

Broncos lose their nerve against Kansas City, then lose game that will haunt Vance Joseph until his final days on Denver sideline

By Mark Kiszla
Denver Post
October 2, 2018

When the Broncos had their chance to bring the hammer down on Kansas City, they lost their nerve. Instead of finishing the job, they got cute. And then they got beat by yet another NFL team with a superior quarterback, in a 27-23 defeat that will haunt coach Vance Joseph until his final days on the Denver sideline.

Deep into Monday night, Denver was a better football team than Kansas City. But for the fourth time in four games, Case Keenum was the lesser of the two quarterbacks on the field. At winning time, Patrick Mahomes beat the Broncos, leading an eight-play, 60-yard drive for a touchdown that put the Chiefs ahead with 99 seconds remaining in the fourth quarter.

Keenum had a shot at redemption, but blew it by horribly misfiring over the head of receiver Demaryius Thomas as he raced toward the end zone in the final seconds.

Hasn't it become obvious? Keenum is what he is. Mediocre at best, which is what \$18 million gets you in the pass-happy NFL these days. His 73.4 QB rating against Kansas City was a failing grade. "I love our team's grit, man," Joseph said.

Yeah, and the Broncos practice well.

Maybe the real shame is the Broncos don't know what they want their identity to be, when the gritty nature of this team is staring Joseph in the face. The Denver coaching staff has frittered away a 2-0 start with consecutive losses. Will Joseph get it figured out before Denver falls from playoff contention?

While the NFL wants to make the game basketball on grass, physicality still can win football games. And Denver was clearly the tougher, meaner team for the vast majority of the evening. The Broncos pounded Kansas City with running backs Royce Freeman and Phillip Lindsay, who took turns punishing the Chiefs, averaging 6.8 yards on 20 carries between them.

It begs some very difficult questions for a Denver coaching staff that has yet to prove it has a clue of how to win at the NFL level: Why did the Broncos stop feeding the rock to Freeman and Lindsay? With a 10-point lead in the final period, why didn't they bring the hammer down and punish K.C. with brute force in the trenches?

"Our offensive line has been really good all year. And both young backs, they ran downhill," Joseph said. "But you score points by throwing the football. We ran the ball to control the game, but you throw the ball to score."

Sorry, coach. That's some weak sauce.

If there's a Randy Gradishar jersey instead of Mahomes' No. 15 hanging in your closet, if your tastes run to beer instead of broccoli, then Kansas City is your least favorite team. The Chiefs are the poster children for what the NFL has become in 2018: a violent sport hiding from the ghosts of CTE by trying to make it illegal to so much as breathe on the quarterback.

It's good television. But is it football?

This much I know for sure: No matter how much the rules have been rigged for offense, these Chiefs aren't winning the Super Bowl.

Maybe the Broncos didn't produce the blueprint to beat Kansas City, but they certainly removed the mystique. Put the pedal to the metal and steamroll the Chiefs.

OK, there's no denying Mahomes is a QB that throws hot 'n spicy BBQ heat and can create chaos with his sweet Bruno Mars feet. In the end, it was Mahomes that got Denver beat. He completed 28 of 45 throws for 304 yards, including one with his left hand with Von Miller nipping at Mahomes heels during a highlight-reel play that stunned the Denver defense, as well as the crowd of 75,687 in the stadium.

"I didn't know he threw it with his left hand," Miller said.

Free advice: Don't review the videotape, Vonster. It will give you nightmares.

The Chiefs are spectacular. But they're soft. Squeezably soft. Spectacular might be good for nearly 40 points per game in September. Soft stinks in January, when that razzle freezes to your dazzle.

Denver took a 13-10 lead into halftime, with a beautifully simple plan: Give 'em a knuckle sandwich. Broncos defensive coordinator Joe Woods refused to allow Mahomes to get in rhythm early by attacking him with blitzes and creative pressure. Freeman and Lindsay plowed through the K.C. defense on the ground.

"We started off so many series pounding the rock," Keenum said.

So why didn't Denver finish off the Chiefs that way?

With 6:27 remaining on the scoreboard clock and Denver clinging to a three-point lead in the final period, the Broncos came out with a light-weight, three-wide offensive set and failed to gain so much as a single first down. Complain about the refs missing a play-clock violation during the Chiefs winning TD drive if you want, but that three and out by the Denver offense is where the game was lost.

"We've got to do a better job late in the game, we're up by 10 points," Keenum said. "We've got to put together a drive; we can't go three and out. That one is kind of glaring in my mind right now."

Nothing is more glaring than the gap Kansas City has opened over Denver in the AFC West standings. "We're finding our identity as a team," Keenum said.

Losing is a painful education. If the Joseph and Keenum don't quickly figure out who they want to be, Broncos Country will soon be calling for a new coach and quarterback.

Lunch Special: What does Broncos QB Case Keenum need to do to better protect the ball?

By Mark Kiszla
Denver Post
October 2, 2018

Columnist Mark Kiszla answered questions about Denver sports in a Lunch Special live chat on Monday. Here are the highlights:

Hey Mark, how are you man? It's good to talk to you again. What do you think of today's game against the Chiefs? Do you see any way the Broncos get away with the win?

Kiszla: I am good. Thanks for asking. Don't know if I'm flying to Chicago or Milwaukee after the Broncos game tonight ... but I hope I'm hanging around for Game 1 of the NLDS at Coors Field on Thursday, after Rockies win in Los Angeles. What do I think of Broncos game against the Chiefs? Well, there are 99 reasons to expect KC to win ... But I picked the Broncos. 24-23. Crazy, huh? My main — and probably only — reason to go with Denver is the desperation factor. If the Broncos don't win this one, looks like it could be a very long season ahead for Vance Joseph, Case Keenum and the gang. Win or lose, this will be a statement game by Denver. Let's hope it's a positive statement.

Why does it feel like the Broncos are 2-1 going on 3-8 soon?

Kiszla: Lose this game to Chiefs, and it would not be a shocker to see the bottom fall out of the Broncos' season very quickly. So that's why I'm picking Denver to win vs. KC. The Broncos have no other choice but to win. Lose ... and it's probably going to get ugly fast.

What about Bradley Chubb? He seems to be very discreet at the start of the season, do you think he's going to evolve this year?

Kiszla: Bradley Chubb has been solid, but not spectacular. He's a talented football player. He's also learning a new position. Nobody would describe what Chubb played in college as outside linebacker. When the Broncos picked him No. 5, I applauded the choice, but warned the transition would be harder than advertised. So far, I think Chubb has done fine job of making a difficult position switch. But it might not be until 2019 until he's up to speed.

What does Case Keenum need to do to better protect the ball?

Kiszla: Too often, Case Keenum looks like a quarterback trying to justify an \$18 million annual salary, rather than just be himself. What is Keenum? A smart, tough, game manager, with good leadership skills and average NFL physical tools. What Keenum can do to better protect the ball is not try to do so much. That's on Keenum first, on offensive coordinator Bill Musgrave second and, in a distant third, the outsized expectations for this quarterback by Broncos Country.

Hope the Broncos can find some way to stop the Chiefs offense, but I'm covering my eyes. Praying for a Rockies win!

Kiszla: Here are the key issues today for Denver teams, in a nutshell.

Can Rockies find a way to generate offense against the Dodgers?

And can the Broncos find a way to slow down Kansas City with defense?

Do we think Joe Woods has a better game plan than he did last week? Seems like it's our only chance considering this high octane offense, and the poor coverages called consistently last week.

Kiszla: Here's what I don't get. Vance Joseph said after the Raiders game that he thought the Denver secondary played too soft at the corners. And Joseph said essentially the same thing a week later, after Denver played Baltimore. Do Joseph and defensive coordinator Joe Woods talk? And, if so, does Woods listen. (Pardon the snark ... but it seems as if this coaching staff needs to get on the same page.)

Any chance Case Keenum and Vance Joseph are still here next year week one?

Kiszla: If Broncos find a way to get nine victories this season, both Vance Joseph and Case Keenum will be back in 2019. That's the optimistic view.

Got a Rockies question ... or comment? Fire away. I'm here for ya.

Kiszla: Aside from the chance to win the first division title in club history, here's why today's game against the Dodgers is so critical for Colorado. Lose ... and there it will be three high-pressure games in three days from Denver to LA to Milwaukee or Chicago for the Rockies. That would be one weary Colorado ballclub facing an elimination game on Tuesday.

I know LeBron played for the other side, but I found myself rooting for him. Amazing talent, but also a great person.

Kiszla: LeBron James is the king. For good reason. Amazing talent. Good dude. But during the ESPN telecast of Nuggets vs Lakers, I couldn't help but feel the pain of Nuggets fans. I like the broadcasters that did the game. But, for much of the broadcast, they barely acknowledged the Nuggets' existence in the game. I know, I know. This night was all about LeBron's first game in a Lakers uni.

Really want Matt Holliday to get in the game today.

Kiszla: A two-run, pinch-hit homer in the seventh inning by Matt Holliday would be nice. And there would be no question Holliday touched em all, including home plate.

Broncos Analysis: Blown 10-point lead allows Kansas City Chiefs to escape with win

By Ryan O'Halloran

Denver Post

October 2, 2018

Leading the unbeaten division leaders, the Broncos needed the kind of clock-draining, point-producing drive they executed to end the first half.

Denver led Kansas City by 3 points and only 6 minutes, 27 seconds stood between the Broncos and the type of win Monday night that quiets the public roars into whispers and turns a season around. Instead, the Broncos went three-and-out and another lousy Marquette King punt handed the Chiefs field position (their 40) and time (4:35).

It was all Kansas City needed to improve to 4-0.

Overcoming penalties that created a second-and-30 and getting away with a delay-of-game call to convert a third-and-7 with a 35-yard Patrick Mahomes rabbit-out-of-his-helmet completion, Kansas City escaped with a 27-23 win on Kareem Hunt's six-yard touchdown run with 1:39 remaining.

After Hunt's touchdown, the Broncos had 75 yards to go and 1:39 of game clock. Quarterback Case Keenum converted a fourth-and-11 (12-yard pass to Emmanuel Sanders) with 56 seconds remaining.

On the next play, Keenum hit tight end Jeff Heurman down the middle for 36 yards, to the Chiefs 28. Three plays later, Keenum overshot an open Demaryius Thomas down the right sideline that would have been the go-ahead touchdown.

On fourth-and-10, the Broncos tried a trick play — a catch by Courtland Sutton, whose backward lateral for Emmanuel Sanders was recovered by the Chiefs with 12 seconds remaining. (The play ended up being ruled an incompleteness).

"I thought we were in good shape until the last play," Broncos coach Vance Joseph said. "Case had shown he could win games late for us."

Said Keenum: "This is a tough one. It stings."

The Broncos led 23-13 with 12:47 remaining, but couldn't finish.

What a setback.

And, at the season's quarter pole, the Broncos are 2-2, fitting because teams at .500 are equal parts average and flawed. They do enough good things to win at home, but don't do enough good things to win as an underdog.

"I told the guys to keep fighting," Joseph said of his post-game message. "We came out with the right mindset, we had a great week of prep and the guys played good football tonight. We'll win games like this. I love our team's grit. We gave up some plays late and that hurt us."

The Chiefs' premier players were better than the Broncos' best players. Mahomes time and time gave himself more time by escaping the pocket and throwing downfield. It took more than three quarters, but tight end Travis Kelce emerged in a big way. And Hunt plowed his way to 121 yards.

Keenum was 21-of-33 passing for 245 yards. Mahomes was 28 of 45 for 304 yards.

"We couldn't get him on the ground," Joseph said of Mahomes.

One of Mahomes' biggest plays was one he got away with — television replays showed the play clock at "0" before he received the snap at the 2-minute mark.

"I did (ask) and (the referee) said, 'He looked up, it was zero and the ball was gone,'" Joseph said. "I disagreed." Broncos player were furious over the non-call.

After doing most everything right in the first half to lead 13-10, the Broncos' demise appeared to be imminent early in the third quarter. Kansas City used gains of 24, 15 and 29 yards to move to the Broncos' 3-yard line. But the Chiefs settled for a 21-yard Harrison Butker field goal to tie the game.

Potential turning point No. 2 came on the next play from scrimmage when Keenum was intercepted on a pass targeted for Heuerman. Two-plus quarters in, the Broncos had finally blinked. The Chiefs would surely take the lead and cruise to a win, right? No. They moved into Broncos territory but stalled thanks to two penalties and Mahomes being pressured into a third-down throwaway.

The Broncos answered with 10 consecutive points. Phillip Lindsay capped an 80-yard drive with a 1-yard touchdown. Courtland Sutton drew a pass interference penalty to convert a third-and-10. After a Chiefs three-and-out, the Broncos went back to work. Royce Freeman gained 10 yards (breaking two tackles) to end the third quarter, followed by Andy Janovich's long catch. The Broncos had to settle for Brandon McManus' 46-yard field goal and a 23-13 lead with 12:47 remaining.

Kansas City cut the lead to 23-20 with 6:27 remaining on Kelce's two-yard touchdown catch.

A lousy three-and-out by the Broncos set up Kansas City's winning drive.

Both teams started the game with field goal drives. The Broncos moved to the Chiefs' 24, including gains of 11 (Heuerman catch), 18 (Freeman rush) and 17 (Lindsay rush) yards to open the game. Lindsay allowed a sack by Dee Ford, though, to stall the possession.

The Chiefs answered with a 10-play, 60-yard drive, the big play a 27-yard catch and run by Hunt. On the next play, Mahomes fumbled the snap.

Kansas City took its first lead on an 89-yard march that was the longest allowed this season by the Broncos' defense. Hunt gained 45 when at least two Broncos missed tackles and Mahomes converted a third-and-4 with an eight-yard throw to receiver Demarcus Robinson. On third-and-goal, Mahomes scrambled left for an eight-yard touchdown.

The Broncos answered, needing only five plays to move 78 yards. Sutton made a fine 42-yard catch and three plays later, on third-and-1, Freeman scored on a 28-yard touchdown when he received the toss well

behind the line of scrimmage then weaved his way through traffic and broke two Chiefs tackles inside the 10-yard line.

On their next drive, the Broncos did two things: They scored and left no time left for Kansas City. McManus' 34-yard field goal gave the Broncos a 13-10 halftime lead.

The Broncos now face a short week and trip to face the New York Jets.

"Obviously, you hate not winning, but we're finding an identity as a team, we're building our character ... and there is no quit at all in that locker room," Keenum said. "Everybody is hurting now, but I know they're going to show up (Tuesday) ready to work."

Broncos report card and game balls from Week 4 against the Chiefs

By Ryan O'Halloran

Denver Post

October 2, 2018

Offense — B

Memo to the Broncos: Keep feeding rookie running backs Royce Freeman and Phillip Lindsay until they prove incapable of carrying the offense. Running with authority, power and vision, Freeman and Lindsay were dominant throughout. At one point in the third quarter, the Broncos were averaging 9.2 yards per carry. ... Case Keenum showed good pocket awareness, sliding up, back and around to buy time to throw, but he missed Demaryius Thomas for the winning touchdown in the final 30 seconds. ... Two suggestions for the passing game: Throw it more to Emmanuel Sanders and Courtland Sutton. Sanders continues to look lightning quick and Sutton is a good bet to make the downfield catch or draw a penalty. ... A three-and-out while leading 23-20 gave the Chiefs hope and time, which they used to win 27-23.

Defense — D

Kansas City rolled up 446 yards, the Broncos had only one sack and their takeaway drought stretched to three games. ... The grade plummeted because the Broncos gave up touchdown drives of 75 and 60 yards in the final 6:27. ... Kansas City faced a second-and-30 on its winning drive, but escaped. ... The pass rush consistently flushed Patrick Mahomes out of the pocket and only his supreme skills allowed him to make something out of nothing. ... The Broncos kept tight end Travis Kelce in check for three quarters before he got going. ... Chiefs running back Kareem Hunt was going to get untracked against somebody and that opponent was the Broncos. Alarming was how the Broncos tried to tackle Hunt high, which is usually a bad business decision.

Special teams — B

Chiefs punt returner Tyreek Hill had a 37-yard gain on his first attempt. Scoring points instead of punting is always the best way to make sure Hill doesn't have a special teams impact. ... Brandon McManus had field goals of 42, 34 and 46 yards and remains terrific on kickoffs. ... What now with punter Marquette King? His lousy punt gave Kansas City prime field position (its 40-yard line) to set up its winning drive. The Broncos signed Colby Wadman to the practice squad last week. Maybe it's time to see what he can do in a game.

Coaching — C

The Broncos' coaching staff needed a rebound from last week's loss at Baltimore and they delivered for the game's first 53 minutes. If Vance Joseph said something privately to the players about self-inflicted penalties, they listened. If Joseph said something to defensive coordinator Joe Woods about sending extra pass rushers, Woods listened. And if Joseph said something to offensive coordinator Bill Musgrave about riding the running game, Musgrave listened. The main nitpick was the final offensive play. Fourth-and-10 from the Chiefs' 28 and a trick play (that failed) is called? They should have called an end zone shot to Courtland Sutton.

Game balls

WR Courtland Sutton: Was targeted six times. He had three catches for 51 yards (including a season-best 42-yarder) and drew a 14-yard pass interference penalty that converted a third-and-10.

RB Phillip Lindsay: Atoned for last week's first-half ejection by rushing 12 times for 69 yards and one touchdown.

