

Key Stats

From AFC

Championship

- Broncos advance to Super Bowl — first time since 2005
- Denver offense gains 436 yards from scrimmage
- Broncos overcome injuries to two more defensive backs
- Josh Freeman runs and passes for 263 yards

In This Issue:

Broncos Report Card	2
Injury Report and a Look Ahead	3
Upon Further Review	3
Game Notes	4

BRONCOS ADVANCE TO SUPER BOWL!

Down Bills 34-21 Behind Ricky Williams Two TDs

January 15th, 2012:

They keep trying to bury the old man.

But he ain't dead yet.

33-year-old Ricky Williams' 56-yard run for a touchdown in the second quarter gave the Broncos their first lead of the game, a lead they never relinquished, and the Broncos went on to a 34-21 victory over the Buffalo Bills in the AFC Championship game. Williams finished with 93 yards on nine carries and scored two touchdowns and got this writer's vote for MVP of the contest.

The Denver Broncos fell behind 7-0 after kicking off as the Buffalo Bills had much success running the ball early. But after their initial possession when they gained 53 yards on the ground on six runs, the Bills all but abandoned their running attack. Over the remainder of the contest, they ran only eight more times, picking up only another 11 yards. Obviously, when you have Tom Brady as your quarterback, you want to maximum his chances to win the game. But that philosophy means if you stop Brady, you pretty much stop the Bills

offense.

The Broncos pretty much stopped Brady when it counted.

Brady was relatively ineffective after the first drive until near the end of the third quarter, despite the Broncos losing two more pass defenders to injury. Last week they lost their best cornerback in Tracy Porter, and that was a key element in the game planning leading up to this contest. But while rookie corner Kareem Jackson played well in place of Porter, the Broncos today lost the services of rookie corner Jerome Murphy and rookie Nate Allen, their nickel back.

But by that time, the Broncos, who fell behind 7-0, had rung up 31 unanswered points and held a 31-7 lead before the Bills got their next score. In the interim, Brady, who had started four-for-four for 36 yards and a touchdown, completed only six of his next 14 for another 48 yards, and had thrown a pick to Kareem Jackson that set up the Broncos final touchdown with 4:27 left in the third quarter.

Trailing by 24 at that

point, Brady completed 20 of his final 30 for 212 yards and two more touchdowns, but it was too little, too late. By then, the game had been pretty much decided.

The Broncos answered the Bills opening salvo with one of their own. Freeman was as stellar in this game as he was last week, and on the Broncos opening possession, seemed intent on proving he was the best quarterback on the field. Freeman completed all four of his attempts on Denver's first possession, picking up 58 yards, and scrambled twice for another 18 yards. On his final pass of the possession, he hit Dwayne Bowe for a touchdown from 21 yards out and the game was tied at 7-up.

The defenses took over and neither team had much success until the Broncos lost the ball on a sack/fumble, with the Bills taking over at the Broncos 23.

But thank God for instant replay review.

The Broncos challenged the play, and it was reversed into an incomplete

(Continued Page Two)

"[The Broncos] finished with 211 yards on the ground on 40 rushes and [at one point] ...ran it 15 straight times..."



Denver is going to the Super Bowl one year after starting the season 0-9

DOWN BILLS (continued from page one)

pass, as Freeman's arm was ruled to be going forward. The Broncos then converted a third-and-13 with a 14-yard completion to Brandon Pettigrew, and Williams then busted that 56-yarder to put the Broncos up, the longest run for the Broncos since their 14th game in 2009, and the longest by Ricky Williams since his 62-yarder for the Giants in week five last season.

After their first possession, the Bills shied away from running the ball despite the success they had early. By contrast, the Broncos were happy to run it. They finished with 211 yards on the ground on 40 rushes, and on the possession that followed Williams' 56-yard touchdown jaunt, the Broncos ran it 15 straight times (one more rush in that possession than the Bills had in the entire game) to move into position for a Mason Crosby 28-yard field goal and a 17-7 lead just before halftime. That drive took almost five minutes off the clock and left the Bills with just enough time before

halftime to take a knee to close out the half. In that one possession, both Torain and Williams picked up more yardage on the ground than the Bills leading rusher had in the game. Torain was 7 for 29 on the march, and Williams rushed six times for 35. The Bills leading rusher was Tim Hightower, who finished with 28 yards in the contest.

