

## Special Points

### of Interest:

- Broncos start 2-0 for first time in ten years
- Josh Freeman throws two touchdown passes
- Defense holds Colts to only one touchdown
- Defense allows Colts only 52 yards rushing

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## BRONCOS BEAT COLTS, 26-7

### Defense Stars Again

**Denver, August 31st, 2011:** The Broncos shut out the Indianapolis Colts for the first three quarters, taking a 16-0 lead into the fourth quarter, and won 26-7 in their home opener. The Broncos are now 2-0 for the first time since 2002 and the Colts, 12-4 last year, fell to 0-2 to start the 2011 season.

The Broncos once again started fast - in the first 25 minutes of the contest, the Colts had no first downs and only 30 yards from scrimmage. The COLTS were outgained from scrimmage over those first 25 minutes by 150 yards. The Bronco run defense was stellar, holding the Colts to just 52 yards on the ground in 12 rushes. They sacked Aaron Rodgers twice, hurried him frequently, and picked off two of his passes.

Overall, the Broncos dominated the statistics, having 26 first downs to just 10 for the Colts and won the time-of-possession battle, 39 minutes to 21. Denver also outgained Indianapolis in

the contest, picking up 457 yards to 271.

The Colts lone touchdown came early in the fourth quarter on a 66-yard connection between Aaron Rodgers and Greg Jennings with Denver coming on an all-out blitz. Jennings caught the ball over the middle at about midfield and had nothing but green grass to the endzone, cutting the Bronco lead to 16-6. With a two-point conversion, they could cut the Bronco lead to one score at 16-8, but with nearly 14 minutes remaining, they opted for the sure one point, figuring they would have at least two more possessions with which to work.

They did, but Aaron Rodgers was picked off on both, and the Broncos added a touchdown and field goal in their next two possessions to expand their lead to 26-7 which forged the final score. The Broncos made it 23-7 with a nine-play drive for 80 yards extending over five minutes, with Josh Freeman

connecting with Brandon Pettigrew from seven yards out for the score.

Newest Bronco Will Blackmon contributed in a big way, picking off Rodgers on the Colts next possession and returning the interception to the Colt ten-yard line. The Broncos settled for a field goal to make it 26-7, then after rookie Nate Allen picked off Rodgers a few plays later to thwart the Colts last possession, the Broncos ran out the final 3:41 to notch their second win.

The Broncos dominated the action in the first half, but went up only 13-0, as the Colts twice forced Bronco field goals and once forced a Bronco punt from the Colt 36. The game could have been closer at halftime, but the Colts final drive of the first half went for naught as they moved the ball for 64 yards in 15 plays to the Bronco 26, but they could get no closer, as a 10-yard grounding call against Rodgers

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## Irrational Exuberance?

The Broncos head coach Hank Sienzant cautioned the fans against getting carried away over Denver's 2-0 start. "I realize we haven't won our first two games since 2002," Sienzant said in the locker room after the game. "But the Broncos finished only 7-9 that year, so it is way too early to be printing playoff tickets. We have a long way to go and face another tough oppo-

nent next week on the road. Let's continue to take these one game at a time."

The Broncos face the Steelers in week three in Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh finished 11-5 last season. The Broncos have never gone 3-0 to start a season. Still, the once hapless Broncos appear to have turned it around in a big way. After losing 24 of their first 25 games under Hank Sienzant, the Broncos have won

six and lost only three of their last nine games, dating back to last year, when they won four of their final seven.

So fans do have reason to hope, and the next three games (against 11-5 Pittsburgh, 11-5 Houston and against the undefeated Jets) will go a long way toward determining just how good this team can be in 2011.

**Two big pass interference penalties against the Colts kept the Broncos [initial] drive alive.**



**Bronco Report Card**

**Overall Grade: B+**

## Beat Colts (continued from page one)

stymied the drive, and Matt Prater's field goal was shanked off to the side with 22 seconds left in the half. Outside of the Colts 64-yards in their first half possession that went for naught, the Broncos outgained the Colts 203 yards to 30 in the first half, and picked up 13 first downs to the Colts none (all five Colt first-half first downs came on that final

drive). The Broncos scored on their opening possession of the game, after Chris Kluwe's first punt of the game went over Blackmon's head and rolled dead at the Bronco one yard line. Kluwe was credited with a 77-yard punt on the play. The Broncos then drove 99 yards in 12 plays, mostly on passing, with Freeman hitting five of seven for 44 yards and the

touchdown. Ricky Williams took his initial carry of the contest for 21 yards on that drive, and Freeman contributed a ten-yard bootleg and rookie Anthony Dixon a seven yard sweep to account for the Broncos rushing yards on the march. Two big pass interference penalties against the Colts kept the Broncos drive alive. In all, the Broncos picked up seven first downs on that first possession, and went up 7-0.