RB Royce Freeman: Showed that he can be a franchise running back by pounding his way to 67 yards on eight carries and a terrific touchdown run. Time to get him more involved.

Broncos lean on Phillip Lindsay, Royce Freeman in loss to Kansas City Chiefs

By Kyle Fredrickson

Denver Post

October 2, 2018

The play call didn't quite fit the situation.

Royce Freeman didn't care.

The Broncos' rookie running back took a sweep pitch toward the near boundary Monday night at Mile High, third-and-short in the Kansas City red zone, and stared down a gaggle of defenders buried deep behind the line of scrimmage. But Freeman used a sharp inside cut to blow past four Chiefs and burst up-field. He brushed off cornerback Kendall Fuller with a stiff arm, and when linebacker Anthony Hitchens grabbed the back of Freeman's jersey at the 5-yard line, Freeman literally dragged him into the end zone.

One clear positive in a heartbreaking 27-23 defeat.

No surprise, really, considering Denver's most successful offensive formula all season. Feed the first-year running backs — Freeman and Phillip Lindsay — and watch the records fall. On Monday, they became the first pair of Broncos rookies in team history to each rush for 60-plus yards and one touchdown in the same game.

"Our offensive line has been really good all year and both young backs ran downhill, but you score points by throwing the football," Broncos coach Vance Joseph said, addressing why he didn't focus heavier on the running game. "We ran the ball to control the game and you throw it to score. That's never going to stop."

Added quarterback Case Keenum: "It seemed like we started off so many series pounding the rock, even with some loaded boxes that KC brought. If we keep running the ball, well, we're going to win lots of games."

The Broncos ran the ball on 22 times, opposed to 33 passing attempts.

Their yardage often arrived in huge chunk plays. Lindsay hit on gains of 17 and 13. Freeman scampered for 18, 11 and 14. Combined, Freeman and Lindsay rushed for 136 yards on 20 touches — a 6.8-yard per carry average.

But Lindsay, at just 5-foot-8 and 190 pounds, also showcased a powerful inside-run game. Tied at 13, the Broncos sat one yard out from pay-dirt. Denver handed the ball to Lindsay — who battered through the gut of Kansas City's defense for the score.

"We've got to come up with more ways to make plays," Lindsay said. "Everybody is frustrated, but this is the NFL. This is why you play the whole entire game. A couple of weeks ago, we were on the other side of it. You have to learn from it."

Freeman's touchdown also placed him in elite company. His three scores in four games are tied for most among all rookie running backs with Saquon Barkely, selected No. 2 overall by the Giants. Freeman also tied Terrell Davis and Jon Keyworth for the most TDs by a rookie through four games in Broncos history.

The Broncos should have ample opportunity to continue its rushing success in Week 5 at the Jets. New York has allowed opponents to average 108.8 yards on the ground through its 1-3 start.

Broncos' up-down drill: Best and worst against the Kansas City Chiefs

By Kyle Fredrickson

Denver Post

October 2, 2018

Here are the most notable ups and downs from Kansas City's victory over Denver Monday night.

UP: Royce Freeman: His second quarter run into the end zone marked Freeman's third rushing score of the season, tying him with Saquon Barkley (Giants) to lead all rookie running backs in touchdowns.

DOWN: Case Keenum's protection: The Broncos quarterback was hurried early and often, including a pair of first quarter sacks (allowed by LT Garrett Bolles and RB Phillip Lindsay).

UP: Punching back: Kansas City quarterback Patrick Mahomes ran 8 yards into the end zone for the game's first touchdown in the second quarter. Denver's response: A five-play, 78-yard scoring drive capped by Freeman's rushing score. Later in the third quarter, Keenum threw an interception. The Broncos defense held stout on the following series and forced a Chiefs punt.

DOWN: Tackling Kareem Hunt: One play in particular stands out. Hunt gained 45 yards on a sideline tap-dance in which he broke at least three Denver tackles.

UP: Uniforms: Denver went with its all-blue look against the Chiefs' red-white-red. A classic AFC West fashion matchup.

DOWN: Von Miller: His first tackle didn't arrive until the second half (although it was one for loss). Miller was mostly a non-factor, especially as KC rallied from a 10-point fourth quarter deficit.

UP: Late-arriving crowd: The stands weren't filled at kickoff, but an impressive 75,687 (969 no-shows) rocked Mile High. The noise got so loud one minute into the third quarter that Kansas City's offense was forced to call timeout before the play-clock expired.

DOWN: Offensive line health: Starting right tackle Jared Veldheer left in the game in the second quarter with a knee injury and did not return. Billy Turner replaced him.

Missed delay-of-game call costs Broncos in loss to Chiefs

By Matt Stephens

Denver Post

October 2, 2018

The Broncos lost to the Chiefs on Monday, marking Denver's fourth straight defeat against its division rival at Mile High. Had it not been for an obvious missed delay-of-game call, the Broncos might be tied with Kansas City atop the AFC West standings.

The Chiefs converted a third-and-7 from Denver's 46-yard line with 2:03 remaining with a 35-yard pass, but the play should have never counted. The play clock had been at zero for more nearly an entire second before Patrick Mahomes snapped the ball. Kansas City went on to score the go-ahead touchdown three plays later.

"The clock said zero, but that's not my job," Broncos coach Vance Joseph said. "(The ref) said he looked up and the clock was zero and the ball was gone. I disagree."

Then again, if the Broncos' defense could have made a stop on the play — or if Denver quarterback Case Keenum could have thrown an accurate pass to a wide-open Demaryius Thomas at the goal line with 0:22 seconds left, a referee's error wouldn't have mattered.

Broncos Ring of Famers are defensive about NFL's player-protection rules

By Mike Chambers

Denver Post

October 2, 2018

Four former hard-hitting Broncos — each enshrined in the Ring of Fame — had choice words for the NFL's competition committee Monday night before Denver hosted Kansas City.

Former Denver linebacker Karl Mecklenburg, defensive ends Simon Fletcher and Rich Jackson and safety Dennis Smith are among the Broncos' all-time greatest defensive players. But they each said they wouldn't have been the same player in today's game, where falling on the quarterback after making a sack now draws a 15-yard penalty.

"If I was playing today, they'd lock me up," said Jackson, who went by "Tombstone" during his playing days. "Only one way to play football, and that's search and destroy."

Said Fletcher: "I guess the people on the rules committee figure it's better to pretend to protect guys than give fans their dollar's worth."

Smith added that he'd like to see former players set the rules rather than a group of people who've never played football.

Mecklenburg played 180 regular-season games for the Broncos from 1983-1994. He and Smith (184 games from 1981-1994) and Fletcher (172 from 1985-1995) each said the controversial roughing the quarterback rule led to a season-ending injury to Miami defensive William Hayes in Week 3 against Oakland. Hayes sacked quarterback Derek Carr but tore his ACL while trying to avoid landing on Carr.

"Are you supposed to pull the quarterback on top of you? Basically, that's the option if you're running through somebody, you're running full speed and he's standing there; how do you not (land on him)? It's tackle football," Mecklenburg said. "I think it's going to have to change. I really don't think you can have a rule saying you can't land on a quarterback. Everybody lands on everybody else. If you're running full speed and you have a collision, and you're trying to twist so you don't land on the guy, you're going to hurt yourself."

Mecklenburg has other issues with today's game, but it all stems from taking the toughness out of the game from Day 1 of training camp — which he says has become "flag football."

"My game was physical. I probably would have ended up owning money at the end of many games (due to fines). And I don't know if I would have made the team," he said. "During training camp, if you don't have full contract drills very often — I don't look good in shorts. I was a 12th rounder, I was the 310th pick of the draft and I had to prove something on the practice field. It was not running around playing flag football."

Jackson, who played for Denver from 1967-1972 (69 games), said he doesn't frequently watch NFL games. He and the other Ring of Famers were in town Monday to participate in the Broncos' alumni weekend.

“I think when the fans catch on to what’s going on, I think the attendance will diminish,” Jackson said. “Football isn’t what it’s designed to be. It’s a contact sport. You need to address some things to protect the ballplayers but right now they are over-protecting and taking away from the game.”

Broncos Ring of Famers are defensive about NFL's player-protection rules

By Mike Klis

9 News

October 2, 2018

Bradley Roby dressed slowly in the far corner of the home locker room, partly because he was bummed at the Broncos' 27-23 heartbreaking loss to the Kansas City Chiefs, but mostly because he didn't have the energy to dress at a higher speed.

"I'm so tired, man," Roby said as he affixed a chain around his neck. "Running after those boys all night. I felt like we were going to win. And then to not, it's so frustrating."

As a Broncos cornerback, Roby was not only out there for nearly all of 72 defensive plays, he had the stress of covering Kansas City Chiefs' receiver Tyreek Hill, among others, as quarterback Patrick Mahomes ran and ran and ran before throwing the ball. Roby and the Broncos' secondary didn't just cover, they had to cover for an extra couple seconds as Mahomes converted a third-and-16 with completions of 16 and 22 yards, a first-and-20 starting with a completion of 19 yards, and later a second-and-30 with obn-the-run darts of 23 and 35 yards.

"They got a great quarterback over there, for sure," Roby said.

The Broncos played an inspired game. Vance Joseph and his coaching staff came up with a good plan. For three quarters and a little of the fourth, they played exceedingly well, pulling ahead 23-13.

And then Pat Mahomes went schoolyard in the fourth quarter and rallied the Kansas City Chiefs to a 27-23 victory that stunned Denver before a sellout crowd of 75,000-plus on a comfortable Monday night at Broncos Stadium at Mile High.

"It's like investing 100 percent in everything that you got, and you lose," said Broncos' pass rusher Von Miller, who was frustrated throughout the game and then at game's end. "There is a sense of disappointment. We've got to get back to the lab and wer'e going to do it again. We've got to reload again. The great teams do that."

The Broncos are not a great team. They are a 2-2 team. The Chiefs are not a great a team, either, not with that defense. But they are 4-0 because they do have a quarterback who is an incredible athlete with a rocket right arm who throws exceedingly well on the run, especially when rolling right. And when he rolled left, with Miller clipping at his heels, Mahomes managed to throw a left-handed pass to Tyreek Hill to convert a third-and-5 to keep alive the Chiefs' game-winning drive.

"I didn't think at all," Mahomes said when asked when he thought he might go with the left hand. "I was kind of just scrambling left. I felt Von on my back and knew I couldn't throw it with my right hand, I knew we needed the first down, so I kind of shot-putted it to Tyreek. He got the first down and made a great play. You just have to get the ball in their hands somehow."

The Broncos' quarterback? Case Keenum played a fine game, but with a chance to rally the Broncos back to victory, he overthrew a wide-open Demaryius Thomas near the Chiefs' 5-yard line. Catch it and Thomas walks in for the Broncos' victory with 16 seconds to play. Instead, the ball sailed way beyond. Make that throw and the Broncos win.

"There's a few, especially those type of plays that I'll lose a little sleep over, thinking about it, laying at night in bed," Keenum said. "It's a tough one. It stings."

Fourth down instead of touchdown. A hook-n-ladder on the next play would have been better had they settled for the hook to Courtland Sutton at the Chiefs' 19-yard line. The ladder exchange got so messed up, the play wound up incomplete.

The Broncos blew a 10-point, fourth quarter lead for the first time since the Devin Hester game at Soldier Field in 2007.

Now, even Broncos' fans -- the last of the holdouts -- are convinced Patrick Mahomes is the real deal.

It took the Broncos and their fans longer than most. They kept hearing about how great this young quarterback from Kansas City was, but forgive them if it took a while to realize what the fuss was all about.

In his first seven quarters at Broncos Stadium at Mile High, Mahomes had zero touchdown passes and 1 interception. That included his NFL debut in the 2017 regular-season finale. He had 13 TDs and zero picks against the rest of the league. He had a tough first-half against the Broncos, completing just 7 of 15 for 65 yards.

"They did a variety of things," Mahomes said. "That's what defenses do. When you have the defensive play-makers that they have, they can cover people. We weren't clicking anywhere in the first half, but we were grinding and fighting and doing what we could. The defense kept us in the game and gave us a chance at the end there to make plays."

But with his team down, 23-13 in the fourth quarter, Mahomes did throw his first TD pass in Denver with 6:27 left in the fourth quarter, a down-the-line dish to tight end Travis Kelce, who steamrolled in from 2 yards out. Mahomes then led the Chiefs on a go-ahead touchdown drive that was capped by a Kareem Hunt 4-yard touchdown run.

Most young quarterbacks when they break containment of the pass rush, they instinctively take off running. Mahomes is schoolyard in the way he scrambles around and throws for broke, but he is disciplined when it comes to keeping his eyes downfield and taking the pass instead of the run just about every time.

"I'm not fast," Mahomes said. "I know that my strength is not running the ball. I know I have a lot of playmakers whose strength is catching the ball and making people miss. I know if I keep my eyes down field and get it to them, they're going to keep working for me and make big plays."

The Broncos thought they had it thanks to their strong running game led by rookies Phillip Lindsay and Royce Freeman, who combined for 136 yards and two touchdowns on just 20 carries. Perhaps, they should have got the ball more.

"We ran the football to control the game, but you throw the ball to score," Joseph said. "So that's never going to stop."

Mahomes struggled early against a Denver D that mixed up their coverages (thank you, Chris Harris Jr.!) and applied enough pressure for the hot, young quarterback to make several inaccurate throws. But Mahomes finished 28 of 45 for 304 yards and had made several incredible athletic scramble completions.

"The kid made some plays," Joseph said. "We couldn't get him on the ground. We had a bunch of good pressures. We pushed him out of the pocket, we lost contain a couple times and he stepped out of a couple sacks."

Keenum had his final-minute rally fall short with the pass to D.T. that was too long. He finished 21 of 33 for 245 yards with no touchdowns and one interception.

Note

The Broncos lost right tackle Jared Veldheer to a knee injury in the first half. He walked out of the locker room carrying, but not using a set of crutches. He will have an MRI on Tuesday morning. Billy Turner replaced him. ...

Broncos offensive coordinator Bill Musgrave to call plays from coaches box

By Mike Klis

9 News

October 2, 2018

The Broncos are making an in-game coaching adjustment for their game Monday night against the Kansas City Chiefs.

Offensive coordinator Bill Musgrave is moving from the sidelines to the coaches' box upstairs and offensive line-tackles coach Chris Strausser will go from the coaches' box to the sideline.

The moves only make sense. For Musgrave, it enables him to see the entire field from a bird's-eye view as he sets up his play calls. He can still relay play calls directly to Case Keenum's speaker device inside the quarterback's helmet.

The Broncos also have an experienced quarterbacks coach in Mike Sullivan who can handle the between-series adjustments and plan.

For Strausser, it allows him to have direct personal interaction with tackles Garrett Bolles and Jared Veldheer.

Klis List: How Broncos can beat the Chiefs in huge game 4

By Mike Klis

9 News

October 2, 2018

There are two games involving Denver sports teams today where the division title is at stake.

The baseball Colorado Rockies play at Dodger Stadium in a one-game-takes-the-National League West Division, loser-settles-for-the-final-wild card-spot.

And the Denver Broncos play the Kansas City Chiefs in a game that is far more important to the Broncos than it is the Chiefs.

It's only game 4 of a 16-game season, but because the Broncos are 2-1 and playing at home, they must beat 3-0 Kansas City to prevent the Chiefs from running away with their third consecutive AFC West Division title.

Win and the Broncos can believe they are playoff contenders. Lose and the Broncos may be headed for a long year. This game is that important.

Here's a Klis List of pressure points the Broncos must push in order to pull off a home upset and defeat the offensive-mighty/defensive-sluggish Chiefs.

Neutral start

The Broncos don't necessarily have to start fast. But they can't allow the Chiefs to get off to a 14-0 or 21-0 first-quarter lead, as they did in their previous two games.

The 3-0 Chiefs have outscored their opponents, 49-6 in the first quarter.

The Broncos have a slim 21-20 combined, first-quarter advantage through three games. If the game is tight 15 minutes in, it's a different game for the Chiefs.

Pressure, hurry, hit, sack and strip Patrick Mahomes

The game can't be this easy. Mahomes has been tremendous through three games, throwing a record 13 touchdown passes against 0 interceptions. He has playmakers galore in Travis Kelce, Kareem Hunt, Tyreek Hill and Sammy Watkins.

The Broncos have to hit Mahomes. He's tough enough to handle it, but if his decisions are hurried, he might make a couple bad ones.

Marquette rebound

Marquette King punted so poorly in the rain last week at Baltimore, the Broncos signed another punter, Colby Wadman, to their practice squad.

Wadman seems to be a pet project of Broncos special teams coordinator Tom McMahon, who has worked him out multiple times in the past two years.

The Chiefs' Tyreek Hill is the most dangerous punt returner in the league. Those low, down-the-middle punts won't work tonight.

Score 27 to 30 points

The Denver defense can hold the Chiefs to 27 points. But can the Broncos offense score 30? They're averaging only 20.3 points and haven't scored 30 points in a game since week 2 of last season against Dallas.

The Chiefs' defense, though, has been generous, allowing 30.7 points per game and a league-worst 474 yards per game.

When the opponent has a great offense and a lousy defense, you better score.

Hold the Chiefs to 27 or fewer points

No one has done it yet as the Chiefs have scored 38, 42 and 38 points in their three games against the Chargers and Steelers on the road, and 49ers at home. None of those defenses, though, have Von Miller.

No more than one turnover

This goes along with scoring 27 to 30 points. Case Keenum has five interceptions through three games. Nothing alarming yet, but there will be if the picks continue.

