

Key Stats

From Week 13:

- Josh Freeman throws three touchdown passes, including game winner in OT
- Broncos surrender 441 yards from scrimmage
- Denver allows Browns 186 yards rushing
- Ryan Torain rushed for 119 on just 20 carries (6.0)

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BRONCOS EDGE BROWNS IN OVERTIME, 37-31 Denver Blows 21-3, 31-17 Leads

November 20th, 2011: The Broncos were lucky to "Phew!" That was the first word uttered by Bronco coach Hank Sienzant in his post-game interview after the Broncos narrowly escaped being upset by the Browns. The Broncos won in overtime, 37-31, on a 17-yard touchdown pass from Josh Freeman to Delanie Walker, but the 4-8 Cleveland Browns came into Denver and gave the Broncos everything they could handle, and then some.

With the win, the Broncos stay atop the ISFL with the best record in the league for another week, moving to 12-1 on the season. The Broncos, who clinched a playoff spot with the narrow win, now have clinched no worse than the fourth seed in the AFC. The defending Super Bowl Champion NY Jets, who are 9-3 as of this writing, may now have to win all their remaining games to edge the Broncos in the AFC East.

escape with their lives against the Broncos. "I think our young team was looking past the Browns to some extent to the bye, and to the Jet game the next week," Sienzant said later. "Not to take anything away from the Browns. They played great. But hopefully our guys learned something today, and understand they can't look past any team in this league."

Although the Browns never led in the game, and trailed by two scores multiple times, but were never deterred, and kept coming back, and back.

With the Broncos ahead 31-17 late in the third, the Browns had two long drives for touchdowns to tie the game and send it into overtime. In both, they mixed the run and pass effectively, and gashed the Broncos for key gains time and time again. They cut the lead to 31-24 on an 11-yard pass from Joe Flacco to Antonio

Gates, marching from their own 14 on a 86-yard drive that took 14 plays and over eight minutes off the clock. After three punts, two by the Broncos and one by Cleveland, The Browns came back to score another touchdown, silencing the crowd and tying the game at 31 with just 49 seconds remaining in regulation, when Mike Tolbert took the handoff from Flacco and pounded in on a sweep around right end from seven yards out. Ray Rice, who was held in check through three quarters (11-34), broke a 29-yard run on third and five earlier in the drive to key the nine play, 65-yard march.

The Broncos made it into Browns territory in those 49 seconds, but time expired when Dwayne Bowe caught an out pass near the sideline but was tackled before he could get out of bounds at the Browns 36.

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BRONCOS DOING IT WITH MIRRORS?

Over the 2009-2010 seasons, the first two years under head coach Hank Sienzant, the Broncos surrendered an average of 25.7 points per game, one of the worst figures in the league.

This year, they have cut that total nearly in half, as they are allowing just 14.3 points per game through thirteen games, and they are using nine of the same eleven core players as last year.

What's the difference? Are they using smoke and mirrors to get the job done, or is there

more to it than that? One GM tells us the Broncos schemes are better, and that is the key to the turnaround. "They aren't gambling as much as in the past," our source says. "They have become a more stay-at-home, bend-but-don't-break defense. Because of this, they aren't giving up as many big plays, and they are forcing teams to earn their points, instead of giving them up in bunches."

"Another thing to consider," our source added, "is the Broncos also have better depth this

year than in years past. When a player gets dinged, they don't lose as much going to the next man standing."

Bronco head coach Hank Sienzant has a different take on this. "Our players may be mostly the same (nine players have started the last two years, with only Jason Pierre-Paul and Jonathon Goff new starters this year), but they are a lot better than last year. Last year we started five rookies on our base defense, including our entire front line."

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[In OT] Ray Rice was brought down from behind by a hustling Ernie Sims, who may have saved the game [for Denver]



Bronco Report Card

Overall Grade: C+



Denver starts a season 12-1 for the first time in their history. In 2005, when they won the Super Bowl, they were 10-3 after 13 games.

EDGE BROWNS (continued from page one)

In overtime, both teams had two chances, but both teams were forced to punt on their first. On the Browns second possession, starting from their own 13 yard line, Ray Rice took the ball off tackle and broke into the Broncos secondary, where it looked like he might score until he was brought down from behind by a hustling Ernie Sims, who may have single-handedly saved the game with his effort. When the dust cleared, the net result was a 41-yard gain by Rice, and the Browns had the ball at the Denver 46. Another first down or two, and they would be in field goal range. But they got no closer, and after two penalties, were forced back and had to punt it back to the Broncos from

their own 45. In the fourth quarter and overtime alone, Rice rushed 11 times for 97 yards.

The Broncos mixed runs by Ryan Torain with passes from Josh Freeman, MVP of the contest, to Dwayne Bowe and Brandon Pettigrew to move the ball to the Browns 17. On that possession, the Broncos Josh Freeman completed all six of his passes, including connecting with Delanie Walker on a short pass that Walker took the final 17 yards down the sideline for the winning score.

