffs with Geno Smith or Drew Lock as his starting quarterback?

On Monday night, when Denver takes the field in Seattle, we’ll find out if Wilson’s truth can make the Seahawks’ alternative facts look foolish.

How Russell Wilson and the Broncos reached the biggest deal in team history

By Nick Kosmider
The Athletic
September 2, 2022

It was 30 minutes before midnight when George Paton began to lose the battle against his eyelids.

No week this side of the NFL Draft is more demanding for general managers than the period that encompasses roster cutdowns and the subsequent waiver-wire process, and Paton was feeling the weight of that grind late Wednesday night. As he awaited word from his cap specialist, Rich Hurtado, that a massive extension with franchise quarterback Russell Wilson had been signed and delivered, Paton finally gave in to his body's demand for sleep.

"And then the phone rang — I don't know what time it was, maybe 11:45 — and it was a FaceTime and it was Russ and (his wife) Ciara," Paton said. "I couldn't figure out the phone, so I lost 'em. I was like, 'Are they going to ask for more money? What are they doing?' But they called again, I answered, and it was one of the best phone calls I've ever received."

Wilson was calling Paton to let him know that the deal, a five-year, \$245 million extension that is scheduled to keep Denver's new quarterback in town for seven more seasons, was done. Hurtado and Wilson's agent, Mark Rodgers, hammered out final details just before the Sept. 1 deadline the two sides had agreed to place on the negotiations. Wilson received the good news from Rodgers just after returning from a dinner Wednesday night with more than a half-dozen veteran teammates and head coach Nathaniel Hackett.

"I wake him and say, 'George, we got a deal,'" Wilson said Thursday, joined by his family at a news conference to announce a deal that makes him the league's second-highest-paid quarterback in terms of average annual value, behind Green Bay's Aaron Rodgers. "He was slowly waking up and he was, like, 'Yaaaahhh.' So I'm glad I woke you up out of your dreams."

That call wrapped a bow on a five-month process that began shortly after the Broncos acquired Wilson from Seattle in March for five draft picks and three players. A long-term agreement became virtually inevitable when Wilson declared at his introductory news conference that he wanted to finish his career with the Broncos, despite being under contract at the time for only two more seasons. Both sides were motivated, but an impending ownership transition pushed discussions into August.

The massive extension was ultimately signed just more than three weeks after the NFL approved the \$4.65 billion purchase of the team by Rob Walton, Greg Penner and the rest of their ownership group. In the landscape of elite quarterback extensions, that's quick work. Just ask the Baltimore Ravens, who are still trying to come to an agreement with former MVP Lamar Jackson after months of negotiations. It also was an early message from the Walton-Penner group that it is willing to aggressively pursue deals it wants to get done.

"Greg rolled up his sleeves and he was a big help," Paton said of Penner, the team's new co-owner and CEO. "His support, his communication, his responsiveness and, of course, the resources were instrumental in us getting this deal done."

Wilson's contract comes with less guaranteed money overall than the deals signed earlier this offseason by Cleveland's Deshaun Watson (all \$230 million guaranteed) and Arizona's Kyler Murray (\$189.5 million of \$230.5 million). Wilson said he wasn't concerned with resetting the market with his new deal or setting a record for guaranteed dollars. After months of discussions with Paton and others in the organization about their long-term vision, Wilson said his priority with the deal was giving "George enough space to work his magic," adding he believes the Broncos will soon become a destination for free agents.

"For me," Wilson said, "it wasn't about how much (money), necessarily. It was about how many. How many Super Bowls can we win? That's really the focus."

Still, Wilson's signing bonus of \$50 million is the third largest in NFL history behind those given to the Cowboys' Dak Prescott (\$66 million) and the Rams' Matthew Stafford (\$60 million). All teams have to abide by the constraints of the salary cap in the NFL, but being able to deliver near top-of-market cash at signing is the product of a new ownership group with extensive resources. And it's why negotiations heated up almost immediately upon Penner's arrival.

"We really kind of started talking about this deal over the last three weeks," Wilson said. "It was pretty fast."

That's not to say this was a matter of just throwing big money on the table. This was also a shrewd deal for the Broncos. Yes, Wilson is 33 years old and is coming off a season in which his EPA per dropback, a measure of play-to-play efficiency, was the lowest of his career. Concerns about whether he has lost some mobility and what that could mean for his overall production are fair. But some of last season's dip can be attributed to the broken finger he suffered midway through the season that had to be surgically repaired, kept him out of three games and affected his release for at least a couple of games after he returned. The Broncos point to his final seven games last season — 64.6 percent completion rate, 15 touchdowns, three interceptions, 104.7 passer rating — as evidence that talk of a decline has been greatly exaggerated.

This offseason, according to Paton, Wilson has looked "like he has fresh legs, he can move and he looks young."

The structure of the deal also provides flexibility for the Broncos. Wilson still takes up less than 10 percent of the salary cap this season (7.7 percent) and in 2023 (9.8) as he finishes the final two seasons on the original four-year, \$140 million extension he signed with the Seahawks in 2019. By the time his cap hit spikes, jumping to \$55.4 million in 2025, the Broncos will once again, barring more trades, have a full complement of first- and second-round draft picks to work with. They will also benefit from the salary cap continuing to balloon as TV deals do the same, giving them multiple avenues to build around their high-dollar quarterback.

Russell Wilson's contract

Year	GTD	Cap Hit
2022	\$7 million	\$17 million
2023	\$8 million	\$22 million
2024	\$17 million	\$35.4 million
2025	\$0	\$55.4 million
2026	\$0	\$58.4 million
2027	\$0	\$53.4 million
2028	\$0	\$53.4 million

Figures via Over The Cap

“I believe this deal is a win-win for everyone,” Paton said. “This allows us to keep building and maintaining a championship roster.”

The first potential out on the deal would come after the 2025 season, when the Broncos would be able to move on from Wilson, who would then be 37, and save \$27.2 million while absorbing a \$31.2 million dead-money hit. After 2026, the dead-money hit would drop to \$12.8 million. There is no guaranteed money on the contract after the 2024 season. The structure paints an obvious championship window for the Broncos, even if it’s one the team isn’t limiting itself to: four years, Wilson’s age-34 through age-38 seasons.

But Thursday was not the day to worry about escape hatches or when windows will close. After six consecutive seasons without a playoff berth, the Broncos are fully allowing themselves to enter 2022 with hope. Wilson firmly believes he’ll still be playing elite-level football when — not if, in his view — he reaches the back end of the contract. He said the deal signaled the start of “the second decade of my career.” He called it “a blessing” that the deal was finalized 11 days before Denver’s season opener, a Sept. 12 return to Seattle, where Wilson’s new team will face his old one.

“This is really about us trying to do this thing together,” Wilson said. “I can’t wait to have a lot of fun, starting this week, and we’ll get ready to roll.”

‘We want to make this a destination location’: Russell Wilson, Broncos prioritize future success with contract extension

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
September 2, 2022

General Manager George Paton had dozed off.

A day earlier, the Broncos’ personnel department had worked into the late hours of the night as they sorted through hundreds of players who had been waived as teams cut their rosters to 53 players.

By Wednesday night at 11:30, with the Broncos in the midst of contract negotiations with quarterback Russell Wilson, Paton had fallen asleep.

He was jolted back awake not long after by a FaceTime call from Wilson and his wife, Ciara.

“I couldn’t figure out the phone so I lost them,” Paton said Thursday, “and I was like, ‘Are they going to ask for more money? What are they doing?’”

The Wilsons, instead, were calling to inform Paton that the extension had been finalized, and Wilson was set to be in Denver through 2028.

“It was one of the best phone calls I’ve ever received,” Paton said. “Ciara and Russ and even [Wilson’s agent] Mark [Rodgers] was on the call. Pretty cool stuff. I’ll remember that — [it’s] the best I’ve felt after a deal.”

Paton wasn’t the only one. The reaction to the deal — in both the Broncos’ locker room and the media — was overwhelmingly positive. In many ways, the deal set the tone for the next era of Broncos football.

“I believe this deal is a win-win for everyone,” Paton said. “This allows us to continue building and maintaining a championship roster.”

The structure and specifics of the deal, according to both Paton and Wilson, will allow the Broncos to build a franchise that is competitive for years to come.

“To me, what it’s really about is being able to win championships and be able to have enough space on the salary cap so that George gets to make his magic and we get guys like Randy Gregory when he comes on the team or other great players,” Wilson said. “I think that we want to make this a destination location. I think it’s one of those things where we have an amazing tradition of an amazing football team. We’ve got a lot of amazing new faces. ... I think what’s important, too, is you surround yourself with amazing players. For me, I love these guys. We’ve been having a blast. It’s been an amazing joy, and so, for me, it wasn’t really about how much, necessarily. It was about how many — how many Super Bowls are we going to win? And that’s really the focus.”

Wilson said he had conversations with both Paton and Rodgers about ensuring that he wanted the Broncos to be able to retain their own talent and sign free agents in the future.

“We talked about how we want to build a championship team, win Super Bowls and to sign guys down the road,” Wilson said. “Obviously, we got some amazing starts such as Pat Surtain [II] and so many other great players, the Jerry Jeudys of the world and Javonte Williams. I love my guy Melvin Gordon [III]. There are so many other amazing talents and guys on the defensive side. ... This team is really special.”

The Broncos’ talent — along with the leadership of the franchise’s ownership group, president, general manager and coach — convinced Wilson that he wanted to be in Denver long-term.

