

Special Points

of Interest:

- Broncos start 6-0 for first time since 2001
- Josh Freeman throws three touchdown passes, no picks
- Defense scores on fumble return
- Broncos defense allows only Browns points on final play of game

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DENVER SHUTS DOWN BROWNS IN WIND, RAIN, 28-6

Freeman Three TD Passes Leads Broncos

October 2nd, 2011: The Broncos pitched a 60-minute shutout, but surrendered a touchdown to the Browns after time had expired to spoil their first shutout opportunity under Hank Sienzant as the Broncos beat division-rival Browns, 28-6. With the Bronco scrubs in the game, Cleveland, which had twice earlier in the fourth quarter failed to score from inside the Denver 20, finally got on the board with no time remaining on the clock when Joe Flacco hit wide receiver David Gettis from eight yards out for the Browns only TD of the game.

The final Cleveland drive started at their own 35 after the Broncos had failed to run out the clock after taking over with 1:49 remaining in the game. On the final drive, Flacco completed six of 67 for all 65 yards, with the big play a long completion to David Gettis for a 20 yard gain to the Bronco eight yard against the Browns prevent defense, with the Browns burning their

final timeout with nine seconds to go.

A incomplete pass to Gettis followed, leaving three seconds on the clock. On the final play, time had expired with Flacco still holding the ball from the shotgun snap, and with no time left on the clock, Flacco finally found Gettis open in the end zone for the score to spoil the Broncos shutout bid. The two-point conversion attempt failed, and the Broncos went home 28-6 winners.

The Browns first possession was a study in contrasts. In their first seven plays they moved the ball 40 yards from their own 16 to the Denver 44. But after an incomplete, three consecutive penalties left them in a second and 35 hole they could not dig themselves out of, and they wound up punting from their own 31 after a ten-play drive that took over five minutes off the clock but netted just 15 yards. The Broncos then got started by scoring on their first

possession, on a 68-yard, 13 play drive with the 15-25 mile per hour gusts at their back. Seven of the first eight plays were pass plays (although one finished as a Josh Freeman scramble), and the Broncos culminated off that first drive with Freeman hitting Dwayne Bowe from a yard out on aq short hitch for the touchdown.

The game turned on a couple of turnovers in the second quarter, one that counted and one that didn't. On the stat sheet it looks innocuous enough - a run by Denver's Ricky Williams for two yards. But in actuality, that play was a fumble by Williams, and a touchdown on the fumble return by Browns safety Paul Oliver that appeared to tie the score at 7-all. But Williams was ruled down by contact, and the Broncos ended that drive with another touchdown toss from Freeman to Dwayne Bowe, this time on a slant across the middle from 13 yards out.

(Continued Page Two)

Ricky Williams Rejuvenated

Thus far this season, Ricky Williams has rushed for 342 yards, averaging 4.8 yards per carry. That projects to 912 yards over a full season, which would be the best rushing total for a Bronco running back since Willis McGahee put up 1422 in 2006.

When the Broncos acquired Williams in the offseason, they expected they'd be getting a running back who would get about 500 yards on the ground as the backup to Ryan Torain

and be a veteran presence who could pick up the blitz and mentor the Broncos three rookie running backs (Dixon, Karim, and Nance).

Instead, when Torain went down with injury in week one, Williams stepped right in and the Broncos offense hasn't missed a beat, averaging 29 points a game.

However, Williams' rejuvenation actually started last year, when he rushed for over one thousand yards as a 32-year-old

New York Giant, picking up 1090 yards on 220 rushing attempts. In the prior three seasons (2007—2009), Williams rushed for 584 yards combined, with all but eight of those yards coming in 2009.

It is pretty much unheard of for a 33-year running back to be this good.

Williams says he expects to play another year or two and is feeling better than he has in years.

[After three quarters] ... the Broncos held a 348 to 122 yardage differential and a 22 to 9 first down differential.



Bronco Report Card

Overall Grade: **A-**



Denver starts the 2011 season 6-0 and now has an eight-game winning streak

SHUT DOWN BROWNS (continued from

Only a few plays later, a bad shotgun snap went over the head of Browns quarterback Joe Flacco, and Tracy Porter scooped it up and raced 23 yards to paydirt for the 21-0 lead with just under two minutes remaining in the half. Just like that, the game went from what appeared to be a 7-7 tie to a 21-0 Bronco lead.

The Browns tried to maneuver into field goal range in the final minute of the first half, but they could not get the kicking team on the field in time after Anquan Boldin was tackled in bounds at the Bronco 39.

The Broncos started the second half with the third offensive touchdown of the game to take a 28-0 lead, with Freeman adding his third touchdown pass of the

game on a five-yard connection with second-year tight Brandon Pettigrew to end the 80-yard progression through the Browns defenses. The biggest play in the possession (there were several, including a Freeman 16-yard scramble to the Browns five) was when Freeman hit Ricky Williams in the flat and the veteran running back beat his coverage to the corner and took it 28 yards down the sideline to the Browns 39-yard line.