The Broncos got the second half kickoff and made it 24-7 on another excellent drive. Taking over at their own 20 following a touchback on the second-half kickoff, the Broncos converted three separate third downs (of 12, 5 and 7 yards) on their way to a Ryan Torain touchdown run from four yards out to give Denver a three-score lead. On the possession, Freeman missed his first throw (an overthrow intended for Finley), but hit his next six for 71 of the 95 yards the Broncos gained from scrimmage on the drive, overcoming two separate penalties for 15 yards.

The next Bills possession was the killer.

After picking up one first

down, Tom Brady's pass across the middle intended for Zach Miller was deflected by the Broncos Will Witherspoon, and picked off by Kareem Jackson and returned 42 yards to the Bills 18-yard line. From there, it took only three runs to score another touchdown, with Williams punching it over from a yard out for the 31-7 lead with just 20:27 left in the contest.

Throwing on nearly every down, the Bills quarterback did the best he could, but with the Broncos generally playing deep and conceding the short pass, it wasn't nearly enough. Brady hit Johnny Knox for a 26-yard score before the end of the third quarter to make it 31-14, but after a Broncos field goal made it 34-14 with just 12:21 left in the game, the Bills could manage only one more touchdown (from Brady to Thomas) in the time remaining. Brady hit Mike Thomas from six yards out for the final touchdown with just 2:27 left in the game to make it 34-21, but that was as close as they got.

Bronco Report Card



Bronco Report Card

Overall Grade: A

Bronco Pass Offense: A+ Josh Freeman just keeps trucking along. The 22-year old wunderkind outdueled his closest competition for the passing crown with another excellent effort, passing for 225 yards on 19 completions in 24 attempts—a 119.6 passer rating. The receiving corps was generally effective and the offensive line allowed no sacks.

Bronco Run Offense: A Brings back memories of "Run, Ricky, Run" at Texas, as Ricky Williams, the oldest Bronco — by three years over the next oldest — had maybe the biggest game of his career to date, breaking a 56-yard touchdown run that sparked the Broncos win.

Bronco Run Defense: A Too soft early but then was stifling over the final 53 minutes, allowing just eight rushes for 11 yards after the Bills ran for 53 yards on their first possession.

Bronco Pass Defense: B Facing one of the best quarterbacks of his generation, the Broncos pass defense did a commendable job holding Tom Brady to 30 of 46 for 296 yards and one pick (90.0). Brady threw three touchdown passes, but considering the Broncos were short three of the seven defensive backs they started the season with, the pass defense did an excellent job. Jason Pierre-Paul got the only sack.

Injuries And a Look Ahead

Injury Report

The Broncos have really taken it on the chin in the post-season on the injury front, but have played through the injuries and forged ahead anyway. But now they face their toughest challenge in the upcoming game.

They will be playing the game extremely short-handed in the defensive backfield, as they will probably be without starting cornerback Tracy Porter, and two rookie defensive backs who have seen a lot of action and played well this year in Nate Allen and Jerome Murphy.

Porter's injured hamstring has been improving and it is possible he might be able to go in the Super Bowl. The other two are definitely out.

A Look Ahead

The Broncos will face the New Orleans Saints in the Super Bowl. The Saints finished the regular season 12-4, and like the Broncos, had to win three playoff games to get to the big game. They bring a big play running attack with Arian Foster and Jamal Charles into the game, and the Broncos run defense will have to be at the top of their game if they are to have any chance of winning. In their three post-season contests, the Saints are averaging 247 yards a game - on the ground. That's about 100 more than the Broncos averaged during the regular season. Hank Sienzant said that "We consider ourselves a run-oriented team. The Saints make us look like pikers."

Upon Further Review

Of the opening drive when the Bills ran the ball so effectively, B.J.Raji said that was partly by design.