Block the edges

The Chiefs have two good edge pass rushers in outside linebackers Justin Houston and Dee Ford, who each have 2.0 sacks this year, as does defensive end Allen Bailey. The Broncos two offensive tackles, Garrett Bolles and Jared Veldheer, each got beat last week against the Baltimore Ravens.

Stay together, maintain composure

The Broncos beat themselves at Baltimore by committing 13 penalties and throwing a costly interception on second-and-goal.

There will likely be a point in the game tonight when the Chiefs have momentum. The Broncos can't get flustered.

Hometown hero Phillip Lindsay a bright spot in heartbreaking Broncos loss

By Jacob Rodriguez

9 News

October 2, 2018

Right there. The win was right there. All quarterback Case Keenum had to do was not overthrow a wide-open Demaryius Thomas along the sideline. There was maybe 30 seconds left in the game. Broncos were deep in Kansas City territory.

But Keenum overthrew it.

The Kansas City Chiefs came into Mile High Field and walked out with a 27-23 win after a heartbreaking game for the Broncos. While a myriad of small issues combined to lead to the four-point loss, Broncos fans can take away one clear thing: Phillip Lindsay is a stud.

A pair of rookies led the Broncos on the ground and got both TDs for the boys in blue Monday night. Royce Freeman, a pick up out of Oregon, had eight carries for 67 yards and a touchdown.

Lindsay, who went to high school in Denver and played for CU Boulder, had 12 carries for 69 yards and another touchdown. Lindsay is the team leader in rushing so far this season, with 267 rushing yards and a touchdown over 45 attempts and four games.

The 24-year-old was born in Aurora, Colorado before attending South High School to play running back, just like his dad. He also wore his father's number in high school, number 22. Though, for the Broncos, he wears number 30.

After South, Lindsay went north about 40 minutes to attend the University of Colorado Boulder and, over four years, set the school record for all-purpose yards with 5,760.

Then he went undrafted.

But the Broncos took him on and gave him a shot in preseason. He became a sensation for fans and media outlets (like this one) - and hasn't taken his foot off the gas since. Sure, he's not turning heads like Ezekiel Elliot his first year - but Zeke was expected to be great.

And sure, the Week 3 ejection for throwing some punches in a pile wasn't a great look, but a passionate rookie running back? Not a terrible thing to have. Plus, 9NEWS Broncos Insider Mike Klis thinks the officials missed a few things anyway, so that's moot.'

Six months ago, no one but fans of the Buffaloes even knew who Lindsay was. Now, for sure, at least the 75,000 Broncos fans in attendance Monday night remember the hope he gave them. Sure, the Broncos lost, but, as Keenum said in the post-game press conference - the players are going to get up on Tuesday ready to get after it. Ready to win.

And with Lindsay and Freeman in the backfield, they've always got a shot (to say nothing of their still-incredible defense).

For any Lindsay haters out there, here's my Twitter handle and my email address. Let's chat.

Von Miller epically sacked an office chicken in an ESPN ad

By Allison Sylte
9 News
October 2, 2018

Being a chicken mascot is hard enough work, but it's even more difficult to get epically sacked by Von Miller in costume for an ESPN ad.

The Denver Broncos linebacker, who has appeared in many an ad campaign in his day, is now featured in "This is SportsCenter." Watch it below, then we can unpack it further:

When he's not sacking quarterbacks, Miller is a chicken farmer. Seriously. He loves those little things ... and even majored in poultry sciences at Texas A&M.

Some of his chickens have been named after his teammates. But in the ESPN ad, his office chickens are all various mascots.

They're placed in a cage.

Thank you for being you, Von Miller.

Here's a short video of him feeding office chickens. Happy Monday!

Chubbtown: A legacy of family strength for Broncos' Bradley Chubb

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

October 2, 2018

Bradley Chubb, a proficient pass-rush prospect, was the fifth pick overall in the April draft by the Denver Broncos.

But there's more, a lot more, to Chubb, whose name alone is a slice of history.

Bradley's father, Aaron, understands his son is expected to be an impact player. But Aaron, despite his own football career at the University of Georgia, didn't set out to raise a football player with a sizable future.

No, he and his wife, Stacey, wanted to raise "the kind of person who could be anything he wants to be, and be successful at it, football or not. We wanted to send our boys into the world ready to treat people how they're supposed to be treated."

At a time when many NFL players are focusing on social justice through peaceful protest, Aaron's desire for his sons to honor their history is about their future.

And why the story of Chubbtown, Georgia, matters.

It matters because of the history and the people. How they all fit together affects the present and the future. It matters to Aaron that in a time of slavery, his ancestors still found a way to carve out a life when so many others like them were forced to live in servitude.

"With all that's going on in the world, with all of the issues we face, it's important to know our family history for our boys," Aaron said. "Because I think it's just behind everything we do, how you treat people, how you live. It was important for us to share -- the history, where we came from, what it means and how we can keep with it."

A place deep in history

What remains of Chubbtown is a patch of ground, rich in heritage for all who carry its name. It's tucked just south of Rome, Georgia, where Cedartown Road and Chubbtown Road intersect just inside the Georgia-Alabama line.

The Chubb Chapel United Methodist Church remains, as well as a cemetery. It dates back to the time of slavery but was a community of free black men and women who carried the same name, who lived a largely self-sufficient existence.

Several documents and historical accounts say the rest of what was Chubbtown washed away in a flood in 1916. It was founded by John Henry Chubb, with his wife and eight sons, who came from North Carolina somewhere between 1850 and the end of the Civil War.

They were not slaves. The family founded the community, whose place was so unique the Chubb descendants say Union Gen. William T. Sherman left it untouched in his March to the Sea. During the campaign, in late 1864, Sherman and roughly 60,000 Union soldiers set fire to many buildings along the way. Sherman wrote that the objective was to “make old and young, rich and poor, feel the hard hand of war.”

The Chubbs took care of themselves, farming the land and making most of their household goods. They also traded with whites in nearby communities. At its peak, Aaron said, Chubbtown’s businesses included a post office, sawmill, blacksmith and meeting hall.

“I remember going a lot, and that my dad [Henry] -- he lived around the area around Cedartown -- let me know why it was important for us,” said Cleveland Browns running back Nick Chubb, who is Bradley’s second cousin. “All of my uncles, those were the people who let you know what it meant.

“It’s the heritage of my last name, that pride you feel for something like that. The people founded the town in the hard times they lived in, how hard they worked, how they persevered through the adversity we might not even be able to really comprehend sometimes, how they just dealt with all the obstacles that were thrown at them.”

That doesn’t mean Aaron’s sons, as they discovered they were their own people, immediately took to the lessons.

Bradley and his older brother, Brandon, weren’t yet teenagers when Aaron began to turn the pages on the family’s story. But to Aaron, it was “just so important,” so he kept revealing the pieces. To Bradley, it sounded like something between fable and myth.

“It was just one of those stories your parents told you about how it was when they were young or something. ... I didn’t believe him,” Bradley Chubb said with a laugh. “I didn’t. That was maybe before sixth grade or right about then. But when I was in eighth grade, he took us, and it really kind of sunk in on that trip.”

The message matters

The lessons of hard work and the ability to respond to what life has in store finally sunk in. And whether Brandon, who is a linebacker for the Detroit Lions, or Bradley found themselves in a corner office, on an assembly line or in an NFL locker room -- “whatever they choose to do,” Stacey said -- those traits will always matter.

“They were self-sufficient. That had to be the kind of hard work most people don’t have to deal with,” Bradley said. “That’s where I feel like I can look back and see where hard work comes from in our family, I really feel that way. Nick and I have talked about it, how our parents, and their parents, and their parents, could just lean on how much people had done before them and how it got passed along.”

When the Broncos did the customary vetting of the 20-somethings on their draft board, Bradley’s football potential leaped off the game video. Broncos coach Vance Joseph called him “a rare player.” But in discussions with Bradley, and those who knew him, there was something else.

Broncos president of football operations/general manager John Elway has said it's often not what's on the film that makes the difference in finding a player who reaches his potential or a player whose talent becomes little more than a starting point to an unfulfilled journey.

"Just in his demeanor, how he plays, how people said he interacted with his teammates, how he practiced, how he handled school," Elway said. "You see how he does things is important to him. That comes from his family. You see it."

Aaron said watching his sons go through the NFL draft experience was a lot to take in. And like most parents, he said, he and his wife hope they've done enough to prepare their children for what's to come.

But that history can help because it still matters.

"Did he believe us about all this at first? Of course not. You know how kids are -- they don't believe you, Daddy don't know anything, you know?" Aaron said. "But it is quite a story. But once he saw it, both [Bradley and Brandon] knew immediately what we were talking about, and [what] I saw was an appreciation for what we've been telling them, what people had done, their elders had done, before them. They can carry that around always ... maybe they don't always need it or want it, but they always have it with them.

"You learn from people. You learn from life. And all of us in our family have learned from that place."

Broncos lose balance, then game to Chiefs

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

October 2, 2018

The first time Broncos running back Royce Freeman touched the ball Monday night, he cruised for an 18-yard gain.

The fifth time he touched the ball, he evaded seven or so would-be tacklers, dragging the last one -- Kansas City Chiefs linebacker Anthony Hitchens -- into the end zone for a 14-yard touchdown run.

Yet those long runs, in a 27-23 loss to the Chiefs, offered another glimpse at the Broncos' aggravating, maddening and now repetitive knack for not doing what they do best:

The Broncos ran the ball to keep the game close Monday, then they ran it to build a 10-point lead in the second half. But when they had a chance to put the game away, they elected to leave behind what had worked.

With a three-point lead and 6 minutes, 26 seconds left in the contest, the Broncos pitched aside the power formations. They lined up in a three-wide set with a failed run out of an open formation on first down, then had a pass for no gain and a sack on the next two plays. What followed was a balky punt from Marquette King, and just like that, all the good work was undone.

"They played good defense there, a three-and-out, we had an OK punt, it wasn't a great punt, we gave them the ball with half the field," said Broncos coach Vance Joseph. "They made some plays."

The Chiefs worked themselves out of a second-and-30 situation, looked to have run a play for a first down after the play clock had run out and capped an eight-play, 60-yard touchdown drive to take the lead.

The Broncos need only look in the mirror after this loss.

"There's a few, especially those type of plays [including a late overthrow of wide receiver Demaryius Thomas] that I'll lose sleep over," said quarterback Case Keenum. "Thinking about it, laying awake at night in bed. It's tough one. It stings."

The Chiefs have led the way in the season's early going, with quarterback Patrick Mahomes entering Monday night's game with 13 touchdown passes and no interceptions. Kansas City averaged a league-leading 39.3 points per game over the first three weeks.

And to run the ball is almost to resist the temptation of today's pass-happy NFL. Yet it was the best move for the Broncos.

First, they're good at it. The Broncos entered the evening averaging 144.7 yards rushing per game. Secondly, if the Broncos had the ball, the Chiefs didn't.

And there was no better reason to run the ball than that against the Chiefs. In the first three games, nobody had been able to try it against the Chiefs.

The validation that the Broncos had it right until it went wrong was that they finished with 159 yards rushing on their 22 attempts -- a robust 7.2 yards per carry average. But they ran the ball just three times on the two possessions in the fourth quarter that could have sealed the game.

"We ran the ball well," Keenum said. "It seemed like we started off so many series, you know, just pounding the rock, second-and-1, first-and-10, even with some loaded boxes; our offensive line played well

Kansas City scored 49 first-quarter points in its first three games combined. That is a number so freakishly outside the league's average that no other team has reached 40 first-quarter points through four games (Cincinnati and Baltimore each have 38 first-quarter points after Week 4).

Run the ball and play defense might not mesh with the league's current environment, but when the Broncos committed to it on Monday, they were mostly rewarded. Freeman right, Phillip Lindsay left, with an Emmanuel Sanders run here and Devontae Booker there.

When Lindsay plowed in from the 1-yard line with 2:05 to play in the third quarter, it gave the Broncos a 20-13 lead. The Broncos ran out of power formations with two backs and two tight ends.

And they ran out of their three-wide sets. Freeman consistently powered through arm tackles, and Lindsay found creases. The lead went to 23-13 with a 46-yard field goal from Brandon McManus with 12:47 to play.

The Broncos have preached the value of "balance," of doing the things necessary to win games against the league's power brokers, which the Broncos haven't done since Peyton Manning was at quarterback.

But they lost their balance in the fourth quarter and, then, the game along with it.

"I told the guys to keep fighting," Joseph said. "We came out with a great mindset, we had a great week of prep and the guys played good football ... we'll win games like this moving forward. But I love our team's grit ... we gave up some plays late and that hurt us."

Denver Broncos say referees acknowledged key missed play-clock call in loss

By Jeff Legwold

ESPN

October 2, 2018

The Denver Broncos believe time ran out on the Kansas City Chiefs on a pivotal play in Kansas City's game-winning drive Monday night.

"It definitely was at zero, the replay showed that," Broncos linebacker Brandon Marshall said. "The ref told us that the ref that was supposed to be watching it just missed it. ... He told us that, the ref told us the guy that was supposed to be watching the clock just missed it.

"So maybe he got caught up in watching the game because it was a good game, but you've got to do your job. Come on, that was huge. That was big."

The Chiefs overcame a 10-point Broncos lead in the fourth quarter with back-to-back touchdown drives in the final 12 minutes, 46 seconds in a 27-23 victory. Kansas City scored the game-winning touchdown on a 4-yard run by Kareem Hunt with 1:43 to play.

However, four plays before the scoring run, the Broncos say the play clock ran out on the Chiefs on what was a 35-yard completion from Patrick Mahomes to tight end Demetrius Harris on a third-and-7. The play moved the ball from the Broncos' 46-yard line to the 11-yard line just before the two-minute warning.

Replays, including those shown on the stadium's video boards, seemed to show the play clock was at zero before the ball had been snapped.

"My opinion, the clock was on zero," Broncos coach Vance Joseph said. "But that's not my job. ... And he said he looked up and it was zero and the ball was gone. I disagree. I disagree."

Marshall said he and several other Broncos players, including several of the team's defensive linemen, were told by referee Craig Worlstad that officials had missed the play.

Asked again if it was the referee -- Worlstad -- who told the players that, Marshall said "he told us. There are several guys that will vouch for that. ... We all heard him, that was the explanation, that he just missed it. Come on."

Cornerback Chris Harris Jr. said that was the explanation he received as well. Harris added that he asked the officials to review the play with replay and was told it was not a reviewable play under the current rules.

"That was crazy, man," Harris said. "It was zero seconds on the clock, forever. ... [You] can't review it, I asked everything. If a ref messed up on a call, you should be able to fix it. Dude, look how long the clock was on zero. That's not why we lost the game -- but that was a huge, huge, no-call."

Second-and-30, an expired play clock and a locker room in disbelief: Anatomy of a Broncos collapse

By Nicki Jhabvala
The Athletic
October 2, 2018

Chris Harris Jr. trotted back to the locker room, helmet in hand and undershirt drenched with sweat, yelling in frustration and asking the one question that had no answer.

“Second-and-30,” he bellowed. “SECOND-AND-30. How we gonna let them smoke us like that?”

Harris never found resolution Monday night after the Broncos blew a 10-point fourth-quarter lead to the Kansas City Chiefs to take their second consecutive loss of the season.

What Harris did find, however, was a locker room filled with the same frustration and anger over the 27-23 loss.

The Broncos, through three quarters, did what no other team has been able to do against Patrick Mahomes and the Chiefs. They held him to only 151 passing yards, zero touchdowns and a 66.9 passer rating; held speedy receiver Tyreek Hill to only 28 yards; and held his team to only 13 points in that span. And in the first half, they kept Travis Kelce from getting a single catch. Travis Kelce, the tight end who pasted 394 yards on the Broncos in his last three games against them.

But then it all fell apart. Those impressive three quarters were squandered by a meltdown in the fourth that went something like this:

After the Broncos blew open their lead to 23-13, the Chiefs responded by methodically and efficiently carving up their defense with a 12-play, 75-yard scoring drive. Mahomes completed 9-of-11 passes and, in spite of a pair of penalties along the way, capped the drive with a 2-yard touchdown pass to Kelce.

Broncos 23, Chiefs 20, with 6:27 remaining.

The Broncos' offense took the field and crumbled, producing a three-and-out without a single yard gained, offering its defense limited rest at a critical hour.

Mahomes proceeded to guide the Chiefs on the go-ahead scoring drive, converting one third down with a left-handed pass, then another to put his team in the red zone after being pushed back to second-and-30 because of penalties.

“Second-and-30, I’m thinking like, ‘There ain’t no way they’d be able to get this,’ ” Von Miller said. “And then they did.”

Out of an empty formation with four receivers and a tight end, Mahomes scrambled to the right and, like a shortstop throwing to first, hit Demarcus Robinson with a 23-yard completion on the run.

After lining up under center for third-and-7, Mahomes awaited the snap as the play clock reached zero. No flag was thrown for delay of game, so Mahomes dropped back and hit a wide open Demetrius Harris for a 35-yard gain as linebacker Shaquil Barrett trailed in coverage.

The Chiefs finished off the Broncos with a 4-yard touchdown run by Kareem Hunt.

Second-and-30. Two plays. Fifty-eight yards. Touchdown. Game over.

“Nah, I don’t want to talk about it,” Harris said in the locker room after.

But Barrett couldn’t shake the third down that put Kansas City over the edge.