So while Wilson’s contract extension was a major step, it was also just the beginning of an era that Wilson hopes lasts the rest of his career.

“I truly believe we’re building something special here,” Paton said. “This is only the beginning.”

Broncos quarterback Russell Wilson ranked No. 61 on 2022 NFL Top 100

By Ben Swanson
DenverBroncos.com
August 15, 2022

For a 10th consecutive season, Russell Wilson has earned a spot on the NFL Top 100 player rankings. Ahead of his first season as a Bronco, Wilson received the No. 61 spot on the list.

While this is Wilson's lowest ranking since first making the cut in 2013, it comes after a season in which Wilson missed three games due to injury. Even considering that, Wilson put up highly respectable numbers with 3,113 yards, 25 touchdowns, six interceptions and a 103.1 passer rating. Among quarterbacks who started at least 10 games in 2021, Wilson ranked fifth in the league in passer rating.

In Denver, Wilson is poised for a healthy bounce-back effort with an offense that Head Coach Nathaniel Hackett has said is tailored to what Wilson does best.

With weapons like Courtland Sutton, Jerry Jeudy, KJ Hamler, Albert Okwuegbunam and more, Wilson could be back in the Top 100's top 25 — the area where he was ranked in each of the eight previous editions of the rankings.

Welcome to Russell Wilson's House of Love, Respect and Care

By Vince Bzdek
The Gazette
July 31, 2022

One good man.

“One good man ain't much,” Janis Joplin sang. “It's only everything.”

I've been blown away by the impact one good man can have on a city and state. In this case, that one good man is Russell Wilson.

The guy has yet to throw a single pass in a game, and he's already made Colorado a better place, raising our collective hopes, spirits and goodwill toward each other.

I'm not even talking on the football field, where his arrival is being heralded as a potential return to greatness for the Broncos franchise.

His contributions off-field, to the community, even before the season starts are nothing short of staggering. Last Monday, he and his wife, Ciara, a Grammy-winning singer, pledged to donate \$500,000 annually to Colorado nonprofits through a partnership with Centura Health.

The couple's Why Not You Foundation will work with Centura's Health Equity and Advancement Fund to distribute grants to local and regional organizations that work to improve health equity, education, food security and social justice.

“Ciara and I have learned since moving here that Colorado is a place where people take care of one another and take great pride in their communities,” Wilson said in a statement. “I'm grateful that I can use this opportunity to join with Centura to give back and support individuals and groups making a difference.”

Since 2014, his Why Not You Foundation, “in partnership with corporate sponsors, has raised over \$10 million for pediatric cancer research and created initiatives to support children's health and education while fighting poverty.”

The foundation gives annual “Dream Big: Anything is Possible” scholarships to underserved kids, as well. And the card machines at Safeway are already asking me to donate. (How fast does this guy work?)

Wilson and Ciara also opened a retail fashion store, House of LR&C, last week in the Park Meadows Shopping Center.

House of LR&C — which stands for Love, Respect and Care — features an element of “giving back.” Every sale at House of LR&C includes a 3% “profits less product cost” donation to the couple's Why Not You Foundation.

“What we are selling is bigger than just fashion,” Wilson said at the event. “It’s about doing good.”

According to a story on [moneyinc.com](https://www.moneyinc.com), Russell is one of the 20 most charitable athletes in the world.

He received the NFL’s Walter Payton Man of the Year Award in 2020 and just this year won the Bart Starr Award, which is given every year to the player who most exemplifies outstanding character and leadership.

When he was in Seattle, the couple gave \$1.75 million to fund a charter school south of Seattle, the Why Not Me Academy, dedicated to serving the needs of the underserved students in the area.

He and his wife also donated \$1 million to Feed America and Food Lifeline while in Seattle, and helped launch the Meals Up campaign, which delivered more than 50 million meals to people in need.

Wilson visited Children’s Hospital just about every Tuesday during the season in Seattle, a tradition he’s already continuing here in Colorado.

Here’s a person who doesn’t have time to whine about how bad things are in the country right now. He’s too busy doing all he can to lift folks up.

“We’ve met the fans (in Denver), who have been excited, which makes you excited,” he told one of our reporters, Dennis Huspeni. “It’s just surely been a memorable time for us, a significant time in our lives for so many reasons — and it feels good.”

Some sports pundits have speculated that this is all brand building for Wilson and Ciara. But I see something deeper going on.

“I grew up with nothing,” Wilson said at the opening of the store. And he wants people who don’t have much to feel what it’s like to experience the bounty he has. Why Not You? he asks.

Wilson gives a lot of credit to his mom and dad for his community-mindedness. Harrison and Tammy Wilson instilled in their children a drive not just to be good at what they do, but to make a difference at the same time.

His mom was an ER nurse, and seeing the difference she made with patients set the stage for his weekly visits to Children’s Hospital, where his presence brings mile-wide smiles to the young cancer patients there.

During his acceptance speech for the Walter Payton Award, Wilson told a story about his dad that explains another side of him.

He told the crowd that on June 8, 2010, he was drafted — by Major League Baseball. “The highest of highs in my life,” he recounted.

Just like that, the next day, June 9, his dad passed away, the lowest of lows, for Wilson. But Wilson had gotten to spend time with his father on his deathbed.

“He showed me what belief really was,” Wilson said. “He showed me what belief really was when he was on his deathbed and he didn’t have much left to live for. And I think that was a key part to my life.”

Wilson's belief in God, and consequently his belief in the general goodness of people, are at the root of the good he tries to do. It's not a belief he wears on this sleeve like Tim Tebow did, but he's not afraid to mention its importance to everything he does.

During that Payton acceptance speech, he tried to explain why he believes.

“I used to go to church all the time growing up — to see the girls,” he said. But the lessons learned there made a lasting impression.

He said he learned to “love big, serve big, and forgive big” at church.

You'll see a lot of Wilson's devotion to faith and family during his time with the Broncos. Ciara and the kids were there at camp last week in a show of support, just like Wilson and his teammates were there for Ciara at the opening of the House of LR&C.

Wilson's belief in the goodness of things to come is embedded in his children's names, even.

“Future, Sienna, Win, you guys have represented love,” he told his kids during that speech. “I love in the scripture in First Corinthians 13 where it talks about love and what it means. The chapter of love,” he called it. “Faith, hope and love, but the greatest of these is love.”

Welcome to the House of Wilson, Denver. If we all follow his lead, this may not only be a championship city again, it may soon be the City of Love, Respect and Care.

Wouldn't that be a nice change of pace?

Pope Francis said it best:

“All it takes is one good person to restore hope.”

How Denver Broncos QB Russell Wilson keeps his offseason from being a distraction

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

July 4, 2022

Hey look, Russell Wilson's throwing out the first pitch at the Colorado Rockies game.

No wait, he's celebrating a Colorado Avalanche win, pom-pom in hand, the team's home ice in the background.

Or he's in Monaco, mingling with the storied Grand Prix's who's-who, A-list faithful.

Don't look now, he's giving the commencement address at Dartmouth. Or posing for photos, handing out the high fives and coaching at his passing camp, visiting patients at Children's Hospital.

In short, the Denver Broncos quarterback, acquired in a franchise-altering trade this past March, has been everywhere over the past four months. But those who have been around him say he has not let the football part of the equation suffer.

"He's all over the place, man," said Broncos guard Dalton Risner, a native of Wiggins, Colorado. "I grew up here, I know what it's like when the Broncos have a quarterback and a leader like that. But Russell, you can tell he wants to lead, on the field, in the community and he's going to be out there."

"When you're making \$30 million a year, you can get a private jet to get you around to wherever you want," running back Melvin Gordon III, a former teammate of Wilson's for one season at Wisconsin, said with a laugh. "It's really easy to do that. [But] he's all about football, though. He's locked in, and there is no other way to put it. ... He comes in at 6:30 in the morning and he's tapped in. He's going over stuff with young guys, with older guys. He's really trying to change the feel around here."

Wilson's desire to quickly become part of his new community only seems to inspire him to push all the more when a football is in his hands.

"It's funny, when it first started, you're like, 'Woah, are you going to be able to pick this stuff up? Are we going to be able to own the offense like we want to?'" Broncos coach Nathaniel Hackett asked. "But he does such a great job of surrounding himself with great people that help him out so he can still do all of these things and still focus solely on football. It's unbelievable to watch. Every single second that he has, he's non-stop working. If he's on a plane, he's watching film, he's studying, he's calling people and he's calling me."

A Wilson FaceTime call is already something his teammates have learned to be ready for, or a flurry of text messages to the wide receivers or a swoop-in call from high above another time zone to bat around an idea about a route against a Cover 4 look.

Wilson makes no secret of his desire to cram as much life into every day as he can. But he is also quick to assure his new teammates and coaches where his priorities lie.

“First of all, football is the No. 1 priority, that’s why it never suffers,” Wilson said. “You do everything you can to spend the extra time, you get here early, leave late. You do all that stuff. One of the things that I believe in is that you pour your whole self into it, no matter where my feet are, I’m going to pour everything that I have into it. When I’m here, even when I’m away from here and everything else, the coaches and I, we’re constantly talking, players, we’re constantly talking.”

Just days after the Broncos acquired Wilson in March, the nine-time Pro Bowl selection was already organizing a throwing session in San Diego for many of his new teammates, including wide receivers, tight ends, running backs and even center Lloyd Cushenberry III. Throughout the Broncos’ offseason program, Wilson organized additional meetings as well as some on-field throwing sessions with the offense.

