



BRONCOS TRADE TONY BROWN TO RAMS

Acquire TE Brandon Pettigrew in 3-for-3 Trade



September 18, 2010: The Broncos traded veteran defensive tackle Tony Brown to the Saint Louis Rams today, along with two other players, for the Rams second round pick in 2011 and three players. In the deal, the Broncos surrendered wideout Devin Thomas, their fifth round pick in 2009, and tight end Joey Haynos, a seventh round selection by the Broncos in 2010.

"We think Devin has a great future in this league, and we all know what a great talent Tony Brown has been," Bronco head coach and general manager Hank Sienzant said in discussing the trade at the Broncos team facilities. "We hated to part with those players, and Joey [Haynos] has been a nice surprise for us this year (four catches for 30 yards, good for second on the team among tight ends). But to quote Bill Robison, the Rams new head man, 'You got to give to get.' And we think we got some good players in return."

But first they had to part with Tony Brown, probably the Broncos best player. Brown played all-out last year, making 109 tackles and two sacks, along with 24 tackles for loss on running plays - incredible numbers for a defensive tackle. He was often seen chasing plays from sideline to sideline. And he is a strong element in the Broncos rebuilt defense this year, helping them to hold opponents to just 94 yards on the ground thus far this season, good for fourth best in the league. This year he already has 17 tackles and four sacks, along with five stuffs. But he is 29 years old, and not likely to be a key component in their defense when the Broncos are rebuilt through the draft - a process not likely to be complete for another two years or more. Thus, he was deemed expendable if the price was right.

We understand that part of the right price was getting the Rams to agree to trade their first round pick from this past draft, rookie tight end Brandon Pettigrew. In past trade discussions, the Broncos always inquired about Pettigrew, and were always told that he wasn't available. But this time the Rams inquired about Tony Brown, and agreed Pettigrew could be traded if the rest of the deal was right. So the Broncos quickly set about making it right.

Pettigrew is a highly regarded tight end, the first selected in the ISFL this year (27th overall), and the player the Broncos were set to draft at the top of round two if he fell to them. In Saint Louis, he was regarded as the logical successor to All-Pro tight end Tony Gonzalez, and rightfully so. At 6-5 and 263, Pettigrew is a great blocker and has soft hands. He immediately improves the Broncos by giving them another legitimate target in the passing game for rookie QB Josh Freeman, and a good edge blocker. As a backup to Gonzalez, he hasn't had much impact, catching just one pass for 11 yards. The biggest negative was a knee injury that may keep him out for the next three or four games. But the Broncos believe he will be fine after that, and look for him to be a solid contributor down the road.

The Broncos also acquired Louis Murphy, the slight (6-2, 200) wide receiver who was the Rams second round pick last year, and he was key to the deal as well. "They [Denver] liked Murphy a lot, but felt he was more a third or fourth round selection than a second rounder," one source told us later. "But they feel he is an upgrade over Thomas." Thus far this year, however, Thomas looks like the better player, as he has five receptions for 61 (12.2) yards while Murphy has just two for 22. Thomas also has six kickoff returns for 121 yards (20.2). Thomas caught 22 for 196 yards (8.9) and one touchdown last year for the Broncos in his rookie season.

Defensive end Philip Merling was a third round pick by the Rams in 2009, and a solid contributor that the Broncos feel will make them stronger by enabling rookie second round pick B.J.Raji to go back from defensive end to his more natural position of defensive tackle (at 6-2, 337 lbs, Raji is hardly the prototypical edge rusher), while Merling is a better fit there at 6-4, 295. "With veterans Tony Brown and Ed Johnson and rookie Roy Miller playing well inside, but not suited to play defensive end, there wasn't enough room in the rotation for Raji to get quality time inside. He was like a duck out of water playing on the outside and the Broncos were Trading one of the defensive tackles frees up that room in the interior rotation and enables the Broncos to move Raji back inside, where he belongs. We predict he will be a starter there this weekend," our source told us. Still, for a player supposedly not suited to the defensive end position, Raji already has three sacks off the edge this season, which ties him for the ninth overall spot in the league in sacks. Tony Brown already has four, and playing next to Brown allowed Raji to bull rush against a single blocker while Brown drew the double-teams more often than not.

The deal now gives the Broncos three second round picks in the ISFL 2011 draft, their own, the one acquired in the Ricky Williams deal, and the one acquired from the Rams in this deal.

Official Transaction:

The Broncos trade Tony Brown, DT; Joey Haynos, TE; and Devin Thomas, WR; to the Saint Louis Rams for the 2011 second round pick; Brandon Pettigrew, TE; Louis Murphy, WR; and Philip Merling, DE