

Special points of interest:

- Broncos win opener for first time in seven years
- Josh Freeman throws three touchdown passes in three quarters of work
- Defense holds Texans to only one touchdown on a four-yard drive
- Defense allows Texans only 15 yards rushing

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BRONCOS STUFF TEXANS, 38-10

Defense Holds Houston to 15 Yards Rushing

Houston, August 24th, 2011: The Denver Broncos stormed into Houston and took no prisoners, holding the Houston Texans to just 15 yards on the ground and picked off two Eli Manning passes to dominate the Texans from the second quarter on.

The game started slowly, with four punts, followed by one turnover by each team. The Texans picked off second-year quarterback Josh Freeman two plays after Peyton Hillis turned the ball over to the Broncos on a fumble. Safety Kerry Rhodes returned the Freeman interception 33 yards to the Denver four. With excellent field position, it still took the Texans four plays to score, with Hillis pounding it over from a yard out on fourth down to give the Texans a 7-0 lead with 43 seconds left in the first quarter. It would prove to be their sole lead and lone touchdown of the game. Their next score would be a field goal

after the Broncos had scored 38 unanswered points in the second and third quarters.

It didn't take long for the Broncos to answer back. After failing to pick up a first down on third and four, a penalty against former Bronco Albert Haynesworth gave Denver new life on the first play of the second quarter. Freeman quickly capitalized, hitting Dwayne Bowe for 41 yards on a long slant, then connecting down the middle with Jermichael Finley for 23 yards and the first Bronco touchdown of 2011. The score tied the game, and after Terrell Thomas picked off Manning, and returned the pick 18 yards to the Houston 42, it took Denver seven plays to score, with Ryan Torain running five times for 22 yards, and Freeman connecting with Nate Washington from four yards out for the score and a 14-7 lead.

After forcing a Texan punt, the Broncos drove 83 yards in

11 plays to make it 21-7, with Ryan Torain punching it over from a yard out to end the drive. Rookie running backs Anthony Dixon (two rushes for 20 yards) and Dimitri Nance (one for nine) helped key the drive, but the biggest plays of the possession was the first two, both Freeman completions to Brandon Pettigrew, with the first one picking up 33 yards and the next another ten yards. Another key penalty helped the Broncos score a touchdown, as an Wilfork offside on a fourth and two field goal attempt extended the drive and took the field goal off the board.

The Broncos Will Witherspoon sacked Manning late in the half to help force a Houston punt, and the Broncos added a field goal on the last play of the half to make it 24-7, with Freeman connecting twice with Louis Murphy for 35 yards on that last possession to move the ball to the Texan 29.

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Josh Freeman Playing Fast and Furious

Josh Freeman didn't look like a player starting only his eight professional game against the Houston Texans. The 22-year-old second year player looked more like an eight-year veteran than a raw recruit.

Freeman and the Broncos didn't do much early, punting on their first two possessions and Freeman then threw a pass into coverage that was picked off and returned to the Bronco four yard line, setting up Houston to take an early 7-0 lead.

At that point Freeman was just one of four for five yards and one sack for minus seven.

But over the next two quarters, Freeman completed 14 of 19 for 281 yards and three touchdowns. He led the Broncos on six straight scoring drives after being intercepted.

"Josh had a remarkable ability to forget the last play and move on. He learns from it, but he doesn't dwell on it," head coach Hank Sienzant said later.

For his part, Freeman credits

his success to his teammates and his diligent preparation. "I didn't win this game, the Broncos won this game. I just did my part, following the game plan prepared during the week by the coaching staff. If we are successful this year, it will be because we play well as a team."

"And because we outscore our opponent," Freeman adds with a smile. He may be only 22, but he already talks like a seasoned vet.

Witherspoon was the star of the [linebacker] unit with 8 tackles, two sacks, and one hurry



Bronco Report Card

Denver starts the season with a big win against a tough divisional opponent (11-5 last year) so the grades reflect that.



Broncos have won their opening game for the first time since 2004

Stuff Texans (continued from page one)

When the Broncos added another touchdown to start the second half to make it 31-7, it was clear this was not to be the Texans day. The Broncos ran six times on the seven play drive, picking up 31 yards on the ground, but it was the long pass completion down the right sideline to Dwayne Bowe that was the biggest play of the possession. Ryan Torain, the Broncos second round draft pick who had run well to that point, was lost for most the first half of the season on the

possession and finished the game with nine carries for 40 yards and the one first half TD. Torain has a history of being injury prone and this latest injury just confirms it.

Ricky Williams pounded it over from a foot out to score the touchdown, but he really looked his age (34) out there, as he finished with just 18 yards on seven carries, and had the lowest average per carry of any Bronco except for Rex Grossman, who took a knee twice to try to run out the clock.

The Broncos made it 38-0 on their next possession, moving the ball out from their own three yard line for another touchdown, this one of 35 yards to Dwayne Bowe on a short run and catch that Bowe took to the house against an aggressive Houston defense looking for the run.

