

## Key Stats

### From Game 16:

- Broncos shut out Chargers
- Denver offense gains 433 yards from scrimmage
- San Diego held to 238 yards from scrimmage
- Josh Freeman wins passing crown with strong game

## In This Issue:

Game and Season Notes	2
Broncos Report Card	2
Injury Report and a Look Ahead	3
Team Records Broken or Tied	3
Freeman Grows Up in a Hurry	4

## BRONCOS FINISH IN STYLE, 37-0

### First Shutout Since 2008

**December 18th, 2011:** The Broncos took it on the chin the last two weeks. This time they dished it out.

After losing two in a row and falling from the first to the fourth seed in the matter of 8 days, the Broncos came out and played as complete a game as they could in demolishing the San Diego Chargers, 37-0. The Broncos finished the regular season at 13-3, tying their best record ever, but could finish second in the AFC East if the Jets beat the Houston Texans. The Chargers fell to 6-10 and will finish third in the AFC West.

After the two teams jockeyed back and forth for the first ten minutes of the game through three possessions, two by the Chargers and one by the Broncos, the Broncos jumped up 7-0 on a 65-yard strike from Josh Freeman to Nate Washington, the only play of Denver's second possession. Freeman hit Wash-

ington in stride at the Charger 30 and the wideout sprinted untouched the rest of the way. By that time, Washington had already caught passes of 18 and 21, and the 65-yarder gave him three receptions for 104 yards, his third 100-yard receiving effort of the season. Washington would not catch another pass, but his 104 yards would lead the Broncos in this contest.

The Chargers, in coach Will Blanford's last game with the Chargers, let it all hang out on their next possession. Facing a fourth and inches at their own 29, they tried a sneak by Mark Sanchez, and the Broncos stuffed the play by blitzing and slanting inside. When Sanchez tried to reach the ball out across the line to gain, he had it batted away by Will Witherspoon and it was recovered by Roy Miller. at the Charger 29. Overall, the Chargers went for it five times throughout the course of the

game and failed every time.

The Broncos made it 10-0 after failing to convert a third-and-two, then made it 13-0 a few minutes later, with Mason Crosby successfully converting 39 and 40 yard field goals. The second field goal came after the Broncos took over at their own 46 and drove 32 yards in six plays to the Charger 32 yard line.

The Broncos added another score before halftime, with Ryan Torain taking it over from six yards out to finish the Broncos last possession of the first half, ending a fine eight play, 62-yard march that was keyed by three completions for 29 yards from Freeman to tight end Brandon Pettigrew. Freeman started the drive with a 16-yard scramble, and Ryan Torain gained the final 11 yards, catching his lone pass of the contest and banging down to the six yard line for a five-yard gain, before sprinting

(Continued Page Two)

## BRONCOS TO FACE TENNESSEE IN WILD CARD GAME

The Broncos, by virtue of their second place finish in the AFC East, finished as the fourth seed in the playoffs and as such, draw the 10-6 Tennessee Titans, who finished as the fifth seed, in their Wild Card game.

The Titans are led by coach Ashton Ewing, who is in his sixth year as the Tennessee coach. Over that span Tennessee has won 44 and lost 52, but the first three years were rebuilding years for the Titan franchise. Since that time they have gone 29-19, and won the AFC West back in 2009.

On the field the leader of the offense is 25-year-old Chad Henne, a second round pick of the Titans in 2009. Henne had his best year this season, completing 285 of 426 for 3237 yards, throwing for 23 touchdowns versus just 13 interceptions. He finished tenth in passer rating with a 94.8 rating.

He is capably backed up by 26-year-old Matt Moore, who put up a 80.4 rating in limited action, getting one start when Henne was injured in week 13 and leading the Titans to a 23-7

win over the Vikings. Marcus Colston is Henne's favorite receiver, and he caught 80 for 1037 (13.0) and 11 touchdowns.

