

Special Points

of Interest:

- Broncos lose for first time in 2011
- Josh Freeman has second poor outing in a row
- Offense held without a touchdown until final minute
- Defense surrenders two rushing touchdowns

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BRONCOS STUMBLE IN LOSSTO JAGS, 14-9

Denver Last Undefeated Team to Fall

October 16th, 2011: The Jacksonville Jaguars were just too good for the young Broncos. They took advantage of their opportunities and denied the Broncos when they had to, beating Denver to raise their record to 7-1 in the NFC East. The Broncos fell to 7-1, suffering their first loss in their last ten games, ending a nine-game winning streak dating back to last year. They still lead the AFC East over the Jets by at least a game.

The second half was a litany of missed opportunities for the Broncos until the final minutes as the Jaguars displayed the epitome of a bend-but-don't-break defense. They had three excellent drives but got nothing out of them. Opening the second half with a hard-fought 3-0 lead, the Broncos drove 56 yards in 13 plays and took over seven minutes off the clock, but when a draw play on third down was stuffed, the Broncos tried to settle for a 42 yard field goal, but Mason Crosby's attempt was wide right.

With the Jaguars taking over at

their own 31 on their first possession of the second half, the Broncos put veteran running back Lardainian Tomlinson out of the game, but the Jaguars scored a touchdown to take the lead at 7-3 when Donald Brown, Tomlinson's backup, came off the bench to punch it over on a fourth-and-goal from the Bronco one.

The Broncos second and third possessions of the second half were equally as ineffective as their first. They started their second possession at their own 20, and got as close as the Jaguars three, but an Asante Samuel pick of Josh Freeman in the end zone ended that threat, and left the Broncos scoreless in the third quarter. The Broncos wasted a big play by Brandon Pettigrew when he rumbled 38 yards on a short slant from Freeman down to the Jacksonville three yard line.

After forcing a Jaguars punt to start the fourth quarter, the Broncos went on the march again this time for 70 yards in 15 plays, taking over six minutes off the clock.

And again they came up empty, when Mason Crosby missed his second field goal of the game, this time from 47 yards out. The drive started when the Broncos took over at their own one yard following a good Weatherford punt, but the broncos got a big third-and-ten catch from Pettigrew to move it to the 21, and followed it up with a nice 23-yard gain by Ryan Torain on a pitchout around left end to move the ball close to midfield. But after Pettigrew converted a third-and-six, the drive bogged down, and the Broncos couldn't get three three on the board to cut it to 7-6.

With less than six minutes on the clock, the Denver defense came up big, stopping the Jaguars on a three-and-out, but rookie punt returner Brandon James fumbled the return, handing the ball to the Jaquars at the Denver 25, and the Jags made it count. Running three straight time to Donald Brown after a completion to Gar-

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Playoffs Always The Goal

The Denver fans who wanted the Broncos to go undefeated this year are certainly disappointed by the Broncos loss to the tough Jacksonville Jaguars yesterday, but their expectations for an undefeated season may have been a bit excessive, at least to judge by the email missives we've received in the past 24 hours.

But the Broncos coaching staff and the team always had different expectations, even as the Bronco record went to 7-0, and the win-

ning streak went to nine straight.

After all, this team is just a year removed from a 4-12 record and two years away from the 1-15 disaster that was the 2009 season.

No, an undefeated season was never the expectation nor the goal of the coaches and players. Instead, the goal has always been to make the playoffs, which this franchise has not done since the 2006 season when they won eleven games a year after winning the Super Bowl.

And with the eighth toughest schedule in the ISFL this year, and five playoff teams to face in their first five games, not many people gave the Broncos a chance to reach even a .500 record this year. By all rights, the Broncos have already exceeded all expectations by winning seven games this year.

All expectations except their own, where a playoff berth has always been the goal of the current staff in rebuilding this franchise from the ground up.

...the Broncos put up a magnificent 94 yard [first half] drive that took over twelve minutes off the clock and took 23 plays [but ended in just a field goal]



Bronco Report Card

Overall Grade: **C-**



Denver lost for the first time this year but is still 11-4 over their past 15 games

Broncos Stumble (continued from page one)

con moved the ball to the 13, the Jaguars put up a touchdown when Brown converted a third and six by running right up the middle untouched for the score that made it 14-3 with just over two minutes to go in the game.

But the Broncos weren't done, and tried mightily to overcome that two-score deficit - the biggest margin they've trailed by in any game this year. It took them ten plays and 1:48, but they finally got their first and only touchdown of the game after Dwayne Bowe took a short pass from Freeman at the sideline and instead of stepping out near midfield, cut back inside of the defender and then raced down the sideline for 50-yard gain, finally

getting pushed out by Marcus Trufant at the Jags seven-yard line. A short out to Brandon Pettigrew moved it to the two, and Ryan Torain took a pitchout around right end for the touchdown that cut it to 14-9 with :45 seconds left in the game. That was as close as the Broncos got, as the two-point conversion attempt failed, and the Jaguars recovering the onside kick attempt and taking one knee to end the game.