The Texans put a field goal up on the board at the start of the fourth quarter, but that was all they could do as the Broncos tried to play keep-away with Rex Grossman playing the entire fourth quarter in place of Josh Freeman.

Broncos Report Card

QB: A- Josh Freeman had a great game marred only by the pick he threw that set up Houston's only touchdown.

RB: C Ground game picked up 147 yards, but 43 came on scrambles by Freeman. Team was 30 for 104 otherwise (just 3.5 per carry).

REC: A- Only one drop, and receiving corps averaged 18 yards per catch. Bowe was leading receiver with 110 yards gained.

OL: B Allowed two sacks and

did not do more than an adequate job on ground game. Played solidly but not spectacular.

DL: B Surrendered only 15 yards on ground but put only sporadic pressure on Manning throughout contest. B.J.Raji had the lone sack, but the unit had one pass defensed, one stuff, one fumble recovery and two forced fumbles.

LB: B- Witherspoon was the star of the unit with 8 tackles, two sacks, and one hurry, ac-

counting for almost all the stats by the linebackers in the game.

DB: A+ Did not allow a touchdown pass, held Manning to 66.8 passer rating, and picked off two. DBs had 36 of team's 58 tackles, six passes defensed, and two stuffs.

Special Teams: A Bronco returns were solid, kicking and punting very good, and coverage units were great, allowing only four yards per punt return and less than 14 on kickoffs.

Game and Season Notes

Game Notes: Josh Freeman finished with 15 of 23 for 286 yards and three touchdowns, with one pick and one sack (129.7) in just three quarters of action. He also led the Broncos in rushing, scrambling four times for 43 yards. Overall, the Broncos picked up 147 yards on 34 rushes (4.3). Three rookie Bronco running backs picked up 48 of those yards on twelve carries, with Anthony Dixon leading the parade with seven carries for 26 yards.

The Broncos defense held the Texans to just 15 yards on 14 carries (1.0). Without a running game to help keep the Broncos defense off-balance, Manning threw the ball 49 times, completing 32 for 321 yards, but was picked off twice and threw no touchdowns, finishing with a

66.8 passer rating. He was also sacked three times, two by Will Witherspoon, and once by B.J.Raji.

After Freeman threw the pick to help give the Texans a 7-0 lead, the Broncos scored five touchdowns and one field goal on their next six possessions. Overall, the Broncos outgained the Texans 442 to 320, with about two-thirds of the Texans yardage coming after the score was 38-7 in the Broncos favor. At the point the yardage differential was 425 to 123 in favor of the Broncos. From that point on, the Texans outgained Denver 197 yards to 17.

Rookie defensive backs Nate Allen and Kareem Jackson played well for the Broncos, with Allen leading the Broncos with 11 tackles and Jackson

picking off Manning in the fourth quarter with the Texans at the Bronco 17 yard line to help preserve the win.

Mark Clayton led the Texans in receptions with 7, while four other Texans had 5 or more catches, as Manning threw 49 times. Three Broncos caught three passes, with Dwayne Bowe leading the Broncos with 110 yards and one score. Rookie wideout Golden Tate caught three for 30 and returned one punt for 13 yards for the Broncos.

After the game, new Texan coach Kaivan Khoshroo (replacing Frank Alluzzi) congratulated the Broncos on the win, and said the Bronco offensive line 'was money' in the bank, and gave them much credit for the win.

Injuries and a Look Ahead

Injury Report: The Broncos lost Ryan Torain until about mid-season with a slight tear in his ACL ligament and his production will be tough to replace. Torain, a second round pick by Denver in the past

draft, had 40 yards and a TD in just over a half of football. The Broncos also lost swing offensive lineman Nick Cole for one or two games. On the other side of the ball, the Texans lost inside lineback-

er Brandon Siler for the first quarter of the season with a high ankle sprain. Expect the Broncos to sign two players off the waiver wire to replace the players lost due to injury.



The Broncos were pinning a lot of their hopes on newcomer Ryan Torain, now lost for most of the first half of the season

2010 Bronco Player Awards

Offensive Player of the Year

Tackle Joe Thomas

Joe Thomas nearly won it in 2009, and might win this award for the next ten years. He is that good. Thomas received All-Pro recognition once again, despite playing for a Broncos team that has a 5-27 record over the past two years. He is a quiet player who lets his play do his talking, and it is saying he is the best tackle in football. Although a draftee of the prior regime, Thomas is one hold-over player who the current staff has never given any consideration to trading.

Offensive Rookie of the Year

Quarterback Josh Freeman

The voting was close, but Josh Freeman edged out running back Glen Coffee, guard Eric Wood, wide out Louis Murphy and tight end Brandon Pettigrew. Freeman was a spot player until nearly the end of the season, and showed what he could do in the Broncos 15th game, when he threw for 362 yards on 20 of 33 for two touchdowns with no picks, winning the ISFL player of the week award. Overall, he completed 151 of 235 for 1610 yards, with seven touchdowns and seven picks. His 81.7 passer rating is better than all but one Bronco quarterback's rating in the last four years. Considering Freeman was just a 21-year-old rookie in 2010, the Broncos have reason to believe they have found a true gem in Freeman.

