

Key Stats

From Week 14:

- Broncos fail to get into end zone in five red zone trips
- Broncos blow opportunity to win at end
- Denver holds Patriots to 255 yards from scrimmage
- Broncos get 144 passing, 144 rushing

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BRONCOS DROP HEARTBREAKER TO PATRIOTS, 13-12

Blow FG Chance in Final Seconds

December 5th, 2011: With one time out left, the Broncos mismanaged the clock at the end of the game, failing to get off the potential game winning field goal after a big completion to Dwayne Bowe to the New England 19. "We felt we had time to get off one more play from the 30 to move it into better range," Bronco head coach Hank Sienzant said afterward. "The players played well on both sides. I blew it. That's on me."

With the loss, the Broncos fell to 12-2 and now have a one game lead over the Jets and face the Jets next week in a game that could decide the AFC East. The Patriots moved to 8-6 with the win and now hold a one game over the 7-7 Colts for first place in the the AFC Central.

Trailing by what would prove to be the final score of 13-12, the Broncos started their ill-fated drive at their own 38 with 1:41 remaining in the game after a

Deji Karim kickoff return of 28 yards. Offsetting penalties started the possession, then after a nine-yard completion from Josh Freeman to Brandon Pettigrew, the Broncos took two running plays to pick up the first down at their own 49. Three more completions followed, but prior to the last one to Dwayne Bowe, the Broncos should have exercised their final timeout to stop the clock. They didn't, and they only got the snap off with a few seconds left. When Bowe caught the ball, the clock had already run down to :00, and when he was tackled, the game ended with the Broncos close enough for a 37-yard field goal, but with no time left on the clock to try it.

Matt Stafford played only the second half and played well (105.5 passer rating) in relief of an ineffective Jason Campbell. Campbell was yanked with the Broncos up 9-0 at the half, having

completed only three of ten passes for 16 yards in the first half, with one sack. His passer rating was a dismal 39.6.

The Patriots opened the second half down 9-0 with an daring onside kick that they recovered at their own 42 that set the tone for their second half comeback. Stafford took over for Campbell at that point and led New England on a ten-play march to a touchdown - the only one in the game - to cut the Denver lead to 9-7. Stafford completed all seven of his passes on the possession for 57 yards and got the touchdown on a six-yard connection with Kellen Winslow Jr on third and five. The onside kick and subsequent touchdown seemed to shift all the momentum to New England, as the Broncos went three-and-out on their next three possessions while the Patriots added a

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BRONCOS FACE JETS NEXT IN BIG REMATCH

Well, they always knew it wasn't going to be easy.

As stressed by Bill Parcells in years past, the football season is a marathon, not a sprint. And while the Broncos opened the season with a league best seven game winning streak, including a big win over the Jets in week five at New York, the Broncos always knew they had a rematch with the defending champion Jets looming late in the year.

What they wanted to do was render that rematch meaningless, and they had that within their

grasp. With the best record in the league at 12-1 and a two game lead in the AFC East over the Jets entering the week 15 games, the Broncos were close to sealing the deal, but their one-point loss to New England changed all that. Now they have a one-game lead, and a loss will put them in second place in the division.

And now the Jets fly into Denver as the hotter team, having won seven of their last eight since they lost to the Broncos by a score of 31-20 in week five.

And the Broncos are reeling from the last-second loss to the Patriots as well as their narrow overtime escape against the Cleveland Browns in their prior game, when Cleveland rallied back to put up 31 points against the previously staunch Denver defense,

So it comes down to this—a matchup of the veteran defending Champions against the surprisingly good upstart young squad in Denver that last year finished 4-12, while the Jets were rolling to an undefeated season.

BRONCOS CLINCH (continued from page one)

“We thought that [Murphy end-around] play would give us the TD and the lead. When Louis cut back, that seemed to be it.”

field goal on the first play of the fourth quarter to go up 10-9.

The Broncos finally got moving after a New England drive reached the Denver 33, but when New England passed up the 50-yard field goal attempt that could have extended their lead to 13-9, their fourth down pass attempt blew up in their face when the shotgun snap went over Stafford's head and he had to fall on the ball at the Denver 44.

