Sports

Denver has the weapons . . .

Jim Muse
Opinion

There was no celebration in the Denver Broncos' locker room Jan. 14. Even after they had put the Cleveland Browns out of the playoffs for the second year in a row, the Broncos did not cheer. They still had something left to do.

The Broncos, humiliated losers in last year's Super Bowl, have arrived. They have taken the experiences of the past year and have learned from them, and now they are looking for their first NFL championship.

The Broncos have a leader and field general without equal in John Elway. Who else can throw 55-yard spirals on target while falling backwards? Who else has the athletic ability to pull touchdowns seemingly out of thin air? That's right, no one.

Denver's Superman, now in his fifth year, has finally taken the NFL by storm, as was predicted when he was the first pick in 1983's legendary "quarterback draft." After some difficult seasons in which he struggled with complex NFL defenses, Elway emerged last year as a mature and extraordinarily dangerous passer.

The shotgun offense, which Denver has utilized to perfection this year, makes Elway even more dangerous. He can see the rush better and has the time to spot his receivers, who can wreck even the best secondary coverage. He also can run the quarterback draw better than anyone else in the league and loves to call his own number inside the 10-yard line.

But enough about Superman. For the longest time, everyone has said that Elway was a quarterback without a team. For a long time there was some truth to that. But no longer.

The secret to Denver's passing attack has been the coming of age of the "Three Amigos," the receiving trio of Vance Johnson, Mark Jackson and rookie Ricky Nattiel. Any one of them is capable of scoring from anywhere on the field, witness Jackson's 80-yard beauty down the sideline against Cleveland. People also seem to have forgotten about Steve Watson, now back from breaking six ribs in a replacement game, who also is dangerous.

The outside speed of the Amigos also helps clear the way for their monster tight ends, Clarence Kay and Orson Mobley, who run 6-foot-2, 240 pounds and 6-5, 260, respectively. Both block well and are not afraid of going across the middle, and both can be devastating after they catch the ball.

Denver's backfield has never gotten the respect it has been due, nor has the offensive line. The Bronco linemen are small (averaging 6-3, 260) but are mobile, strong and persistent, which fits in perfectly with Denver head coach Dan Reeves's plan. The line could have trouble handling Washington's monster goons, but Elway's mobility will easily make up for that.

On the other side of the ball, the defense was decimated by the offseason retirements of nose tackle Rubin Carter, linebacker Tom Jackson, now of ESPN fame, and defensive backs Steve Foley and Louie Wright. With those four gone, the team lost over 40 years of NFL experience and leadership.

The defensive line had a below-average year, getting just nine sacks in 12 non-strike games. That's sad. They also are a bit smallish, as NFL linemen go, and may have problems with Washington's "Hogs." They'll have to try and hold the line and let their more-than-capable linebackers do the job.

There, Ricky Hunley and all-over-the-field Karl Mecklenberg have been giving the Broncos vital aggressiveness and leadership.

The secondary is talented behind safety Dennis Smith and former All-Pro cornerback Mark Haynes.

The biggest difference in the team from last year is simply experience. They have character, they survived the strike and they endured an incredible rash of injuries which probably would have crippled any other team.

Take the Broncos by a touchdown in the last two minutes. This one's going to be a dandy.

But Washington has the brawn

David Hall
Opinion

No player in the NFL is more dominant than Denver's John Elway. That is fact. He is the one player who, like other great athletes, can do what he wants in truly significant situations. Without him, Denver, a team equipped with exceptional, albeit undersized, athletes, would be merely ordinary. With him, they are the AFC's best.

Unfortunately, the Washington franchise, thanks to the savoir-faire of General Manager Bobby Beathard and owner Jack Kent Cooke, has been built with great attention to the demands of a great all-around football team.

To suggest that the Redskins are undersized would be folly. The Broncos, in a repeat of last year's dismally one-sided affair, will have extreme difficulty matching up with the bulk and quickness of the Redskins' trenchmen.

The most pressing problems will likely lie with Denver's Orange Crush defensive crew. Both the linemen and the much-heralded linebacker quartet — watch for Denver's exceptional rover Karl Mecklenburg, who can play up to seven different positions — will have problems when confronting the versatility of Washington's offense. Washington's offensive line, known as the "Hogs," will have little trouble in either defending the Broncos' pass rush or in plowing forward against the relatively diminutive Denver frontmen for rushing yardage.

On offense, Washington has all the players necessary, at skill positions, to make life impossible for Denver. In the backfield, the talented trio of 1982 Heisman Trophy winner George Rogers, surprising rookie Timmy Smith and former USFL MVP Kelvin Bryant is used on the three downs respectively.

