

Special Points

of Interest:

- Broncos start 3-0 for first time since 2001
- Josh Freeman throws another touchdown pass
- Defense holds Steelers to only one touchdown
- Defense surrenders 131 yards on 31 rushes

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BRONCOS EDGE STEELERS 13-10

Denver Alone in First Place

September 9th, 2011: The Denver Broncos moved to 3-0 on the season by narrowly beating the Steelers, 13-10. The Broncos took over sole possession of first place in the AFC East when the Jets were beaten by the Green Bay Packers. The Steelers fell to 1-2 in the AFC Central. All three of the Steeler games have been decided by three points or less.

In the tight defensive struggle that saw both teams almost evenly matched in yards from scrimmage, the difference in the contest came down to the legs of the kickers. The Broncos Mason Crosby (2 of 3 on field goals) outdueled Ryan Lindell of Pittsburgh, who missed two of his three field goals. Josh Freeman was the offensive star of the contest and won his third consecutive MVP of the game award, completing 17 of 25 (68%) for 221 yards and one touchdown. He finished with a 108.9 passer rating. For the Steelers, Marshawn Lynch

picked up 70 yards on 17 rushes against the Denver defense, and added another ten yards on one catch.

The Steelers jumped to an early 7-0 lead on their first possession, marching 57 yards to a one-yard Marshawn Lynch touchdown on third and one. Lynch carried five times on the six play drive, gaining 50 yards. It was Lynch's 36-yard run around end down to the Bronco four that was the big play of the drive. After the Steelers defense held the Broncos to a quick three-and-out, Pittsburgh drove downfield for another score - or so they thought. Dixon hit Josh Morgan for 27 yards to start the possession and moved the ball to the Denver 34 yard line, but the Steelers could gain only fifteen yards on six more plays and the Steelers Ryan Lindell missed a short 26-yard field goal that could have given the Steelers a 10-0 lead. That miss, and one other in the second quarter, would prove to

be the difference in the contest. After another Denver three-and-out, the Steelers went 40 yards from their own 14 to the Denver 46, but a Dixon pass intended for Mike Sims-Walker fell incomplete and the Steelers had to punt. The Steelers totally dominated the Broncos in the early going, outgaining Denver 141 to 11 in yards and picking up eight first downs to none, but only had a seven point advantage in the second quarter.

The Broncos turned it around, driving 90 yards on their first possession of the second quarter to tie it up at 7-7. The biggest gainer was a Freeman slant pass to tight end Jermichael Finley that the young tight end took for 39 yards, but the biggest play was the challenge of a Ricky Williams fumble after a 20-yard run down to the Steeler three-yard line that was overturned, allowing the Broncos to score on a Freeman to Williams 3-yard

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Rational Exuberance!

The undefeated Broncos now have a five-game winning streak, dating back to the final two games of the 2010 season. That streak is now the longest active winning streak in the ISFL (including playoff games).

Dallas has the longest active regular season winning streak, at seven games, including the first two this year, but they lost in the 2010 playoffs.

The New York Jets active

streak ended with a loss at the hands of the Packers, and their just-ended streak makes the Broncos streak pale by comparison. Prior to their loss to the Pack, the Jets last lost in week seven of 2009. They did not lose again until yesterday, an incredible 33 in a row - their final 12 in 2009 (including three playoff games), and all 19 in 2010 (including three playoff games), and their first two this year.

They had a six game winning streak before that, so the Jets have won 39 of their last 41.

The Broncos and Jets face off twice, first in week five in New York, and then in week 16 (game 15) in Denver. The Broncos three wins this year have come against teams that each won 11 or more games last year.

For the first time in a long time, the Jets are looking up at the Broncos in the standings.

“Nate's 37-yarder in the fourth quarter turned the tight field position game around”



Bronco Report Card

Overall Grade: C+

Edge Steelers (continued from page one)

pass connection. The recalled Williams fumble was the closest either team came to a turnover.

In response, the Steelers moved the ball effectively again, marching 54 yards in 11 plays, but another Lindell field goal attempt, this one from 40 yards out, again failed to go thru the uprights.

After the miss, the Broncos got the ball back with just over three minutes to go in the first half at their own 29. Freeman hit Nate Washington down the left sideline for 28 to start the march, which concluded with Crosby's field goal from 39 yards out. The boot gave the Broncos a 10-7 lead at the half.

