

Special Points

of Interest:

- Broncos start 4-0 for first time since 2001
- Josh Freeman throws three touchdown passes
- Defense holds Texans to only one late touchdown
- Defense surrenders just 44 yards on 12 rushes

Inside This Issue:

Broncos Report Card	2
Game and Season Notes	2
Injury Report and Player Acquisitions	3
Ryan Torain: Pine Rider?	3
Broncos Play Jets in Key Week Five Game	4

BRONCOS DOMINATE TEXANS, 38-13

One of Two Undefeated AFC Teams

September 18th, 2011: The Broncos are for real, it appears. Despite talk that the Broncos 3-0 start was a chimera, and they would be exposed soon, the Broncos got the better of the Houston Texans for a second time already this season, beating them decisively, 38-13. They are now one of two AFC teams remaining undefeated (Dallas is the other). The Texans fell to 2-2, with both losses at the hands of the Broncos.

The Broncos looked good in all phases of the game. The Broncos had over 400 yards of offense for the third time this season and the defense allowed only one touchdown for the sixth consecutive game - dating back to last season. Even special teams got into the act, forcing a fumble that led directly to the Broncos second touchdown.

The Broncos defense again took away the Texans' running game, forcing Eli Manning to the air. It wasn't pretty, as Manning completed 25 of 45 for 231

yards and one touchdown, but threw two picks. He put up just a 58.7 passer rating on the day.

By contrast, Josh Freeman was the star for the Broncos, throwing for three touchdowns and sneaking for another. Freeman completed 16 of 24 for 182 yards, and threw one pick, for a 111.5 passer rating. He also rushed four times for 38 yards.

But it probably the Broncos running game that was the key difference in the game. It contributed 217 yards on 44 rushes, as the Broncos controlled the line of scrimmage and the game, piling up nearly twelve more minutes time of possession than the Texans.

The Broncos took the opening kickoff looked crisp, driving 68 yards for a touchdown in just five plays, all passes, with Freeman hitting Bowe from eight yards out for the score. Two passes to Jermichael Finley accounted for 42 of the 68 yards, with Finley getting 27 and 15 on back-to-back receptions down

the middle of the Texans defense.

When Leodis McKelvin fumbled the ensuing kickoff (recovered by the Broncos Tracy Porter at the Texans' 11 yard line), the Broncos made it 14-0 in short order, with Ricky Williams taking a draw play right up the middle for the score on third and ten.

The Texans kicked two field goals sandwiched around a Bronco missed field goal attempt to cut the Denver lead to 14-6, but that was as close as they got. Both Texan drives were long drives, of eleven and twelve plays respectively, but each ended with a Manning incomplete pass on third down forcing the Texans to settle for a field goal.

After the Texans second field goal, the Broncos made it 21-6 at the half, driving 80 yards in eleven plays to score on a Freeman to Pettigrew 18 yard slant pass down the middle of the Texans'

(Continued Page Two)

Broncos in Final Four!

Not the playoffs. That won't be determined for another three months or so.

However, the Broncos are one of only four remaining undefeated teams left in the ISFL after four games. They now have a six-game winning streak, dating back to the final two games of the 2010 season. That six-game streak is now the longest active winning streak in the ISFL (including playoff games).

Three other teams are also 4-0 or 3-0 at this time (with all week four games yet to be played).

Dallas is 3-0, and face off against the 2-1 San Diego Chargers in week three before their week four schedule is complete. Dallas was 12-4 last year, so their 3-0 start is no big surprise.

A bigger surprise is the 4-0 Packers, who upset the defending champion Jets last week and

haven't beaten anyone by more than eight points. This after a 9-7 season last year which gave no inkling of their fast start this year.

Philadelphia, which was only 3-13 last season, is as much or more of a surprise as even Denver. Last year they managed to beat only 4-12 Carolina twice, and added a win against 8-8 Arizona. This year they have swept all four opponents in their path.

DOMINATE TEXANS (continued from page

“It took the Broncos six plays to gain the final two yards to thwart a fine Texans goal line stand...”



Bronco Report Card

Overall Grade: **B**

defense.

The Broncos made it 28-6 early in the second half when rookie Nate Allen made his second interception of the season, picking off Manning on a third-and-ten and returning it 11 yards to the Texans' 22. Freeman got credit for the touchdown on a four-yard hookup with Louis Murphy, but Dimitri Nance deserves partial credit, as the big back rumbled 14 yards off tackle behind a Ryan Clady block on a second-and-18 to get the ball to the four yard

line.

The Broncos added another ten points on a Crosby field goal and a Josh Freeman quarterback sneak to end the Denver scoring. It took the Broncos six plays to gain the final two yards to thwart a fine Texans goal line stand, with Freeman sneaking over from a yard out on fourth and goal from the one yard line.