The Broncos marched from that point to the New England 13, with a 14-yard scramble by Freeman priming the drive, and a Louis Murphy 27-yard gain to the

New England six on a third and one end-around the big play. “We thought that play would give us the TD and the lead,” Bronco head coach Hank Sienzant said later. “When Louis cut back, that seemed to be it.” But Murphy got caught from behind, and from the six, one pass went incomplete, and two Torain runs could only move the ball to the Patriot three-yard-line. The Mason Crosby field goal was good, but only after a holding penalty moved the ball back to the thirteen and forced a re-try. The Crosby kick gave the Broncos a short-lived 12-10 lead that lasted only until the Patriots next drive.

From their own 25, the Patriots got as close as the Bronco 12, with a big completion from Stafford to Winslow for 31 on a third-and-five short slant the key play. The Stafford connection with Winslow moved the ball to the Bronco 26, from where Stafford connected to the Denver 12 with Andre Roberts for 14 yards. Two runs lost three yards, and a Stafford pass intended for Santana Moss fell incomplete, but the 33-yard field goal from New England's Adam Vinatieri's foot was true, and the Patriots had a 13-12 lead with just under two minutes remaining, setting up the Broncos for the tough loss.



Bronco Report Card

Overall Grade: **D**

QB: D One of Freeman worst efforts this year, he threw for only 148 yards (144 net) . Freeman did add 35 yards on the ground on three rushes.

RB: D Running backs had a poor game with just 82 yards on 24 carries (3.4 per carry). Ryan Torain had two drops in the passing game, once when he was wide open. Ricky Williams had an excellent game in spot duty with 8-52 (6.5) and one catch for 12 yards.

REC: F Dwayne Bowe had four for 49, but no one else had more than 14 yards receiving as the receivers consistently failed to get separation and provide Free-

man with passing targets. Patriot defenders batted away six passes. Louis Murphy added 27 yards on an end-around, but also had two drops.

OL: C The O-line didn't dominate like we've come to to expect and allowed Freeman to be sack once and hurried on numerous occasions.

DL: C Run defense was back on track, holding the Patriots to just 71 yards on the ground on 32 rushes (2.2). Adrian Peterson was bottled up constantly, gaining just 30 yards on 13 carries. B.J.Raji added a sack on a bull rush.

LB: B- Ernie Sims made a big impact with two forced fumbles

and one stuff, while Will Witherspoon added a stuff and pass defended. Goff added another stuff.

DB: C A tale of two halves. The Broncos held New England to 13 net yards passing in the first half, but got riddled by Stafford in the second half, surrendering 171 yards and one touchdown.

Sp.Teams D There was some notable special teams efforts that deserve recognition, like Mason Crosby's 4-4 on field goal attempts, but surrendering the inside kick at the start of the second half turned the game around and overshadows all the good special teams plays.

Game and Season Notes

The Torain Express was derailed by the New England defense and Ricky Williams still leads the Broncos in rushing yards for the season. Torain was bottled up all day and finished with 28 yards on 14 carries - with a long of just six yards - while Williams had 52 yards on eight carries, with a long of 38 yards. Williams now has 667 yards on the ground while Torain has 639. Williams' 38 yard long run in the second quarter was the Broncos longest this year.

Josh Freeman had another poor game at precisely the wrong

time, finishing with a 67.7 rating and not throwing a touchdown pass in the game for only the second time this season.

The Broncos defense played well, holding the Patriots to just 65 yards from scrimmage in the the first half and shutting them out, but with the inside kick and the change to Matt Stafford, the Broncos effort came undone. They allowed scores (one touchdown and two field goals) on three of New England's second half possessions, which proved to be just enough to give the Patriots the victory.

With the Jets winning, they are just a game out of first, and if they win, will own the key tie-breaker in common games and would control their own fate. If the Broncos lose, their collapse from best team in the league to the fourth playoff spot in the course of two games will be monumental.

With the Cowboys also winning, Dallas now owns the first seed and the Broncos need to win out and hope for the 12-2 Cowboys to throw a wheel against either 4-10 San Francisco or the 7-7 Colts.



Denver now faces a tough task in beating the defending Super Bowl Champions twice in one year

Injuries And a Look Ahead

Injury Report

The Broncos suffered no injuries of note and will be relatively healthy against the Jets. They got back Jermichael Finley against the Patriots and Finley caught one for seven yards in limited action as the Broncos eased him back. The Broncos get back rookie running back Dimitri Nance (45-184, 4.1 rushing) and rookie wide receiver Golden Tate (6-49, 8.2 receiving). DE/LB Robert Ayers is a game-time decision, while DE Jared Odrick and LB Kaluka Maiava are definitely out against the Jets.