The meetings and sessions were detailed enough and players felt they were important enough that wide receiver Tim Patrick said if a player didn’t think they needed to attend “then you’re not serious about winning and you don’t belong on this team.”

Patrick also added that “if our quarterback does it, then no one has an excuse not to do it.”

No matter how much Wilson crams into the calendar, he says it’s still not as busy as when he played both baseball and football while attending NC State. Wilson was a good enough baseball prospect to have been selected in the 41st round by the Baltimore Orioles in 2007, then by the Rockies in the fourth round of the 2010 draft and even in his second season with the Seattle Seahawks (2013), as the Texas Rangers selected him in the Rule 5 draft.

“Everyone is always shocked with how busy I am,” Wilson said. “I’m like, ‘You think this is busy?’ I took 18 credits every semester in college. I played two sports. I went to football lifts in the morning, went to class, then went to baseball, played all night until 11 o’clock at night, then I did my homework. That was busy. That was the hardest thing I’ve ever done.

“Being able to do fortunate things, to be able to speak at Dartmouth, to support Ciara, my wife, and then also to do things with other guys and everything else, hangout when I can, it means a lot. One thing that I’ve always believed in is, it’s a lifestyle. You have to make your whole entire being and your thought process about winning, about being successful. With that comes great opportunities but it also comes with great challenges. How do you manage those challenges? How do you think about it?”

A day with Russell Wilson: Broncos star coaches kids, helps community with foundation

By Troy Renck

KMGH

June 19, 2022

Russell Wilson talks as if he is reading from a teleprompter. There are no pauses, no mistakes, only a smooth delivery that is part star player, part presidential.

Nothing catches him off guard, a byproduct of his favorite habit.

“Beating the sunrise,” Wilson said. “I try to beat the sunrise everyday.”

Despite sleeping roughly four-to-five hours a night, Wilson attacks his schedule like a shark. There is no wasted movement, only film to watch, children to inspire, communities to help.

Wilson, 33, executed all three on Friday, the bulk of the day spent working with more than 400 kids at his first Russell Wilson Passing Academy in Colorado and announcing a monthlong fundraiser for he and wife Ciara’s Why Not You Foundation in partnership with Safeway.

At Chaparral High School in 100-degree heat, Wilson helped lead drills for campers as they ran routes and fired passes. Wilson used one station to take pictures with campers as his personal quarterbacks coach Jake Heaps — Heaps will leave his Seattle radio job and move to Colorado in late July — kept the lines moving. The camp finished with a dance contest — a boy named Charlie won over the crowd with his splits to a Michael Jackson hit — and Wilson taking questions from an audience of campers and parents.

Wilson made it clear that there is no elevator to the top floor in sports. Hard work is required in the classroom and on the field, and he encouraged parents not to have their kids specialize in sports unless they are “like a top 10 nationally ranked tennis player or something along those lines.” Wilson let the crowd know that he plans to finish his career with the Broncos, drawing cheers.

After Wilson high-fived campers, he met with the media, a throng of kids surrounding him. Wilson explained that he started his football camp with a friend as a junior in high school because “that way I could get prepared when I do it in the NFL.”

Simply put, he loves working with the kids, and has embraced Colorado.

It remains hard to articulate the thirst Broncos Country has for Wilson’s arrival after eating dirt the last six years and pretending it was gourmet.

“It’s been a blessing just to come here, to come to an amazing city like Denver and be a part of it with so many amazing teammates and great coaching staff,” said Wilson, who took BP at Coors Field with Peyton Manning on Thursday, hitting nine home runs. “Once I knew the trade was going to happen, I wanted to go to a city that wants to win, I wanted to go to a team that wants to win and I wanted to go to a city that knows how to win, and all those things were checked off a box here in Denver. I think we’ve got a chance.”

Wilson hustled off and arrived at a Denver Safeway roughly two hours later. The Russell Wilson and Ciara Why Not You Foundation remains integral to their life and their faith, as the couple is determined to leave an imprint that goes well beyond sports and music. “Much is given, much is required,” he told Denver7 at a presser attended by several young students from Denver Public Schools.

An in-store fundraiser was launched to help support equitable education access, food security initiatives, and children’s health. The fundraiser is simple with shoppers asked to round up their bill to the nearest dollar. One hundred percent of the donations raised at 125 Safeway and Albertsons stores across five states will go to the Why Not You Foundation for distribution to organizations working to uplift and empower young people.

At the event, Wilson offered insight into his character and motivation. The Why Not You came from helping convince a cancer patient in Seattle to try an experimental treatment that saved his life after he was given 12-to-18 hours to live. He told the young boy, who was reluctant and upset, “If it doesn’t work you won’t remember it (said with a smirk to ease the tension), and if it does you will be a miracle. So, Why not you?” Something similar happened in Wilson’s life when his mom prayed, he recalled, in his father’s hospital room, buying him more time with the family.

The Why Not You Foundation will help people in Colorado. But this wasn’t your typical business presser. Wilson’s ease with the crowd and the kids proved disarming. At one point, an older woman grabbed the mic and asked, “Why are you at my grocery store doing this while I am shopping?” Wilson laughed and asked what she bought. “Dish soap and gum,” she said. “Well, while you were getting that dish soap and gum I was talking about the foundation.. And what kind of soap did you get?” The woman responded, “Dawn!” ... “The good stuff,” Wilson agreed as the shopper thanked him and walked out the door.

Responding to kids’ queries, Wilson revealed his favorite food to cook (barbecue ribs using his grandmother’s recipe), his favorite cake (red velvet cheesecake because he had several pieces the night he and Ciara were married at Peckforton Castle in Liverpool, England) and why he began playing quarterback (it happened in seventh grade after the coach saw him pitch a baseball). I asked Wilson why it was so important to get involved so soon with the foundation. No one would blame him for taking a year to assimilate given the enormous pressure and expectations on him and his new team.

“Anytime in life you are blessed to do what you do — I am one of 32 people in the world that get to do what I do and God chose me for it — much is given, much is required. It is important to me anytime I walk into a room to try and inspire that room,” Wilson explained.

“That’s just God’s calling on my life. For me coming to this amazing city, this amazing community, it’s to make a difference. That’s what life’s about right? I don’t know how many days I have left. Anytime you wake up, I ask, ‘What am I trying to accomplish today?’ I am trying to have purpose, trying to inspire somebody. Ultimately, I know that I can help. For me, I firmly believe in bringing people together of all different races, all different socio-economic classes. I have an amazing gift to be able to throw a ball, and for whatever reason God graced that ball to help bring people together. So why wouldn’t me and Ciara help?”

Wilson walked off the stage a few minutes later, posed for pictures with checkout clerks and shoppers, presented kids with signed jerseys and then exited to his waiting SUV. Wilson always has somewhere to be. To whom much is given, much is required.

Russell Wilson's first passing academy in Colorado features 485 kids, high energy

By Kyle Newman

Denver Post

June 18, 2022

Of the 485 kids who attended the Russell Wilson Passing Academy on Friday, one took full advantage of an open-mic Q&A with the new Broncos' quarterback at the conclusion of the camp.

Will Wilson be with the Broncos for the rest of his career?

"That's why I came here, and that's the plan," Wilson told the crowd. "And to win a couple Super Bowls, too."

The crowd roared, one of many high-energy moments throughout the four-hour camp at Chaparral. The nearly 500 players aged eight to 15 stretched across two full fields, with about 50 coaches working an array of skill and training stations. There were a few high school varsity coaches, along with many youth coaches and a large contingent of Chaparral varsity players helping out.

The camp came together in about five weeks and cost \$225 per player, though Wilson reserved a large number of spots for scholarship kids. It marked Wilson's first passing academy in Colorado. He put on his first camp as a junior in high school, and has held them on an annual basis since in Seattle and at various other locations.

"I've done a lot of youth camps in my day and initially when I was told there were going to be about 500 kids, I wasn't too sure about it," Chaparral football coach Jeff Ketron said. "But it gathered steam really quickly, and the end turnout doesn't surprise me all that much."

"This camp shows the excitement of the fanbase — Russ in Denver and there's a lot of optimism with the Broncos this year, and these kids know it, too."

Wilson posed for a photo with every camp attendee, and also chimed in on teaching moments and drills while bouncing from group-to-group. The quarterback said afterward that his drive to pass the game along off the field is as great as it is to win on it.

"It's about the kids, it's about giving back and it's about trying to make a difference in the world," Wilson said. "These are the stars of the future and the guys and girls who are going to make a difference in the world, and hopefully I can give them a glimpse of what that looks like."

Will O'Brien, Wilson's personal trainer for the past couple of years and also his strength coach in high school, said Wilson's natural leadership is not only applicable to his professional teammates, but to players of all ages. O'Brien saw it back at Collegiate High in Richmond, Va., and again on Friday.

"We used to have early morning workouts, 6 a.m. on a Monday during the school year, and the kids' energy coming in was lacking," O'Brien recalled. "But as soon as Russ walked in, he brought everybody to

another level... That's what great leaders do and we saw it again (on a grassroots level) today. A guy who has risen to his stature, to make himself available and accessible to the kids, that's what it's all about."

Over the years, about 10,500 kids have participated in Wilson's passing academies, which are camps designed for players of all positions. Wilson said the idea to initially call it the Russell Wilson Passing Academy came as an homage to the Manning Passing Academy, which Wilson attended as a high school sophomore.