The running backs are by committee, and the Titans have an excellent committee in Knowshon Moreno and Michael Bush. Moreno finished with 1005 yards and nine touchdowns on 209 carries (4.8) and caught 25 for 197 yards (7.9). Bush rumbled for 854 yards (4.6) on 187 rushes, scoring eight times on the ground and added 79 yards on another eight receptions (9.9).

**BRONCOS FINISH** (continued from page one)

**“...The Chargers were behind in field position throughout the game.”**

**Bronco Report Card**

**Overall Grade: A**



**Denver now faces the 10-6 Tennessee Titans in the Wild Card Round of the ISFL 2011 Playoffs**

around the left corner for the final six yards and the score to make it 20-0.

“Graham [Gano, the Broncos kickoff specialist] did an excellent job all day,” Hank Sienzant noted. “The Chargers were behind in field position throughout the game.” Gano’s kickoffs and excellent coverage bottled up the Chargers Brandon Tate continually inside the 20 (eight for 90 yards). The Broncos defense didn’t make it any easier for the Chargers, as they held San Diego to just 238 yards of total offense and weren’t able to get into Denver territory until the final seconds of the first half, when the Broncos held that 20-0 lead. Having no success behind Mark Sanchez at quarterback (just four of 13 for 37 yards in the first half), the Chargers inserted Drew Stanton into the game on the Chargers final possession of the first half, and he seemed to spark the Chargers, scrambling

for 27, but the Chargers weren’t rushing things, and the half expired before they could get into field goal range, getting only as far as the Broncos 39 yard line. It would be their deepest penetration of the contest.

In the second half, the Broncos made it 27-0 on their second possession of the half, running five straight times on that drive to move the ball from their own 29 to the Charger 49, then, after a short crossing pass gained six yards on a fine catch by Louis Murphy, Freeman faked a handoff to Ryan Torain and the Charger defenders bit on the fake big time, as Freeman hit Murphy running free deep down the sideline and Murphy waltzed into the end zone to complete the 43-yard play.

The Broncos made it 30-0 when the Chargers failed to convert a fourth and six from their own 26, and the Broncos took advantage of the short field and

moved the ball to the Charger 11 before the drive stalled, and Crosby made his third field goal, this time from 29 yards out.

The Broncos finished it off on their next possession, with Ryan Torain ripping off 15 and 12 yard runs to move the ball to the Charger 15, from where Freeman hit Dwayne Bowe for Freeman’s third touchdown pass of the contest 44 seconds into the fourth quarter. It was Bowe’s 17th touchdown reception of the season

The Chargers drove twice more into Bronco territory in their final three possessions of the game, but never got closer than the Denver 45, and all three possessions ended when the Broncos stopped fourth down attempts. The Broncos had two more opportunities to score, but twice passed up field goal attempts in the fourth quarter, twice running it on fourth down, but were stopped each time.

**Bronco Report Card**

**QB: A** Freeman finished the game with a 133.6 rating, good enough to finish as the top rated passer in the ISFL this year, narrowly beating out Tom Brady (see separate story on the back page). Freeman also rushed for 42 yards (6.0 average).

**RB: B+** Running backs combined for 102 yards on 27 carries, a 3.8 average and scored one touchdown rushing. They also added five receptions for another 38 yards.

**REC: A** Brandon Pettigrew caught six for 65 yards but wideouts Nate Washington and Louis Murphy made the big plays, combining for six receptions for 172 yards and two scores.

**OL: A-** Freeman was sacked once, otherwise this would have been a solid A grade, as the Broncos piled up 433 of total offense.

**DL: B** Allowed 142 yards on the ground but came up with big plays when they were needed.

Raji was the big presence with six tackles, two deflections and two tackles for loss.