In the first half, neither team could manage much offense, although the Jags had the better of it early. But a key lost fumble inside the Broncos 25 after a completion to Chris Cooley on the Jaguars second drive denied Jacksonville an

early opportunity to score, and after an exchange of punts, the Broncos put up a magnificent 94 yard drive that took over twelve minutes off the clock and took 23 plays -- and ended when the Broncos passed up a chance for the touchdown on fourth and inches from the Jaguars four and instead settled for the Crosby 22-yard field goal with 1:25 left in the first half.

The Jaguars tried to pass their way into field goal range in the final minutes, but a completion to Reggie Wayne at the Bronco 26 ended the half as Wayne could not get out of bounds, ending the half with the Broncos ahead by a narrow 3-0 margin.

Bronco Report Card

QB: F Freeman had plenty of opportunities but didn't do anything with them, coming up small when they needed him to play big. Freeman's most disappointing game to date.

RB: A Can't do much better against a run defense that was allowing only 91 yards per game through seven weeks, the Bronco running backs got a boost from getting Ryan Toran back and Denver finished with over 200 yards on the ground.

REC: B- Some big catches and runs on short completions. But two drops lower this rating a half-grade. Pettigrew and Bowe particularly impressive.

OL: A Dominated the line of scrimmage despite facing one of the best defensive lines in football. Jacksonville allowed a 100-yard rusher for only the second time this year (week one vs. Seattle).

DL: D+ Run defense allowed 88 yards on the ground, and put intermittent pressure on Brees. No

sacks and it was painfully clear Brees was too often too comfortable in the pocket.

LB: C Witherspoon and Goff contributed 13 tackles, two hurries and a stuff, but Sims mostly a cipher (2 tackles, one stuff).

DBs: C- No picks, Porter's forced fumble only big play. Allowed receivers too much room to get open.

Special Teams: F Two missed field goals, botched punt return spelled difference in game.

Game and Season Notes

Befitting two teams that had the #1 and 2 scoring defenses, the game was a low-scoring affair with just 23 points allowed in total.

The Broncos controlled the clock and the line of scrimmage, running off 72 plays from scrimmage to the Jaguars 54, and had twelve more minutes of possession time than the Jaguars, but their inability to score when they had opportunities doomed their chances.

In his first game back from a hamstring pull in week one, Ryan Torain became the first Bronco to rush for over one hundred yards in a game this season. Torain picked up 104 in 20 carries, rushing for a 5.2 average and the Broncos lone touchdown. Ricky Williams started the game at running

back for the Broncos and was effective throughout, rushing nine times for 51 (5.7). Donald Brown was the Jags best runner, gaining 58 on ten carries and scoring both Jags TDs. LaDainian Tomlinson had 29 yards on eight carries (3.6) and one drop before he went out with injury.

The Broncos could not capitalize on their ability to move the ball on the ground, however, as Freeman had one of his worse days as a pro, completing only 14 of 29 for 198 yards and one pick (56.4). By contrast, Drew Brees was 24 of 32 for 226 yards (94.0), and was held without a touchdown pass for the fourth time this season. Brees' two favorite receivers were Reggie Wayne (9 for 102, 25 long) and Pierre Garcon (7 for 71). Each had

five catches for first downs, contributing 10 of the Jags 19 total first downs. Chris Cooley but loss one big fumble in the first half. Brandon Pettigrew was the Broncos leading receiver and has really emerged in Finley's absence, catching six for 90 yards, while Dwayne Bow had four catches for 82 and that big 50-yard catch and run late in the contest.

The Broncos had an opportunity to tie their own team record with eight wins to start the season (set back in 2001), but that fell by the wayside with the loss to the Jags. Their nine straight wins over two seasons (set last week against Buffalo) ties the club record set by that 2001 team (one win to conclude 2000, eight straight to start 2001).

Injuries And Transactions

Injury Report

The Broncos got nickel wide out Louis Murphy back, but after one catch, he re-injured himself and went back out again. He may miss next week as well, as the Broncos don't want to rush him back and lose him again.

The Broncos will be without Jermichael Finley and Louis Murphy next week on offense, and Nate Allen and Jared Odrick on defense.

Jacksonville lost starting guard Logan Mankins in the second quarter and LaDainian Tomlinson in the third quarter. Tomlinson may be back next week but Mankins, who has been in-and-out of the lineup with assorted injuries all year will probably miss the next few games.

A Look Ahead

The Broncos travel to the west coast to play the 4-4 San Diego Chargers in week nine. The Chargers play the Broncos twice this year as they did last year. Last season the Broncos and Chargers split their two games, with San Diego winning 31-9 in week one in San Diego, and the Broncos winning 27-10 in the fifteenth game of the season.