The Broncos jumped to a 21-3 lead in the first 21 minutes and looked like they would run away with the game early. They scored on their second possession on a Freeman-to-Bowe six yard con-

nection to end a crisp 76-yard, 8-play drive. After the Browns Daniel Sepulveda bobbled the punt snap after the three and out, and was tackled for a one-yard loss at this own 18 for a turnover on downs, the Broncos ran Ricky Williams four straight times, and Williams banged it over on his fourth carry from a yard out to make it 14-0.

After the Browns made it 14-3 on a Rackers 31-yard field goal, the Broncos went 66 yards in just 7 plays, with Freeman hitting Nate Washington for the score from nine yards out. The touchdown made it 21-3 but the Browns were far from dead.

They cut the Bronco lead to 21-10 on a Flacco five-yard pass to

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Bronco Report Card

QB: A Freeman threw three touchdown passes with no picks and led the Broncos to the win in OT by hitting six of six for 73 yards on the final Bronco drive.

RB: B+ Running backs contributed 27 for 148 on the ground (5.5) and three for 30 yards receiving, including the winning grab in OT (by Delanie Walker).

REC: A+ Receiving corps caught 23 for 242 and two touchdowns. Pettigrew and Bowe each had eight receptions.

OL: B+ Offensive line didn't allow a sack for the fourth time in the last five games and Denver rushed for 4.5 per carry on 34 rushes.

DL: F Only one sack and one hurry and the running game of the Browns gashed the DL for 186 yards on 41 rushes (4.5), controlling the tempo of the game.

LB: B+ Did not play well overall, but Sims showed up with a pass defense and four tackles, includ-

ing one that saved the game for Denver in OT. Will Witherspoon had a TD on a fumble return.

DB: C Too many uncontested completions and only one pass defended. Thomas and Landry's nine tackles each point to front line failures.

Special Teams: B Crosby perfect, Ryan very good. Deji Karim did well on KO returns (150 yards on 6 returns), and coverage units bottled up Browns return game for most part.

Game and Season Notes

The Browns put up 31 points on the Broncos. The previous high this season was just 21 points by the Chargers a few weeks ago. The 186 yards on the ground by the Browns was the most the Broncos have allowed this season, and the third consecutive game the opposing team has broken the one hundred yard barrier against the Broncos run defense. In the first ten games, the Broncos opponents broke 100 yards only twice. Ray Rice gashed the Broncos run defense for 131 yards while Mike Tolbert added another 51,

For the Broncos, Ryan Torain had his third consecutive one hundred yard game with 20 for

119, and his fourth in the last six games. Ricky Williams added 29 on seven carries and the two backs are now only four yards apart on the season in the rushing stats. Williams still leads the club with 615 yards on the ground (4.8 per carry) while Ryan Torain now has 611 (5.5).

The two teams were very close in most of the stats but Cleveland did own a significant edge in time of possession (almost 40 minutes to the Broncos 33).

Josh Freeman has been having an exceptional season for a 22-year-old quarterback. He leads the league in a number of significant passing categories, including passer rating (115.0), touchdown

passes (32), and yards per attempt (8.4).

The Broncos have clinched no worse than fourth in the AFC with a 12-1 record. They are two games ahead of the defending Super Bowl Champion Jets in the AFC East with three games remaining in the season for both teams. A Bronco win combined with a Jets loss will clinch the division for Denver. Any other combination leaves the Jets alive and sets up the big rematch in Denver in week 16 which could decide both clubs fate. The Broncos have a one-game lead over 11-2 Dallas for the first seed in the AFC Playoffs, and home games as long as they are alive.

Injuries, Transactions And a Look Ahead

Injury Report

The Broncos lost wideout / punt returner Golden Tate for week 14 (bye) and possibly for week 15 as well. They also lost the services of linebacker Robert Ayers for most of the rest of the season, including the big matchup in week 16 with the Jets. Ayers could be back for the final regular season game, but will definitely be back for the playoffs.

The Browns lost Clint Avril, but he should be back after the bye, and Antonio Gates. Gates may return for the final game of the season, but even that is iffy.

Transactions

The Broncos released safety Jarrad Page as Tracy Porter is back for the week 15 game. The Broncos signed Page prior to their week 11 game against the Eagles. In three games with the Broncos, Page had four tackles and one stuff.

The Broncos also cleared the signing of Eric Moore with the Commissioner's office to replace Robert Ayers through the duration of Ayers' injury. The 6-4, 268 pound Moore had a cup of coffee with the Dolphins earlier this season (9 tackles, 2 forced fumbles).

A Look Ahead

The Broncos travel to New England to face off against the 7-6 Patriots the week after the bye, while the Browns host the 2-10 Saint Louis Rams in their final home game of the season.