**LB: B** Witherspoon did it all again, with seven tackles to lead the club, one sack, one stuff, and one forced fumble.

**DB: A** Held the Chargers to just 107 passing yards (96 net) and just a 50.3 passer rating.

**Sp.Teams A** Kicking game bottled up the Chargers all game and Broncos won the field position battle on special teams,

**Game and Season Notes**

Mark Sanchez finished the game with just seven completions in 20 attempts, for 59 yards (43.8). Former Bronco Drew Stanton relieved Sanchez at halftime and completed five of ten for 48 yards (63.8). Neither Charger QB threw a pick or a touchdown pass. Sanchez finished as the 20th best passer, but his touchdown to interception ratio is much improved from last year, when he threw 25 picks to 19 touchdowns. This year he threw 24 touchdowns and just 14 picks.

Rookie LeGarrette Blout rushed for 57 yards on 14 carries to lead the Chargers in rushing. The rookie posted 1140 yards on the season, the tenth best rushing total in the league this year.

Miles Austin caught four for 47 to pace them in receiving, just missing a one-thousand yard season. Austin finished with 79 receptions for 981 yards and five touchdowns Austin lead the league in one negative category, a category long dominated by Dwayne Bowe. Austin had twelve

drops for the season. Dwayne Bowe finished the year as the Broncos leading receiver, with 79 for 1205 yards and 17 TDs.

Defensively, Tulloch had 12 tackles to lead the Chargers, but Darnell Dockett had eight tackles, a forced fumble, a tackle for loss, and one quarterback hurry. Will Witherspoon looks to be the shoo-in for most valuable Bronco defender this year, as he again led the team in tackles with seven, and added a sack, a forced fumble and a tackle for loss.

## Injuries And a Look Ahead

### **Injury Report**

For the Broncos, Jermichael Finley is questionable and Jared Odrick is definitely out. The Titans will be minus DE Marcus Spears and RB Tyrell Sutton, while Mario Williams is questionable.

### **A Look Ahead**

The AFC Playoff Matchups this week pit the Bills at New England, the Titans at Denver, and the NFC, the Seahawks at New Orleans and the Cardinals at Jacksonville.

## Bronco Team Records Broken or Tied in 2011

The Broncos closed out the 2011 regular season setting or tying a number of team records. The biggest and most obvious is the Broncos 13-3 final won-loss record, tying the won-loss record from their 2005 season, when they won their lone Super Bowl to date. There are a lot of parallels between this team and that one, and many of the records that fell this year were set by the 2005 club. This bounce-back campaign proved to be a welcome tonic after the Broncos won only ten games (and lost 38) in the previous three years and a number of new team records on both offense and defense help explain why the Broncos improved their won-loss record so dramatically.

Chief among the offensive marks set or tied is the number of turnovers the Broncos made on offense. In 2011, the Broncos turned the ball over only 13 times, just one off the league low of 12 this season, and two better than the prior team record of 15, set in 2003 and tied in 2005. Only Cleveland and Buffalo (both in the AFC East with Den-

ver) had fewer turnovers in 2011. The Broncos offense had a record low 14 fumbles (tying a record set in 2002), and set a new team record with only three fumbles lost all year (the old record was 6 in 2002). They also set a team record for fewest sacks allowed (13), and lowest sack percentage (2.8%). The 13 sacks allowed is five better than the old record of 18 set back in 2000, while the sack percentage record was 4.2%, set in 2005.

Offensive penalties also hit a new low in both number (65) and yardage (473). The old records were both set last year, as Sienzant has made this a continued point of emphasis (73 and 545). Denver also set a team record for fewest kickoff returns (46) and fewest kickoff return yards (1037). The old records were 54 and 1088, both set in 2005. Although a new low, that is actually a positive indicator and again shows how the Broncos defense has improved, as kickoff returns increase as points are allowed.

Which brings us to the defen-

sive side of the ledger. The 230 points the Broncos defense allowed is the new team mark, breaking the old record of 280 set in 2006. Teams also rushed only 396 times against the Broncos, breaking the previous record of 400 from 2005. The Broncos allowed only 1571 yards on the ground this year, which isn't a new mark, but is only two yards shy of the Bronco record of 1569 set in 2008. The Broncos defense allowed 26 total touchdowns this year (17 passing and nine rushing), breaking the previous record of 34 set in 2005. They also allowed only 42 scoring plays this year (26 touchdowns and 16 field goals, breaking the old low of 49 scoring plays allowed first set in 2005 and then tied in 2006.