Friday's camp marked the third straight day Wilson made an appearance on the Denver sports scene on a Broncos off-day. On Wednesday, the quarterback and his family attended the Avs' Game 1 overtime win over Tampa Bay in the Stanley Cup Final, and on Thursday Wilson donned a Rockies uniform and took batting practice with Peyton Manning during pregame at Coors Field.

Wilson said he hit "eight or nine" homers.

"I was swinging away, baby," Wilson said. "It was fun and a great time (with Manning). Obviously, Peyton and I have gotten really close together over the years, but especially as of late, spending time together, watching film. We had a good time. Peyton was hitting some base hits. He didn't hit any out, but he came close on two of them."

Team Wilson helps Broncos QB spread his passing academy to Denver

By Mike Klis

KUSA

June 18, 2022

There is the team Russell Wilson plays for.

And there is Team Russell Wilson. It consists of Wilson, his personal trainer, his own strength and conditioning coach, a massage therapist and his own private quarterback coach. They are aside from Broncos coaches Nathaniel Hackett, Justin Outten and Klint Kubiak.

The personal help is all there to help Wilson become the best quarterback possible for the Denver Broncos.

Team Russell Wilson helped the Broncos' new star quarterback conduct his Russell Wilson Passing Academy for about 500 kids, aged 7 through 18, on a hot, sunny Friday at Chaparral High. Helping Wilson run his youth football camps is where Jake Heaps broke in as Wilson's personal quarterbacks coach.

They first met when Heaps, a former 5-star high school recruit and starter at BYU and Kansas, was an undrafted first-year player on the Seahawks' practice squad in 2016. He was in Wilson's quarterbacks room again as a member of the Seahawks' 90-man roster in the offseason of 2017.

"When I was trying to make the team on and off for a couple years, he and I really connected just through the work and the process," Heaps said from the sideline as Wilson was finishing up his passing academy with a camper dance contest. "Him seeing my work ethic, we really connected on that level. We got started with the youth camps, working with the next generation of quarterbacks. And then I got a random phone call five years ago asking me to come work out with him. I didn't know it was a tryout but I've been with him ever since. It's been a lot of fun."

Follow the journeys of Wilson day by day is to assume he is not one who enjoys lounging on his couch, watching sports. After his passing academy was finished at around 1:45 p.m. – 45 minutes later than scheduled as he posed for a photograph with each of the estimated 500 campers and signed autographs for all those asked – he rushed off to a 3 p.m. "Why Not You" Foundation event with his wife Ciara at a Safeway store. Sometime soon, he and his family are flying over to Europe and taking several of his teammates with him.

Oh, and on Thursday morning, the day before his camp and the day after the Broncos' offseason program concluded, he took batting practice and infield grounders with former Broncos quarterback Peyton Manning at Coors Field. Wilson, a former Colorado Rockies minor league second baseman, hit about 8 or 9 BP homers in the session and NFL Films was there to tape it.

"I was swinging away, baby," Wilson said. "It was fun. Obviously Peyton and I got really, really close over the years, especially as of late spending time together, watching film. I've always admired him. I went to his camp, The Manning Passing Academy years ago in Thibodeau, La. And I was one of 12 kids, kind of like this little circle here. And just because of that opportunity they gave me inspired me that much more. And hopefully I can do that for some other kids."

“But, yeah, we were having a good time. Peyton was hitting some base hits. He didn’t hit any out but he got close on two of them.”

That Wilson calls his camp a Passing Academy is a nod to the Manning family. Wilson organized and led his first Russell Wilson Passing Academy when he was a junior in high school in Richmond, Va.

“Yeah, the first camp kind of like this I went to was the Manning Passing Camp,” Wilson said. “So I said you know what, let’s call it the Russell Wilson Passing Academy. RWPA. Sounded good, sounded cool. That was in high school and it’s lived on since.”

Who is this guy? Wilson is a guy dedicated to being the best quarterback he can be, but his aspirations seem much larger.

“I’ve been fortunate to be able to do the Russell Wilson Passing Academy all over. We’ve gone all over the world, really,” Wilson said.

His college towns of Raleigh, N.C. and Madison, Wis. Seattle, of course.

“My first camp was actually high school,” Wilson said. “I was a junior. And my best friend Scott, I said ‘Hey let’s run a camp.’ That way we get prepared to do it in the NFL. That’s what we did.”

A junior in high school, no more than 5-foot-11, preparing to run youth camps once he makes it in the NFL. As if there was a doubt.

“We’ve met probably over 12,000 kids now at this point,” he said. “I remember we took a tour bus from Raleigh, North Carolina all the way to Chicago. We stopped in Chicago, we went to Wisconsin. We drove all the way out to Seattle, did Seattle. We’ve done Vancouver. We’ve done L.A. We’ve done China. We’ve done Shanghai. We’ve done Beijing. We’ve done Europe. It’s been amazing, we’ve gone international.

“And so to me to implement myself here in Denver and doing all those other major cities around the world, internationally, obviously Denver, Colorado, Seattle’s meant a lot to me, my colleges, it’s about the kids. It’s about giving back. It’s about trying to make a difference in the world and these are the stars. They’re the future. These are the guys and the girls who are really special that are hopefully going to make a difference in the world and helpfully I can give them a glimpse of what that looks like.”

But first, there is football. It’s why he has Team Wilson on his payroll.

“To come to an amazing city like Denver, to be a part of it with some amazing teammates, a great coaching staff,” Wilson said. “But also once I came here, once the trade was going to happen I was like, ‘Hey, listen, I want to make sure I’m going to a city that wants to win. I want to make sure I’m going to a team that wants to win. And I want to go to a city that knows how to win. And all those three things were checked off the box here in Denver. And I think we’ve got a chance.”

In pursuit of perfection, Russell Wilson utilized art of pushing offseason boundaries

By Mike Klis

KUSA

June 16, 2022

There was a red zone period during minicamp this week when several Russell Wilson throws soared just a tad high.

We're talking consistently an inch or two over the fingertips of various receivers in the end zone. Wilson is ordinarily so precise with his passing, it was as if he was purposely drilling his passes, say, 9 feet, 4 inches off the ground just to see if the likes of Courtland Sutton and Tim Patrick could stretch their usual catch radius of, say, 9 feet, 2 inches.

As they say, a guy never knows how far he can go unless he first goes a tad too far.

As it turns out, Wilson's pursuit of perfection has included making a few throws in the offseason that he ordinarily wouldn't try in the regular season. If he throws into coverage in June and gets picked off, so what? It's June. By taking a slight risk now – the Broncos' offseason ended Wednesday with a day of fun and games set up inside the Pat Bowlen Fieldhouse -- the boundaries are more established come September.

"No doubt. We try to be aggressive as heck down here," Broncos offensive coordinator Justin Outten said Tuesday. "There is a lot of throwing the ball down the field, just to see the landmark of the receivers and just to see the timing of the quarterback. We encourage those tight-window throws. The experimentation with this offense throughout these OTAs and this minicamp has been something that we have been looking forward to. Once the installations are done, you can start to settle down a little bit and be creative as far as the formations and motions and shifts.

"With Russell, he's a pro's pro. You'll give him some information and it will be a little bit outside of the box. He'll look at you funny and he'll see it work and then it comes to fruition. He's a really good guy to work with. He gives you feedback, and we also give him feedback. He's very coachable and in the position that he's in, he could easily tell us, 'It's my way or the highway.' He's been very good about just getting around the system and learning it all and asking questions every single day. It's been great."

It didn't always go smoothly for Wilson and head coach Nathaniel Hackett's offense during the 15 OTA and minicamp practices – eight of which were observed by the media. They looked good during the first day of voluntary minicamp before the draft in late-April. They looked good again on what turned out to be the final mandatory practice Tuesday.

In between, the defense had its moments – six of the top 10 paid Broncos are defensive players -- as the offensive players sometimes struggled with the complexities of Hackett's wide zone-running concepts -- and passes off the fake wide zone-running concepts.

Then again, a good offense is not supposed to be mastered in a day or a week or a month. If that were the case, it would be a simple offense. Not a sophisticated offense that keeps a defense off balance. After

operating the new offense the past nine weeks, Wilson likes it. And he believes the offense is far enough along that it's going to be productive when it counts on Sundays.

"I feel extremely confident in what we're doing," Wilson said earlier in the week. "We look really good. We're going against a great defense every day. That's the challenge we want every day—to go against the best. Our defense is the best of the best, and we're getting better every day. We're making touchdown plays, and guys are making key stops on defense. We're making key plays on key third downs. It feels great."

Wilson then went about making sure to compliment all offensive positions, naming as many players as possible. The offensive line was first. Then all the tight ends and receivers and running backs. He finished by circling back to praise his offensive line.

"We're going to have a really good football team," Wilson said. "The running backs we have, the tight ends, the receivers, and the line. I think we have a chance."

Yes, Wilson is relentlessly positive. If the sky is dark, he might see it as, hey, at least the sun won't burn the grass.

Still, when a quarterback who has earned 9 Pro Bowls in 10 seasons and averaged 11 wins a year through his first 9 healthy seasons believes the Broncos are going to have a real good team, that means something.

'Football's the No. 1 priority': Russell Wilson details ability to excel as a QB amid busy schedule

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
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Russell Wilson's defensive teammates have quickly learned about their quarterback's ability to operate on the move.

On plenty of occasions this offseason, Wilson has taken off and made something happen — and that approach isn't limited to the football field.

In the months since joining the Broncos, Wilson has made a hospital visits in Seattle and Denver, attended an event at the White House, jetted off to a Formula 1 race in Monaco and — most recently — spoken to recent graduates in Hanover, New Hampshire.

