

## Key Stats

### From WC Game:

- Broncos hold Titans to 44 yards rushing
- Broncos gain 186 on ground
- Denver picks off Chad Henne twice
- Josh Freeman has terrible first half (3-10, 20 yards)

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## BRONCOS DOWN TITANS IN WILDCARD GAME, 23-12

### Defense and Running Game Bring Home Win

January 1st, 2012: The Broncos edged the Titans in a tough defensive struggle that was a lot closer than the final score indicated. With just five minutes left in the game, the Broncos held a narrow five-point margin at 17-12, but added two field goals in the next three minutes to take first an eight-point, then an eleven-point lead that Tennessee could not overcome.

The Titans were held to just 44 yards on the ground while the Broncos rushed for 186. Chad Henne responded to the challenge, throwing 50 times and completing 30 for 310 yards, but two interceptions helped seal the Titans fate. The first came in the second quarter and led directly to the Broncos taking their first lead of the contest. With the Titans at their own 41, Will Witherspoon, who has played at a high level all season, dropped off his man and picked off Henne at the Denver 44, returning it nine yards before being hit and

fumbling. With the ball loose on the field, both coaches held their breath until Bronco linebacker Ernie Sims came out of the scrum with the ball. On replay, it looked like the Titans recovered the fumble but somehow Sims managed to come out of the pileup with the ball held aloft. After the game, Sims said with a smile, "All's fair in love and war — and football pileups. It's not who gets the ball first, it's who has it last."

The Broncos took immediate advantage, keeping the ball on the ground for all eight plays of the drive, marching for 47 yards and their lone score of the first half, punching it over from five yards out on a Ryan Torain pitch -out around left end for the touchdown on third and five that gave Denver a 7-3 halftime lead. Just prior to the touchdown, Ricky Williams lost the handle on the ball on a 13-yard run off-tackle at the Tennessee nine yard line, but Denver guard Josh Sit-

ton managed to get the recovery and keep the drive alive.

Until the pick, the Titans had dominated the action, running off 31 plays from scrimmage to the Broncos 23, and piling up a 196 to 75 yardage advantage. But a missed field goal by Jay Feely from the Bronco four-yard line helped keep the game at just 3-0 going into the final five minutes of the first half, and allowed the Broncos to take a 7-3 lead with just 1:08 remaining in the half.

The Titans mounted a final drive and got to the Bronco 33 with one second left on the clock, but a 51-yarder into the five-mph wind that could have cut the Denver lead to 7-6 was no good off the foot of Feely. That one hurt the Titans chances, but the one that hurt more was the 22-yard Jay Feely miss earlier in the second quarter after the Titans had marched 76 yards from their own 20, taking 6:35 off the clock on an excellent

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## Game and Season Notes

Game Notes: Josh Freeman was four for 57 rushing before his final two kneel downs. He led the Broncos in rushing with six for 55 (9.2), but Ryan Torain and Ricky Williams were both close behind in yardage. Torain rushed 14 times for 54 yards (3.9) and scored the first Bronco touchdown, while Williams was 11 for 52 for a 4.7 per carry average.

Javon Ringer was Tennessee's leading rusher with 28 yards on five carries (5.6), while Knowshon Moreno, who gained over a thousand yards on the season on the ground for the Titans, was

held to ten yards on three carries. Henne scrambled twice for six yards.

Wide receiver Marques Colston led the Titans in receptions and yardage with nine catches for 134 yards, and Jacoby Jones added another six for 43 yards. The Broncos leader was Dwayne Bowe with four for 61, while Jermichael Finley had three for 60.

After the pick to start the second half, Freeman played well, putting up 7 of 13 for 121 yards and an 85.7 rating). He finished with 11 of 24 for 148 yards, one pick, and a 48.6 rating. Chad

Henne ended with 30 of 50 for 310, with two picks and a 61.3.

Linebacker Will Witherspoon was the star of the defense, although cornerback Tracy Porter had more tackles (seven). Witherspoon finished with six tackles, two hurries, and one key pick that immediately preceded the Broncos first touchdown. Kevin Burnett had seven tackles, a stuff, a hurry, a forced fumble and that big pick and return early in the second half that led to a field goal and made the score 7-6. Rookie safety Eric Berry led the Titans in tackles with nine.

*"That field goal [miss] down close really hurt their chances," Hank Sienzant said afterward. "It seemed to pick up our squad a bit."*



Denver now finds the defending Super Bowl Champion Jets in their way to the AFC Championship Game



Bronco Report Card

Overall Grade: B

## BRONCOS DOWN TITANS (continued from page one)

13-play possession. That miss allowed the young Bronco squad to relax a bit. "That field goal [miss] down close really hurt their chances," Hank Sienzant said afterward. "It seemed to pick up our squad a bit."