Defensive Player of the Year

Cornerback Tracy Porter

Tracy Porter was a star for the Broncos defense and got some serious Pro Bowl recognition. After missing most of his rookie year with injury, cornerback Porter finished fourth on the team with 90 tackles, and led the team with five interceptions, returning two for touchdowns. In the season's final game, he was recognized as the ISFL's Defensive Player of the week with three picks.

Most Improved Offensive Player

TE Jermichael Finley Guard Josh Sitton

Josh Sitton was an eighth round pick in 2009, a mere afterthought to most. But when veteran guard Mike Wahle went done with injury in the 12th game of the season, Sitton got a chance to get off the pine. He never looked back. In 2010 Sitton played every game and was a solid presence on the Broncos offensive line. Jermichael Finley went from 13 catches to 53 and scored three touchdowns after scoring none in 2009. As a rookie, Finley had only 161 yards to 457 yards receiving in year two.

Most Improved Defensive Player

Cornerback Terrell Thomas

Terrell Thomas improved from a spot starter into a solid cornerback with 119 tackles (second on the team), 4 interceptions, one touchdown, one forced fumble, one fumble recovery, and four pass deflections. The second year player played in all 16 games last year and went from 32 tackles to 119, and from one pick to four. Only 26 in 2011, he is off to a great start this year, with one pick and one pass interception in the first game against Houston.

Comeback Player of the Year

Safety Dawan Landry

When safety Dawan Landry missed most of the 2009 season with a severe knee injury, there was some talk he would not be the same player when he returned in 2010. He wasn't - he was better. He picked off four passes, returning three for touchdowns and finished third on the team with 91 tackles, was second on the team with six passes deflected, had five stuffs, and forced two fumbles.

Defensive Rookie of the Year

Defensive lineman B.J.Raji

Second round selection B.J.Raji was a force early in the year and helped the Broncos defense cut their points allowed from 452 to 369, a reduction of nearly 20%. Raji led the team in sacks with five, had 49 tackles, was second on the team with eight stuffs, forced two fumbles, recovered one, and had one pass deflection. He also had five hurries. Playing with a severe ankle injury for most of the year, Raji was still one of the best young defensive tackles in the game, and the Broncos cannot wait to see what he can do when healthy.

Denver Bronco

Fast Fact:

The Broncos have now won five of their last eight games and shouldn't be overlooked this year

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Denver
Broncos

Denver 2010 Season in Review

The Broncos didn't start the season off well, but they certainly finished it that way.

Losers of their first nine games in 2010, the Broncos didn't give their fans a whole lot to cheer about over the first half of the season. And after losing 24 of their first 25 games under Hank Sienzant (1-15 in 2009, 0-9 to start the 2010 season), many were calling for Hank Sienzant's head on a platter. But the Broncos turned it around over the final seven games, winning four of those games to finish with a 4-12 record.

That improvement gives the Broncos the strong belief that they have turned a corner.

The Broncos got their first win of 2010 in week ten, with a 37-31 overtime victory over the equally inept New England Patriots. The win came when safety Dawan Landry picked off Patriot rookie quarterback Matthew Stafford on a fourth-and-six pass and returned it 68 yards for the touchdown in overtime. Coming just a week after the Broncos were crushed by the Jets 30-0, the victory showed that Sienzant had not lost the team.

The Broncos followed that up with a stunning upset of the Houston Texans in Houston, dominating the 7-3 Texans in a 21-12 victory that gave the Broncos back-to-back wins for the first time since the 2006 season. Although the Broncos lost their next three, they rallied back to win their last two games, beating the Chargers 27-10 and then edging the Seahawks 10-7 to finish with four wins.

The Broncos 15th game of the season against the Chargers in Denver showed the ISFL what the Broncos had been saying all along about rookie quarterback Josh Freeman. In that game, getting his first start in over a month, Freeman looked better than he had at any point in the season, completing 20 of 33 for 362 yards and two touchdowns, without a pick. Freeman followed up that effort with another solid game in the season finale, completing 60% of his passes for one touchdown and one pick, leading the Broncos to another win in the process.

But there were other players besides Freeman who contributed greatly to the Broncos resurgence, perhaps none more than cornerback Tracy Porter, who was the MVP of two different Bronco wins in the final seven games. Against the Texans, with the Broncos clinging to a narrow 14-12 lead in the fourth quarter, Porter picked off Eli Manning and returned the interception 44 yards for a touchdown to give the Broncos a 21-12 upset win.

In the season's final game, Porter picked off three passes to help stymie the Seahawks as the Broncos won a defensive struggle, 10-7. Porter's final pick came in the final two minutes with the Seahawks in Denver territory and sealed the win.