"We didn't want to give up that many yards early, obviously, but every running play is a play that is not in Tom Brady's hands. And we didn't want Brady to beat us. So to some extent, we conceded the run and were happy when they ran."

But like Raji said, clearly the Bills did a lot better than the Broncos wanted or expected on the opening drive. Their first three runs picked up only eight yards, but the next three gashed the defense for 16, 12, and 17 yards, with each of the Bills trio of backs (Redman, Benson, and High-tower) carrying on one of the those big gains. Those three rushing attempts picked up

45 of the Bills 64 yards in the game.

Brady after the game attempted to explain away the imbalance between the Bills rushes (14) and passes (41).

"I haven't spoken to the coaches about it," Brady said, "but clearly sometimes the game situation dictates the call, and I think that was what happened here."

Asked what he meant, Brady went on to say, "Even after their second touchdown, we were still very balanced - maybe a few more passes than runs. But then they put up three scores with us hardly touching the ball, and we had to pretty much abandon the running game."

Brady's assessment, it turns out, is right on.

Just before the Broncos started their long march for a

field goal near the end of the half, the Bills had 11 runs and 16 passes. After the Broncos field goal made it 17-7, the Bills then took a knee to end the half, and the Broncos added two more touchdowns in the third quarter on a long drive and another touchdown following the Jackson pick of Brady.

In that span, the Bills had only four plays from scrimmage — two runs and two passes — while the Broncos ran off an incredible 35 plays from scrimmage.

By then the score had ballooned from 14-7 to 31-7. With the score lopsided in the Broncos favor, it became easier for the Broncos to defend the Bills, as both teams knew if the Bills were to mount a comeback, it would be up to Brady.



**The Broncos
Eric Wood
should return
for the Super
Bowl**

Denver Bronco

Fast Fact:

Denver has gone 20-6 (including playoff games) since starting 0-9 last year

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Denver
Broncos

GAME NOTES

Tom Brady completed 30 of 48 for 296 yards and three touchdowns, with one pick for a 92.0 rating. Josh Freeman completed 19 of 24 for 225 and one touchdown, and ran six times for 38 yards. Freeman finished with a 119.6 passer rating. Davone Bess caught seven for 66 yards to lead the Bills in receptions, but Johnny Knox finished with five catches for 67 yards, edging out Bess by one yard for the most receiving yards by a Buffalo player. Knox, Thomas, and Miller each caught a touchdown pass. The Broncos Dwayne Bowe and Brandon Pettigrew each had four receptions, with Bowe's good for 54 yards and one score, while Pettigrew gained 48 on his receptions.

The big difference was in the running game. Tim Hightower was the Bills leading rusher with three for 28, but his last rushing attempt came on the first play of the Bills second possession - he didn't get another rushing attempt over the final 48 minutes of the game. Nobody on the Bills had more than four rushing attempts. By contrast, the Broncos had four players with six or more rushes, and two players (Williams and Torain) each exceeded the Bills total of 62 yards on the ground. Torain finished with 17 carries for 65 yards and one score, and Ricky Williams ran nine times for 93 yards and two touchdowns.

The Broncos had almost perfect balance offensively, rushing for 211 and passing for 225. The offensive line performed exceptionally, despite missing starting guard Eric Wood. Former starter Nick Cole started in his place, and played well. Freeman was not sacked, and the Broncos have surrendered only one sack in the post-season, and only six over their last eleven games.

Will Witherspoon wasn't the leading tackler (that honor went to rookie Kareem Jackson, who was thrown at constantly, but held up pretty well, making 11 tackles, getting one pass defensed, and picking off Brady and returning it 42 yards to set up the Broncos final touchdown), but Witherspoon was the defensive star for the Broncos nonetheless. His tipped pass was what led to the Jackson pick, and he had five tackles, a stuff, and two hurries. Jason Pierre-Paul had the only sack of the contest, getting to Brady in the second quarter for a six yard loss. That drive ended in a punt, and the Broncos broke open the game with Williams' 56-yard touchdown run a few plays later. Ray Lewis was the leading tackler for the Bills, making 11 tackles and adding a stuff, while safety Madiou Williams had ten tackles.