Sitting at his locker, still dripping with sweat, Barrett shook his head in disbelief as he replayed the series in his head.

“The play that I remember is me not having good eyes and not sticking with my tight end when he got the nice however-many-yards catch. And that hurt us,” he said. “If I had just done my job, we’ll never know how this game would’ve turned out. That’s what eating me up right now. I just have to do my job and read my keys.

“This is going to hurt for a long time.”

As questions were asked and the loss sunk in, the stinging feeling seemed to intensify. The Broncos believed they outplayed the Chiefs, and for three quarters they did.

But they also know they let it slip away all too easily.

That no-call ahead of Demetrius Harris’ completion was a point of contention too. The play was unreviewable, and the explanation the Broncos say they received from officials only fueled their frustration.

“It pissed me off,” linebacker Shane Ray said. “We all saw it at zero. ... It’s just frustrating, man. You can’t leave the game in the hands of the ref and we just have to do our job and finish it. We can’t let those situations happen.”

Vance Joseph said after that he received an explanation from officials that he disagreed with; the official told Joseph that “he looked up, it was zero and the ball was gone.”

Said Ray: “They need to send that to New York and start getting that reviewed since they want to review everything. Make a rule about that.”

Linebacker Brandon Marshall said the officials admitted to the critical mistake when players inquired over the no flag.

“The ref came into the huddle and the ref, that’s his one job, he just missed it,” Marshall recounted. “One of our players was like, ‘Well, if that’s his one job, how did he miss it?’ They tried to say he was also looking at the quarterback — I don’t know, man. How do you miss that? That’s crazy.”

But the Broncos, while annoyed over the call, said missed or otherwise it wasn't the cause of their fourth-quarter meltdown. It didn't give the Chiefs the win.

For three quarters, the Broncos held to their plan of pressuring Mahomes and playing tighter coverage on his targets. And for three quarters it worked. The Chiefs entered the game as the second-best team on third downs, but they converted only four of 11 through the first three quarters and failed to score on two of their three drives in the red zone.

In the fourth, Kansas City's offense stayed on the field for 9:28 of the quarter, racked up 169 net yards and converted three-of-four third downs — including the dagger to Demetrius Harris. The one that left Chris Harris Jr. trotting back to the locker room in disbelief, yelling "second-and-30" repeatedly in frustration.

"We just didn't finish. We've got to close that game out," he said. "We have them second-and-30 and we just let them off the hook."

'Is this dude a magician?': With the left-handed throw, the legend of Patrick Mahomes grows

By Lindsay Jones
The Athletic
October 2, 2018

Even if Patrick Mahomes plays another 15 seasons, we'll still remember the left-handed throw.

We'll talk about the way he casually flipped the ball from his right hand to his left and flicked it 10 yards downfield, all while scrambling to his left, with Von Miller draped around his legs.

We'll remember how that play jump-started his first fourth-quarter comeback of his first full season as the Kansas City Chiefs' starting quarterback, and how he led the Chiefs from down 10 points to beat the Broncos, 27-23, in Denver on "Monday Night Football."

"I'm sure this is one that will be on his highlight reel his whole career," right tackle Mitchell Schwartz said.

We'll remember that moments after the left-handed throw came two equally-improbable plays: a 23-yard completion on second-and-30, followed by a 35-yard throw on third down, proving that right now there might not be any down and distance that's unmanageable for the NFL's hottest young quarterback.

Let's go inside the three biggest plays on the Chiefs' game-winning drive, as Mahomes went 5-of-6 for 69 yards before running back Kareem Hunt capped the drive with a 4-yard touchdown run:

The left-handed pass:

The Broncos had been chasing Mahomes all night, forcing him from the pocket but struggling to get him onto the grass with the ball still in his grasp. (The Broncos officially hit Mahomes nine times, but registered just a single sack).

This time was no different.

On third-and-5, the Broncos dialed up an all-out blitz with six rushers, including Miller and Shane Ray from the defensive left, and Bradley Chubb from the right. Miller tapped Schwartz on the back as he blew past, and together Miller and Ray flushed Mahomes to his left. Mahomes took eight strides, and felt Miller bearing down behind him.

As Miller lunged, Mahomes switched the ball from one hand to the other and, almost casually, tossed it forward with his left hand. Tyreek Hill caught it, took a few steps and darted out of bounds, just past the first-down marker.

"I was just trying to get down there and clip the ankles. I knew he was getting ready to throw though. I kind of felt it," Miller said. "But I didn't know he threw it with his left hand. He's a great quarterback."

With 3:14 remaining, the drive remained alive.

“You just have to get the ball in their hands somehow,” Mahomes said.

More than half an hour after the game ended, teammates were still marveling at how Mahomes managed to pull it off.

Hunt called Mahomes a “magician.”

Hill, a lefty, said Mahomes is a better left-handed passer than he is.

Linebacker Justin Houston said it was “something special” that Mahomes managed to make that type of pass under that type of pressure.

Safety Eric Murray was still in total disbelief.

“Nobody in history has ever seen that. C’mon now. Nobody,” Murray said.

But other teammates insisted they had seen it before. From Mahomes. Multiple times, but always in practice.

Tight end Demetrius Harris said Mahomes used to pull stunts like that, including left-handed shot-put style passes, against the Chiefs’ starting defense last year, when Mahomes was running the scout team.

Backup quarterback Chad Henne said Mahomes has even done it in practice this year, also while scrambling to his left.

“I guess it’s just knowing that you can get it there. If it’s close enough and you can flick it out there, I mean, he’s done it before,” Henne said, shaking his head.

The second-and-30:

Penalties nearly killed the drive — first, an intentional grounding call against Mahomes after he threw the ball away as Chubb, the Broncos’ first-round pick, tried to bring him down inside the pocket. That set the Chiefs up with a second-and-20.

A holding call on center Mitch Morse on the following snap — which negated an 8-yard pass to Hunt — backed the Chiefs up even further, to their own 31-yard line.

And yet, the Chiefs were still thinking they were driving for a touchdown, not a field goal that could tie the game at 23, and they treated it as a four-down situation. If they could pick up a chunk on second down, another chunk on third down, a fourth-down conversion would be feasible.

“Everybody was kind of staying calm. We’ve got a live crowd so you’ve got to be quiet in the huddle just to hear what’s going on, what Pat’s saying. He did a good job communicating to us,” receiver Demarcus Robinson said.

But while it would have made sense for the Chiefs to call something safe, like a screen pass to pick up a chunk of yards, they brought out four wide receivers to spread out the Broncos’ defense, including Robinson, who lined up in the right slot.

Mahomes stepped up in the pocket, felt pressure coming from his left and ran to the right as Robinson, trailed by Broncos safety Justin Simmons, cut toward the near sideline. He came back for Mahomes' pass and caught it in front of Simmons for the 23-yard completion.

"We just had some routes going past the sticks, some getting to the sticks and some getting short of the sticks. I mean, I made a catch and made a play," Robinson said.

The Broncos, after yet another fruitless pass rush, with too many extra seconds for their defensive backs to cover too many receivers, were stunned.

"I'm thinking, 'There ain't no way they'd be able to get this,' and then they did," Miller said.

But the drive was far from over.

The non-delay-of-game:

Robinson's catch set up a third-and-7 — far more manageable for the Chiefs offense.

But once again, Mahomes and head coach Andy Reid went for the home run after finding a matchup they liked: Harris, the No. 2 tight end, covered by linebacker Shaquil Barrett, with no help from any of the Broncos' defensive backs. From there it was easy, or at least the type of play Mahomes is making look easy. A quick scramble to his right, and a 35-yard strike to Harris.

"He scrambled and kept the play alive like he always does and made a great ball," Harris said.

But as the replay flashed on the video board, it showed the play clock hit zero before center Mitch Morse snapped the ball.

No flag was thrown, and it was a non-reviewable play.

Referee Craig Wrolstad went to the sideline to tell Broncos head coach Vance Joseph that the ball had been snapped in time.

"I disagree. I disagree," Joseph said after the game.

On the field, Broncos defenders waved their arms in disgust. The home crowd was livid and booed loudly as the Chiefs lined up for their next snap. Two plays later, Hunt was in the end zone, the Chiefs had their first lead since the second quarter, and the legend of Patrick Mahomes only grew larger.

"Is this dude a magician or something?" Hunt said. "He is doing things that you don't see often. He's a great player and I'm glad he's on my team."

Broncos fall to Chiefs as KC rallies for win

By Troy Renck
KMGH
October 2, 2018

The value of toughness resonated Monday night.

AFC West games are played in octagons. For a team to rebuild its image, to take strides on the road to redemption, it requires rolled-up sleeves, bare knuckles and shots of Pepto-Bismol. They slugged their way to a 10-point lead in the second half. It amounted to a tease in the Broncos' heart-in-a-blender 27-23 loss at Mile High Stadium.

"We just didn't finish," said cornerback Chris Harris Jr., who required two IVs to make it through the game. "We just let them off the hook."

The Broncos knew they weren't equipped to run a relay race with a Chiefs team attempting to become only the third in NFL history to score at least 38 points in each of its first four games. Instead of Air Raid, they went Old School, relying on a ground attack that would have made Terrell Davis smile in delight. The Broncos totaled 159 rushing yards, leading 23-20 with two minutes left.

And it still wasn't enough. After an awful 35-yard punt by Marquette King following a three-and-out -- "He has to perform better. He has to flip the field," said coach Vance Joseph -- the Chiefs took over and watched Patrick Mahomes make everyone else invisible. He completed passes with both arms. He bought time on scrambles, and when required most, he connected on back-to-back completions for 57 yards deep into the fourth quarter. The last completion, a 35-yarder to tight end Demetrius Harris, drew the sellout crowd's ire.

The scoreboard showed the play clock at zero before Mahomes took the snap. It was not a reviewable play.

"The ref came into the hotel and said the ref whose job it is missed it. One of our players said, 'If that's his one job how did he miss it?'^ linebacker Brandon Marshall said. "How do you miss that? It's crazy."

Shaquil Barrett pointed the finger in the mirror. He insisted Harris should have never been open.

"If I had just done my job, we'll never know how this game would've turned out," Barrett said. "This is going to hurt for a while because I feel like it was my fault for not sticking my guy."

Moments later, running back Kareem Hunt chugged in from 4 yards out as the Chiefs secured a 27-23 lead with 1:39 remaining. With the alarms blaring, Kansas City sewed together back-to-back touchdown drives. It amounted to Sea Breeze in an open wound. One play did not determine the outcome. And the Broncos were quick to praise Mahomes, who completed 21 of 30 passes in the second half. But the timing of the mistake became amplified with the outcome.

"I asked the official and he said he looked up, it was '0' and the ball was gone," Joseph said. "I disagree. I disagree."

The Broncos put together an admirable final drive, including a long catch from tight end Jeff Heurman with under 30 seconds remaining. But Case Keenum failed to connect to a streaking open Demaryius Thomas with 16 seconds left, dousing the rally.

"There's a few plays, that one especially," Keenum said, "that I will lose sleep over. It's tough. It stings."

The Broncos fell to 2-2, anchored by effort, but undermined by the results.

"I never doubted us," Mahomes said. "This is a good confidence booster going into the rest of the season."

The outcome seemed reversed for long stretches.

The Broncos invested in smarts after the 5-11 dumpster fire. They drafted players with attitude and aptitude. They added two new offensive line coaches. Forget a chip, these guys had the entire bag of Fritos on their shoulders. It paid dividends in a crucial second half juncture.

Momentum shifted, if only briefly, with the game's first turnover. After his best first half as a Bronco, Keenum slightly under threw a lob pass to Heurman, who had the ball wrestled away by Chiefs defensive back Eric Murray.

The Broncos defenders, who spent time extolling the crowd and each other on the sideline, responded by throwing down the sawdust. Top draft pick Bradley Chubb made the Chiefs' line jumpy, resulting in a penalty and pressure. Mahomes, a mess of miscommunication and misfires for long stretches early, finished the drive fleeing the pocket and remaining inaccurate. Change-of-possession points sabotaged the Broncos last season. Monday, it set up a score.

The Broncos found their identity -- as a running team in a passing league. They plodded, plowed and pushed for 80 yards, taking a 20-13 lead with 2:05 remaining in the third. Of the nine plays, seven came on the ground. Rookie Phillip Lindsay provided the exclamation point with a 1-yard plunge rewarding the work of the grunts up front by handing the ball to Garrett Bolles to spike. Keenum admitted last week the Broncos were determined to keep Kansas City's offense off the field. Through three quarters, the Broncos had 153 yards rushing on 19 attempts, an eye-opening 8.1 yards per clip.

Lindsay and Royce Freeman made an impression and history. They became the first pair of Broncos rookies to total 60 yards rushing and one touchdown in the same game.

Following a 46-yard field goal by Brandon McManus that widened the margin to 23-13, the onus fell on the defense to show elasticity without snapping. They broke under the pounding from Hunt and Mahomes' magic wand. The Chiefs methodically moved down the field with Hunt powering the machine. A 12-play jaunt gobbled the clock and shaved the Broncos' lead to 23-20.

Denver needed a drive. Revived from the exhaustive scoring drive by the offense, the Chiefs D produced a three-and-out with 4:45 remaining. King compounded the sputter with his worst punt of the night, a 35-yarder that tumbled out of bounds. His job is potentially in jeopardy after his latest disappointing performance.

The blueprint existed to undercut the Chiefs, tucked away in a briefcase in a dim lit room. It begins with throwing the first punch to the windpipe. The Broncos cranked back their right arm and delivered a jab to

the midsection. Looking to make a statement, Denver drove 51 yards on seven plays, gashing the Chiefs on their first three plays for 46 yards. A drop by Thomas stalled the march, leading to a Brandon McManus 42-yard field goal. It represented the Broncos' 24th first quarter point, less than half of Kansas City's total.

The need for continued flow became obvious with the Chiefs' first drive. They wasted no time tying the score by relying on their forgotten star, Kareem Hunt. He converted a gutsy fourth-and-1 from Kansas City's own 34-yard line, and plowed over Justin Simmons on a 27-yard reception. And yet, there was hope as Bradley Roby deflected a third-down pass to Sammy Watkins.

Harrison Butker drilled a 33-yard field goal, marking the first time this season the Chiefs failed to score a touchdown on their opening drive. The Chiefs offense demands LifeLock security to prevent them from stealing your will, if not your identity.

Kansas City eschewed the quick strike in the second quarter with a 12-play, 89-yard march. What made it disheartening is that Denver missed tackles, leading to a 45-yard run by Hunt. And a third-down touchdown resulted from miscommunication as Mahomes raced in for a score from 8 yards.

It represented a watershed moment for the Broncos. They showed resolve, toughness and a willingness not to play favorites. They leaned on the rookies: Courtland Sutton turned a 50-50 ball into an 80-20 proposition, his basketball skills revealed on a 42-yard reception (He forced an interference call in the end zone on the drive that led to the Broncos second touchdown). Lindsay added an 18-yard burst, and Freeman showed patience on a sweep, waiting to put his foot in the ground before heading south and through jersey tackles for an 18-yard score.

Tied 10-all with 6:37 left in the second quarter amounted to a victory, and followed the strategy.

The Broncos made Mahomes, who had the second highest quarterback rating through four career starts, look uncomfortable. The defensive backs held private meetings, watched additional film. It paid off with the team's best first half. Mahomes appeared rushed, unable to audible and off target. He completed 7 of 15 first-half passes for 65 yards, while failing to deliver a touchdown for the first time this season. The Broncos, meanwhile, received the type of Keenum outing they penciled in when they signed him in March. He took chances while taking care of the ball, completing 14 of 19 passes in the opening 30 minutes for 139 yards, easily his best first half of the season.

In the end, the pain was real. The Broncos lost because they couldn't put together one more offensive drive -- they went three wide, going away from the run -- and couldn't stop Mahomes. He was the best player on the field in the fourth quarter.

"He had that second-and-30, and I am thinking there ain't no way they'd be able to get this.' And they did," lamented Von Miller, who failed to register a sack for the second straight game. "Patrick Mahomes is a great quarterback."

There was nowhere to run or hide as the time ticked away. The Broncos lost their first home game, their losing streak reaching six against the Chiefs. There's no shame in losing to the Ravens and Chiefs, both considered AFC title contenders. But fall to the New York Jets, and this game will be viewed as a trigger mechanism rather than a painful Monday in a vacuum.

"Obviously, you hate not winning. But we are building our identity as a team," said Keenum, who finished 21 of 33 for 245 yards and no touchdowns. "We are building character and grit. Everybody is hurting. But there's no quit at all in that locker room. We will learn from this."

Footnotes

No surprises, but concern with the Broncos' inactive list: defensive end DeMarcus Walker, cornerback Tramaine Brock, quarterback Kevin Hogan, safety Shamarko Thomas, linebacker Alexander Johnson, tackle Elijah Wilkinson and guard Sam Jones. Brock's absence left the Broncos with four healthy cornerbacks against the league's most prolific offense. It placed pressure on Adam Jones and Isaac Yiadom to play well. ... Right tackle Jared Veldheer injured his knee in the second quarter. Billy Turner replaced him. Veldheer told Denver7 he will get an MRI on Tuesday. He's not sure what's wrong, but said "nothing's broken." ... Fullback Andy Janovich proved critical in the running game with multiple lead blocks. He also hauled in a 32-yard pass in the fourth quarter. ... Marquette King's second consecutive dismal performance has possibly placed his job in jeopardy. The Broncos signed a practice squad punter last week.