Over the weekend, Wilson delivered the commencement address at Dartmouth College, where his father and three of his uncles attended school. Wilson joked Monday that he may or may not have had the grades to get into Dartmouth, but the winter weather during a visit in eighth or ninth grade was enough to cross the school off his list.

The opportunity to return and honor his late father, though, was clearly meaningful to the Broncos' quarterback.

"It meant a lot," Wilson said. "To have my brother there, Ciara there. My mom unfortunately couldn't come but she watched live. It was just special. My sister couldn't come but she watched live too. It's just an amazing moment to be able to talk about his legacy and what he meant. The coolest part of the whole entire thing, I got there on Saturday and I had a few people come up to me and they just talked about my dad and what he meant to them and very successful people — people that were former teachers there, [Dartmouth football coach] Buddy Teevens. It really meant a lot to me, and I think that's just a blessing. And hopefully I can be a mere fraction of what my dad was to other people."

Perhaps just as impressive as Wilson's message to the Dartmouth graduates has been his ability to effectively balance his obligations with his career. That process, Wilson explained, stems from a simple understanding.

"Football's the No. 1 priority," Wilson said. "That's why it never suffered. I think you do everything you can to spend the extra time, get here early, leave late, do all that stuff. One of the things that I believe in is you pour your whole self into it. No matter where my feet are, I'm going to pour everything I have into it. So when I'm here — and even when I'm away from here and everything else — the coaches and I are constantly talking. Players [and I are] constantly talking. That investment into players getting better and trying to help them and vice versa, it's a key thing."

A loaded schedule is nothing new for Wilson, who has always aimed to maximize his time. In college, Wilson was a two-sport athlete whose schedule was always packed.

“As life grows, I’ve always been busy,” Wilson said. “Everybody is always shocked at how busy I am. I’m like, ‘You think this is busy?’ I took 18 credits every semester in college, played two sports. Went to football lifts in the morning, then went to class, then went to baseball. Played all night until 11 o’clock [p.m.], then I did my homework. That was busy. That was the hardest thing I’ve ever done.”

Wilson’s current lifestyle may seem easy to manage in comparison, and he’s mastered the way to keep football his top priority. His performance team joins him on each trip, and he counts on others to keep the logistics running smoothly.

“Everybody’s super organized and so there’s never wasted space,” Wilson said. “I think that’s the key thing, never wasting space.”

Head Coach Nathaniel Hackett, who in Green Bay worked with another quarterback with plenty of obligations, praised Wilson’s ability to handle his responsibilities.

“When it first started you’re like, ‘Whoa, are you going to be able to pick all this stuff up? Are we going to be able to own the offense like we want to?’” Hackett said. “But he does such a great job of surrounding himself with great people that help him out so he can do all these things and still focus solely on football. It’s unbelievable to watch and just watch every single second he has, he’s nonstop working. If he’s on a plane, he’s watching film, he’s studying, he’s calling people, he’s calling me. That’s what you appreciate. Everybody’s professional, everybody does things different. Some people are here and they might not work even as hard as he does when he’s leaving. I think that everybody’s different and he does a fantastic job learning everything.”

Wilson, of course, understands that his ability to spend his time in such a manner is a blessing.

“To be able to do fortunate things, to be able to speak at Dartmouth, obviously to support Ciara, my wife, and to do things with other guys, hang out when we can, it means a lot,” Wilson said. “One thing that I’ve always believed in is it’s a lifestyle. You have to make your whole entire being and your thought process about winning and about being successful.”

How Russell Wilson is already building his relationship with Rob Walton and the Broncos' new owners

By Zac Stevens

DNVR.com

June 14, 2022

It was date night for Russell Wilson and Ciara.

As the two enjoyed top-notch fish flown into Denver that day at Sushi Den, Wilson's phone rang. And rang. And rang.

George Paton and Patrick Smyth, the team's chief communications officer, wanted to be the first to tell Wilson that the organization had entered into a purchase and sale agreement with the Walton-Penner family.

But Greg Penner, Rob Walton's son-in-law who will be running the team on a day-to-day basis with his wife Carrie Walton Penner, wanted to personally deliver the news to the start quarterback as well.

"As soon as they called, I got a call from Mr. Penner himself. He called and I got to talk to him," Wilson said after Monday's mandatory minicamp practice. "I was like, 'Oh, this is interesting. This must be good news.' He called and I got to talk to them for a while, Greg and Carrie. [We] talked about a lot of stuff, but they got to meet 'C' (Ciara) a little bit. Just a cool experience."

The following morning, Wilson talked to Rob Walton, who is worth between \$50 billion and \$70 billion, on the phone.

But it wasn't Wilson and Walton's first time talking to each other.

In fact, when Walton visited the organization in May, not only did the two meet, they sat down and began to form their relationship.

"I got to spend some time with them. I got to spend time with Mr. Walton himself. I got to spend time with Greg Penner. I got to spend time with Carrie [Walton Penner] as well," Wilson explained. "We've had some really good bonding moments just about life and success and visions and all the things that they wanted to do and how they wanted to impact the Broncos."

And on Monday morning, just before the start of mandatory minicamp, Wilson finally got to talk to the fourth major member of the ownership group, Mellody Hobson.

"What a tremendous accomplishment and what a gift to be able to do what she's going to do. She's the first black woman to do this. This is a big deal. This is history. I think it's gone over people's heads a little bit. It's news," Wilson said about Hobson, who is the president and co-CEO of Ariel Investments and the chairwoman of Starbucks. "It's a tremendous representation for minorities, but Blacks in particular. I think the growth within the NFL and what they are trying to do—the Waltons, too. To do that and honor that is pretty awesome."

In less than a week after the deal became official, Wilson had not only talked to the top four members of the Broncos' new ownership group, but had begun building his relationship with them because he knows how important it is.

"Being able to talk to Mr. Walton himself and be able to talk to Greg and Carrie—it's an honor to be able to do that in the first place. In today's age of football, that relationship between players and owners is so critical because we're playing for ourselves and our families, but we're also playing for them, too," Wilson explained. "We're playing for this whole city. To be able to have that bond and that kind of relationship—you notice it a lot in basketball, particularly, with some of the ownership groups. There are some in football, too. That's been important."

Wilson not only knows the importance as a player, but he knows it from the ownership side as well with he and Ciara being part owners of the Seattle Sounders soccer team.

"I think that relationship is really important, and we want to do everything we can to win. That dialogue is everything. That's what helps win," he added. "It's been awesome. I think the new ownership group is going to be great."

Two of the reasons why Wilson believes in the new ownership group is because of their commitment to the community and their dedication to winning.

"It's about being successful and giving us all the resources we need to make sure that we're successful and do whatever we need to do and just be great," No. 3 explained.

With the ownership nearly in place, the Broncos will now have the four pillars of the organization—owner, general manager, coach and quarterback—set for the foreseeable future, something that has not been the case for years in Denver.

"I think for us, it's about doing whatever we can as players of giving ourselves the best chance," Wilson said. "I think Coach Hackett, and I think George Paton are amazing. These guys are top-notch guys. They know how to lead. So that's what we're excited about."

A day after giving the commencement speech at Dartmouth, his father's alma mater, inspiring the future generation, Wilson left the new ownership group with a similar charge.

"I think with change there comes great opportunity."

'A king in every room': How Russell Wilson is already taking command of Broncos, wowing teammates

By Parker Gabriel

USA Today

May 31, 2022

Long before Russell Wilson arrived in Denver as the Broncos' new star quarterback, before he won a Super Bowl in Seattle or earned the starting quarterback job as a 2012 third-round rookie, he was the new guy at the University of Wisconsin.

Wilson arrived on campus in Madison just a couple of weeks ahead of preseason camp after an accomplished career at North Carolina State – he accounted for 37 total touchdowns the year before and overall threw for 8,545 yards (57.6% completions) and 76 touchdowns against 26 interceptions over three seasons – but at the time also a bit of a rarity as a quarterback transfer.

With only a matter of weeks before the Badgers opened their season against Fresno State, part of Wilson's challenge, in addition to picking up the playbook and figuring out the nuts and bolts of life at a new school, was to make a quick impression on his new teammates.

So he threw a football against a pipe.

More than a decade later, Wilson is the new guy again, this time with the Denver Broncos, after a March trade delivered him to a playoff-starved franchise hoping that a star quarterback fills out an otherwise quality roster and opens a long window of championship contention.

Nine Pro Bowl appearances, 158 NFL starts and a world championship means everybody in the Broncos' facility knows more about the 33-year-old's resume than those in Madison did in 2011, but Wilson himself said recently that he's drawn from experience as far back as his collegiate days as he sets about not only settling in with a new franchise, but putting his fingerprints on it, too.

"The cool part about being able to almost start all over again is you're able to learn from your experiences and what's gone really, really, really, really well and from your experiences of, 'What could we have done better? What could I have done better?'" Wilson said. "And then also, too, the opportunity to just continue to learn. Every day I wake up, that's what I'm obsessed with is the ability to learn, keep growing, keep building and stacking the chips, in a way."

'A little folklore'

Bret Bielema laughs quite a bit when recounting old Russell Wilson stories.

Now the head coach at Illinois, Bielema recruited Wilson to Wisconsin in 2011 and, with the help of then-offensive coordinator Paul Chryst (now the head man in Madison), landed the quarterback over Auburn – which, Bielema intimated, had pitched Wilson on being the next Cam Newton.