The Broncos scored another three-pointer on their first drive of the second half, but were held scoreless by the Steeler defense thereafter. They did get close enough on one fourth quarter possession for Mason Crosby to miss his first field goal of 2011, from 44 yards out. The Steelers managed a three-pointer on the first play of the fourth quarter to cap a fine 60-yard drive, but that was all they could manage as the Broncos defense clamped down and held the Steelers to only 111 yards in the second half after surrendering 195 in the first half.

The problem was primarily young Steeler QB Dennis Dixon,

starting in place of an injured David Garrard. Dixon was ultra-sharp in the first half, completing 10 of 15 for 119 yards (90.7). But in the second half, he was erratic, completing just 6 of 17 for 62 yards (46.7).

And in the fourth quarter, with the Steelers within three and the game on the line, Dixon could manage to complete only two of eight for 16 yards (39.6). And with the Steelers managing to add only 20 yards on the ground in the fourth quarter, the Broncos defense rode to the rescue once again, to keep the Broncos undefeated.

Bronco Report Card

QB: A Josh Freeman played well again, completing 17 of 25 for 221 and one TD, with no picks.

RB: C Running backs picked up exactly 100 yards against the Steelers, averaging 4.5 per rush.

REC: C Two Drops, 2 of 9 on

3rd down conversions. Tight coverage by Steelers contributed.

OL: C+ Allowed two sacks, holes weren't open long.

DL: D+ Run defense allowed 131 yards on the ground, letting the Steelers chew up the clock.

DE Ziggy Hood had lone sack.

LB: C Witherspoon was again the star of the unit, with six tackles, one stuff and two hurries.

DBs: B- No picks, Allowed Dennis Dixon too much space to complete passes.

Game and Season Notes

Marshawn Lynch gashed the Broncos for 54 yards on his first ten carries (all in the first ten minutes of the contest. But the Broncos regrouped and held Lynch to just nine more carries for 26 yards over the remaining 50 minutes of the contest.

The Broncos were out-gained on the ground for the first time this year, 131-104, with Tashard Choice contributing ten carries for 38 yards to the Steelers cause. Ricky Williams was the leading ground gainer for the Broncos with 12 rushes for 67 yards (5.6).

Nate Washington was the big receiver in the Bronco arsenal today, catching five

for 104. Head coach Hank Sienzant said Washington played an exception game today, and said "Nate's 37-yarder in the fourth quarter turned the tight field position game around," as the Broncos moved from their own three yard line to their own forty. "That was the play of the game for us," Sienzant said.

Although the Broncos eventually had to punt the ball back to the Steelers, Pittsburgh started the ensuing drive at their own 22 instead of close to the Bronco 40. That was a big swing, as the Steelers picked up 25 yards on their final possession, ending up just short of

midfield when they failed to convert a fourth and ten. Without the Washington catch, the Steelers would have been set up inside the Bronco 20 and would have had a chance at a tying field goal in the final minute.

Anthony Dixon ran for 20 yards on 8 carries, while Dimitri Nance picked up 13 more on two runs for the Broncos.

A.J.Hawk was the leading Steeler defender with 8 tackles, but defensive tackle Kyle Williams had an excellent stat line of 7 tackles, one sack, one stuff, and one hurry.

Dawan Landry led the Bronco defenders with 8 tackles.



Denver starts a season 3-0 for the first time since 2001.

Injuries And Acquisitions

Injury Report

The Broncos suffered no injuries of consequence, and could get back both starting guard Eric Wood and swing offensive lineman Nick Cole. Cole is back for certain, Wood will be a game-time decision.

The Steelers lost two defenders, with defensive tackle Alex Carrington going down for nearly half the season, while cornerback Kevin Dockery will miss at least the next month and maybe more.

A Look Ahead

The Broncos host the I-I Houston Texas in week four. They downed the Texans 38-10 in week one in Houston and have won two of the last three against the Texans. The Broncos have a chance to go to 4-0 for the first time since their 2001 season, when they started 8-0 before finishing up at 11-5. The I-2 Steelers try to right their listing ship when they travel to New England to face the I-I Patriots.

Player Acquisitions

The Broncos added veteran guard Keydrick Vincent prior to game three to help replace the injured Eric Wood. Vincent played last year with the Steelers. With only a few days of practice, Vincent got the start and played well, allowing no sacks and making one key block on a Ricky Williams run of nine yards. Vincent also helped the defense as he walked them thru some of the Steelers blocking schemes.