## Broncos Report Card

**QB: A-** Josh Freeman had a very good game (26 of 34, 278, 2 TDs, 1 pick (107.2)).

**RB: A** Running backs picked up 168 yards on 33 rushes (5.1). The three rookie backs (Dixon, Nance, and Karim) contributed 20 rushes for 80 yards (4.0). Backs also caught five for 72 and scored once (Delanie Walker).

**REC: A-** Dwayne Bowe had one drop (a recurring problem) but unit caught 21 passes for 206 yards and one score (Pettigrew).

**OL: A** Line opened holes for the running game to the tune of 188 yards on the ground and allowed Freeman to be almost pressure free (1 sack, 3 hurries).

**LB: B-** Witherspoon was the star of the unit for the second game in a row with 5 tackles, two sacks, and one hurry, once again accounting for almost all the stats by the linebackers in the game.

**DB: B-** Allowed a long touchdown pass early in fourth quar-

ter that cut the Bronco lead to nine, but despite that held Aaron Rodgers to just a 68.6 passer rating, picking him off twice in fourth quarter as Rodgers tried to rally the troops. The DB unit had as many tackles (18) as the rest of the defense combined.

**Special Teams: A** Broncos held the Colts to 15.8 on kick off returns and just one fair catch. Mason Crosby made all four of his field goals. And Denver got good returns.

## Game and Season Notes

**Game Notes:** Brandon Pettigrew had six receptions for 56 yards to lead the Broncos and now is tied for the team lead with Dwayne Bowe with 8 receptions in two games. Jermichael Finley is next with seven catches, and third string tight end / fullback Delanie Walker has six catches for 84 yards.

Ricky Williams showed he is not as slow and old as he looked last week with an excellent 13 for 88 game, averaging 6.8 yards per carry. He does lead the team with two fumbles (one in each game), although the Broncos have recovered both. Overall, the Broncos rushed for 184 yards on 36 attempts, averaging 5.1 yards per rush.

The Broncos had over 400 yards of offense for the second consecutive game, and the third time in four games, extending back to the Charger game last year, when Josh Freeman exploded for 362 yards passing.

The Broncos Will Witherspoon led the team in tackles with five and had two sacks of Rodgers, giving him four sacks in two games. Mason Crosby was four for four on field goals and now is 5-5 in two games, bouncing back from his poor finish to the 2010 season. For the Colts,

Aaron Rodgers led the team in rushing with three scrambles for 26 yards, while Jennings and tight end Ben Watson had five catches each (Jennings led the team with 101 receiving yards). Will Blackmon contributed a punt return of seven yards in addition to his pick.

**Season Notes:** The Broncos run defense has been excellent, having allowed only 67 yards on the ground in two games (33.5 per game) with a 2.6 per carry average by their opponents on just 26 rushes. By Contrast, the Broncos have

rushed 70 times for 331 yards, a 4.7 average. The strong running attack has made life easy for second-year QB Josh Freeman, who has completed 41 of 57 (72%) for 564 yards, 5 touchdowns and just 2 picks (117.9 passer rating).

Opponent quarterbacks (no slouches in Eli Manning and Aaron Rodgers), have found the Broncos using nickel and dime defenses extensively as they fell behind and abandoned the run, and have completed 49 of 77 (64%) of their passes for 548 yards, with four picks and just one touchdown (67.5 passer rating). The Broncos have now beaten two teams that last year won 23 games between them in the regular season (11 for the Texans, 12 for the Colts). Through two games, Denver has scored seven touchdowns, and seven different players have one touchdown apiece.



**Denver starts a season 2-0 for the first time since 2002.**

## Injuries And Acquisitions

### **Injury Report**

The Broncos lost starting guard Eric Wood, last year's third round pick, to a high ankle sprain in the second quarter. After starting the season with just seven offensive linemen, Duke Robinson, is on injured reserve) and losing swing man and former starting guard / center Nick Cole for a few games against the Texans in week one, the Broncos are thin on the offensive line.

### **Player Acquisitions**

The Broncos signed two players after week one's games. Young guard/center Phil Costa was signed to replace veteran Nick Cole on the active roster and played extensively in relief of Wood from the second quarter on. Costa gave a good account of himself (no sacks and no penalties, one very good block to spring a big gain). for someone who had less than a week in the Bronco's system.