Instead, he arrived on campus in July and, Bielema recalls, challenged a few guys to a game of "crossbar" on the field at Camp Randall Stadium.

“And they started on whatever yard line, and he proceeded to back up every five yards and throw the ball and hit the crossbar in the back of the end zone, which a lot of us can’t do from the 4-yard line, let alone the 40,” Bielema said. “He kind of just built a little folklore around him in that regard.”

Within a month, Wilson was named one of Wisconsin’s captains. A year later, Wilson showed up and won a job again, this time as a rookie in the NFL when he beat out newly signed quarterback Matt Flynn for the starting job in Seattle despite a widespread assumption he’d begin his career down the depth chart. According to a 2013 ESPN story, Wilson was taping up goals and giving them to Seattle coaches, taping them in his locker and talking about winning multiple Super Bowls before he ever won the starting job.

There’s no quarterback competition in Denver, of course, though the opening three months of Wilson’s tenure have been rejuvenating nonetheless. This spring at the team’s Englewood headquarters, it’s not uncommon hear comparisons to 2012, when Peyton Manning signed with the franchise as a free agent.

“There was a complete wave shift when Peyton walked into the building and he came in,” Broncos wide receiver Courtland Sutton said recently. “Everyone talks about how it was and how Peyton came in and the standard got set to a different level. Obviously, I wasn’t here when Peyton was here, but I was able to hear it from Emmanuel (Sanders) and (Demaryius Thomas), and they raved about it. Emmanuel would tell me Peyton would come in, he’d wear his pants, shirt tucked in, everything was to a ‘T.’ He had a mission, and he knew what he was coming here to do.

“It’s a very similar thing that Russ does. Russ comes in and he has an agenda of what he’s getting done that day. He’s coming in, he’s going to push himself and everybody around him to maximize what we can bring to the table. Anybody that remotely wants to get better will feed off of that and love to be around that.”

Down to the details

Actually winning football games and earning real, bona fide respect, of course, isn’t borne fully out of Dude Perfect-esque exploits, taping goals in your locker or tucking in your shirt.

In Denver, teammates have expressed a common refrain about the work their new quarterback puts in.

“He always has something to add on to just kind of help our offensive players evolve and adapt,” tight end Albert Okwuebunam said. “It could be just a little detail about protection, it could be a little detail about coverage and what we might do if we see this look. I think that’s one thing directly on the field that he’s been doing a good job of.”

Added offensive lineman Quinn Meinerz, “When he’s talking, we’re listening and we’re listening to every single detail because we’re all trying to be the best and that’s the goal here.”

That sounded familiar to Peter Konz, a former All-American offensive lineman at Wisconsin who was picked a round ahead of Wilson in the 2012 draft by the Atlanta Falcons. Konz started at center for 11 of Wilson’s 14 games at Wisconsin, meaning he as much as anybody in the program had to get up to speed with Wilson right away.

“The way he works hard is different than other people,” Konz said. “It’s easy to just say, you’re not running the route right or you should have had that block, but to actually discuss ways of getting better and not allow an ego to get in the way of it is huge.”

Searching for a specific example, Konz settled on the natural connecting point for centers and quarterbacks: His butt.

“I’ve had quarterbacks where, they want to put their hands on you and to put as much pressure (as they can) on you,” Konz said. “I’ve fallen over or false started because I’ve had quarterbacks basically push my ass up in the air and I’m falling down, and I’ve had guys who aren’t willing to work with me on what that means. I’m a 6-foot-6 center, so you don’t have to lift me up at all – I’m already pretty high compared to a lot of interior guys. Russell was willing to work on it and say, ‘Hey, where do you want my hands? How much pressure do you like?’ When I’m in the shotgun, he’d tell me, ‘Here’s where I want the ball. If it’s a read option, here’s where we want it placed.’ It was just those little details and the ability to work with people.”

In his lone year at Wisconsin, Russell Wilson made a fast impression on his new set of teammates en route to leading the Badgers to an 11-3 record.

As Wisconsin prepared to go to Soldier Field for a non-conference game that September, Bielema said he kept catching Wilson looking at an empty corner of the end zone from under center during practice.

“He’d come by after practice to watch film, and he’d stop by my office and grab a piece of bubble gum, and I’m like, ‘Hey, man, what were you doing every day? I saw your eyes going to that empty spot.’ He said, ‘Well, coach, I looked up the stadium, and I was visualizing where the 40-second clock was, so I was training my eyes to go there,’” Bielema said.

“I’m just like, ‘Oh, yeah, I knew that’s what you were doing. I’m glad I thought of that.’”

Now the Broncos offensive players are getting the full blast from Wilson through the first two phases of offseason workouts and into OTAs, except he has 10 years of starting experience at the highest level under his belt added to the equation.

“I think that’s the thing that allows us to be able to gain that connection with him,” Sutton said. “He’s prepping, but he’s also bringing us along with the prep. He’ll say, ‘Hey, what do you guys have going on right now? Come up and watch this,’ whatever it may be, it’ll be real quick, so I can see what he sees. I can explain to him what I may see in that, and then boom, we’re on the same page.”

‘A king in every room’

This time around, Wilson is new in proximity only.

Cornerback Ronald Darby is one of many on the roster who has played against him.

This spring, however, he’s getting his first up-close look. Darby said he “surprisingly” spotted Wilson and head coach Nathaniel Hackett standing in the back of a defense-only portion of a voluntary offseason workout a few weeks back.

“Like, he didn’t have to be there, but he was sitting back there with the head coach and they both were just watching. He likes to pick up on everything,” Darby said.

Darby smiled as he noted that Wilson walks around in his game pants long before practice starts, a habit that a few others seem to have picked up recently, too. Sutton said his quarterback “bleeds football.”

“Honestly, I didn’t know what to expect,” Sutton said. “I knew that Russ was an amazing football player. What Russ does on the football field is, you know, special to him. But the preparation, unless you’re around it, you don’t really understand. Being able to be around him and understand how he has been able to have the success that he’s had and to be a Super Bowl winner, it doesn’t happen by luck.”

Perhaps this as much as anything is what makes Denver interesting this fall. Wilson and a mostly new coaching staff are tasked with trying to get the Broncos back into contention, doing so right away and in perhaps the toughest division in football.

Year 1s, though, have been a Wilson strong suit. The 2011 Badgers set school offensive records, finished 11-3 and ranked near the top of the country in scoring (sixth, 44.1 points per game) and yards per play (fifth, 7.0). The 2012 Seahawks went 11-5 and won a wild-card game before bowing out in the divisional round with their rookie quarterback.

He’s not the only reason those teams had success, nor is he alone in Denver, which returns the core of a solid defense and an intriguing set of offensive skill talent. He will undoubtedly, though, be the focal point for the Broncos this fall and likely for as long as he continues playing.

Wilson 11 years ago was talking with Bielema during their short stint together when he imparted a message that stuck with the veteran coach over the years.

“There’s a king in every room,” Bielema said. “Russ really takes that to the highest level. He knew walking in that the expectation level that he wanted to set was from a leadership standpoint that would make others believe in him and follow, but not just follow blindly.

“They had to believe in him first, and that’s what he just has an uncanny ability to do and that really transcends the game of football.”

How Russell Wilson plans to ‘set the standard’ in Denver, as he did at Wisconsin in 2011

By George Stoia
The Gazette
April 19, 2022

It took only one practice for Bret Bielema to realize the special type of player and leader he had in Russell Wilson.

Bielema, who coached Wilson’s final year of college football at Wisconsin, recruited Wilson to Madison as a transfer from N.C. State in 2011, not knowing the future superstar quarterback would transcend the program. And it started with his first day on the field that July.

“Just to see the way he interacted with guys, to see how he prepared — you knew he was a guy that you don’t come across often,” Bielema told The Gazette. “He just attacks every day for what it is. He knows every day is a day to better himself and better everyone he’s around. He truly is what you see is what you get. He wears his heart on his sleeve.”

Now nearly 11 years later, Wilson is in a familiar spot in Denver, joining a new team for the first time in his NFL career after being traded to the Broncos from the Seahawks in March. And in his short time in Denver, he’s re-energized Broncos Country, bringing high expectations and an energy that hasn’t been felt since Super Bowl 50.

And like Bielema, it’s only taken a few days for those inside the Broncos organization to realize how lucky they are to have Wilson.

“We all can feel it,” Broncos receiver Courtland Sutton said April 12, two days into their off-season workout program. “The juice is just different. I wasn’t around when Peyton (Manning) came or was here, but from what I’m hearing from everyone who was here when Peyton was here, the juice and the energy is pretty similar, knowing we have a guy that has been at the top of that mountain before, has won a Super Bowl before, does know what it’s like to be at the highest level for his position and to lead a team to a Super Bowl.”

Wilson hopes to replicate the success he had in Seattle, where he was a nine-time Pro Bowler, making two Super Bowl appearances, including in 2014 when he beat the Broncos. The 33-year-old has made it clear he’s here to win, waiving his no-trade clause not only to be a Bronco next year but possibly the rest of his career.

But long before he made the Seahawks Super Bowl contenders and before he arrived in Denver this March to do the same with the Broncos, a 22-year-old Wilson had to navigate his way to becoming the player and leader he is today. And if there’s anyone who knows the type of immediate impact Wilson can have on a team, both on and off the field, it’s Bielema and those who were inside the Wisconsin program in 2011.