The Patriots lost linebacker Ahmad Brooks for their next game.

A Look Ahead

The 8-6 Patriots travel to the desert to face the 11-3 Arizona Cardinals in a big game for them, as they now have a one-game lead over the Colts with two games to go.

The Broncos host the New York Jets in a game the Broncos need to win or they could potentially fall to the fourth seed with one game left (hosting 4-9 San Diego) while the Jets would host the 4-9 Texans. A Broncos win will clinch the division for Denver and guarantee the Jets the fourth (first wildcard) seed, while a Jets win will give them the edge in the division based on common opponents.



The Broncos may be without DE/LB Robert Ayers for the key Jets rematch

DRAFTING FOR FUN AND PROFIT

The Broncos will be the first to tell you it's not all film study, interviews and 40-times. "Let's be honest here," Bronco G.M. Hank Sienzant says, "You can do all the scouting you want, but drafting good players isn't an exact science. Some of it is luck. Maybe a lot of it."

"There were players we wanted badly that went earlier in the round we targeted them for, sometime just one or two players ahead of us in some cases. At the time, we cursed our fate, and took the next best player on our board. But as it turned out, we got lucky, as the player we wanted may not have panned out, and the player we settled for did. There but for the grace of God...", Sienzant trails off, leaving the thought unfinished.

On the flip side, Sienzant says there were nearly as many times the Broncos did get the player they wanted, only to be rewarded with a washout and a wasted pick for their trouble. Vernon Gholston and Limas Sweed come to mind. Gholston was a "can't miss" late second-round supplemental pick awarded to the Broncos when they took over the team. In two years in Denver, he didn't start a game, didn't register a sack, and didn't register a fumble recovery or forced fumble. Limas Sweed caught all of seven passes as a rookie, then developed a severe case of dropsy, causing the one-time future star to be cut one season after the Broncos selected him in the third round in 2009.

So they've hit their share of home runs, but they've had their share of swings and misses too. But clearly, they've had more hits than misses, and people have taken notice, as evidenced by the Broncos GM finishing third last year in the GM of the Year award, despite the Broncos 4-12 record last season.

Here's a mini-review of the best Bronco draft picks of the past three years, counting down from tenth best pick to the best pick overall. We took into account the draft pick used as well as the value obtained from the pick. Older picks are given more weight than more recent picks, as they have more of a history behind them.

10th: Maurkice Pouncey - 1st, 2011 - Pouncey was a no-brainer for the Broncos and it took them about 30 seconds to get his selection in once they were on the clock. Being the first-round pick, Pouncey was expected to come in and challenge immediately for the starting job, but he's taken hold of the job and played at a pro-bowl level. He's solidified the Bronco offensive line, and made them one of the best in the league.

9th: Eric Wood - 3rd, 2010 - Wood was a highly-regarded C/G prospect out of Louisville who lasted until the third round in 2010, where the Broncos were happy to select him. Wood came in as a rookie and earned a starting guard job opposite Josh Sitton right away. Although he missed six games in his first season with a broken leg, he came back to finish the season as a starter, showing his toughness. He's a starting guard again as a second year player. His best position may be center, but with Pouncey there, he may be stuck at guard.

8th: Tracy Porter - 3rd, 2009 - Porter fell to the third round despite an excellent career at Indiana, where he played well enough to be ranked as one of the top senior cornerbacks in the 2009 draft. Porter missed most of his rookie year with a broken arm, but has played at a high level the past two years.

7th: Malcolm Jenkins - 2nd, 2010 - Jenkins has played both corner and safety for the Broncos, but it looks like safety is his long-term position. Still, he is good enough to play cornerback for most teams, including the Broncos, and the Broncos use him as their nickel corner and even start him when Porter or Thomas is out.

6th: Terrell Thomas - 4th, 2009 - Coming out of USC, Thomas wasn't a highly regarded cornerback mostly due to an injury history that kept him out of a lot of games at the collegiate level. His lack of fluidity and average forty time also didn't help. Still, the Broncos liked what they saw, and took him in the fourth round in 2009. He earned the starting cornerback role in his rookie year, has been a solid player for the Broncos, and hasn't missed a game over the past two years.