The Broncos and Patriots matched up last year in another 37-31 overtime thriller that the Broncos won in overtime on a long interception return of 68 yards for the touchdown by safety Dawan Landry. The Patriots hung up 527 yards from scrimmage against the Broncos that day, the most allowed by the Broncos under Sienzant.

EDGE BROWNS (continued from page two)

Anquan Boldin, and then took the ball back quickly when they recovered a Ryan Torain fumble at the Denver 41 in the final minute of the first half. Driving for a touchdown, they passed up the 50-yard field goal attempt on 4th and one, and Flacco hit Antonio Gates for the first down, but disaster struck the Browns

on the play, as Terrell Thomas stripped Gates after the catch and Will Witherspoon scooped up the loose ball and returned it 78 yards for a touchdown just before the end of the half. The Witherspoon touchdown gave the Bronco a 28-10 lead, but still the Browns wouldn't quit.

The Cleveland Browns scored

on their first possession of the second half on a Flacco to Tolbert six-yard pass to cut Denver's lead to 28-17 to culminate a nine-play, 75-yard drive, then, after a Broncos field goal that made it 31-17, came back with two more touchdowns to tie the game and send it into OT where the Broncos finally won it.

MIRRORS (continued from page one)

"Two other players were in their second year. Frankly, in a lot of games, we were over-matched in what we could do and how much we could put in from game-to-game. With the additional experience all these players have, they have improved their play, and that means we're getting better results from the same group of guys."

"In addition, this year we're only starting one rookie (Jason Pierre-Paul) on defense. While we've gotten some great contributions from some of our other rookies (notably Nate Allen and Kareem Jackson), having experienced players in the scheme

makes a world of difference. They are not as prone to mistakes as rookies, and they recognize things more quickly."

Sienzant singled out two second-year players specifically as playing much better. "Malcolm [Jenkins] has been playing lights out of late. He's lined up at both cornerback and safety and done whatever we asked of him, and done it very well. He may be our best defender."

The other player praised highly by Sienzant was defensive tackle B.J.Raji. "While every player on defense has contributed to our high ranking against the run (just 83.1 yards per game through twelve games, third best in the

league), B.J. has been exceptional in that regard. He's been seeing a lot of double-teams, and still making plays from the interior. We believe he's a viable All-Pro candidate."

With a tough schedule remaining, though, exactly where this defense will end up has yet to be determined. But the Broncos think they can continue to win with the guys they have, and they believe they haven't yet reached their peak. "Most of our guys are in their first two or three years of ISFL play. We think they will only get better as they mature," Sienzant says. "Someday soon, we think this group can be special."



Robert Ayers will miss the crucial week 16 game against the Jets

Denver Bronco

Fast Fact:

The Broncos have won 14 of their last 15 games, including the final two last year.

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ZIGGY JUST A LUNCHPAIL GUY

Ziggy Hood wasn't a high draft choice of the Denver Broncos in 2010. When the Broncos selected him at the top of the fourth round, the Broncos knew what they were getting.

Hood wasn't flashy. Hood wasn't ever going to be a high-sack guy who would get after the quarterback and make highlight-type plays. Hood wasn't ever going to be making Subway commercials with Reggie Bush.

But what Hood was, was a solid football player who could anchor and chase, and could play anywhere along the defensive line. The 6-3, 300-pound Hood "has no holes", according to head coach Hank Sienzant and is just a lunchpail guy who shows up and plays hard every play, every game.

While his best position might be inside in a 4-3, he can also play outside in the 3-4, and the Broncos are probably using him out of position as a 4-3 defensive end. But Hood is a team-first, not a me-first player, and he goes about the job the only way he knows how - playing hard and fast. He brings his lunchpail to work every day and goes to work.

After sitting on the bench as a rookie on a bad team, playing in just 11 games and making only 12 tackles with no other statistics of note, Hood's hustle and determination earned him a starting role on one of the best defenses in the league in his second year. This year, taking over from Philip Merling, Hood has been a key contributor and a solid starter in all 13 Bronco games played to date. He already has 15 tackles, five sacks, two deflections, five hurries, and two tackles for loss, playing on 83% of the Broncos defensive snaps. He also has one forced fumble.

He is a solid run defender (maybe the second best, after B.J.Raji, on the Bronco defensive line), and his five sacks are tied for second on the team, just one behind the team leader, Will Witherspoon. Good run defender? Check. Good pass rusher? Check.

Like Sienzant said, no holes.

But his stat line doesn't do him justice - at 23, Hood's best years are still ahead of him, and while he may never put up the sack numbers of somebody like Jason Pierre-Paul, who plays opposite Hood on the Bronco defensive line, Hood will always be just what he is - a solid football player who plays with a lunchpail mentality. Two other