The competitive aspect of the game pretty much ended at that point, although the Broncos did get to the Browns one-yard line on their next possession, but failed to punch it over after a 16-play, nine-minute march from their own twenty that took the

game into the fourth quarter with the Bronco second-teamers in the game. At that point the Broncos held a 348 to 122 yardage differential and a 22 to 9 first down differential.

The fourth quarter was all Browns as they twice went on long marches that stalled and died inside the Broncos 20-yard-line. The fourth quarter helped to even up many of the stats in the game, but accomplished little else for the Browns. Denver stopped the Browns on a fourth and seven from the Denver 13, and a fourth and one from the Denver 10 on successive long drives for the Browns, of 86 and 49 yards respectively, before the Browns finally broke the shutout on the final play of the game.

Bronco Report Card

QB: A+ What can we say? Freeman's best day ever at 18 of 21 for 187 yards, 3 touchdown passes and no picks. 143.4 passer rating. Oh year, added 20 yards on two scrambles.

RB: B+ Running backs had a very good game 146 yards on 36 rushes. Deji Karim played well in his first real action this season.

REC: A+ Dwayne Bowe stood out with 9 catches for 81 yards and two TDs. Brandon Pettigrew added five catches and one TD.

OL: A The Broncos linemen generally dominated the line of scrimmage, allowing no sacks and opening holes for the running game.

DL: B+ Run defense allowed just 70 yards in the game. Got excellent pressure on Flacco, with Ziggy Hood registering a sack and the D-line hurrying Flacco on seven occasions.

LB: B- Will Witherspoon was the star of the unit once again, and playing like he's 22. With-

erspoon made seven tackles, forced a fumble, and was credited with a stuff and hurry as well.

DB: A No picks, but four pass deflections and one fumble recovery for a touchdown. Allowed Flacco to complete just ten of 23 for 69 net passing yards through three quarters (52.1 passer rating).

Sp.Teams C Browns Logan bottled up on returns all day, but Broncos missed a 41-yard field goal.

Game and Season Notes

The Broncos moved to 6-0 on the season and now have four wins against no losses in the tough AFC Eastern Conference. They've won eight in a row dating back to last season, and have won ten of their last 13. With Buffalo's loss to the Jets, the Broncos own at least a three-game lead over everyone in the division except the Jets, who are two games back at 4-2.

Josh Freeman's 143.4 passer rating was his best ever, as he completed 18 of 21 for 187 yards and three touchdowns, with no picks. He also added two scrambles for 20 yards. He was the

MVP of the contest, but again the defense, which held the Browns in check until the fourth quarter, and scored once, deserves honorable mention if not a co-MVP award.

Four Bronco running backs carried the ball at least eight times, as Denver outrushed the Browns 166 yards to 70, with rookie fifth round pick Deji Karim getting his first extended workout of the season. Karim led Denver in rushing yards with 8 for 51, a 6.4 average. Ricky Williams contributed 46, the same as Brown's leading rushing Ray Rice, while rookies Dimitri Nance and

Anthony Dixon added 25 and 24 respectively.

Derrick Mason of the Browns caught 8 for 91 to lead Cleveland, while Dwayne Bowe led Denver in receiving with 9 for 81 and two TDs. Boldin and Celek added six each for the Browns.

Will Witherspoon was the leading Bronco defender with seven tackles, a stuff, a hurry and a forced fumble (credited as the blitz on the shotgun snap over Flacco's head), while defensive end Ziggy Hood contributed the lone sack for either team. Barrett Rudd had ten tackles to lead the Browns.

Injuries And Transactions

Injury Report

Late in the game, the Browns lost veteran LB Keith Bullock for three weeks, but get back two other linebackers, Pisa Tinoisomoa and Akin Ayodele just in time for their game against the Jets in New York next week.

Player Transactions

The Broncos announced the release of H-back Kory Sperry, with fullback Delanie Walker coming back from his injured ankle. Sperry caught three passes for 23 yards in the two games he played for the Broncos.

A Look Ahead

The Broncos will get back fullback / tight end Delanie Walker for their next game, at home against the 3-3 Buffalo Bills, who lost to the Jets this week. RB Ryan Torain is close to returning, but might not play until the following week.

Rex Grossman: Starting Quarterback?

Rex Grossman wants to start, and believes he can be a solid quarterback somewhere, even if that's not in the cards in Denver.

And the Broncos think he is already an exceptional quarterback - as a 30-year-old backup to 22-year-old Josh Freeman. Grossman allows the Broncos to sleep at night knowing that if anything happened that took Freeman out of action for a game or more, Grossman is ready, willing and able to step in and lead the Broncos.

The Broncos talk about competition for every starting job, but at quarterback, it's clear that Josh Freeman is going to remain the starter for the long term, and Grossman's opportunities will have to come elsewhere or not at all. But while Rex wants to start, he also knows that the Broncos value his contributions to the team as a backup and mentor to Freeman and isn't about to make any waves. At least, not at this time. So while he's happy in Denver at present, and willing to serve as the understudy to Freeman this year, he's not likely to accept that role next year and beyond.