The field goal drive covered 50 yards in seven plays, with only one pass and six runs, taking over three minutes off the clock be-

fore Mason Crosby booted home a 32-yarder, while the Denver touchdown drive took over seven minutes and 12 plays, ten of them runs.

After that, the Texans managed to score their only touchdown of the contest, and only the fourth Denver has allowed in four games, on an 88-yard, 15-play drive against the Denver second-teamers to end the scoring, with Manning hitting Clayton from six yards out on fourth down with 2:19 left in the contest.

Bronco Report Card

QB: A- Josh Freeman got credited with the MVP of the game award, completing 16 of 24 for 187 yards and three TDs with one pick (111.5).

RB: A Running backs picked up 181 yards against the Houston Texans, averaging 4.8 per rush.

REC: B Brandon Pettigrew did well picking up the slack after both Jermichael Finley and Delanie Walker went down. Three difference receivers caught touchdown passes, and the Broncos picked up 12 first downs passing.

OL: A Allowed one sack for for just two yards lost, and opened big holes for the running backs.

DL: B- Run defense allowed the Texans just 44 yards on the ground, but did not mount much pressure against Eli Manning in the passing game.

LB: C Witherspoon led the unit with six tackles, but there were no big plays from this group this week other than one pass defended by Witherspoon. In fairness, the starters played only about three quarters, and subs Kaluka Maiava (3 tackles)

and Will Herring (1 tackle) played much of the fourth quarter,

DBs: A+ Two picks, six passes defended, and one fumble recovery. A very good day.

Special Teams: B Forced a big turnover on a hard hit by Ed Johnson, but Mason Crosby missed a 38-yard field goal and Jon Ryan had one punt (which went for a touchback). Coverage teams were exceptional (14 yards per return for the Texans), but the Bronco return game was nothing to write home about.

Game and Season Notes



Denver starts a season 4-0 for the first time since 2001.

Both Ricky Williams and Anthony Dixon had 70 or more yards rushing against the Texans. Williams finished with 12 for 70 (5.8) and a long gain of 29, while Dixon led the Broncos in rushing with 17 for 71 (4.2) and a long of 13. Dimitri Nance kicked in another 40 yards on 9 rushing attempts (4.4).

For the Texans, Peyton Hillis got 38 yards on 11 carries, a 3.5 yard average, with a long gain of nine yards. Eli scrambled once for six yards.

The Broncos running game now has 652 yards in four games, an average of 163 yards per game. Last year the Broncos averaged just 107 yards per

game on the ground. Because the Broncos are using a running back by committee approach, none of their backs are in the top 15 in yards, but the Broncos have one of the best ground games in the league as of this writing. Their 163 per game total is good for third right now.

By contrast, the Denver run defense is allowing only 60.5 yards per game, good for second in the league. Last year Denver allowed 120 yards per game, so they've cut that number in half through their first four games.

The Texans' Roddy White caught ten passes for 126 yards and Dallas Clark added eight for another 59 as Eli once again

filled the air with passes against the Broncos. Brandon Pettigrew was the Broncos leading receiver with five catches (for 46 yards), but Finley's three catches went for 66.

Five different Broncos scored one touchdown each, with Ricky Williams and Josh Freeman scoring on the ground, and Pettigrew, Bowe and Murphy catching touchdown passes.

Inside linebacker Rolando McClain led the Texans in tackles with eleven, while Tracy Porter had an exceptional game for the Broncos, leading the team with seven tackles, in addition to getting a pick and three pass deflections.

Injuries And Acquisitions

Injury Report

The Broncos suffered three key injuries the week before their biggest game in years, and all three players will miss the Broncos next game. In the third quarter they lost two of the three tight ends on their roster, losing both Delanie Walker and Jermichael Finley to injury.

Finley's is the more substantial injury and also has the greatest consequences, as he was leading the team in receiving yards with 241, Finley had demonstrated a remarkable ability to get

open regardless of the coverage and catch everything thrown in his area. Finley, who suffered an ACL injury, is lost for most of the rest of the season.

The Broncos also lost tight end / fullback Delanie Walker and rookie defensive end Jared Odrick.

Odrick's injury will keep him out for the remainder of the season, while early indications are Walker will be back in a week or two. Walker had contributed eight receptions for 90 yards in four games while Odrick had four tackles in four games.

A Look Ahead

The Broncos travel to the New Meadowlands Stadium to face off against the Jets. The Jets have been playing in Giants Stadium, which is scheduled for demolition this week. The Broncos are 4-0 but expect the Jets to be favored.