The Broncos allowed 82 kickoff returns for 1508 yards, and while the 82 kickoff returns is a new high, topping the previous team record by one, that is a positive indicator for the Broncos offense, as the opponents kickoff return opportunities increase each time the Broncos offense put points on the board.

### **Freeman (continued from back page)**

Freeman had a rocky start to his rookie year, but by the end of the season had found his groove, passing at a 99.7 clip over his three starts to close out the 2010 season. His effort against the Chargers in the Broncos next-to-last game of the season last year signaled his improvement and gave an inkling of what he would be capable of -

he completed 20 of 33 for 362 yards and two touchdowns, a passer rating of 118.2 and won the ISFL Offensive Player of the Week award for his efforts. It wasn't a surprise to the Broncos therefore, that Freeman took off this year where he left off last year. Due to his over-the-top preparation, Freeman was leading the league in passer rating for

most of the season, but fell to second behind Brady with two less-than-stellar efforts against the Patriots and Jets. But he rebounded nicely against the Chargers, throwing for three touchdowns and 284 yards and put up a 133.6 passer rating, just good enough to win the ISFL passing crown, the youngest player ever to do so.



***The Broncos hope Jermichael Finley can go against the Titans***

### ***Denver Bronco***

#### ***Fast Fact:***

***The Broncos finished 13-3 only once before in their history. They finished the 2005 season at 13-3, their Super Bowl season***

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## Josh Freeman Grows Up In A Hurry

Josh Freeman is just 22, an age when many young men are still in college, going to classes during the week and partying on the weekend. Josh Freeman is just two years removed from the Kansas State campus, where Freeman was a three-year starter until leaving for the ISFL before his senior year. 21-year-old Josh Freeman was a first round draft pick of the Broncos in 2010, and became their full-time starter late in his rookie year. And now 22-year-old Josh Freeman has edged out an inactive Tom Brady on the final weekend of the season to win the ISFL passing crown with a passer rating of 110.6 to Brady's 110.0. Freeman put up a passer rating of 133.6 in his final regular season game while Brady sat out the final weekend of the season, and it was just enough to push him past Brady.

In fact, so close was it that it wasn't until Freeman's final pass of the season, a 15-yard touchdown strike to Dwayne Bowe early in the fourth quarter of the Broncos victory over that Chargers, that Freeman clinched the passing crown. Until that final pass, Freeman had a 109.7 passer rating, good only for second place in the passer standings. But that touchdown pass, along with the completion and the yardage gained, proved to be just enough to push Freeman past Brady.

Not that the Broncos or Freeman was aware of it at the time. "We didn't know Brady was sitting out at that time," head coach Hank Sienzant said later. "We just wanted to beat the Chargers decisively and put those two losses (to the Patriots and Jets in back-to-back games) behind us going into the playoffs."

"Josh certainly deserves the recognition," said Sienzant. "He's played beyond his years and has just been so -- stable back there (in the pocket). To watch him on tape, you wouldn't know he's just 22 years old. You would think he's a ten-year veteran."

The Broncos aren't surprised, however, that Freeman has prospered this quickly in Denver. That was their thinking all along, as they felt Freeman was the best quarterback coming out that year, according to our sources. "They basically fell in love with his skill set, and his collegiate production. Even if they hadn't traded down (from 4th to 12th), they still would have taken Freeman near the top of the draft."

There's a lot to love, as the 6-6, 250-pound quarterback has proven since being drafted. His strong arm and mobility are two of his athletic assets, but Freeman is very mature for his age, and understands that it takes a lot of hard work off the field to excel on the field. The Broncos believe that workaholic attitude is what sets him apart from other players his age, and gives him an edge in the games. "If you break the huddle in a alignment that you've only used once or twice, chances are Josh is prepared for it," Sienzant gushes.

(Continued on page three)