“He’ll set the standard and the expectation that no one else can match,” said Bielema, now the head coach at Illinois. “He’ll prepare, practice, rehearse and put himself in a position that when it comes time to

compete at the highest level of competition, he'll be the standard for what everybody else has to be at. I know that's what he did in college, I know he did that in Seattle and I know he'll do it in Denver."

In the summer of 2011, Aaron Henry took Wilson and his family to Jordan's Big Ten Pub in Madison.

Henry, then a star safety for Wisconsin, was assigned by Bielema to recruit Wilson on his visit. And it only took a few minutes for Henry to realize why Bielema wanted Wilson.

"Some people are able to just walk into a room and have this presence about them and that's what Russell had," Henry said. "From that moment, we were all-in to try and get him."

At the time, Wilson was still trying to decide if he wanted to play football or baseball after he was drafted in the fourth round of the 2010 MLB Draft by the Rockies. He was also fresh off a visit at Auburn, which was considered the favorite to land him, having just won a national title with Cam Newton at quarterback.

"They were telling him he was going to be the next Cam," Bielema said. "And what worked in my favor that I didn't realize, is that Russell wanted to be the best Russell Wilson he could be. He didn't want to be compared to anybody else. He wanted to set the standard for what he is.

"When he left my office, I told him if he didn't come to Wisconsin, go play at Auburn. The game of football needed Russell Wilson."

Wilson chose Wisconsin, and eventually football, and wasted little time accumulating himself into the program.

During his first week on campus that July, he organized throwing sessions with his receivers, dinners with his offensive line and learned the entire offensive playbook, making over 100 hand-written index cards with play designs on one side and coaching notes on the other. Within two months and by the season's start, Wilson was voted a team captain.

"The first day he got on campus, man, you knew this guy was going to be a team captain," said Henry, who was also a team captain. "For that cat to walk in there and learn the playbook in the span of a week and to start throwing with receivers immediately – he got people's attention. He was all business. This wasn't a dude who was having fun. This dude was about ball."

"He had amazing presence, amazing leadership qualities. He's just different, man. I wish there was a word that I could use – his personality makes you want to be around him."

Six months and a Big Ten Championship later, Wilson finished his lone season in Madison as one of the most decorated quarterbacks in Wisconsin history. Today, he holds the school's single-season record for passing yards with 3,175, touchdowns with 33 and completion percentage at 72.8%.

"I think he sort of transcended the quarterback position at Wisconsin," Henry said. "I think that what was magical was that he was a perfect fit for what we were looking for and for what he needed. We needed a quarterback, right? And he wanted to be a part of a really good offense, right? And the marriage was a match made in heaven."

The Broncos are hopeful they have a similar marriage with Wilson.

For the past six seasons, in which the Broncos have missed the playoffs each year, the excuse has always been that they don't have a quarterback. It's a talented roster with plenty of offensive weapons, but missing that elusive puzzle piece.

Wilson is that missing puzzle piece.

"We were going to do anything it took to get 'Russ,'" Broncos GM George Paton said March 16. "The 'It' factor that all great quarterbacks have, 'Russ' has."

As he did in Wisconsin, Wilson has made his presence felt early in Denver. Within his first week as a Bronco, he FaceTimed nearly all his new teammates, organized throwing sessions in San Diego with his new receivers and has been instrumental in setting the tone at the organization's optional workouts. And he's sure to learn coach Nathaniel Hackett's offense quickly while replicating his in-depth scouting reports, which started at Wisconsin and became famous in Seattle. Wilson has already studied every Broncos game from a year ago, including the preseason.

"He's a great leader. I love Russ," Broncos left tackle Garrett Bolles said. "I love his determination; I love his focus; I love his mental; I love everything. You talk about some of the greatest athletes — Kobe Bryant, LeBron James, Michael Jordan — the type of mentalities those athletes have — that's what he has. He's just so focused all the time, ready to rock and roll, and it's what we needed here. He's just so positive all the time, just a lovable guy. You just want to play your heart out for him."

And Wilson won't be a stranger off the field, either.

Wilson, who was named the Walter Payton Man of the Year in 2020-21, is known for his strong faith, which has led to his involvement in the community. He and his wife Ciara, who is arguably more famous than her husband, have already visited the Children's Hospital of Colorado — another habit Wilson started in Madison and continued in Seattle. While those who don't know Wilson sometimes question his realism off the field, his family, friends, teammates and coaches know he's as real as they come.

"That's the part that gets lost. I think people are going to have expectations of him based on what they've seen or what they heard or what they believe they know," Bielema said. "And then they're going to be in a locker room with him and they're going to realize the presence, they're going to realize the realism that he lives every day with and the standard that he's going to set. There's no false bone in Russell Wilson. He may say some things, do some things that people might look at with skepticism, but they'll soon realize he's the most honest and genuine person that they would ever come across in their life."

That's why players and coaches alike love playing alongside Wilson — from Madison to Seattle to now Denver, he's stuck to his beliefs and remained himself.

And as Bielema realized that first day of practice in 2011, and as Broncos Country is learning now, there are few like Russell Wilson.

"When it's at its best, it's easy to be good," Bielema said. "For Russell Wilson, when it's at its worst, he's at his best. When it all goes sideways around him, he has an ability that has been born into him that he's going to be better in that moment than anybody else. And that's the difference between him and other guys."

The only thing Broncos QB Russell Wilson cares about as much as winning? Giving. Especially to kids. “He actually cares.”

By Sean Keeler
Denver Post
March 20, 2022

You can call Russell Wilson a lot of things, Milton Wright III said, but don't you dare call him a phony. Not when it comes to the things nearest and dearest to Wilson's heart.

“He's a good guy,” Wright, a cancer survivor, former Seattle Children's Hospital patient, Seattle Children's Hospital nursing staffer and longtime DangeRuss pal, told The Post by phone. “He's a cool dude.

“When I first met him, I didn't know if it was for real or not. A lot of people do (hospital visits) and what not. He's been doing it this whole time I've been here (in Seattle). When he came in here, when he was visiting patients, it's not a publicity stunt, like I feel (it is) for a lot of other (celebrities). For him, it was a personal thing.”

Wright grew up in and out of hospitals. Chemotherapy. Experimental treatments. A childhood roller-coaster. At age 8, Milton was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia. It returned when he was 15. And again at 20. When it comes to kids and charity work, Milton can spot a phony from seven yards out.

“And it wasn't this persona that (Wilson) was putting on,” Wright stressed when asked about the new Broncos quarterback. “To see that he actually cares, he actually wants to do this, and then to get to talk to him and hang out with him here or there — that's who he is. It's pretty much what he says. He's pretty much at face value for what he does.”

Russell Wilson is a lot of things, Wright said, but don't you dare call him shallow.

You want a scouting report on Wilson, the quarterback, you call Seattle Seahawks general manager John Schneider. You want a scouting report on Wilson, the human being? You call Milton.

Wilson and Wright first met 10 years ago, when the former was a rookie quarterback in the NFC West and the latter was a senior quarterback at local Garfield High, back in treatment at Seattle Children's Hospital.

DangeRuss was adjusting to a new town and new community. Wright was adjusting to life without football, having been told by doctors that all those years of radiation treatments had caused him to develop cardiomyopathy, weakening his heart to the point where he had to give up the game.

“If I didn't get sick or what-not,” he told Wilson, “I'd be coming for your spot right now.”

Wilson just shook his head and laughed. The two became fast friends, a bond that grew, in part, because of Wilson's weekly Tuesday visits to Children's Hospital.

Wright would occasionally be a guest in Wilson's private box at Lumen Field. When schedules lined up, the two even did fundraisers together for the Strong Against Cancer initiative. Russell and Ciara Wilson's Why Not You Foundation had reportedly raised \$8 million for Strong Against Cancer as of March 2020.

"I think you guys can expect the same thing from him (there) because obviously, that's very near and dear to him," Wright said.

"He just got out there (in the community). You guys are going to see plenty of it. And I think you guys can expect the same things that here in Seattle that we know and love him for. And I know everybody out here is happy for him. There's no hate out here. Everybody wants him to do well and wants him to do good, no matter what team or what he's doing. He's a big part of Seattle. And always will be."

If Week 1 of The Russell Wilson Era is any indication, he wants to be a big part of Broncos Country, too.

A day before he was to be introduced to Denver fans and media at UHealth Center, in his first major Front Range event as the soon-to-be face of the Broncos, the nine-time Pro Bowl quarterback and wife, Ciara, visited Children's Hospital in Aurora. The couple visited patients and read from their new book, "Why Not You?," which encourages kids to chase their dreams, no matter how big, no matter what obstacles life puts in front of them.

DangeRuss even dropped Wright's name, unprompted, this past Wednesday while addressing reporters.

"I remember memories of guys like Milton Wright, who had cancer and he told me he only had 12 to 18 months left to live," Wilson recalled. "Dr. Mike Jensen telling me there's a chance, and the nurses telling me there's a chance, if we do T-cell therapy. I asked them what T-cell therapy (was), and they told me they take the T-cells out of his body, regenerate and re-energize them, and come back in the kid's body and within two weeks, hopefully, the kid's cured. 'We don't know if it'll work or not.'

"So I went back in there and told him, I said, 'If you do this and it doesn't work, you won't remember.' He started laughing and I said, 'If you do this and it does work, you will be a legend forever.'

"He got up and said, 'Hell, yeah, I'm doing this! You know what? Not me!' And (he) walked out with it.

"Those kind of memories, those kind of miracles, those kind of moments and all the amazing doctors and nurses and people that give and help with research — it's everything. So for Ciara and I, going to hospitals and going to children's hospitals and helping the youth is everything to us because we have three beautiful kids. The reality is, that you never know."