Denver7 keys to Broncos victory over Kansas City Chiefs

By Troy Renck

KMGH

October 2, 2018

History assaults the senses Monday.

In existence since 1993, the Rockies play for their first National League West title in Los Angeles. In Denver, the Broncos face the Kansas City Chiefs as a home underdog for the second time since 1991.

The Rockies enjoy better odds, trotting out starter German Marquez against the fang-bearing Dodgers. Marquez owns a 1.20 ERA at Dodger Stadium this season. He turns hitters' knees to Jell-O with a wicked slider and a 95-mph fuzzy fastball.

The Broncos possess outside linebacker Von Miller, one of the league's best players. However, baseball is a series of solo performances in a concert. Football is a collaboration, requiring teamwork and execution to win. Von must be great tonight to upset the Chiefs, but he needs plenty of help.

My Denver7 Keys to a Broncos' victory:

1) Von Is On

Remember how the Broncos topped Seattle? Miller outplayed quarterback Russell Wilson, collecting three sacks. A similar total is unrealistic Monday. But the Broncos need to hit Patrick Mahomes, make him uncomfortable. He has faced almost zero pressure, finding easy completions with routes that have produced more open receivers than any team in the NFL. Think of the Broncos' big wins in recent seasons, and it almost always involved Von harassing the quarterback.

2) New Case File

In a league that has produced 12, 400-yard passing games this season, Keenum remains a pedestrian acquisition. He has been terrific in the fourth quarter, completing 24 of 33 passes and engineering comeback wins over the Seahawks and Raiders. The number falls to 14 for 25 in the first quarter, part of a 56 percent completion percentage percentage in the first three quarters. He knows he has to be better, along the lines of two or three touchdowns and no interceptions.

3) Control The Clock

The CliffsNotes summary of the Chiefs: They are the Broncos under Peyton Manning. Mahomes has 13 touchdowns in three games, the most ever, breaking Manning's record. How did opponent's slow Manning? Gorge the clock. The best defense is keeping Kansas City off the field. Denver's goal has to be to win 30-27, not 41-38. Kansas City allows 5.22 yards per carry. The Broncos require a heavy dose of Phillip Lindsay and Royce Freeman to pull off the victory, setting up play action for Keenum.

4) Win the turnover battle

This cannot be forgotten. When the Broncos take care of the ball they take care of business. They have won 32 straight games when winning the turnover battle. A short field for Kansas City spells doom for Denver.

5) 60 Minutes of Hell

This is gleaned from Nolan Richardson's old Arkansas hoops teams, who created 40 Minutes of Hell for opponents with a fullcourt press. The Broncos must play a strong amount of press coverage, trusting the outcome to Chris Harris Jr. and Bradley Roby. Will it lead to big plays at times? Yes. However, allowing Mahomes to gain rhythm with easy completions like Joe Flacco and Derek Carr guarantees a loss. The key is protecting the third and fourth corners, Adam Jones and Isaac Yiadom, especially against tight end Travis Kelce, who has torched the Broncos. The best way to help the pair is by creating pressure on Mahomes up the middle with stunts and twists from the defensive linemen. That allows Von to create havoc and rushed throws.

6) Start Fast, Incite the Masses

The Chiefs have scored 49 first quarter points, easily tops in the league. The Broncos sit at 21. Denver cannot afford to play catchup against Kansas City. Deliver the first punch to the windpipe. It serves two purposes: creates an early lead, and incites a crowd wanting a reason to go bonkers on Monday night. The fans can make a difference. Let them.

7) Make Adjustments

When the Broncos faced good teams last season, they were thoroughly outcoached. Boss Vance Joseph and defensive coordinator Joe Woods know they are sitting on a Bunsen burner. Nobody doubts their football IQ, but the ability to make adjustments in real time remains critical. If Joseph doesn't like what he's seeing from the defense, be assertive in the first drive, first quarter, whatever. Waiting until halftime could be too late. The Chiefs Andy Reid is a master playcaller, creating mismatches through motion and blending a wicked version of a college run-pass-option concepts. Beating Reid requires playing chess from the first pawn placement.

RENCK PREDICTION: Chiefs 34, Broncos 27

Big day for Denver sports: Rockies play for NL West title; Broncos host Chiefs on MNF

By Blair Miller
KMGH
October 2, 2018

Monday is one of the biggest days in recent memory for Denver sports teams and their fans, as the Rockies have a chance to win their first-ever NL West championship and the Broncos host the Chiefs on Monday Night Football.

After the Rockies' 12-0 drubbing of the Washington Nationals Sunday, they have a one-game playoff in Los Angeles with the Dodgers Monday to see who will win the division and who will go play a Wild Card game in the Midwest on Tuesday.

The Rockies and Dodgers are tied atop the NL West with identical 91-71 records and will win the division with a victory Monday.

Outfielder David Dahl was named the National League Player of the Week on Monday after hitting .333 with six home runs, 15 RBI and eight runs scored over seven games last week. His performance kept the Rockies in the chase for a playoff berth.

The first pitch Monday is slated for 2 p.m. MT. The game will be broadcast on ESPN. The Rockies will start German Marquez (14-10, 3.76 ERA) and the Dodgers plan to start Walker Buehler (7-5, 2.76 ERA) on the mound for the final regular-season game for the two teams.

The loser of the game will play the loser of the Milwaukee Brewers – Chicago Cubs game, which is being played in Chicago ahead of the Rockies game, in a Tuesday Wild Card game.

If the Rockies win Monday, they would host games 1 and 2 of the NLDS starting Thursday.

The Broncos, meanwhile, face an important early-season matchup with the red-hot Kansas City Chiefs on Monday Night Football at Broncos Stadium at Mile High.

The Chiefs and undefeated and quarterback Patrick Mahomes set a new NFL record for the number of touchdown passes thrown in the first three games of a season.

A Broncos win would keep the team into a first-place division tie with the Chiefs heading into the second quarter of the season, though a loss could spell trouble for the Broncos, who would sit at 2-2 if they lose.

The Broncos game will be televised on ESPN and locally on Channel 20. Kickoff is scheduled for 6:15 p.m. MT.

Showtime: Mahomes rallies Chiefs past Broncos, 27-23

By Arnie Stapleton
Associated Press
October 2, 2018

Patrick Mahomes is athletic, agile — and ambidextrous, apparently.

Thanks in part to a nifty left-handed throw as he was about to get sacked by Von Miller at midfield on the game-winning drive, the right-handed Mahomes rallied the unbeaten Kansas City Chiefs past the Denver Broncos 27-23 on Monday night.

By overcoming a 10-point fourth-quarter deficit, the Chiefs (4-0) took a two-game lead over the Broncos (2-2), their AFC West rivals whom they've now beaten six straight times.

The only other remaining unbeaten team is the Los Angeles Rams.

Down 23-13, Mahomes directed a 12-play, 75-yard drive that ate up more than six minutes and culminated with a 2-yard TD toss to tight end Travis Kelce.

After a three-and-out by Denver, Mahomes added a 60-yard touchdown drive, handing off to Kareem Hunt for the 4-yard score with 1:39 remaining.

On that last drive, Mahomes was getting dragged down by Miller on third-and-5 at midfield when he shifted the ball to his left hand and threw it to Tyreek Hill a yard past the first-down marker at the Broncos 49.

"He's actually more athletic than people" realize, Denver linebacker Brandon Marshall said. "People talk about his arm, but he can move out of the pocket and make the necessary throws."

Even with his left hand.

"I didn't know he threw it with his left hand," marveled Miller. "He's a great quarterback."

"Patrick worked real hard on that left-handed throw," Chiefs coach Andy Reid quipped. "Some amazing plays there. We've seen it in practice but not under those conditions."

Mahomes proved slippery all night.

"We played well and we got to him but he would scramble out to his right as he likes to do," Marshall said. "It's almost like we'd have him in our fingertips and he'd scramble away and throw for a first down."

"The kid can play. He's going to be really good. He's really good right now, but we should have won the game."

It was the first time since 2004 that the Broncos blew a 10-point fourth-quarter lead at home.

RUN, ROOKIES, RUN

In between Kansas City's scoring drives, the Broncos, who had run roughshod over the Chiefs all night — a 7.2-yard average per run — suddenly abandoned their ground game in favor of three-wide receiver sets that resulted in a quick three-and-out that sent Denver's exhausted defenders right back out.

"We ran the ball to control the game," Broncos coach Vance Joseph said, "but you throw the ball to score."

After the three-and-out, struggling Broncos punter Marquette King shanked a 35-yarder out of bounds, giving the Chiefs the ball at their 40 with 4:35 left.

"He's got to perform better," Joseph said. "We're at home and it's his job to flip the field. It ain't happening."

If anything, the Broncos' 1-2 punch of rookie running backs needed more work.

Phillip Lindsay ran 16 times for 69 yards and a TD and Royce Freeman ran eight times for 67 yards and a TD.

Freeman took a toss from Case Keenum and slipped seven tackles on his way to a 14-yard touchdown in which he dragged linebacker Anthony Hitchens across the goal line in the first half.

BIG BLUNDERS

Mahomes overcame a couple of flags that put Kansas City in a second-and-30 hole from their 31 and completed consecutive passes covering 23 and 35 yard to reach the Broncos' 11 at the 2-minute warning.

That last play never should have counted because the play clock expired well before the snap. But referee Craig Wrolstad's crew missed it. Joseph said he raised the issue with an official who insisted the Chiefs had gotten the play off in time.

"I disagree. I disagree," Joseph said.

Cornerback Chris Harris Jr. said there should be some recourse when the officials blow a call.

"If a ref messes up on a call, yeah, you should be able to fix it. Go back and fix. Like, 'Dude, look how long the clock was on zero?' I mean, c'mon," Harris said. "That wasn't the reason we lost the game. We still had plenty of chances but that was a huge, huge no-call."

The officials had another blunder when Mahomes was about 1½ yards past the line of scrimmage when he scrambled and hit Kelce for a 29-yard catch to the 3 early in the second half. Joseph appeared to be reaching for his red challenge flag but never threw it.

Denver's defense bailed out its coach by forcing the Chiefs to settle for a field goal.

NATIONAL ANTHEM

Thomas and Broncos teammate Brandon Marshall both stood with their teammates during the national anthem. Since the preseason, both players had been retreating to the tunnel nearest their bench during the singing of "The Star-Spangled Banner."

INJURIES

Chiefs: Wide receiver Sammy Watkins pulled a hamstring in the second quarter and didn't return. Linebacker Dee Ford (groin) left in the fourth quarter.

Broncos: Right tackle Jared Veldheer left in the first quarter with a knee injury and was replaced by Billy Turner.

UP NEXT

Chiefs: Host Jacksonville on Sunday to begin a stretch of three home games in four weeks.

Broncos: Visit the Jets on Sunday, the first of three road games in four weeks.

Go left: Mahomes' pass with opposite hand the talk after win

By Pat Graham
Associated Press
October 2, 2018

Patrick Mahomes was hitting all the right notes, even when he had to throw with his left hand .

Is there anything the Kansas City quarterback can't do these days?

Mahomes made one of the most memorable plays of the game on a left-handed heave late in the fourth quarter that helped the Chiefs to a 27-23 comeback victory over the Denver Broncos on Monday night.

"I thought, 'Is he a magician or something?'" said running back Kareem Hunt, whose team improved to 4-0. "He's doing things you really don't see often. He's a great player. I'm glad he's on my team."

Mahomes' left-handed toss occurred with about 3:15 remaining in the fourth quarter and was all the buzz on social media. As he scrambled to his left on third-and-5 at the Kansas City 45, Mahomes switched the ball to his other hand so pass rusher Von Miller couldn't strip it from him. Then, Mahomes lofted a perfect strike to receiver Tyreek Hill for a 6-yard gain and the first down.

"He actually throws better than me and I'm left handed," Hill quipped. "It was a good throw. It was a good toss. Pat, I don't even know what to say, man. Pat just does a great job of looking down the field, trusting us to stay alive and stuff like that."

He's seen better from Mahomes, though.

"He threw the ball like 85 yards in practice," Hill said. "That probably surprised me. I've never seen a quarterback throw the ball that far."

Mahomes said he sometimes throws left-handed when the QBs engage in competitions during practice. But that's about the extent of his ambidextrous ways.

"I did it a couple of times in college but it was to throw it away," said Mahomes, who finished 28 of 45 for 304 yards and one TD, along with running in another. "I never had thrown it to a receiver. So it was a cool deal, got the first down and got the win."

He even surprised Miller, who had no idea Mahomes threw it with his opposite hand.

"I just felt like he was getting ready to throw it, so I was just trying to get down there and clip the ankles," Miller explained. "But I didn't know he threw it with his left hand. He's a great quarterback."

It seems like Mahomes is constantly topping what he did before.

"I saw it when it came out of his hand, and I went, 'Oh wow,'" fullback Anthony Sherman said. "At this point, we should just trust him and know he won't put us in a bad situation. He'll find a way to get the ball to an open receiver."

That was readily apparent soon after his dazzling left-handed throw. Trailing 23-20, Mahomes was called for intentional grounding, which was followed by a holding penalty on the offensive line. All of a sudden, the Chiefs faced second-and-30 at the 31.

No problem for Mahomes. He threw a 23-yard completion to Demarcus Robinson and then a 35-yard strike to Demetrius Harris.

See, no worries.

A few plays later Hunt took it in for a 4-yard score to put the Chiefs on top. The defense took it from there to preserve the win.

"When you step back, you go, 'Whoa, that was pretty good,'" Chiefs coach Andy Reid said. "But really you're just trying to figure out the next play that he can scramble around and make plays on."

This is how much Mahomes' scrambling ability influences a game: He physically drained Broncos cornerback Chris Harris Jr.

"I had to go inside and get two IVs," Harris said. "I was just done. Just playing those extra times. He made us scramble in coverage the whole game. We couldn't sack this man. He's a hell of a player. He's a hell of a quarterback."

Patrick Mahomes proves his point — Broncos should have drafted a quarterback

By Paul Klee

Colorado Springs Gazette

October 2, 2018

You saw it, I saw it, millions of people watching ESPN saw it.

On a crisp, classic, autumn night inside a growling Mile High, the type of atmosphere that's chewed up and spit out Hall of Fame quarterbacks many times over, the future of the NFL arrived.

And the Broncos brought a Super Soaker to a UFC fight. While Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes was lifting a faulty roster to a 27-23 triumph in front of 76,456 rowdies, Broncos quarterback Case Keenum was flipping a would-be game-winning touchdown pass too high and too far from reach.

"The one over DT's head?" Keenum said afterward.

Yes, the one over Demaryius Thomas' head. The one that had Mile High grumbling, and not from the Rockies' loss to the Dodgers earlier in the day. The one that Mahomes connects on 9.9 times out of 10, judging by the aerobic display the 23-year-old wunderkind put on for the rest of the game.

This isn't to point the blame on Keenum, who's been just about what most folks expected in a 2-2 start. What, you expect a guy to turn down \$36 million when John Elway says it's yours?

But after seeing Mahomes flash a 60-minute trailer about the feature film he's about to release over the next decade or so, it's OK to concede the Broncos made a mistake by not drafting a young quarterback with the No. 5 pick in the NFL draft last April. Bradley Chubb looks like a keeper, the kind of pass-rushing talent that can succeed Von Miller when Vonnie Football says it's all over or moves on to full-time chicken farming.

But there's no comparison for a quarterback that can carry a franchise. Those years between Elway and Peyton Manning mostly showed as much. Now the Chiefs have one of those guys.

"We've got to get him down, plain and simple. He's pretty fast, run all day, buy time, especially to the right, deep, then throw the ball 40 yards," Miller said of Mahomes, who completed 28 of 45 passes for 304 yards. "He's a great quarterback."

All those mistakes sure to fill sports radio on Tuesday? Makes for good smack talk, but it's those kinds of mistakes a big-time quarterback covers up. The backed-up yards from a Garrett Bolles holding penalty? NBD. The DT drop that crushed the opening drive? Next snap, please.

Meanwhile, Vance Joseph and the Broncos brought a terrific gameplan and the playmakers to see it through. They built a 10-point lead into the fourth quarter. The defense played like it's won a championship ring or something, and Phillip Lindsay and Royce Freeman became the first Broncos rookies to rush for 60-plus yards and a touchdown in the same game.

And it still wasn't good enough to beat a Chiefs team that has serious holes after Mahomes. But he's enough. His kind is enough. There's no guarantee the Broncos would have hit on a guy like Mahomes. I thought they should draft the best player available, too, and that was Chubb. I was wrong. The Broncos are treading water and hoping for a 2015 repeat until they find one.

You saw it, I saw it, millions of people watching ESPN saw it. Over 24 hours the four-letter network broadcast a Nuggets game, a Rockies game and a Broncos game. Perhaps in the next 24 hours ESPN will realize there was a Colorado team also participating in each one. Is the network so hard up it must sell Lakers, Dodgers and Chiefs tickets to cover costs?

What seemed to hurt the most in the Broncos locker room was the realization they gave their best shot, and the Chiefs still came in and left with a fourth consecutive win at Mile High.

I thought the Broncos needed 30 points, and they did.

The '18 Chiefs are setting up their cursed fanbase for another painful January. In the time you were reading this, another running back gained 12 yards and another wideout found himself wide open. But the K.C. franchise has the most difficult piece to track down, and those usually pay off in the end.

"Special player," safety Darian Stewart said.