The Broncos Eric Wood could possibly return to action this week. Back up guard and former starting center Nick Cole (above) will definitely be back for the Texans.

WITHERSPOON LEADS RESURGENT DEFENSE

September 8th, 2011: It isn't often that a rebuilding team rebuilds its defense around a 30-year-old linebacker, but that's just what the Broncos did.

Most teams would have dealt the older player for a draft pick or two. But the Broncos new coaching staff liked what they saw in the 28-year-old Will Witherspoon when they took over the squad in 2009, and have made Witherspoon the cornerstone of their defense.

Acquired in March 2005 by the previous ownership from the Jets as part of a package deal where they surrendered Nnamdi Asomugha and their own first, third and fifth round choices, the Broncos quickly realized they didn't get the better end of that deal, but the current ownership is happy with Witherspoon's contributions to the team.

Because Nnamdi Asomugha was (and is) listed as Nick Asmougah on the transaction, the deal probably didn't look so lopsided

at the time.

Now 30, Will Witherspoon leads the ISFL after two games with four sacks, and he is second on the Broncos with 13 tackles. Through two games, the Broncos rebuilt defense has surrendered just 17 points, tied for the second lowest total allowed (the Jets have surrendered 16).

In his seventh year on the Broncos, Witherspoon's the ultimate team player, moving from outside linebacker to play inside in 2010, and then moving back outside to make room for Jonathan Goff in 2011. A fan favorite since arriving in 2005, through it all he's done a workmanlike job, leading the team in tackles three times in the past six seasons, with a high of 163 in 2007. He's never finished lower than third on the team in tackles in his six-plus years on the club.

A Jack-of-all-trades type, he does it all, as reflected by his six picks, nine forced fumbles, 15 sacks and 41 deflections in the prior six

years on the team. And this year is shaping up as one of his best.

2011 has Witherspoon in a role he hasn't played much of since 2007, a pass-rushing force off the edge. In the past three years, he's mostly been utilized in coverage, with only one sack over that span. Compare that to his first three years on the Broncos when he had 14 sacks as an edge rusher.

But this year in just the first two games, he's already accumulated four sacks as he's reverted to his old role. "It's not exactly like riding a bike," Witherspoon relates, "but it's akin to that. Some of the [pass-rushing] techniques came right back, and some of it I had to work on. I'm comfortable either way - rushing the passer or dropping into coverage."

And the Broncos are more than comfortable with Witherspoon as the veteran leader of their resurgent defense.

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

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Denver
Broncos

JOSH FREEMAN GROWING GAME BY GAME

The Broncos young starting quarterback's great play thus far this season has been mostly overlooked in the Broncos great start.

Freeman hasn't had a bad game this year, and with a 3-0 start, is among the league leaders in both passer rating and passing yards. That's quality and quantity.

In week three against the Steelers, Freeman completed 17 of 25 (68%) for 221 yards and one touchdown, with no picks. His 37-yard completion to wide out Nate Washington in the fourth quarter moved the Broncos out from the shadow of their own goal posts, and was deemed the play of the game by his head coach, Hank Sienzant.

Freeman has put up a passer rating of 115.1 this year, good for second in the league as of this writing and has thrown for 785 yards in three games, an average of 262 yards passing per game. Freeman has also rushed 8 times for 65 yards (8.1), excluding the one kneel down he took against the Steelers.

Freeman has not only shown patience in the pocket, he's demonstrated the ability to recognize defenses and put the ball on his receivers with accuracy. He also has shown he's a leader, as the Broncos fell behind the Steelers early, but Freeman patiently led the team back to take the lead before halftime, and made big plays with his strong arm throughout the contest.

Freeman's growth is a continuation of his play as a 21-year old rookie. Although Mark Sanchez got all the accolades and properly won the ISFL Rookie of the Year award in 2010, the Broncos have said all along they were more than happy with Freeman's development. Freeman didn't play as much as Sanchez, but he actually put up a better passer rating than Sanchez last year. Freeman's 81.7 passer rating came on only 235 passes, while Sanchez threw the ball more than twice as often, putting it up 480 times for a 68.1 passer rating.

Thus far this year, Freeman has outplayed Sanchez, but not by much. Sanchez has compiled a 103.7 passer rating through two games as he's led the Chargers to one win and one loss through the Chargers first two games.