

Voice of the Rocky Mountain Empire

# THE DENVER POST

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AFC Championship  Denver Broncos 26, New England Patriots 16

# Perfect Peyton

## QB SETS UP DENVER-SEATTLE SUPER BOWL



Quarterback Peyton Manning holds the Lamar Hunt Trophy as he receives congratulations from coach John Fox, right, and John Elway, executive vice president of football operations, left. The Broncos beat New England 26-16 Sunday to win the AFC championship and advance to the Super Bowl on Feb. 2. Joe Amon, *The Denver Post*

By Patrick Saunders *The Denver Post*

The sky was Colorado blue and the stands were a bright, shining sea of orange.

Peyton Manning proved once again — as if he really ever had anything to prove — that he is one of the greats in NFL history. Champ Bailey finally is getting the trip of his lifetime. And Broncos fans, who screamed their voices raw, have another big party coming soon.

Sunday was indeed seventh heaven at Sports Authority Field at Mile High. And, yes, the Broncos are indeed going to the seventh Super Bowl in franchise history. Their authoritative 26-16 victory over the New England Patriots in the AFC championship game propelled them to Super Bowl XLVIII on Feb. 2 at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, N.J.

The Broncos will play the Seattle Seahawks, who defeated the San Francisco 49ers in the NFC championship game 23-17 on Sunday.

This will be the Broncos' first trip to the Super Bowl since John Elway was named MVP of Super Bowl XXXIII, then hung up his jersey for good. That was 15 years ago.

"I tell you what, it has been a terrific group. They have worked their tails off all season, and I'm excited for them," said Elway, now the Broncos' executive vice president of

football operations and the architect of a team that improved to 15-3 by beating the Patriots.

The Broncos have an opportunity to win their third NFL championship, which would put them atop Denver's sports pantheon. The Avalanche has two NHL championships, while the Nuggets of the NBA and the Rockies of Major League Baseball still are waiting for their first.

There were no "This one's for Peyton!" cries after Sunday's game, but it was clear that his teammates were thrilled for their all-pro quarterback, who was nearly flawless against New England, passing for 400 yards and two touchdowns.

"It was amazing," said wide receiver Demaryius Thomas. "What can you say? To do that in the AFC championship game? Amazing."

Much was made of Manning's 4-10 career record against Patriots quarterback Tom Brady going into the game, but with a temperature of 63 degrees at the opening kickoff, it turned out to be a day at the beach.

"The offense was great, led by a virtuoso performance by No. 18," said Hall of Fame tight end Shannon Sharpe, a former Broncos star who is an NFL analyst for CBS Sports. "And the defense played its best game of the season."

Though Brady finished with 277 yards pass-

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## BRONCOS FEVER

### Across region, fans raise game to Super frenzy

By *The Denver Post*

Blue and orange ran through the streets of Denver on Sunday as the Broncos charged, yard by yard, to their first Super Bowl berth in 15 years. The 26-16 win over the New England Patriots for the AFC championship was witnessed by Broncos fans in shopping malls, sports bars, retirement homes and many locations in between. Expect to see Broncos fever rise as the team and fans ramp up for Super Bowl XLVIII against the Seattle Seahawks on Feb. 2 at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, N.J.

On the second floor of the Cherry Creek Shopping Center, about 25 people — mostly men — had gathered around two large TVs.

Ozz Camara, 27, was there while his girlfriend was at a cosmetics store. "My girlfriend lost her

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