For all the pressure the Broncos defense directed at Mahomes, it sacked him only once. As the players dressed while wearing long looks, one defender said: "I need our (offensive) line."

"This is a game — with how we were playing and what we were doing out there — we should have won," said Broncos linebacker and Kansas City native Shane Ray.

OK, so the delay-of-game penalty that wasn't called. Big whiff by the officiating crew. With the game clock clearly on "0," Mahomes took the snap, escaped and zipped a 35-yarder to Demetrius Harris. The Broncos on the sideline and the crowd leveled its venom at the refs.

"It was 100-percent sure (a penalty)," linebacker Shaq Barrett said.

But that's the little stuff a great quarterback can overcome. The Chiefs covered up a second-and-30 just like that.

"It's a tough one," linebacker Todd Davis said.

You saw it, I saw it, millions watching ESPN saw it. Monday night, the Chiefs brought to town the best 20-something in the NFL. The Broncos left with the realization they played their most complete game in over a calendar year — and it wasn't good enough to hold off Mahomes.

Until they locate something like that, if not that, get used to the new sheriff in the AFC West.

Klee's Rapid Reactions: Chiefs 27, Broncos 23

By Paul Klee

Colorado Springs Gazette

October 2, 2018

Paul Klee's three quick observations from Broncos Stadium at Mile High:

1. Oh, that one's going to tickle. The Broncos played their finest game in over a year, and it still wasn't good enough to hold off Patrick Mahomes and the Chiefs. When the Broncos opened a 10-point lead in the fourth quarter, Mile High rocked and rolled like we've seen a hundred times before. But Case Keenum and the Broncos' offense couldn't seal the deal, going three-and-out and giving the ball back to Mahomes with 4:35 left on the clock — the exact scenario that Vance Joseph wanted to avoid. And the Chiefs danced on the sideline with their fourth straight win at Mile High.

2. It's time to shake up the wide receiver group. Courtland Sutton belongs in the first pairing — ahead of Demaryius Thomas. Whether it's catching a deep ball from Keenum or forcing a defensive back into a pass interference penalty, Sutton is a matchup problem. And these Broncos rookies are the foundation for a brighter future. Royce Freeman, bouncing off and running through Chiefs tacklers. Phillip Lindsay, handing the football to Garrett Bolles for the touchdown spike. Sutton, the go-to wide receiver on third down, drawing penalty flags. It's frightening to think where these Broncos would be without the 2018 rookie class. Thankfully, no one has to. Freeman and Lindsay became the first Broncos rookies to rush for 60 yards and a touchdown.

3. And the survey says... Mahomes is the real deal. Slippery, strong-armed, fearless. He made plays where there were no plays to be made. Case in point: a left-handed pass completed to Tyreek Hill deep in the fourth quarter. Woo, boy. Still, let's curb the 2013 Broncos comparisons for now, Kansas City. It's an offense that's delightful entertainment, but Peyton Manning's 18th Airborne didn't score fewer than 33 points until Week 10. Similar to other elite quarterbacks, Mahomes has the ability to cover up holes on the roster. Adding a quarterback like Mahomes puts the Chiefs in the Super Bowl mix for years to come. And now it's a fair question: did the Broncos whiff by not drafting a quarterback with the No. 5 overall pick?

Broncos show promise in disastrous loss to Chiefs

By David Ramsey
Colorado Springs Gazette
October 2, 2018

If the Broncos had finished 11-5 last season, Monday's loss to the Chiefs would be cause for mourning.

But the Broncos finished 5-11 last season. They inspired mass suffering on the Front Range. They lowered expectations. They turned Mile High into a quiet, gloomy destination.

The Broncos should have beaten the Chiefs Monday night. They contained the magnificent Patrick Mahomes for three quarters. They had the Chiefs in a 2nd and 30 hole with less than three minutes left. They fumbled a victory that would have vaulted them in the ranks of serious playoff contenders.

And yet ...

This was a rarity. It was an encouraging loss.

During much of the fourth quarter, Mile High was pounding with joy. The Broncos were roaring. The Chiefs were stumbling. Coach Andy Reid was sputtering. A massive victory was in sight.

Getting close means little to a strong team. Getting close could mean a lot to a team that's been as weak as the Broncos.

For three quarters, the defense resembled the mighty crew from 2015 that carried the Broncos to NFL supremacy. Mahomes in 2018 is Dan Marino in 1984, an emerging superstar. He's blessed with a powerful right arm, stunningly quick feet and superlative vision.

After three quarters, Mahomes was stumbling with a tiny 66.9 QB rating. He failed to find receivers. He was under constant pressure. For the first time this season, he looked vulnerable and mediocre.

Yes, the Broncos came so close.

"We were there," Von Miller said. "We were playing great defense. ... We had a chance to win the game and we just didn't do it."

If officials had noticed a gigantic zero beaming at them from the north and south end zones, the Broncos might have escaped with a victory.

With two minutes left and the Chiefs facing a 3rd and 7, Mahomes took too long to call for a snap, and the play clock ran out. Tens of thousands of fans at Mile High and a few million TV viewers saw zero before the ball was snapped.

Joseph saw the zero, too.

"In my opinion, the clock was zero, but that's not my job," Joseph said.

Joseph said he spoke with an official and asked why a delay of game flag was not thrown.

“He looked up and it was zero and the ball was out,” Joseph said, summarizing his brief conversation. “I disagree. I disagree.”

It’s easy to forget after the crushing final minutes, but with 2:53 left, the Chiefs looked done. Mahomes, under serious attack, blundered into an intentional grounding call, which was followed by holding. The Chiefs faced 2nd and 30.

Mahomes, being Mahomes, engineered a great escape. On second down, Mahomes escaped a fierce rush, sprinted right and found Demetrius Harris for 23 yards. On third down, after officials somehow missed that zero, he found tight end Demetrius Harris wide open down the right sideline. The Chiefs scored three plays later.

Still, the Broncos struggled to a final chance. With 22 seconds left, Demaryius Thomas sprinted past clueless Chiefs cornerback Orlando Scandrick and was open at the 5-yard-line.

Case Keenum missed him. His pass sailed high, well over Thomas’ head.

“It was close,” Keenum said, knowing it should have been closer. He said he would “lose a little sleep” over the throw.

He won’t be the only one losing sleep.

Those two Mahomes throws after the 2nd and 30 silenced a joyous crowd. Two plays shredded what should have been an uplifting, massively significant victory, a victory that would have erased some of the pain of 2017.

But two plays don’t have to destroy a season.

Cover 4: Broncos fall 27-23 as Chiefs complete fourth-quarter comeback

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
October 2, 2018

The Broncos built a 23-13 lead over the unbeaten Kansas City Chiefs, but Denver couldn't hold on in the fourth quarter and fell to 2-2 with a 27-23 loss.

Game-changing moment

With the Broncos leading 23-20 with 2:53 to play, it appeared Denver would need just one more big play to seal the win. The Broncos got their chance when the Chiefs faced a second-and-30. A stop there would've made the Chiefs' task nearly impossible. But Patrick Mahomes found a way to make a play. The first-year starter rolled to his right to escape the Denver pass rush and found Demarcus Robinson for 23 yards to set up third-and-7. That's when things got worse for the Broncos. Mahomes found a wide-open Demetrius Harris for 35 yards for a first down. The Chiefs would score a touchdown a few plays later to take the lead, and the Broncos were unable to complete a last-minute comeback. They nearly pulled it off, as Keenum led the Broncos into Chiefs territory. But Keenum missed an open Demaryius Thomas for the game-winning score, and the Broncos couldn't convert their second fourth down of the drive. The Chiefs got the ball back, and the Broncos fell to 2-2.

Defining statistic

14.

The Broncos held the Chiefs to 13 points through three quarters — and then Kansas City more than doubled that output in the final seven minutes. Mahomes found Travis Kelce for a 2-yard score with 6:27 remaining, and Kareem Hunt scored another touchdown with 1:39 to erase a double-digit deficit.

For three quarters, Denver played good enough football to win, but the team couldn't quite finish off the contest. As Broncos fans reflect back on this edition of "Monday Night Football," it will be hard to forget Kansas City's 14 fourth-quarter points.

Memorable highlight

With 8:48 to play in the second quarter, Courtland Sutton showed the nation why Broncos fans are so excited about the young receiver. Down seven points, Keenum looked down the right sideline and found Sutton, who made an impressive catch with Chiefs cornerback Kendall Fuller draped all over him. The play set up the Broncos' first touchdown of the game — and it was Denver's second-longest reception of the young season.

Top performers

Rookie running backs Royce Freeman and Phillip Lindsay continued their strong starts to the season as they combined for 136 yards and two touchdowns on 20 carries. Freeman tied Giants running back Saquon Barkley for the most rushing touchdowns this season among rookie running backs. Freeman also joined

good company in Broncos history. Only Terrell Davis and Jon Keyworth rushed for as many touchdowns through four weeks during their rookie seasons as Freeman.

Fullback Andy Janovich also made his presence felt, as he again made a series of key blocks and also caught a 32-yard pass on a wheel route to set up a Denver field goal.

Safety Justin Simmons gets a nod here for his defensive performance. He led all Broncos defenders with eight tackles. Todd Davis, meanwhile, tallied the second sack of his career. Davis, Simmons, Brandon Marshall and Darian Stewart all played a role in slowing Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce, who totaled seven receptions but went catch-less in the first half.

Injury Updates: Jared Veldheer will not return after suffering knee injury against Chiefs

By Zach Pereles
DenverBroncos.com
October 2, 2018

Starting right tackle Jared Veldheer left Monday night's contest against the Chiefs late in the first quarter with a left knee injury. The Broncos announced Veldheer is questionable to return.

Veldheer went down awkwardly and limped to the sideline under his own power. Once he got to the sideline, Veldheer was assisted to the bench and then walked under his own power to the medical tent. He went to the locker room shortly thereafter.

Veldheer, 31, is in his first year with the Broncos. He started each of the team's first three games but left the Week 2 victory over Oakland with a concussion.

Billy Turner replaced Veldheer at right tackle.

UPDATE [7:52 p.m. MT]: The Broncos announced Veldheer will not return to the game.

UPDATE [8:11 p.m. MT]: Chris Harris Jr. went to the locker room about halfway through the third quarter. The 29-year-old corner was hurt on the Chiefs' second offensive possession of the second half. With Harris out, Adam Jones and Isaac Yiadom moved up the depth chart playing alongside Bradley Roby.

UPDATE [8:25 p.m. MT]: Harris returned to the game later in the third quarter.

Patrick Mahomes leads game-winning drive as Kansas City Chiefs survive vs. Denver Broncos

By Nate Davis
USA Today
October 2, 2018

The Patrick Mahomes train lost just a bit of steam Monday night, but not enough to derail the Kansas City Chiefs' perfect season as they outlasted the Denver Broncos, 27-23, to remain the AFC's only unbeaten team.

No player in the league was hotter than Mahomes in the first three weeks, when he set a record with 13 TD passes over that span. He had more modest numbers against K.C.'s AFC West rival (304 passing yards, one TD apiece throwing and running) — Denver was the first team Mahomes faced twice in his career — but perhaps did something more important to his development by leading his first fourth-quarter comeback, which culminated with a 4-yard touchdown run by Kareem Hunt with 99 seconds to go.

"It was a great test," Mahomes said on SportsCenter after the game. "This Denver defense is the real deal."

Mahomes extended the eight-play, 60-yard game-winning march by completing a 6-yard throw left-handed to Tyreek Hill on third-and-5 from his own 45 with 3:07 to go. Yes, Mahomes transferred the ball to his off hand while rolling left to outrun pressure and successfully heaved it in Hill's direction.

"I did it a couple times in college," Mahomes said of the southpaw toss. "I just put it out there, and he made a great play."

The legend continues to grow.

Here are three things we learned from Monday's game:

Broncos backs: Denver nearly pulled off the upset by continuing to ride its stellar rookie running back combo of Phillip Lindsay and Royce Freeman. The duo teamed for 136 rushing yards and both scored a touchdown in staking the Broncos to a 23-13 fourth-quarter lead.

Cooler barbecue: The Chiefs and their fans will only care about their 4-0 start. But this was the first time Kansas City failed to score at least 38 points this season. Playing in front of a raucous Denver crowd, the Chiefs committed 10 penalties, including two false starts by left tackle Eric Fisher. Wideout Sammy Watkins was forced from the action early by a hamstring injury. Hunt did have his best game of the season with 175 total yards.

Keenum's struggles: Denver quarterback Case Keenum continued an up-and-down transition to his new club. He completed 21 of 33 passes for 245 yards and threw his sixth interception of the season (against three TDs). Worse, Keenum missed a wide-open Demaryius Thomas down the right sideline with 16 seconds to go for what should have been a game-winning 28-yard touchdown.

Patrick Mahomes leads game-winning drive as Kansas City Chiefs survive vs. Denver Broncos

By Nate Davis
USA Today
October 2, 2018

If Kareem Hunt's run wasn't NFL player safety violation, nothing is

The NFL can't say or do enough in its avowed commitment to player safety — especially when it comes to saddling players like Clay Matthews with dubious roughing-the-passer infractions.

Yet then one watches Chiefs running back Kareem Hunt barreling through Broncos safety Justin Simmons in the first quarter Monday night for a 27-yard gain — and, make no mistake, Hunt lowered his head to make his upper body parallel to the ground while using the crown of his helmet as a battering ram — and ... no flag.

Sigh.

Hunt finished with 175 yards from scrimmage and the game-winning touchdown in Kansas City's 27-23 come-from-behind win.

Verbatim from the NFL's new "Fact Sheet — Use of the Helmet" guidelines:

"The Rule: As approved by NFL clubs in March, it is a foul if a player lowers his head to initiate and make contact with his helmet against an opponent. Contact does not have to be to an opponent's head or neck area — lowering the head and initiating contact to an opponent's torso, hips, and lower body, is also a foul. Violations of the rule will be easier to see and officiate when they occur in open space — as opposed to close line play — but this rule applies anywhere on the field at any time.

"Penalties for Violation: Loss of 15 yards. If the foul is by the defense, it is also an automatic first down. The player may also be ejected. Ejection standards:

- ▶ Player lowers his helmet to establish a linear body posture prior to initiating and making contact with the helmet
- ▶ Unobstructed path to his opponent
- ▶ Contact clearly avoidable and player delivering the blow had other options"

If Hunt's run wasn't a textbook violation under those new points of emphasis, then nothing is.

Chiefs vs. Broncos final score, takeaways: Mahomes' legend grows after engineering heroic comeback

By Sean Wagner-McGough

CBS Sports

October 2, 2018

It's going to take more than just altitude and a once-great defense to stop Patrick Mahomes and the Chiefs. At this point, it might require an act of God or a moment of sorcery to stop what has quickly emerged as the most predictable, yet exciting appointment television show of the year.

After the Chiefs raced out to three straight wins over the Chargers, Steelers, and 49ers to begin the season, during which Mahomes threw for 896 yards, 13 touchdowns, and no interceptions, the NFL community circled this Week 4 contest in Denver as the night when the Chiefs' highly combustible attack would finally cool off.

That's exactly what happened in the first half. And then, when the circumstances demanded greatness, Mahomes happened.

The Broncos managed to slow down the Chiefs and make them work for every point and every yard, but they couldn't stop them over the course of four quarters. The Chiefs trailed by 10 points early in the fourth quarter, which is when Mahomes took over to rescue his team.

On Monday night, the Chiefs beat the Broncos, 27-23, extending their unbeaten run to four games, pushing their lead in the AFC West to two full games, and issuing one final warning that they're not on some unsustainable run that's bound to crash at any point.

The Chiefs are this explosive. They're this good. They're the best team in the AFC -- at least right now. And Mahomes, well, he's the best quarterback in football -- again, right now.

Their defense has its issues. An Earl Thomas trade, prior to his season-ending injury, definitely would've helped. Eric Berry, who is dealing with a pesky heel injury, can't arrive soon enough. But the Chiefs don't need a top-notch defense, because their offense can win games on their own. They started slow, but they ended the game masterfully -- in a way that would certainly earn Tom Brady and Bill Belichick's approval.

After giving up a field goal on the first series of the game, which marked the first time the Chiefs have trailed all season long, Mahomes and company revved up their engines. Facing a fourth-and-short on their fourth play from scrimmage, Andy Reid boldly, but wisely kept his offense on the field. Kareem Hunt got the necessary yardage. Two plays later, Hunt was trucking his way down the right sideline for a 27-yard gain that placed the Chiefs in the red zone. After a dropped shotgun snap on the next play killed their momentum, they settled for a field goal to tie the game, which marked the first time all year that their opening drive didn't result in a touchdown. The first quarter ended at 3-3.

When the Chiefs finally scored their first touchdown in the second quarter, they did so in a foreign way. May I introduce you to Mahomes, the scrambler, as if his flamethrower arm wasn't already enough to deal with:

He just does it all. He doesn't run much, but he's got the necessary athleticism to take advantage of space. So, he did.

Still, at halftime, it was only 13-10 ... Broncos. Travis Kelce was shut out. Mahomes missed a couple throws. Tyreek Hill dropped a gimme. The Chiefs' offense was making mistakes with the play-clock and the snap count. They looked sloppy. They looked confused. But they had the superhero quarterback to render their sloppiness insignificant.

At halftime, the Broncos had run only one more play than the Chiefs, but they'd picked up 60 more yards. We expected the Chiefs' offense to come back down from earth, but we didn't expect them to get outplayed by the Broncos' offense.