The 7-1 Jacksonville Jaguars host the 6-1 (as of this writing) Detroit Lions in week nine. Both teams have five game winning streaks. Detroit can extend it to six games with a win against Dallas in week eight. Those two five game streak are currently the longest in the ISFL with the Bronco streak ended at nine.

Player Acquisitions

The Broncos signed safety Anthony Smith off the waiver wire to replace Allen, and he got the start when the Broncos opened in the nickel defense, with Malcolm Jenkins moving to corner to man up on Reggie Wayne.

Smith did not play well (no tackles) and may not see the field much over the next few weeks as the Broncos missed the playmaking Nate Allen.

The Broncos, with the exception of the injury to Nate Allen last week and Louis Murphy against Jacksonville, are relatively injury free right now. Jermichael Finley is still out, of course, but the only other player out is Jared Odrick, a rookie backup defensive lineman.

FREEMAN NEEDS TO GET ON TRACK

October 16th, 2011: It was only two games ago that Josh Freeman was riding high as the toast of Denver and possessed the highest passer rating in the ISFL. Not too shabby for a 22-year-old wunderkind two years removed from Kansas State.

But in the what-have-you done-for-me-lately world that is today's ISFL, Freeman's play has come under scrutiny due to his apparent poor play in the two games since he put up a 143.4 passer rating in week six against the Browns in Cleveland.

And just a week after throwing two picks against the Buffalo Bills—the most in any game this year and tying his personal high from week three of 2010 when he was a raw rookie — Freeman played even poorer, not throwing a TD pass for the first in eleven straight games and completing fewer than 50% of his passes for the first time as a pro.

So today, despite being ranked as the second-best quarterback in the ISFL by passer rating (with a 109.3, behind only Jay Cutler), and despite having thrown 18 touchdown passes to just six interceptions, Broncos head coach Hank Sienzant finds himself having to defend the kid and asking for a little perspective, please.

"It's not all on Josh's shoulders. I didn't say it first, but it bears repeating that a quarterback gets too much of the credit when a team is winning and too much of the blame when they are losing.

"And that applies to the game we just played against Jacksonville," Sienzant says.

"Josh made his share of mistakes, but so did the coaching staff and so did the other players. We have to remember he's just 22 years old this season and he's done exceedingly well for a kid who would be a rookie right now if he hadn't

come out as a 21-year-old junior."

"We feel lucky to have Josh," Sienzant concluded.

And by way of comparison, the Broncos are heading west to face the Chargers, who drafted Mark Sanchez with the first pick in the first round last year. Freeman and Sanchez have been linked at the hip since both were first round picks for their respective teams before last season.

Sanchez won rookie-of-the-year honors last year, and while the Chargers, like the Broncos, are improved this year, the Chargers and Sanchez haven't enjoyed the same kind of success the surprising 7-1 Broncos and Freeman have had. The Chargers are just 4-4 and Sanchez, while a key cog in the San Diego offense, has put up only a 78.4 rating thus far this year. The upcoming game will be a great benchmark to compare the relative progress of these two.



The Broncos Louie Murphy came back this week but after one catch went back down and will probably miss next week

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

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Denver
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BRONCOS UPBEAT DESPITE FIRST LOSS

You didn't expect Denver to go undefeated this year, did you?

One loss doesn't mean much in the ultimate scheme of things, but the Broncos are certainly licking their wounds today from the tough loss to Jacksonville yesterday.

They've had an opportunity to reflect on the game and know they didn't make the best of the opportunities they had, and handed some big opportunities to Jacksonville. Although no platoon was without key mistakes, special teams play in particular let them down, and the coaching staff may make some changes there the rest of the way.

Still, all things considered, the Bronco coaching staff and players are surprisingly upbeat. "It's a marathon, not a sprint," Bronco head coach Hank Sienzant reminds us. "I've been stressing that here since day one, and I didn't expect us to be 7-1 at the halfway mark. I doubt anyone expected that. So while the loss stings, and we feel we should have done better, we've moved past it and are now preparing for our game in San Diego against the 4-4 Chargers. And," he added, "7-1 isn't so bad, considering."

The Jacksonville defense made Josh Freeman look ordinary. Freeman acknowledged that and says. for his part, "They are good. Real good. And well-coached too. We thought we had a good game plan, but there were some looks they gave us that caught me off-guard. I need to do a better job of reading defenses and throwing to the open man."

Sienzant deflected any criticism of Freeman when asked if Freeman's play cost the Broncos the game. "We win and lose as a team. That was a loss for the Broncos, not a loss for Josh."

And certainly losing to the 7-1 Jacksonville Jaguars, one of the pre-season favorites to win the ISFL Super Bowl, is no disgrace. And the Broncos did come away with some positives against the Jags, like running for over 200 yards and throwing for nearly as mainly. But as you might expect in a tough loss of this nature, there was more minuses than pluses against the Jaguars, and the Broncos today get back to work on the task of winning their next game. It starts with review of game film and scouting reports.