Rogers, on first down, still has the the ability to earn 3 or 4 tough yards despite having struggled for the better part of the season. Timmy Smith, for the postseason, has been Washington's most successful back, having gained 138 yards in postseason play against two of the stingiest NFL rushing defenses (Chicago and Minnesota) with limited PT. Bryant, in spite of another injury-plagued season, is nothing short of indefensible on third down, given his speed, size and, most importantly, his ability to catch passes.

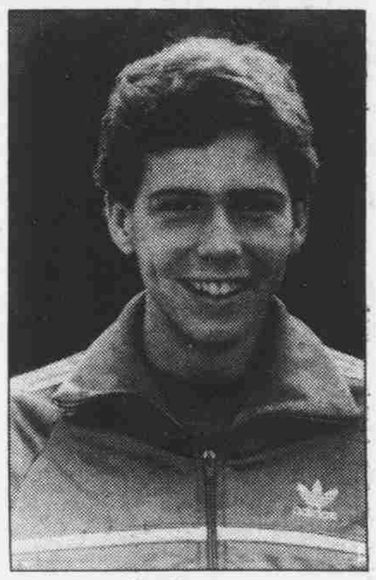
In addition to the talent in the backfield, the aged and infirm Denver secondary will have even more trouble stemming the talents of receivers Gary Clark and Ricky Sanders. Passing to them will be Doug Williams, who just now is demonstrating his immense talents and burgeoning confidence.

Williams has overcome the great obstacles of racism and league ostracism to emerge as a true threat at that position. In addition to his much-fabled arm strength and size, Williams is traditionally the league leader among quarterbacks in fewest sacks. That factor, combined with the pass protection that he will receive from the "Hogs," will enable Williams to pick the Denver secondary clean.

The most underrated factor for Washington thus far has been its tremendous pass rush, led by defensive ends Charles Mann and the loquacious Dexter Manley. The duo is so consistently brilliant that, like Magic Johnson, it is often overlooked. Expect Elway to do much scrambling and to expend even more time on his back as both of the men will create havoc among Denver's squat offensive line.

Denver could be helped by injured Vance Johnson, who is head taco of the Three Amigos. But Darrell Green will have had two weeks to rest his abdominal pull. Expect the 'Skins to explode to a 31-20 victory.

UNC Athlete of the Week



Jim Farmer

It's time once again for the moment you've all been waiting for — who is the UNC Athlete Of The Week?

The suspense is probably killing you, right?

Well, we don't want to hurt anybody, so we'll get right to the point.

UNC track star Jim Farmer, a senior from Raleigh, won the 3000-meter run at the Eastman Kodak Track and Field Invitational last weekend with a time of 7:57.63 — a personal best.

With that time, Farmer bettered the qualifying standard for March's NCAA indoor track championships. Congratulations, Jim.

With this incredible feat and his incredible feet, Farmer has captured The Award.

The Award that goes beyond the limits of time and space.

Jim Farmer — the runner, the man, the UNCAOTW.

— DAVE GLENN

Wake

from page 1

traveled under pressure to turn the ball over with six seconds left.

After Fox got nailed for a backcourt violation picking off Wake's home-run pass, Ivy was fouled on the ensuing inbounds play, and hit both free throws. Chilcutt then fumbled away the ball while trying to get it inbounds, sealing Wake's win.

"Wake played a tremendous basketball game," UNC coach Dean Smith said. "We just have to learn to play without J.R., but I liked our chances in the last minute. Our team didn't give up."

Wake shockingly outrebounded the Tar Heels 33-21 for the game, but most importantly had 18 offensive boards. That work translated into a plethora of second shots and, in turn, a number of easy baskets.

"We couldn't seem to stop Carlyle," Smith said. "Some of the shots he threw in I really thought we had him covered."

Carlyle's second bomb of the half cut UNC's lead to 54-46, and when Boyd sandwiched two more treys around a Chilcutt jam, Wake trailed by just four. Less than a minute later, at the 12:41 mark, Reid picked up his fourth foul.

Smith decided to let Reid play, and he responded by ravaging the Wake zone for seven straight points, controlling the paint at will. When he hit one of two free throws at the 8:56 mark, UNC led 67-61 and seemed ready to take over.

But two minutes later Reid fouled out on a touch call, and when Wake's Todd Sanders tied it at 69 with turnaround jumper, the stage was set for the wild final minutes.

"I think our players believed that if we played well, we would be right there," Wake coach Bob Staak said. "We read their pressure well in the second half, and were able to get some good shots. We were able to hang tough. It was really a team win." And for Staak, what could be more beautiful than that?

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