

SCOUTING REPORT

Cowboys at Broncos » 2:15 p.m. today » KDVR-31

By Jeff Legwold, The Denver Post

GamePlan

When the Broncos run

The Broncos take their first swing at a 3-4 defense and better get used to it. Their next five games come against 3-4 teams.

In Igor Olshansky, the former Chargers end who occasionally gave the Broncos a difficult time, and Marcus Spears, the Cowboys are a little bigger at end than some teams who play the 3-4. The key is getting somebody to linebacker Bradie James. James is the finisher in the defense and usually makes the most tackles.

Edge: Cowboys

When the Cowboys run

Felix Jones, sporting a league-leading 10.1 yards per carry, has a sprained posterior cruciate ligament and is not expected to play. Marion Barber III was held out of Monday's game with a thigh injury, and if he plays today, it'll likely be on a limited basis. Barber tried to play on injuries last season and only made them worse, so the Cowboys may be conservative about his return.

That leaves second-year back Tashard Choice as the likely main ball carrier. Choice doesn't have Jones' speed or Barber's power, but he has good quickness and vision and led the ACC in rushing in back-to-back seasons at Georgia Tech.

Edge: Broncos

When the Broncos pass

The Cowboys figure to put the game squarely in Kyle Orton's lap. The Broncos have made the most of their running game and have controlled the tempo with it much of the time.

But after an opening weekend cave-in on run defense against the Buccaneers, Dallas didn't let the Giants run (97 yards) or the Panthers run (73 yards).

Edge: Broncos

When the Cowboys pass

Quarterback Tony Romo has been his usual mercurial self. Sometimes boom, sometimes bust, but always in the middle of things. Romo has performed better when the Cowboys run the ball early in the game to pull some defensive help toward the line of scrimmage. That makes it easier for him to get the ball to Jason Witten, and Romo seems to have better timing and patience when he knows he can find his favorite target.

Three of his four touchdown passes this year are for at least 42 yards (42, 66 and 80).

Edge: Cowboys

Special teams

With cornerback Alphonso Smith hurting (right ankle), Eddie Royal figures to get much of the work in the return game once again. The Cowboys' Mat McBriar is a power punter and can get Dallas out of some field-position problems.

Edge: Cowboys



Broncos WR/returner Eddie Royal
Doug Pensinger, Getty Images

InjuryReport

Broncos

Out: LB Spencer Larsen (shoulder).

Doubtful: G Ben Hamilton (hamstring), CB Alphonso Smith (ankle).

Questionable: OT Ryan Harris (shoulder), WR Brandon Stokley (thigh).

Probable: RB Peyton Hillis (head), WR Kenny McKinley (illness).

Cowboys

Out: S Michael Hamlin (wrist), LB Curtis Johnson (hamstring), RB Felix Jones (knee).
Probable: OT Flozell Adams (shoulder), RB Marion Barber (thigh), LB DeMarcus Ware (neck), LB Jason Williams (ankle).

The Picks



Lindsay H. Jones (3-0)

Broncos 20, Cowboys 20
Tony Romo will out-mistake Kyle Orton.



Mark Kiszla (3-0)

Broncos 28, Cowboys 23
Wade Phillips vs. Josh McDaniels? Advantage, Denver.



Mike Klis (2-1)

Cowboys 24, Broncos 21
This assumes that Bad Romo doesn't make the trip.



Dave Krieger (2-1)

Broncos 23, Cowboys 20
Sipping the Kool-Aid.



Jeff Legwold (2-1)

Cowboys 21, Broncos 20
'Boys find just enough offense to get over the top.



Woody Paige (1-2)

Cowboys 24, Broncos 16
But who really knows?

5 things to watch



Cowboys
linebacker
DeMarcus
Ware

Getty Images
file photo

1 Dr. Feelgood

A new week, a new challenge for the Broncos. This time, how will they handle prosperity? At 3-0, and leading the league in both scoring defense and total defense, they have been one of the early-season surprises in the NFL.

They're being noticed and being lauded. The success will test the maturity of a team with plenty of new faces and plenty of things to still be concerned about.