But not right away. And not the offense, or at least, not Josh Freeman. The 22-year-old Freeman, who finished the year as the ISFL's leading passer, was in the midst of a terrible outing, and his first half was simply horrendous, as he overthrew and underthrew his receivers throughout the half. Even though Freeman's arm wasn't working, his legs did fine, as he took a called quarterback draw for 12 yards to the Titans 22 on a key third and five to keep the touchdown march alive. Freeman finished the half just 3 of 10 for 20 yards passing, and Sienzant said, "Josh needed to settle down a bit, we felt. That was part of the reason we ran on every down on that touchdown drive. It seemed to work."

But not until Freeman threw a pick early in the second half right at Kevin Burnett, who caught the ball in self-defense and rumbled 35 yards before being brought down at the Bronco 15. The Broncos defense stiffened after a holding penalty call set the Titans back, and Tennessee had to settle for a Feely field goal from 36 yards out to cut the Bronco lead to 7-6. At that point, Freeman was just 3 of 11 for 20 yards, with one pick (1.7 passer rating - like we said, horrendous).

Freeman finally came alive, hitting four of five for 61 yards on the Broncos next possession, which ended in a 11-yard reverse for a touchdown by Louis Murphy to give Denver an eight point lead at 14-6. Freeman connected with

Bowe over Darrelle Revis three times on the march, with the big pitch-and-catch a long slant for 33 yards to the Tennessee 11-yard line.

After the Broncos went up 14-6, the momentum seemed to shift completely to the Broncos. The Titans went three-and-out, and Denver came right back with another scoring drive, this one of ten plays, taking 4:34 off the clock, but gaining only 27 yards from the Bronco 40 to the Titan 33. It was just enough yardage, as Mason Crosby booted a 51-yarder just over the cross-bar for the first of his three field goals in the game, giving the Broncos a 17-6 lead late in the third quarter.

The Titans got one first down on their next possession, but a third-and-two pass to Mercedes Lewis was slapped away by Malcolm Jenkins, and the Titans were forced to punt.

But Denver went three-and-out and punted it right back to the Titans, and they took over at their own 47 and capitalized on the short field by marching for their lone touchdown, with Javon Ringer banging it over from three yards out on a trap play. Chad Henne threw for 50 yards on the drive, completing 5 of 7 to get Tennessee in close, from where Ringer scored on the second of two straight carries. The Titans went for two in an attempt to cut the Bronco lead to 17-14 with 8:46 left in the contest, but the two-point conversion attempt failed and the Broncos held onto a narrow 17-12 advantage.

But Freeman and the Broncos had no fear airing it out at this point, and Freeman threw three straight times to Jermichael Finley, connecting on all three, for 14, 8, and 38 yards. The 38-

yarder was the back-breaker for the Titans, as Finley broke a tackle after a short pass and raced down the sideline for a big gain to the Titan 15. The Tennessee defense stopped the Broncos at the Titan eight, however, and Denver added a second field goal from Crosby to make it 20-12 with just 4:53 left in the game.

Nate Allen nearly picked off Henne on Henne's first pass on the Titans next possession, but the play was ruled incomplete after a challenge, and then B.J.Raji sacked Henne for a six-yard loss on second down. Henne's pass intended for Marques Colston was too high on third down, and the Titans, after some thought, punted it back to the Broncos with 3:34 left and regretted it almost immediately. Brandon Fields out-kicked the coverage, and Golden Tate returned the punt 19 yards to the Titan 41.

"We felt it would work there," Hank Sienzant explained after the game of the Broncos next call, and he was right. With Tennessee aggressively attacking the line, Josh Freeman ran a bootleg and had the biggest run of his career to date, trucking for 36 yards to the Titan five-yard-line when the Titan defenders were caught out of position on the call. Three consecutive runs by rookie Anthony Dixon gained five yards, but a illegal motion call against full-back Delanie Walker before the final Dixon run nullified Dixon's gains and left the Broncos to settle for yet another field goal and an eleven-point lead with just under two minutes remaining.

Terrell Thomas picked off Henne on third-and-two to end the final Titan possession and wrap up the contest in favor of the Broncos.

## Bronco Report Card

**Bronco Pass Offense: D** The Broncos passing game was stifled by the tough Titans pass defense for much of the game. This grade would have been an F if the Broncos had lost, but Josh Freeman managed to do enough in the second half to secure the win.

**Bronco Run Offense: A** Denver managed to rush for nearly 200 yards (helped by some trickery) and score two touchdowns

on the ground. They controlled the game with the ground game and helped to keep their defense fresh for most of the contest.

**Bronco Run Defense: A+** The Titans apparently felt they could not run effectively against the Broncos, so they called six passes for every rushing attempt. The Tennessee ground game did produce one touchdown on the ground in the fourth quarter, and

was otherwise effective but under-utilized. The Titans had only eight rushing attempts for 38 yards (4.8) (and two scrambles for six yards).

**Bronco Pass Defense: B+** The passing yardage is skewed by the number of attempts (304 net), but the pass defense played well, picking off Henne twice and holding the Titans to just a 61.3 pass rating.