Player Acquisitions

There were no new signees for week four, but the Broncos will need to sign three new players to replace Finley, Walker, and Odrick on the roster.

Ryan Torain: Pine Rider?

When the Broncos spent a second-round choice on Ryan Torain in this past draft, it was expected that he would challenge for the starting job. When he got the majority of the work in camp, camp followers wrote that off as par for the course. When he was anointed the starter over Ricky Williams just before the start of the season, that came as no surprise. And when he went down early in the second half of game one, it was expected he would be the starter upon his return.

But Torain is now the fifth best rusher on the Broncos, stuck at nine carries for 40 yards, and will remain so for at least another two or three weeks as he is expected to miss the next few games and be out until approximately week eight of the 2011 season.

He has already been out-rushed by three running

backs (veteran Ricky Williams and two rookies) and by quarterback Josh Freeman. And with those other running backs playing so well, it is by no means a certainty he gets his job back when he is once again cleared to play.

Veteran Ricky Williams has certainly performed well, rushing 44 times for 243 yards and two scores (a nifty 5.5 average) and will be hard to bench at this point. After a poor start in week one (seven rushes, 18 yards), Williams has averaged 75 yards a game and over six yards a carry. But the Broncos are also getting good performances from two rookie draft picks, Anthony Dixon and Dimitri Nance.

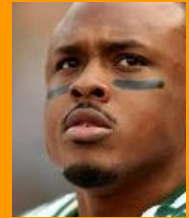
Dixon, a fifth round pick of the Broncos, has rushed the same number of times as Williams. Dixon has 166 yards to date, a 3.8 average. Dixon's had three solid games in four outings, with a high in week four of 17 carries and 71 yards (4.2).

Dimitri Nance, a Broncos supplemental (11th round) pick, has out-rushed Torain as well, picking up 93 yards on 22 carries, good for a 4.2 average. His most carries and rushes came in week four against the Texans (9 for 40) and a solid 4.4 average.

Neither Nance nor Dixon has caught a pass yet, but Williams has been productive in the passing game, befitting his veteran status, catching five for 31 yards (6.2) and one touchdown.

Hank Sienzant was approached about Torain's status recently, and he said only that "It's a nice problem to have," and "We typically believe that starters don't lose their job due to injury" but added that "There have been plenty of exceptions over the years. It's by no means a hard-and-fast rule that we always adhere to."

So this is another big story line out of Denver awaiting a conclusion. Stay tuned.



The Broncos lost Jermichael Finley for most of the rest of the year and his play-making ability will be hard to replace.

***Denver Bronco
Fast Fact:
The Broncos
have now won
eight of their last
eleven games
extending back
to last season.***

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Denver
Broncos

BRONCOS PLAY JETS IN KEY WEEK FIVE GAME

While the odds-makers have the upcoming Broncos at Jets game in week five rated as close to even, the Jets are the clear favorite to win in the eyes of the public and their perception of the two is that the Jets are the stronger team and the Broncos have much to prove. That assessment is probably correct.

But if anyone had told you at the beginning of the season that when the Broncos played the Jets in week five one of the two teams would be undefeated, would you have guessed it would be the Broncos?

No way, right? But that's precisely what the standings say, so we have no choice but to believe them.

Still, the Broncos do have so much to prove.

Recent history says it all. It was only last year that the Broncos started the season winless in their first nine games, after all, while the Jets were rolling through their schedule undefeated. While the Broncos have turned it around since just after mid-season last year, winning four of their final seven last season and their first four this year, remember that the Jets have won twelve games and lost only one in that same span of time (with the week four game this year still to be played).

So is this just a fast start to a mediocre season or is far more in store for the Broncos?

The Broncos do seem to have turned a corner in a big way, as they are beating teams decisively now that have previously dominated them. But they are starting to see some key injuries pile up as well, and with the Jets looming on the schedule, that is not a good time to be playing short-handed.

The Broncos did get both Eric Wood and Nick Cole back on the offensive line for Houston, but losing both Jermichael Finley and Delanie Walker from the Broncos receiving corps will clearly hurt the Broncos chances. Above all, Finley's playmaking ability will be tough to replace. Brandon Pettigrew, the Broncos sole remaining tight end at this time, has one more catch than Finley, but nearly one hundred fewer yards than Finley. He's a good player, but not in Finley's class.

But this game will be played regardless, so the Broncos have no choice but to suit up and go play.

It should be a great game, and one that will enable us to better gauge the Broncos progress this year.

Even a close loss will tell us the Broncos are for real. A blowout at the hands of the Jets will let us know the Broncos have farther to go before they can match up to a team like the Jets. We can't wait.