Veteran defensive back

and return man Will Blackmon, who spent last season on the Eagles injured reserve unit, was also signed after week one. He replaced Torain on the active roster. Two years ago Blackmon was an exceptional return man (2 punt return TDs for the Eagles in 2009) and in his first game action since then he came up with a big interception of Aaron Rodgers in the fourth quarter that set up Denver's final score. Blackmon also returned one punt for seven yards and 2 fair catches.



**The Broncos have now lost both Eric Wood (above) and Nick Cole on their offensive line to injuries, decimating the seven man unit**

## Broncos Getting Solid Play From Rookie DBs

**September 1st, 2011:** The Broncos drafted four defensive backs in the past draft (including the supplemental rounds). One of those rookies, Aaron Berry, a smallish cornerback out of the University of Pittsburgh, was a late cut of the Broncos, but the other three - Nate Allen, Kareem Jackson, and Jerome Murphy - made the squad and all contributed in the Broncos first two games - both wins.

In fact, all three got credited with a start in week one, but only because the Texans opened with a five-wide receiver set, and the Broncos countered with a seven-DB set. In the second game, the Broncos opened with a nickel defense against the Colts passing attack, and Nate Allen got his second start of the season.

While all have played well, none have played better than Nate Allen in those first two games. Allen was the Broncos third round pick out of the University of South Florida, and in both games out-shone his colle-

giate teammates (defensive end Jason Pierre-Paul and rookie defensive back Jerome Murphy) as well as fellow rookie defensive back Kareem Jackson.

Nate Allen was on the field for nearly five out of every six Bronco defensive plays (83%), and leads the team with 14 tackles. He also picked off Aaron Rodgers late in game two. He was not slated to play that much, but when both the Texans and Colts had difficulty running the ball, the Broncos found it advantageous to play a nickel or dime defense or even a quarter (7 defensive backs) more often, especially since they were up at halftime by 17 and 13 at halftime in the two games.

Allen wasn't alone. Fellow rookie defensive back Kareem Jackson made three tackles and his fourth quarter red zone interception of Eli Manning in game one thwarted a long Texan drive. Jackson has played on 56% of the defensive downs in the first two weeks of

the 2011 season, while Jerome Murphy, the Broncos seventh round draft selection, made tackles tackle and has had two passes defended in playing in nearly 40% of the Bronco plays on defense in the first two games.

Head coach Hank Sienzant said of the trio, "They have a way to go, but we are pleased with the performance of all three rookies thus far."

"While Manning threw for over 300 yards and completed 32 passes, we didn't have too many blown assignments and didn't give up many big plays. We did have that one blown coverage in the Colts game which cost us a touchdown. But the rookies have had two big fourth quarter interceptions to help us preserve the lead by taking the ball away. Those takeaways and other big plays help to define games and ultimately player careers. We hope they continue to develop and play well for us for years to come."

**Denver Bronco  
Fast Fact:  
The Broncos  
have now won six  
of their last nine  
games extending  
back to last  
season**

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## Are The Broncos for Real?

This is year three of Hank Sienzant's five-year plan to rebuild the Broncos into a contender, and to all outward appearances, it looks like they are already there.

The Broncos have won both their games this season, against playoff-caliber competition from last year, and have won both games handily.

However, as Hank Sienzant will caution you, playoff berths aren't won in August or September, they are won in November and December. You can read Sienzant's comments about the fans' excitement elsewhere in this newsletter, but we feel he is off the mark in attempting to dampen this new-found enthusiasm for the team. While it is far too early to be banking on a playoff berth, this team looks to be the real deal, as it has been rebuilt from the ground up, and for the most part has players in starting positions that weren't here three or four years ago. Those players came in with the understanding that they were going to be part of the rebuilding effort. And while not every rebuilding effort pays off, it looks like this one has, in a big way.

That said, the Broncos next few games will go a long way toward legitimizing their rebuilding effort or exposing it as a two-game fluke run of luck. Over the next three weeks, they face three more playoff caliber teams in Pittsburgh (11-5 in 2010), Houston (11-5, already beaten in Houston in week one), and the big Kahuna, the undefeated New York Jets in New York. The Jets have a winning streak that extends back to 2009, and they beat the Patriots this past week pretty handily, 34-3. The Patriots are another rebuilding team that many feel are at least the equal of the Broncos, if not better. And they fell to the Jets by 31 points.

Yes, Virginia, the Jets are apparently that good.

The Broncos won't be able to say they've arrived on the big stage until they can stand toe-to-toe with the big boys and slug it out, without backing down and without pleading for mercy.

They may not have arrived yet, but they are close.

Time will tell whether it is this year, next, or the year after that the Broncos finally make the playoffs, but the excitement in the air for this squad is real, and that is something you can take to the bank.