They should feel pretty good about what they've done, but even the glass-half-full club can point to a deflected ball for a game-winning touchdown against Cincinnati, a benched quarterback against Cleveland and an almost-benched quarterback in Oakland.

2 DeMarcus Ware

Quick, who leads the Cowboys in sacks? OK, it's Victor Butler, who played all of five snaps against the Panthers on Monday night. Still, he had two sacks and forced a fumble.

Ware, who led the league with 20 sacks last season, has none. Reasons vary, but look at the video and it's clear that Ware misses Greg Ellis on the other side of the formation. Ellis, now with the Raiders, pulled pass protection his way and Ware had a little more freedom to dominate.

Ware won't be without a sack much longer, but he may not reach his level of statistical happiness of the past few years unless Anthony Spencer can force teams to rotate his way a little more.

3 Jason Witten

Witten is as good as any tight end in the league in the passing game. He has a good feel for routes, knows how to get rid of the linebacker or safety trying to run with him and finishes off plays with fervor.

The Cowboys can also put themselves in a two tight-end look with Martellus Bennett and Witten in the formation. That's a difficult matchup for any defense's linebackers.

The tight ends are strong enough to overpower safeties as well to go get the ball. Five of Witten's 12 catches this season have come on third down, as has his only touchdown catch this season.

4 The big guys

Despite their injuries at running back, the Cowboys still have the potential to pound the ball in the run game. This will be the biggest offensive line the Broncos have faced this season. The front three has been able to keep the linemen away from inside linebackers Andra Davis and D.J. Williams so far.

But the Cowboys go 338, 307, 318, 353 and 318 across the offensive front, and that puts nose tackle Ronald Fields, as well as ends Kenny Peterson and Ryan McBean, in the crosshairs.

The real test will be if the Cowboys choose to roll the dice and run the ball on passing downs when the Broncos often go a little lighter up front.

5 Third down

The Broncos have been one of the best in the league at getting off the field on third down. They are tied for fourth best.

The Cowboys have a much better offense than the Broncos' three previous opponents, however, and are at just over 40 percent in converting third downs. They were an eyebrow-raising 55 percent (6-for-11) against a stout Giants defense in Week 2. They get anywhere close to that total Sunday and the Broncos won't win.

ByTheNumbers

2-3

Cowboys' record in games in Denver. The last Dallas win in Denver came in 1992, when current Cowboys coach Wade Phillips was the Broncos' defensive coordinator.

1

Teams with a winning record defeated by Dallas and Denver in their five combined wins this season. Denver beat Cincinnati (2-1) in Week 1.

BRONCOS ROSTER

No.	Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.
1	Brett Kern	P	6-2	215
2	Chris Simms	QB	6-4	230
3	T. Brandstater	QB	6-5	223
5	Matt Prater	K	5-10	187
8	Kyle Orton	QB	6-4	225
10	Jabar Gaffney	WR	6-2	200
11	K. McKinley	WR	6-0	183
14	B. Stokley	WR	6-0	192
15	B. Marshall	WR	6-4	230
19	Eddie Royal	WR	5-10	180
20	Brian Dawkins	S	6-0	210
21	A. Goodman	CB	5-10	184
22	Peyton Hillis	RB	6-1	240
23	Renaldo Hill	S	5-11	205
24	Champ Bailey	CB	6-0	192
26	Jack Williams	CB	5-9	183
27	K. Moreno	RB	5-11	210
28	C. Buckhalter	RB	6-0	223
30	David Bruton	S	6-2	211
31	Darcel McBeth	S	6-1	198
32	LaMont Jordan	RB	5-10	242
33	A. Smith	CB	5-9	190
36	Josh Barrett	S	6-2	225
46	S. Larsen	LB-FB	6-2	243
50	Ben Hamilton	G-C	6-4	290
54	Andra Davis	ILB	6-1	251
55	D.J. Williams	ILB	6-1	242
56	Robert Ayers	LB-DE	6-3	274
57	Mario Haggan	ILB	6-3	267
59	W. Woodyard	ILB	6-0	222
62	C. Wiegmann	C	6-2	285
66	Lonie Paxton	LS	6-2	281
70	Seth Olsen	G	6-5	308
71	R. Hochstein	OL	6-4	305
73	Chris Kuper	G	6-4	303
74	Ryan Harris	T	6-5	300
75	Chris Baker	DL	6-2	329
76	T. Polumbus	T	6-8	300
77	Brandon Gorin	T	6-6	309
78	Ryan Clady	T	6-6	325
79	M. Thomas	DL	6-3	316
81	Richard Quinn	TE	6-4	255
84	Brandon Lloyd	WR	6-0	194
88	Tony Scheffler	TE	6-5	255
89	Daniel Graham	TE	6-3	257
90	K. Peterson	DL	6-3	295
91	Ronald Fields	DL	6-2	314
92	Elvis Dumervil	LB-DE	5-11	248
94	Jarvis Moss	LB-DE	6-7	257
95	Darrell Reid	LB-DE	6-2	270
97	Le Kevin Smith	DE	6-3	308
98	Ryan McBean	DL	6-5	297
99	V. Holliday	DL	6-5	285