That was the first half. The Chiefs rallied to pass the test -- their first true test of the season. Mahomes bailed out his team the way star quarterbacks are supposed to.

The second half saw Mahomes return to his superhuman status. Facing a third down, Mahomes escaped pressure and created a huge first down. He did it again later in the drive, leaving the pocket before throwing a wicked cross-the-field pass from left to right(!) for another huge gain. This isn't possible for humans, but it is possible for cyborgs sent from the future:

The Chiefs settled for another field goal. The game was tied. The Broncos, relying on their ground game, led by 10 points early in the fourth quarter. But a 10-point lead isn't enough against an offense as heavily armed as the Chiefs.

Down 10, Mahomes engineered two straight scoring drives. The first drive went 12 plays for 75 yards, during which Mahomes went 8 of 10 for 84 yards (penalties allowed him to do that). It ended with Mahomes taking advantage of an unsuspecting Broncos defense near the goal line.

The Chiefs' defense forced a quick three-and-out, giving Mahomes a chance to finish the comeback. He proceeded to manufacture an eight-play, 60-yard, game-winning drive.

It involved a left-handed third-down completion.

And it involved the Chiefs overcoming a second-and-30 with ease before Kareem Hunt polished off the series in the end zone.

From there, the Chiefs' defense only just barely preserved the lead thanks to Case Keenum missing what should've been a game-winning touchdown and the Broncos botching a hook-and-ladder on their final offensive play in Chiefs' territory. But don't blame the Broncos for blowing this game. Give Mahomes credit for taking it.

In a way, this game was more revealing than the previous three. This wasn't a quick blowout that allowed the Chiefs to massage a big lead and kill the clock. This was a grind, the kind of game the Chiefs need to be able to win if they're going to emerge as a Super Bowl contender come January.

No, they didn't put up video-game numbers. No, it wasn't perfect. But they won ugly. And that matters. Mahomes felt pressure for the first time this season, and he overcame it. It would've been more

impressive if they'd gone into Denver and dropped 50 on the Broncos, but it was nearly just as impressive to see Mahomes carry the the Chiefs out of a 10-point hole on the road in a hostile environment.

At halftime, Mahomes was 7 of 15 for 65 yards. After halftime, he was 21 of 30 for 239 yards and a score. He finished 28 of 45 for 304 yards, one touchdown, no picks, and a 89.5 passer rating -- and that was his worst game of the season statistically speaking.

Give credit, by the way, to Kelce for rebounding after a difficult first half. In the second half alone, he caught seven passes for 78 yards and one touchdown.

Believe in the Chiefs. Stop expecting them to wither away. Their offense came crashing back down to earth, and they still managed to win a road divisional game. They're just as a scary as they were a week ago.

They might already have the best quarterback in football.

Kareem Hunt gets going

It's weird and scary. It's weird that after leading the league in rushing yards during his rookie season, Hunt has been not good so far this season. It's scary that Hunt has been this bad and the Chiefs' offense has been this good.

Oh, speaking of Hunt, he finally got going on Monday night. A week after he scored two touchdowns, but averaged only 2.4 yards per carry, Hunt looked like it was 2017 all over again. He provided the firepower on the Chiefs' tying series in the first quarter.

He did it again during their go-ahead series early in the second quarter.

And then he scored the game-winner.

Hunt has been an afterthought on the best offense in football so far. Don't expect that to last so much longer. He ran for 121 yards on 19 carries and picked up 54 yards through the air against the Broncos.

The Broncos can run

Drafting Paxton Lynch and signing Case Keenum might not have solved their quarterback problem, but the Broncos do at least feature a capable running game that's spearheaded by two rookies, Royce Freeman (third round) and Phillip Lindsay (undrafted).

Freeman and Lindsay combined for 136 yards and two touchdowns on 20 carries. They're a two-headed monster that the Broncos can ride from here on out.

Check out this monster (and patient) touchdown by Freeman to tie the game at 10-10 in the second quarter:

It was Lindsay's turn to score the next touchdown. This one -- after a big (and obvious) pass-interference call went against the Chiefs -- gave the Broncos a 20-13 lead late in the third quarter. It's not flashy, but that's a great hard-nosed run.

Unfortunately for the Broncos' rushing machine, they didn't get any help offensively. And when the Broncos had a chance to salt away the game, leading by three with six minutes to go, they ran the ball once and threw the ball twice, leading to a quick three-and-out that preceded the Chiefs' game-winning drive.

Keenum's disappointing season continues

After he emerged as a surprising MVP candidate with the Vikings last year, Keenum scored a two-year, \$36 million deal with the Broncos. It's weird, because he's neither their quarterback of the future nor a bridge quarterback. He's not talented enough to be a franchise kind of guy, but he's not a bridge to another quarterback because the Broncos don't really have a viable quarterback behind him.

To this point, Keenum's been uneven with the Broncos, entering the game with two more picks than touchdowns and a 71.6 passer rating. He submitted another meh performance, going 21-for-33 for 245 yards, no touchdowns, one pick, and a 73.4 passer rating.

According to ESPN Stats & Info, Keenum "hadn't completed a pass thrown 30+ yards downfield since Week 10 of last season ... going 0 of 12 on such throws in that span." He broke the streak on Monday night, completing a nicely thrown 42-yard completion to Courtland Sutton down the right sideline.

Then again, his pick in the third quarter came as a result of a horribly underthrown pass to a wide-open receiver and an incredible catch by Eric Murray.

Again, that's an incredible catch and absolute thievery. Nine times out of 10, that play ends in an incompleteness. But the completion was there for the taking. Keenum just put too much air under the ball and left it too short, giving Murray an opportunity he never should've had. And he took it.

Keenum's biggest mistake came on the final series of the game. Trailing by four and needing a touchdown after the Chiefs regained the lead, Keenum had Demaryius Thomas wide open for a game-winning touchdown. But he missed the kind of pass that NFL-caliber quarterbacks are supposed to hit 10 times out of 10.

He just missed him.

That picture doesn't just sum up Thomas' season so far. It also sums up Keenum's. The win was standing right there, wide open with empty space in front. But he missed the opening.

Stop punting to Tyreek Hill

It might be time to give Tyreek Hill the Devin Hester treatment. Punt to him at your own risk.

In the first quarter, Hill fielded Marquette King's 51-yard punt at his own 22-yard line. He didn't go down until he reached the Denver 41. This is a 37-yard return that somehow looks effortless.

Hill entered the game with four punt returns for 100 yards and a touchdown.

Ford, Houston lead Chiefs' pass rush

The Chiefs' defense isn't good. We've been over this many times. But let's give credit to two players who might be able to turn a bad defense into a decent defense, which really would be good enough for the

Chiefs considering the state of their offense. Dee Ford and Justin Houston, if they can continue to rush the passer the way they attacked Case Keenum, can turnaround this defense.

Ford and Houston got after Keenum early, each generating a sack in the first quarter and applying pressure to force a couple stops.

Houston's already a known commodity at this point with 71.5 career sacks before Monday, but Ford has been playing well lately. He picked up two sacks during the first three weeks of the season. At times, he looks like the best pass rusher on the defense. It's worth noting that he exploded for 10 sacks in 2016, so he's already demonstrated the ability to be a double-digit sack guy. At the quarter mark of the season, he's on pace for 12 sacks. His groin injury, however, is worth monitoring.

As a team, the Chiefs finished with four sacks. Their pass rush might be their only redeeming quality on defense.

Sammy Watkins' hamstring

Filing this under something to keep an eye on. Watkins, the Chiefs' big free-agent signing, left the game with a hamstring injury. He was initially deemed questionable to return, but he was declared OUT before halftime.

So far this season, Watkins has 227 yards and one touchdown from scrimmage. The Chiefs certainly aren't lacking weapons, but they'll miss Watkins during an upcoming stretch of difficult games if he's forced to wait for his hamstring to heal.

What's next?

The road isn't going to get any easier for the Chiefs. In what might be the game of Week 5, they'll host the 3-1 Jaguars. If you thought the Broncos' once-great, now middle-of-the-road defense would challenge the Chiefs, you should already be salivating at Sunday's matchup. After playing the Jaguars, the Chiefs then get Patriots and Bengals. Their schedule isn't letting up.

The Broncos, meanwhile, travel to New York to face the Jets before being forced to confront the best team in football, the Los Angeles Rams. After, they get the Cardinals in Arizona.

And then, the Broncos and Chiefs will meet again in Kansas City in Week 8.

Broncos not happy with missed penalty on Chiefs' game-winning drive

By Jason Owens
Yahoo! Sports
October 2, 2018

Patrick Mahomes raised his burgeoning star even higher on Monday with a fourth-quarter rally to top the Denver Broncos at Mile High.

With the Kansas City Chiefs trailing 23-20 late in the game, Mahomes led a remarkable drive that included a pair of huge third-down conversions, one with a stunning left-handed throw while Von Miller was draped on him.

Big play sets Chiefs up in scoring position

The second conversion on a third-and-seven resulted in a 35-yard gain on a downfield pass to Demetrius Harris that set the Chiefs up at the Broncos' 11-yard line.

Play should have been blown dead

But there was a problem. That play should never have happened. The Chiefs let the play clock tick down to zero before the ball was snapped, which should have resulted in a whistle and a five-yard penalty on Kansas City.

But the whistle was not blown. Instead of what should have been third-and-12, the Chiefs were set up with a first down in the red zone.

While the refs didn't catch the penalty, the Broncos certainly did. And they weren't happy after the game.

Brandon Marshall: 'How do you miss that?'

Linebacker Brandon Marshall put things succinctly on the missed call. Basically, the offending official had one job to do. And he didn't do it.

"The ref came into the huddle and said that, you know, that that's his one job, and he just missed it," Marshall said. "And so one of our players was like if that's his one job, how did he miss it? Then he tried to say that he was also looking at the quarterback.

"I don't know man. How do you miss that? That's crazy."

Vance Joseph disagrees with official's assessment

Head coach Vance Joseph took a more diplomatic, fine-repelling approach when asked if he talked about the missed call with the official.

"I did and he said he looked up and up at a zero, and the ball was gone," Joseph said. "I disagree. I disagree."

It was a big blown call at a critical juncture of a Monday night game. In a season defined in part by officiating controversies, add this one to the growing list.

Broncos comeback attempt falls short

Denver had an opportunity for a last second victory, but a missed open receiver, and a botched lateral sealed a Chiefs victory.

Patrick Mahomes' teammates are in awe too: 'Everything he does is amazing'

By Frank Schwab
Yahoo! Sports
October 2, 2018

Sure, the Kansas City Chiefs have seen Patrick Mahomes go with a left-handed pass ... in practice.

But in a game? With Von Miller about to sack him, trailing by three points late, 76,656 fans screaming and millions watching on ESPN?

"We've seen it in practice," Chiefs coach Andy Reid said. "Not under those conditions before."

Mahomes wasn't as dominant as he was in his first three games. It really doesn't matter because all we're going to remember from Monday night is Mahomes sprinting to his left and throwing a short first-down pass with his left hand to Tyreek Hill.

That unbelievable play kept a game-winning drive going, and the Chiefs moved to 4-0 with a 27-23 victory.

"When it came out of his hand, I went, 'Oh wow,'" fullback Anthony Sherman said. "At this point I think we should just trust him."

Mahomes has started just five games in his NFL career, but it seems like he has many years worth of highlights. We can add a fantastic fourth-quarter comeback on Monday night in Denver to the list, and of course, the left-handed pass.

"Nobody in history has ever seen that," Chiefs safety Eric Murray said. "C'mon now. Nobody."

Patrick Mahomes on lefty pass: 'I knew we needed the first down'

The Broncos blitzed Mahomes a lot on Monday night. After seeing him throw for 13 touchdowns and no interceptions through three games, Denver emptied its playbook with all the exotic blitzes it could come up with. On third-and-5, leading 23-20 with 3:14 left, Denver dialed up an overload blitz to Mahomes' right.

It worked because Mahomes had to sprint left. He had no options. And just before Miller tripped him up, Mahomes switched hands and pushed the ball out to Hill for a 6-yard gain. It's not like Mahomes was planning to switch hands at any point as he was running for his life. It just happened.

"I didn't think [about] it at all," Mahomes said. "I was just scrambling left, I felt Von on my back and I knew I couldn't throw it with my right hand. I knew we needed the first down and so I kind of just like shot-putted it to Tyreek."

Mahomes has proven already that he's precocious as a pocket passer. He was supposed to be raw coming out of Texas Tech, but after sitting and learning most of last season he plays like a longtime veteran. So don't look at the highlight-reel plays or the improvisation and miscast him.

He's the best quarterback in the NFL through four games this season because he's already a pocket technician with the supreme physical talent to execute Reid's offense.

But he also has that rare, fun ability to make something out of nothing, even if it's instinctually going to his left hand when a play needed to be made.

"It was a cool deal," Mahomes said.

Mahomes had other amazing plays

Mahomes had just 65 passing yards at halftime. The Broncos threw everything at him and it worked, for a while at least.

Mahomes isn't going to break a long run very often — "I'm not fast, and I know my strength is not running the ball," Mahomes said afterward — but he's athletic enough to avoid the rush and keep plays alive. The Broncos have a good pass rush, sent extra rushers at Mahomes often, and they still sacked him just once.

"He made us cover for a long time. I had to go inside and get an IV," Broncos cornerback Chris Harris Jr. said. "We couldn't sack this man. He's a hell of a player, he's a hell of a quarterback."

Many times Mahomes had to get creative because the rush was coming. Once he broke outside for an 8-yard touchdown run. On a third-quarter play he was running left, twisted his body and remarkably threw a fastball back to the middle of the field to Travis Kelce for 23 yards.

"No, [the coaches] never encourage that," Mahomes said with a grin. "At the same time, as long as you complete it and get the first down, they're fine with that."

There might not be five other people alive who could have made that throw. Maybe there aren't any others.

"Most guys are told not to do that," Sherman said. "Then he goes out there and executes it and it's like, 'Uhhh, OK, I guess you can do that.'"

Mahomes said: "You never want to throw across your body as a quarterback, especially in this league because guys can make plays on the defensive side of the ball. It kind of just naturally [happened]."

Mahomes' fourth-quarter comeback was a big test

Mahomes' first time on a prime-time stage wasn't isolated highlights. The Chiefs were trailing 23-13 with less than seven minutes to go. Mahomes was in a similar spot last season in a meaningless Week 17 game at Denver and led a game-winning drive.

With the Broncos about to win on Monday night and tie the Chiefs for first place, this game was far from meaningless. It didn't bother Mahomes.

"He didn't have any ups and downs," Sherman said. "He just stayed the same guy."

There will be plenty of tests as we watch Mahomes' career develop, and he passed this one. He led two scoring drives, the final one culminating with a Kareem Hunt 4-yard touchdown with 1:39 left to put the Chiefs ahead for good.

There isn't much Mahomes hasn't shown already this season, even just four games in. Even his teammates, who see him every day in practice, are watching the show like everyone else.

"Oh, everything he does is amazing," Sherman said.

Patrick Mahomes' teammates are in awe too: 'Everything he does is amazing'

By Kalyn Kahler

MMQB

October 2, 2018

Patrick Mahomes got his first taste of adversity against the Broncos on Monday Night Football, and the Chiefs' quarterback, on a record-breaking tear so far this season, didn't even blink.

Denver's defense brought plenty of pressure on the quarterback, and even with a depleted secondary, the defensive backs matched up honorably with Kansas City's many offensive weapons. The Broncos were able to do something none of the Chiefs' first three opponents this season could do: Prevent the Chiefs from scoring a touchdown on the opening drive (instead, Kansas City kicked a field goal). The Chiefs scored at least 20 points in the first half of their first three games, and Denver held them to just 10 points in the first half.

Mahomes's first half stats this season:

Week 1 at Chargers: 7/14, 131 Pass YDs, 1 TD

Week 2 at Steelers: 8/10, 119 Pass YDs, 3 TDs

Week 3 vs. 49ers: 17/25, 252 Pass YDs, 3 TDs

Week 4 at Broncos: 7/15, 65 Pass YDs, 1 Rush TD

At halftime in Denver, Mahomes and the Chiefs found themselves playing from behind for the first time this season, trailing the Broncos 13–10. Kansas City then fell behind by another touchdown, entering the fourth quarter down 23–13 and putting their undefeated season record at risk.

Mahomes responded to Denver's pressure by stepping out of a couple sacks and extending plays by leaving the pocket when it was collapsing around him. According to ESPN Stats & Info, Mahomes threw for 192 yards out of the pocket, the most passing yards of that kind in the last 10 seasons.

With three minutes left in the game, the Chiefs needed to convert a third down in order to keep the drive—and the game—alive. As the ball was snapped, Broncos linebacker Von Miller closed in on Mahomes, pushing him outside the pocket and grabbing him by the ankles. The QB switched the football from his right to left hand when he sensed Miller closing in on his right side, and he tossed a left-handed, shot-put throw to receiver Tyreek Hill to convert the third down. Even when off balance and holding the ball in his non-throwing hand, Mahomes was still able to convert a crucial third down to put the Chiefs in position to score the game-winning touchdown.

HOT READS

NOW ON THE MMQB: Conor Orr on why the Steelers might be better off trading away Le'Veon Bell, now that he's reportedly returning to the team in Week 7. ... Albert Breer leads his Monday Afternoon Quarterback with Matt Nagy's glowing review of Khalil Mack. ... Jonathan Jones from Eric Reid's first press conference as a Panther ... Breer's MMQB leads with Mike Vrabel taking chances with the Titans.

