things to watch

1 Branden who?

Broncos quarterback Jay Cutler will be without his No. 1 target, Brandon Marshall, for the second straight game, which force someone else to step up as the receiver. It can’t be an easy task, considering the Raiders’ Nnamdi Asomugha and Asante Samuel are one of the NFL’s best backcourt duos. So who will it be? The Broncos will have four active wide receivers for their season opener, some of whom will be making their Denver debuts: veterans Darrell Jackson and Kasy Colbert and rookies Eddie Royal and Ryan Torain, a second-round draft pick.

2 Hold on to the darn ball

The Broncos’ last trip to Oakland was a nightmare. Four turnovers — two fumbles and two Jay Cutler interceptions — led to 24 Oakland points in a 52-30 loss. The Broncos’ inability to hold on to the ball repeatedly gave the Raiders possession in Denver territory. Fortunately for the Broncos, they have been much better at ball control in 2008. The team was plus-four in turnovers in the preseason. Denver had only three turnovers in four games, all interceptions by backup quarterback Patrick Ramsey. When the Broncos pass

Jay Cutler was among the league’s best quarterbacks through the preseason, and he had big reason for that success: the starters on the offensive line. It seems to be an untapped secret, but otherwise they didn’t allow Cutler to be sacked in the preseason. Their linemen were solid, too, and allowed only two sacks — tied for the fewest in the NFL in team history. Of course, that was all against vanilla defenses. So can the Broncos prove that the slew of offseason changes — new defensive coordinator Bob Shilkey, the addition of tackled DeWayne Robertson, moving D.J. Williams from tackle to end — have made a difference. Last time these teams met, the Broncos gave up 175 rushing yards, including 46 rushing yards by JaMarcus Russell. That’s the defense the Broncos face tonight.

3 Protect the passer

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4 Rattled rookies

Starting in a season opener as a rookie is scary enough, but doing it in the Black Hole? That’s terrifying scenario four Broncos face tonight. Offensively, tackle Ryan Harris also will be making the first start of his NFL career. It certainly won’t help matters considering the Raiders’ Nnamdi Asomugha and Asante Samuel are one of the NFL’s best backcourt duos. So who will it be? The Broncos will have four active wide receivers for their season opener, some of whom will be making their Denver debuts: veterans Darrell Jackson and Kasy Colbert and rookies Eddie Royal and Ryan Torain, a second-round draft pick.

5 An improved defense?

Derek Carr gave up more than 400 yards in 2007 and ranked 30th against the run. Now is the time to see if that is the case of offseason changes — new defensive coordinator Bob Shilkey, the addition of tackled DeWayne Robertson, moving D.J. Williams from tackle to end — have made a difference. Last time these teams met, the Broncos gave up 175 rushing yards, including 46 rushing yards by JaMarcus Russell. That’s the defense the Broncos face tonight.

By Lindsay H. Jones, The Denver Post

**Broncos at Raiders **8:15 p.m. tonight **ESPN, KDVR-31

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**SCOUTING REPORT**

**BRONCOS STARS OFFENSE**

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**Broncos starters**

- **QB Jay Cutler**
- **WR Javon Walker**
- **WR Ashley Lelie**
- **C Chris Kuper**
- **RG Matt Slauson**
- **C Matt Schaub**
- **G Ben Hamilton**
- **RT Michael Schofield**
- **C Kyle pérez**

**Broncos star**

- **RBContacts**

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- **C Matt Schaub**
- **G Ben Hamilton**
- **RT Michael Schofield**
- **C Kyle pérez**

**Raiders**

- **QB JaMarcus Russell**
- **WR Randy Moss**
- **WR Darrius Travis**
- **C Andy Levitre**
- **G Ben Lunch**
- **RT Southtide**
- **LT Urban**
- **C teammates**

**Broncos’ top rushing defense**

- **LB Boss Bailey**
- **LB D.J. Williams**
- **DB Champ Bailey**
- **DB Mike Adams**
- **DB Marquand Manuel**
- **DB Aaron Curry**

**Broncos’ run defense**

- **LB Boss Bailey**
- **LB D.J. Williams**
- **DB Champ Bailey**
- **DB Mike Adams**
- **DB Marquand Manuel**
- **DB Aaron Curry**