Head coach: Josh McDaniels

COWBOYS ROSTER

No.	Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.
1	Mat McBriar	P	6-1	222
3	Jon Kitna	QB	6-2	218
6	Nick Folk	K	6-1	222
7	Ste. McGee	QB	6-3	218
9	Tony Romo	QB	6-2	226
11	Roy Williams	WR	6-3	215
17	Sam Hurd	WR	6-2	208
18	David Buehler	K	6-2	228
19	Miles Austin	WR	6-3	214
20	Alan Ball	CB	6-1	188
21	Mike Jenkins	CB	5-10	198
23	Tashard Choice	RB	5-10	212
24	Marion Barber	RB	6-0	222
25	Pat. Watkins	S	6-5	218
26	Ken Hamlin	S	6-2	209
NA	C. Washington	RB	5-11	222
28	Felix Jones	RB	6-0	218
32	Orl. Scandrick	CB	5-10	193
34	Deon Anderson	FB	5-10	246
36	Mi. Hamlin	S	6-2	213
41	Ter. Newman	CB	5-11	191
43	G. Sensabaugh	S	6-0	210
51	Keith Brooking	LB	6-2	242
53	Steve Octavien	LB	6-0	246
54	Bo. Carpenter	LB	6-2	249
56	Bradie James	LB	6-2	247
57	Victor Butler	LB	6-2	246
58	Jason Williams	LB	6-1	246
63	Kyle Kosier	G	6-5	307
64	Mon. Holland	G	6-2	326
65	Andre Gurode	C	6-4	318
68	Doug Free	T	6-6	313
69	Duke Preston	C	6-5	311
70	Leonard Davis	G	6-6	353
71	Corey Procter	C	6-4	311
72	Ste. Bowen	DE	6-5	306
75	Marc Colombo	T	6-8	318
76	Flozell Adams	T	6-7	338
77	Pat McQuistan	T	6-6	317
78	Junior Siavii	DT	6-5	318
80	Ma. Bennett	TE	6-6	266
82	Jason Witten	TE	6-5	263
84	Patrick Crayton	WR	6-0	204
85	Kevin Ogletree	WR	6-0	192
89	John Phillips	TE	6-5	255
90	Jay Ratliff	DT	6-4	303
91	L.P. Ladouceur	LS	6-4	256
93	Anth. Spencer	LB	6-3	256
94	DeMa. Ware	LB	6-4	262
96	Marcus Spears	DE	6-4	309
97	Jason Hatcher	DE	6-6	305
98	Curtis Johnson	LB	6-3	237
99	Igor Olshansky	DE	6-6	315

Head coach: Wade Phillips

TeamStats

	Broncos	Cowboys
Total offense	374.3 (9)	429.7 (3)
Rush offense	158.7 (4)	193.7 (1)
Pass offense	215.7 (15)	236.0 (14)
Total defense	214.7 (1)	382.7 (26)
Rush defense	78.3 (7)	114.7 (17)
Pass defense	136.3 (2)	268.0 (27)
Turnover margin	+6 (2)	-1 (116)
Points/game	20.7 (14)	28.7 (5)
Opp. points/game	5.3 (1)	20.3 (17)
Punting (gross)	44.2 (20)	46.2 (10)
Punting (net)	37.5 (26)	42.4 (9)