WHAT YOU MAY HAVE MISSED: Andy Benoit on how the Jaguars built a Blake Bortles-based offense... Yours truly on Jameis Winston's first game back from his three-game suspension.

PRESS COVERAGE

1. Le'Veon Bell plans to return to the Steelers Week 7, during the bye week.
2. Before Earl Thomas was injured Sunday, the Chiefs were preparing to trade for him.
3. Jameis Winston will be the starter when the Buccaneers return from their bye week.
4. Packers coach Mike McCarthy feels good about his relationship with Aaron Rodgers, despite Rodgers comments about the “terrible” offense on Sunday.

THE KICKER

Even though Mahomes is a star and so is Kareem Hunt, ESPN’s Diana Russini reminds us they still share a room together on the road and sleep in twin beds.

Harris: 'How we gonna let them smoke us like that?'

By Kevin Patra

NFL.com

October 2, 2018

And on the eighth day, God made Patrick Mahomes.

God saw what he had made, and it was very good.

The Kansas City Chiefs' second-year quarterback shined late in Monday night's 27-23 come-from-behind victory over the Broncos in Denver.

The key sequence for the wunderkind quarterback came on the game-winning drive. Following a preposterous, Brett Favreian left-handed toss by Mahomes to pick up a first down, the Chiefs found themselves backed up after consecutive penalties. With under three minutes left it was second-and-30 on their 31-yard-line.

Two plays later, Mahomes had the Broncos at the Denver 11-yard-line headed in for the go-ahead score.

"Second-and-30," Broncos cornerback Chris Harris fumed in the locker room after the game, via Nicki Jhabvala of The Athletic. "SECOND-AND-30. How we gonna let them smoke us like that?"

First, Mahomes picked up a chunk gain against Denver's man-coverage, finding reserve receiver Demarcus Robinson for 23 yards. Then on third down, the QB hit tight end Demetrius Harris downfield for a 35-yard gain to set up the winning score.

"Second-and-30, I'm thinking like, 'There ain't no way they'd be able to get this,'" Von Miller said. "And then they did."

They did.

The sequence was not without controversy.

Replays showed the play clock hit zero before the snap on Mahomes' toss to Harris. Broncos coach Vance Joseph was asked after the game if he spoke to the refs about the no-call.

"I did, and he said he looked up, it was zero and the ball was gone. I disagree. I disagree," Joseph said.

The rule of thumb for NFL referees is the one watching the play clock will look back to the line once it hits zero to see if the ball is snapped. Unable to watch two things at once, the mechanics of the play generally give the offense an extra fraction of a second to get the snap off.

In Monday night's case, the milliseconds made a huge difference.

"It pissed me off," linebacker Shane Ray said. "We all saw it at zero. ... It's just frustrating, man. You can't leave the game in the hands of the ref and we just have to do our job and finish it. We can't let those situations happen."

"The ref came into the huddle and the ref, that's his one job, he just missed it," added linebacker Brandon Marshall. "One of our players was like, 'Well, if that's his one job, how did he miss it?' They tried to say he was also looking at the quarterback -- I don't know, man. How do you miss that? That's crazy."

Missed call or not, the Broncos can't help but bemoan their inability to stop Mahomes after getting him into second-and-30.

"We just didn't finish. We've got to close that game out," Harris said. "We have them second-and-30 and we just let them off the hook."

Mahomes leads Chiefs' comeback win over Broncos

By Jeremy Bergman

NFL.com

October 2, 2018

Patrick Mahomes led the Kansas City Chiefs (4-0) back from a 10-point fourth-quarter deficit to keep their undefeated season alive in a 27-23 victory over the Denver Broncos on Monday Night Football in Week 4.

1. Patrick Mahomes had his moment on Monday night. After struggling through an unproductive first half during which he averaged just 4.3 yards per pass attempt, Mahomes (304 yards, TD) rebounded with confident abandon. With the Chiefs down by 10 points in the fourth quarter, the second-year gunslinger led two touchdown drives, showing off the remarkable out-of-pocket accuracy and ball speed that earned him the starting gig in Kansas City and early-season MVP chatter. After the Broncos went three-and-out with 4:35 to go, Mahomes marched K.C. down the field in eight plays, converting two third downs and bouncing back from second-and-30 at one point, to take a four-point lead over Denver with just under two minutes to go.

Case Keenum took Denver into Chiefs territory quickly, thanks to a 36-yard heave to tight end Jeff Heurman. But the Broncos quarterback followed that up with four straight incompletions from the Chiefs' 28-yard line, including one misfire toward the end zone in the direction of a wide-open Demaryius Thomas. Game over. Point, young gun.

1b. Mahomes' night can't be summed up in numbers or metrics, but this stat from the ESPN broadcast comes pretty damn close. The Chiefs quarterback threw for 192 yards outside of the pocket on Monday night, the most by any quarterback in the past decade. The Brett Favre comparisons are easy to make, especially when Mahomes is completing passes ambidextrously and launching rifles off balance at obtuse angles like the former Packers legend. But it's hard not to make them. The only difference? Mahomes doesn't turn the ball over. Through four games, he has a 14:0 TD-to-INT ratio. Mahomes is pacing the MVP race ahead of Jared Goff and Khalil Mack -- and the gap's not small.

2. Onlookers at Broncos Stadium at Mile High were up in the arms over one particular official oversight during Mahomes' game-sealing drive. On a third-and-7 for Denver's 46 with 2:03 to go -- and with Broncos fans screaming in a fever pitch -- Mahomes appeared to snap the ball with no time remaining on the play clock. Craig Wrolstad's crew didn't blow the whistle and the ensuing play was a 35-yard bomb to tight end Demetrius Harris to set up the winning score.

When asked if he confronted the officials about the play clock, Broncos coach Vance Joseph told reporters, "I did, and he said he looked up, it was zero and the ball was gone. I disagree. I disagree."

3. Kansas City's league-worst defense was no match for a pair of rookie running backs from the Pac-12. Denver's dynamic backfield duo, Phillip Lindsay and Royce Freeman, combined for 136 yards and two touchdowns on 20 carries. Complementary in nature, Lindsay's slash-and-dash style and Freeman's ground-and-pound demeanor hammered K.C.'s veteran front through the first three quarters, racking up first downs and extending drives to keep Mahomes off the field. The Broncos inexplicably went away from the pair on a three-and-out preceding Mahomes' final march, a decision Broncos offensive coordinator Bill Musgrave will rue when he watches the film.

4. For most of Monday evening, the Chiefs' offense was hamstrung by a hamstring. Sammy Watkins exited the game with a bum hammy in the first quarter, leaving Mahomes with one fewer weapon to work with. Heading into Monday, Watkins had played the most snaps of any Chiefs wide receiver, averaging 51.3 snaps per game; he played just 12 against Denver. In his stead, Harris, Chris Conley and Demarcus Robinson saw more snaps, but couldn't replace his production or spread out Denver's defense until late in the second half. Chiefs coach Andy Reid described the injury as simple hamstring tightness, but given his outsized use in K.C.'s offense, Watkins' health will be something to monitor this week.

The main beneficiary of Watkins' absence was running back Kareem Hunt, who, until Mahomes went all Brett Favre on Denver in the fourth quarter, was solely responsible for keeping the Chiefs in this one. The reigning rushing champion is oft overlooked in the star-studded juggernaut that is Kansas City's offense, but not on Monday. Hunt averaged 6.4 yards on the ground and racked up 175 total yards on 22 touches, one of which was the game-winning score in the red zone.

5. This loss will sting more than most for the Broncos, whose defense more or less shut down the hottest quarterback in the sport for three quarters by coupling tight coverage with a ferocious pass rush. Chris Harris and Adam Jones handled Travis Kelce for the bulk of the game. Derek Wolfe, Bradley Chubb and Von Miller led a Broncos pass rush that hit Mahomes nine times, but sacked him only once. Kansas City's 10-point comeback was the first surrendered by the Broncos in Denver since 2004.

6. Unable to thwart Mahomes' magic fourth quarter, the Broncos missed out on an opportunity to tie their division rivals atop the AFC West at 3-1. Denver is now two games behind K.C. and must hope that the Chiefs drop a game or two against the Jaguars, Patriots and Bengals (combined record of 8-4) over the next three weeks before the two meet again in Week 8.

Broncos upset officials missed delay of game on final Chiefs TD drive

By Josh Alper
Pro Football Talk
October 2, 2018

One of the biggest plays of Monday night's Chiefs win came when Patrick Mahomes hit tight end Demetrius Harris for a 35-yard gain on third-and-7 on the final play before the two-minute warning.

The play set up running back Kareem Hunt's go-ahead touchdown a few plays later, but replays suggested it shouldn't have happened at all. The play clock was at zero when Mahomes took the snap and it appeared that it was there longer than the extra beat it can take for officials to rule a play dead for delay of game.

Broncos linebacker Brandon Marshall said after the game that referee Craig Wrolstad confessed that they made a mistake.

"It definitely was at zero, the replay showed that," Marshall said, via ESPN.com. "The ref told us that the ref that was supposed to be watching it just missed it. ... He told us that, the ref told us the guy that was supposed to be watching the clock just missed it. So maybe he got caught up in watching the game because it was a good game, but you've got to do your job. Come on, that was huge. That was big."

Cornerback Chris Harris heard the same thing and said "you should be able to fix it" when he was told it was not a reviewable play. Harris added it wasn't the reason the Chiefs lost, but the "huge, huge, no-call" didn't make their chances of winning any better.

Vance Joseph calls out Marquette King

By Mike Florio
Pro Football Talk
October 2, 2018

The Broncos added a punter to the practice squad last week as a shot across the bow to Marquette King. It didn't know.

King generated a net average 28.7 yards on three punts last night. His longest effort — a 51-yard kick — was fielded by Tyreek Hill and returned for 37 yards. King also had a punt from the Kansas City 48 that went out of bounds at the 11.

His final punt, from the Denver 25 in the fourth quarter with the Broncos clinging to a 23-20 lead, traveled only 35 yards before going out of bounds at the Kansas City 40, setting the stage for the game-winning drive. After the game, coach Vance Joseph called King out.

"He's got to perform better," Joseph told reporters. "We're at home and it's his job to flip the field. That isn't happening. He's got to play better."

Via Nicki Jhabvala of the Athletic, King had been checked out by trainers after the final punt, and he was limping in the locker room after the game.

He could soon be limping right out of Denver. There are too many guys out there who can punt the ball well to justify keeping a guy who isn't.

Chiefs rally from 10-point fourth quarter deficit to grab 27-23 win over Broncos

By Curtis Crabtree
Pro Football Talk
October 2, 2018

Patrick Mahomes and Kareem Hunt carried the Kansas City Chiefs out of a 10-point fourth quarter deficit to remain undefeated with a 27-23 victory over the Denver Broncos on Monday night.

Mahomes led two touchdown drives over the final 6:27 and Hunt scored on a 4-yard touchdown with 1:39 remaining to give the Chiefs the lead.

Case Keenum had a chance to flip the script on Denver's final drive as a 36-yard completion to Jeff Heurmann moved the Broncos to the Chiefs 28-yard line. However, a missed throw to Demaryius Thomas and an unsuccessful hook and lateral call on fourth down allowed the Chiefs to hang on for the win.

Mahomes completed 28 of 45 passes for 304 yards with a passing and rushing touchdown for Kansas City. Hunt gained 121 yards on 19 carries with the game-winning score.

Mahomes scored on a 8-yard scramble to cap a 12-play scoring drive that give the Chiefs a 10-3 lead in the second quarter. A 42-yard pass from Keenum to Courtland Sutton set up a 14-yard Royce Freeman touchdown that evened the game at 10-10. McManus' 34-yard field goal as time expired gave Denver a 17-14 advantage at the break.

After a 21-yard Butker field goal tied the game once again, the Broncos took control. Phillip Lindsay scored on a 1-yard run to conclude a nine-play 80-yard scoring drive and a 46-yard field goal from McManus pushed the Denver lead to 23-13 with 12:47 remaining.

Freeman and Lindsay combined for 136 yards rushing and two touchdowns on 20 carries for Denver.

Mahomes responded with an impressive drive that overcame a pair of offensive penalties that set the Chiefs back. They faced third-and-16 and first-and-20 on the drive and converted a fourth-and-1 to ultimately find the end zone on a 2-yard pass to Travis Kelce.

The Chiefs forced a three-and-out and Marquette King delivered only a 35-yard punt for the Broncos as Kansas City got a prime chance to get the score they needed.

Mahomes completed a pass left-handed to Tyreek Hill to convert on a third-and-5. Then the Chiefs had to again overcome offensive penalties that put the Chiefs in a second-and-30 situation at their own 31-yard line. Mahomes scrambled to his right before hitting Demarcus Robinson for 23 yards to set up a manageable third down. Demetrius Harris broke free for a 35-yard gain down to the Denver 11 at the two-minute warning.

Two plays later, Hunt scored from 4 yards out to give the Chiefs the victory.

Broncos lead 20-13 heading into fourth quarter

By Charean Williams

Pro Football Talk

October 2, 2018

The Broncos took a 20-13 lead with 2:05 remaining in the third quarter as they attempt to knock off the undefeated Chiefs.

Phillip Lindsay's 1-yard touchdown run capped a nine-play, 80-yard drive. It was set up by a 13-yard penalty on Chiefs cornerback Orlando Scandrick, who interfered with Courtland Sutton at the Kansas City 5.

The story, though, has been the Broncos defense, which has limited the Chiefs to 277 yards. Patrick Mahomes is only 15-of-29 for 151 yards with no touchdowns.

Kareem Hunt does have his first 100-yard game of the season and seventh of his career, having rushed for 108 yards on 16 carries through three quarters.

Case Keenum has completed 15 of 22 passes for 156 yards and an interception through three quarters.

Broncos lead Chiefs 13-10 at halftime

By Charean Williams
Pro Football Talk
October 2, 2018

Patrick Mahomes doesn't look like the Patrick Mahomes of the first three games. He has no touchdown passes and a 59.0 passer rating at halftime.

The second-year quarterback, though, did run for an 8-yard touchdown. It was his first career rushing touchdown.

The Chiefs trail the Broncos 13-10 at halftime.

Kareem Hunt, with 10 carries for 80 yards, has more yards rushing than Mahomes has passing yards. Mahomes is 7-of-15 for 65 yards.

The Chiefs have only 163 total yards.

The Broncos have 223 yards, with a 12-play, 60-yard drive setting up a 34-yard field goal by Brandon McManus on the final play of the half.

Case Keenum has completed 14 of 19 passes for 139 yards. Royce Freeman has five carries for 47 yards and a touchdown, and Phillip Lindsay has five carries for 41 yards.

Jared Veldheer questionable to return with knee injury

By Charean Williams

Pro Football Talk

October 2, 2018

Broncos right tackle Jared Veldheer injured his knee in the second quarter.

Although the Broncos list him as questionable to return, Veldheer appeared to have trouble putting weight on his right leg while getting to the bench.

Billy Turner replaced Veldheer.

Veldheer has started every game this season at right tackle after starting 13 games at three different positions in Arizona last season. But he left the Week Two game against the Raiders in the third quarter after doctors diagnosed him with a concussion.

Broncos, Chiefs tied 3-3 at end of first quarter

By Charean Williams
Pro Football Talk
October 2, 2018

This is not Rams-Vikings.

The Chiefs and Broncos exchanged field goals in the first quarter.

So after 15 minutes, the AFC West rivals are knotted at 3-3.

The teams have combined for 137 yards and three punts.

The Broncos opened the game with a seven-play, 51-yard drive, with Royce Freeman getting one carry for 18 yards and Philip Lindsay one for 17. Brandon McManus kicked a 42-yard field.

The Chiefs tied it on their first drive, going 60 yards in 10 plays. Harrison Butker kicked a 33-yard field goal.

The big play in the drive was a 27-yard catch-and-run by Kareem Hunt, who got away with lowering his head to initiate contact at the end of the play.

Patrick Mahomes completed 4 of 8 passes for 41 yards in the first quarter, while Case Keenum went 5-for-7 for 37 yards.

Broncos left tackle Garrett Bolles had a rough quarter, giving up a sack to Justin Houston and getting a holding penalty. It was his fourth holding penalty of the season, tying Bolles for the league lead.

Tramaine Brock won't play tonight, but Adam Jones will

By Charean Williams

Pro Football Talk

October 2, 2018

The Broncos won't have cornerback Tramaine Brock tonight. Brock returned to practice on a limited basis Saturday, but the Broncos still listed him as doubtful in their status report.

He was among the team's seven inactives, though the Broncos will have cornerback Adam Jones. Jones, who was limited in practice all week, was questionable with a thigh injury.

Denver need rookie cornerback Isaac Yiadom to play well in Brock's stead.

The Broncos' other inactives are quarterback Kevin Hogan, safety Shamarko Thomas, linebacker Alexander Johnson, defensive end DeMarcus Walker, offensive lineman Elijah Wilkinson and offensive lineman Sam Jones.

Denver has made Walker inactive for every game this season.

The Chiefs made cornerback Tremon Smith a healthy scratch. He played the first three games.

Kansas City's other inactives are safety Eric Berry (heel), running back Darrel Williams, offensive lineman Austin Reiter, offensive lineman Kahlil McKenzie, defensive lineman Justin Hamilton and tight end Alex Ellis.