5th: B.J.Raji - 2nd, 2010 - B.J. played well as a rookie, moving from defensive end early in the year to defensive tackle late in the season. An ankle injury slowed him down, but didn't stop him. This year he has played at a close-to-All-Pro level and has shown he can be a dominant player for a long time.

4th: Ryan Clady - 1st, 2009 - The first player ever drafted by the Sienzant coaching staff, Clady looked like a future Hall of Famer his first two years. However, in the off-season after his second season, he tore his patella tendon in a pickup basketball game and although he has rehabilitated the knee to the point he can play, he still isn't 100%. If he gets back to his old form, he moves up this list. If not, he can drop off it entirely.

3rd: Josh Freeman - 1st, 2010 - Josh has improved by leaps and bounds since he first stepped on the field in game one last year replacing an injured Daunte Culpepper. He is the unquestioned leader of the offense that is first in the league in total yards from scrimmage after 14 weeks. Josh is leading the league in passing rating, touchdown passes, and yards per pass attempt. Freeman is only 22 years old in this, his second season. His success at this age is nearly unheard of.

2nd: Jermichael Finley - 5th, 2009 - Jermichael has gotten better and better, and despite missing nearly half the season this year, Finley has still gotten rave reviews for his play and more than one respected GM has said he is his pick for the active player who has the best chance at a Hall-of-Fame career. Already in his third year in the league, Finley is still only 23 years old.

1st: Josh Sitton - 8th, 2009 - You can't make a better (or luckier) selection than drafting a pro-bowl-caliber player in the eighth round, and that's exactly what the Broncos got when they tabbed Josh Sitton in 2009. He's improved every year and today is recognized as one of the best young guards in football.

Denver Bronco

Fast Fact:

The Broncos have never been 12-2 before. They were 11-3 at this point in 2005, their Super Bowl season

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Denver
Broncos

BARWIN READY TO CONTRIBUTE NEXT YEAR

Connor Barwin had taken a circuitous journey to the ISFL Broncos.

In his first two seasons at the University of Cincinnati, Barwin played both football and basketball, but was a reserve in both sports. As a junior, he abandoned basketball to concentrate on football. But Barwin as a tight end was a player who flashed some skills but never could break the starting lineup, catching 31 for 399 yards and two touchdowns. As a senior, Barwin found his niche, moving to the defensive side of the ball to help out the Bearcats depleted defensive line, and was named a team captain, leading by example. His exemplary senior year (11 sacks, 16 tackles for loss) and his all-out hustle led to him being drafted in the third round in 2010 by the Broncos with a pick acquired from the Cowboys as part of a draft day deal for the Broncos first pick overall.

Barwin wasn't ready for prime time as a rookie defensive lineman, but the Broncos threw him to the wolves, starting Barwin in all 16 games as a defensive end, and Barwin was admittedly overwhelmed, but never quit. He finished his rookie season with three sacks, two fumble recoveries, and three pass deflections, and was looking forward to a long career as a starting defensive end for the Broncos when he got caught in a pile during a scrimmage and broke his left leg, suffering a compound fracture that put him out of the game for the entire 2011 season.

But Barwin didn't quit, and has worked hard to rehabilitate the leg, to the point where it is now the stronger of his two legs. He has been running and working in the weight room in preparation for returning to the pro football wars next season bigger and stronger than ever.

But now the Broncos have thrown him another curve, letting him know that they are considering moving him to yet another position for what would technically be his third pro season, but only his second where he sees any action. No, the Broncos are not moving him back to tight end, as they've already got Finley and Pettigrew there, but rather, the Broncos have let Barwin know they are "strongly" thinking of moving the 6-4, 264-pound Barwin to outside linebacker next year because they have a surplus of defensive end candidates and are thinner at linebacker. Head Coach Hank Sienzant speaks highly of Connor, saying that "The kid has some skills, and hustles all the time. We want more players like him, and we know we have to find a way to get him on the field somewhere. Heck, he would play quarterback if we asked him to, but we think the defensive side is where he fits best as a pro."

Although the position switch is not written in stone and will be worked out in training camp next year, the Broncos believe Barwin's pass-rushing skills off the edge that he displayed in college would be an asset as a blitzing linebacker, and his hustle, size and speed (4.66 at the combine) giving him the requisite skills to excel at the position. As a blitzer in the Broncos 4-3 defensive front, Barwin will typically be matched up against smaller running backs, and that will prevent him from being overmatched off the edge against bigger offensive linemen.