That's because Rex isn't getting any younger (he's 30) and he knows his window of opportunity for starting again is closing. As a former starter who once threw for more than 3800 yards and 31 touchdowns (in Chicago in 2007), Rex knows what it's like to be The Guy, and not just the backup to The Guy. Josh Freeman is clearly The Guy in Denver, a role that Grossman still covets - and he would be willing to relocate to get that job back.

For the Broncos part, they deny they are shopping Grossman around, and it's unlikely they could find a suitor at this point anyway. They have talked him up in the recent past, and did give him plenty of action in the pre-season, and while Grossman did look good, it was mostly against second- and third-team players. Most ISFL GM's remember the reasons that Grossman, who looked so good at times in Chicago, lost that starting job in Chicago and aren't about to go out on a limb to acquire him. They are afraid it would snap off behind them and send them - and their team - crashing to earth.

But Grossman is quick to clarify, saying he's more mature, and more ready to lead a team than he was years ago in Chicago. "That's ancient history. I've learned from it and have moved on. I was just a kid back then. I've grown up a lot in the past few years."

The Broncos believe they are set at QB for the near term with both Josh Freeman and Rex Grossman. "While we'd have liked to add a young developmental QB in this past draft, the draft didn't fall into place for us that way," a Broncos insider said recently. "Some of the players we had as second round picks went higher than we anticipated and we didn't get to add a young quarterback we liked." Currently the Broncos only have two quarterbacks on their roster, so could not trade Rex without getting someone back in return. "And we're very happy with Josh and Rex, and any claims to the contrary are absolutely false,"

our insider said. "They work well together and help each other out. We also believe Rex can be a starting quarterback in this league if given the right opportunity, but we are not ready to trade him at this time."

If the Broncos don't move him this year, look for Grossman to ask for an opportunity to shop himself around next year. The Broncos would be amenable to that if Grossman can command a good-enough trade value, but whether anyone would part with what the Broncos think Grossman is worth is open to debate. For their part, they haven't put a solid price on Grossman's head, but we understand from behind-the-scenes discussions that they think it is in the David Garrard range. Garrard was traded a few weeks ago for a first round pick in 2012, and another quarterback.

But while Garrard was a solid starter in Pittsburgh for years, Grossman has been a backup for about as long, so the values aren't comparable on their surface. But the Broncos are quick to point out that Grossman is younger than Garrard by nearly three years, and Garrard's best seasons came after he hit the age of thirty - right where Grossman is now. "Sometimes it takes a while for everything to fall into place for a player. Grossman still has the arm strength he had when he came out of Florida as a collegian that made him a first round ISFL pick back in 2004, and if he can put it together, he can be a starter for another five or more years in the right system."



Newcomer Kory Sperry was released after the game as Delanie Walker was activated.

Denver Bronco

Fast Fact:

The Broncos have now won ten of their last thirteen games extending back to last season.

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Denver
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TOO EARLY TO THINK PLAYOFFS?

October 1st, 2011: With the Broncos winning their sixth in a row and having a 4-0 record already within the AFC East, the fan chatter has started to mount that the Broncos will almost certainly make the playoffs, barring a massive collapse.

Despite a two-game lead over last year's Super Bowl Champions, and a three game or larger lead over everyone else, Denver's head coach Hank Sienzant would hear none of it. "We've got a long way to go and a lot of games of play. Even though we believe we've turned this ship around in a great many ways, there's still more work to do.

"At this point we're guaranteed only a 6-win season," Sienzant pointed out, "and that's not going to be enough to win the division."

Sienzant is correct in his math but it's also true that less than a month ago he said ten wins in the AFC East would be enough to make the playoffs. That means the Broncos need to win only four of their final ten games to make the playoffs. Confronted with that argument, Sienzant back-tracked, saying he was mis-quoted. "I said ten wins gets us in the conversation. There have been ten-win teams that haven't made the playoffs. Last year Chicago went 10-6 in the AFC Central, and failed to make the playoffs. I never said ten wins gets us into the playoffs."

Despite Sienzant's back-tracking, it's clear the Broncos have a strong leg up in the playoff hunt. As one of only three undefeated teams left in the ISFL (Dallas and Denver are both 6-0, while Green Bay is 5-0 as of this writing), the Broncos are in rarified air right now. They are closing in on their best start ever, an 8-0 start in 2001 followed by a 3-5 collapse over the second half of the season.

The Broncos cannot let that happen again. And a look at their remaining schedule says that is unlikely. Remember that four of the Broncos six wins were on the road already, so of their remaining ten games, six are at home. But Sienzant is quick to counter this argument as well, pointing out that the Broncos lost six home games last year, and they have one of the toughest schedules in the league remaining. "Of our final ten games, we face eight games with winning records right now. There is not a weak-sister in this league, and no game is a gimme in the ISFL. Start thinking that way and you lose."