Russell Wilson is a lot of things, Wright says, but don't you dare call him stiff.

"Believe it or not, as serious as he is, and as much of a businessman as he has become now," Milton said, "he actually has a funny side to him."

Funny ... how?

“(If) he’s talking in public or after the game, he looks like such a serious person. But you get him behind the cameras, where he doesn’t have to do all that, he’s actually a funny guy, he’s really loose, just nonchalant, jokes with you, all that stuff.”

Wright almost got DangeRuss to dance on stage with him once. Almost. If you throw some classic Michael Jackson tunes on, and Wilson’s in the mood, anything’s possible.

“He’s always on the go, he’s always trying to get it,” said Wright, who’s in good health and is transitioning into a career in law enforcement.

“That’s one thing that I do try to take from him. If I’m down, that whole (mindset of), ‘No, you do this. Come on, get this and get at it.’ I’m in the gym six days a week, I’m lifting three days a week ... that’s one thing I do take from him. I respect his drive.”

He respects the man’s mission, too. And admits he’s envious for the kids along the Front Range who’ll get to see just how much the Broncos quarterback makes that mission a part of his soul.

“I’m happy you guys have him and I’m happy you guys can utilize him for what he’s worth,” Wright said.

“I feel bad, personally, for Russ ... (The Seahawks) hadn’t been (giving) Russ what he deserves as far as rebuilding the team. So I would love to see him win a couple more Super Bowls.”

Join the club, Milton. Join the club.

Russell Wilson: 'I don't fear anything' entering new chapter with the Broncos

By Nick Kosmider

The Athletic

March 17, 2022

The bold new era began with an expletive.

Well, almost.

"Come on, ya'll! Russell Wilson!" Broncos coach Nathaniel Hackett said as prepared to introduce the nine-time Pro Bowler as Denver's new starting quarterback Wednesday. "Holy shhh — very exciting!"

Hackett may have been able to stop himself from flirting with an FCC fine as he stood at the podium and talked about his eagerness to coach one of the NFL's top quarterbacks, but that wasn't the case last month when general manager George Paton first approached his new head coach to ask what Hackett would think about the possibility of trading for Wilson.

"I don't think he said yes," Paton said of Hackett's response. "He said F-yes. Very loud."

More than a week after news broke that the Broncos would be acquiring the Super Bowl champion and 2020 Walter Payton Man of the Year, there seemed to still be a surrealistic feeling among members of the organization about their new reality, even as the No. 3 orange jersey Wilson held up for photos signaled that the blockbuster trade had indeed been completed. It wasn't just Hackett's giddiness. It was Wilson's new teammates sitting inside the auditorium at the team's practice facility, hanging on every word the team's new quarterback had to say about what he envisioned for the Broncos going forward.

"He instills confidence in an already confident group of guys," star safety Justin Simmons said. "I'm pumped."

If Wilson was feeling any of the same is-this-real sentiments about holding up a new jersey after a decade of winning — a lot — with the Seattle Seahawks, he had fully compartmentalized those by the time his official introduction rolled around. He came armed with a story about his introduction to Denver in 2010. Twelve years ago, he was a fourth-round draft pick of the Colorado Rockies. On a prospect visit to Coors Field, he sat behind home plate with his agent, Mark Rodgers, who pointed to the green grass in the foreground and told Wilson he would one day play at the picturesque big-league ballpark.

Wilson said he then motioned toward the direction of Empower Field at Mile High, which sits across the interstate.

"I'm going to play there one day," Wilson remembers saying.

For Wilson to come full circle, it meant leaving an organization he had helped lead to eight playoff appearances, two NFC championships, one Super Bowl title and 104 victories, the most in a quarterback's first 10 seasons since Peyton Manning won 105 games during his opening decade in the league. It meant saying goodbye to a community into which he and his family had poured themselves year after year. It

meant splitting with Pete Carroll, the only coach he had played for as a pro. It meant wrapping his head around starting anew.

Manning, the last star quarterback who stood in this space, introducing himself to a new city and fan base after years of pouring excellence into a different franchise, wasn't afraid to admit to some uncertainty about what would come next as he prepared for a new chapter. That was owed mostly to the fact that he was preparing to return to the field after multiple neck surgeries that cost him an entire season on the sideline. Manning, of course, rebounded quite nicely, winning four division titles in four seasons in Denver, guiding the Broncos to two Super Bowl appearances and one title. If Wilson is sharing any similar doubt about what will happen for him next, he did a masterful job of hiding those feelings Wednesday.

"I don't fear anything," Wilson said. "I'm excited to live in the now. The old was really good, but I'm excited to live in the now."

The most pressing question for Wilson on Wednesday: Why Denver? With a no-trade clause in his contract, the quarterback had the ultimate say in his destination once the winds began blowing toward a trade. Seattle said in a statement Wednesday that Wilson "made it clear" he wanted to be dealt. Wilson countered that "it was definitely mutual." However the two sides arrived at the decision Wilson would be traded, it wasn't going to happen if the 33-year-old didn't approve of the destination.

So why the Broncos, a team that hasn't tasted the kind of success the past six seasons to which Wilson is so accustomed?

"Knowing that there was probably going to be a change, I wanted to make sure it was the right situation for me and my family. Denver is a place that has meant a lot to me over the years," Wilson said, noting how the community embraced him back in 2010, when his father died one day after he was selected by the Rockies. "But I know this is a winning football team. If I was going to wave my no-trade clause, it had to be to a winning football team. These guys are winners back here. That's what I was excited about."

Wilson said he was on vacation with his family earlier this month when he was told by his agent that a deal with the Broncos, which Paton said began coming together seriously at the NFL Scouting Combine during clandestine conversations with Seahawks general manager John Schneider, was heating up. Wilson had already done some preliminary homework on Denver's roster, but as a trade moved closer to reality, he dove in extensively.

"I had to figure out if this was the place for me or not," he said.

Wilson said he watched each of Denver's 17 regular-season games from 2021 and their three preseason contests as he prepared to fly to Denver on March 7 to meet with Paton and Hackett and talk through their vision. Then he wound through those games again. And again. Turns out, you can get plenty done when you only sleep four to five hours per night, which is Wilson's self-prescribed allotment.

"As I saw these guys making plays, it was exciting to see," Wilson said. "There's a lot of great players here and I'm looking forward to that. There's just a good energy going here. I got on a group chat with the receivers. Those guys are interesting; that's for sure."

If there was any doubt about the research Wilson had done, it was eliminated when he started naming specific plays made by the Broncos during the 2021 season. Tim Patrick high-pointing a deep touchdown

catch against the Cowboys. Courtland Sutton laying out for a touchdown grab in Pittsburgh. Rookie guard Quinn Meinerz bulldozing defenders in Dallas. Javonte Williams running over linebackers, well everywhere.

“You have to love a running back that doesn’t get tackled,” Wilson said of Williams.

What kept popping up for Wilson while poring over the film was a team full of hunger and potential. He saw a team that was “right there.” But Paton knew the talent he — and John Elway before him — has accumulated needed a firm, guiding hand from the quarterback position. Developmental prospects. Bridge veterans. Roll-of-the-dice first-round pick. None of it had worked for Denver since Manning retired. When Paton returned from the combine, he knew the draft capital the deal would require. It was a haul. But as he sat in his office on the Sunday night before the deal was wrapped up, Paton couldn’t shake the vision of where Wilson could take a roster starved for a true presence at quarterback.

He called Schneider one last time to hammer out the final details.

“If you know me, you know it’s tough to trade a lot of picks,” Paton said Wednesday, providing a reminder that Denver gave up two first-round picks, two second-rounders and three “really good” players in the deal. “But that’s the price you pay when you add the kind of player and person of Russell’s stature. Once we knew Russell could be available, he was our No. 1 target. He was our top priority for the offseason. We were going to do anything it took to get Russ. It’s just unique that you can trade for a franchise quarterback in his prime, and we just felt we had to take that chance.”

Wilson landed back in Denver on Tuesday morning with his wife, Ciara, and the pair immediately paid a visit to the Colorado Children’s Hospital in nearby Aurora. Wilson said Wednesday he hopes to play 10 to 12 more years and win “three or four” more Super Bowls, and as long as he’s playing, he plans to use his significant platform to enrich the community in which he’s playing.

“I want to make a difference here,” Wilson said. “Hopefully we can help a lot of lives.”

While his impact in that arena was felt immediately, Paton conceded that Wilson’s arrival doesn’t magically turn the Broncos into a sure-fire championship favorite in 2022. There is more work to be done tinkering the roster after the free-agency additions of defensive lineman D.J. Jones and pass rusher Randy Gregory. There are new schemes that must be implemented on both sides of the ball. Wilson and Hackett have built quick chemistry, they said, over their shared love for the history of the game, with Hackett telling Wilson upon their first meeting last week stories about watching Joe Montana practice when Hackett was 8 years old and his father was an assistant for the 49ers. Still, that relationship will be a work in progress as each figures out how the other best operates.

No one, Wilson least of all, is shying away from the fact that a tall challenge remains. The AFC West belongs to the Chiefs until another team says otherwise. The Chargers and Raiders have loaded up with defensive stars in free agency. The Broncos, as Paton noted, still have to learn how to win.

But for the first time since Manning sat in the same room six years ago this month, saying goodbye to football, anything seems possible.

“Broncos Country,” Wilson said as he left the podium Wednesday, “let’s ride.”