

Broncos Buck Chiefs From AFC West Race

Sports

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Kansas City, MO (SportsNetwork.com) - Four of Peyton Manning's five touchdown passes went to Eric Decker and the Denver Broncos held on to beat the Kansas City Chiefs, 35-28, on Sunday for first place in the AFC West.



Manning and Decker connected for three straight scores to start the second half, turning a seven-point deficit into a 35-21 lead. The Chiefs made it a one-score game on Jamaal Charles' 1-yard touchdown with 6:32 left, but a final drive came up short when Alex Smith's fourth-down pass to Dwayne Bowe was broken up by Broncos safety Mike Adams in the end zone.

"A great, gritty effort on the road," said Broncos interim coach Jack Del Rio. "We knew it was going to be a hostile environment and figured they would have a surge early with emotion as a factor and I love the way our guys responded to that."

Manning threw two interceptions in the first half that led to Kansas City touchdowns, but finished with 403 yards passing and broke his own Broncos record by reaching 41 touchdown passes this season.

Decker had eight catches for 174 yards and a team-record four touchdowns and the Broncos (10-2) beat the Chiefs (9-3) for the second time in three weeks to take a one-game lead in the division.

Knile Davis had a 108-yard kickoff return touchdown for the longest play in Chiefs history and Smith threw for 293 yards with touchdown passes to Junior Hemingway and Anthony Fasano.

Smith was sharp on the final drive on throws of 26 yards to A.J. Jenkins, who made the catch falling backward, 28 yards to a diving Dexter McCluster and 19 yards to Bowe on the left sideline.

Bowe was open in the end zone on Kansas City's final play from the Denver 13 after Broncos cornerback Kayvon Webster fell, but Adams broke up the pass.

"It came right down to the end and we weren't able to punch it in," said Chiefs coach Andy Reid. "There are a lot of things in between we can get better at and we'll do that."

"I mentioned to the team, this isn't college football. This isn't the end of the season. ... We came up short. Now it's important we get ourselves back and ready to go to finish the season like we're capable of doing."

The Broncos, who blew a 24-0 halftime lead on the road last week to the New England Patriots, actually climbed out of a 21-7 hole in this one.

A well-protected Manning led them to a 27-17 win over the Chiefs in Denver two weeks ago, denying Kansas City its first 10-0 start in franchise history. With Sunday's win, Manning moved to 10-0 vs. the AFC West since joining the Broncos before last season, and to 11-1 in his career against Kansas City.

The Broncos went 3-1 under Del Rio, the Denver defensive coordinator who took the reins while head

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coach John Fox recovered from heart surgery. Fox, who had an aortic valve replacement, has been medically cleared to return and will be back with the Broncos on Monday, the team said.

"We missed him," said Del Rio. "It will be great to have him back."

Manning said Del Rio kept the team together in Fox's absence.

"You can tell he's an experienced head coach," Manning said. "Our team has faced a lot of adversity in a short time and you never expect your head coach not to be with you the entire time. But coach Del Rio's done a good job of keeping us together. He had a tough stretch of four games and we were able to endure."

The Chiefs, once the last undefeated team remaining in the league, have now dropped three in a row. They were missing pass rusher Justin Houston (elbow) but fellow linebacker Tamba Hali (ankle) was active for the game.

Still, Manning went 22-of-35 and continued to find Decker open behind the Chiefs defense, hitting him on two touchdown passes of at least 37 yards, and another throw that went for 42 yards and set up a score.

Decker got behind Brandon Flowers and Quintin Demps for his second touchdown catch, a 37-yarder that tied the game at 21-21 just 3:09 into the second half.

Demaryius Thomas, who left the game for a spell in the first half with a shoulder injury, had a 77-yard catch to set up Decker's 1-yard score, which capped a 95-yard drive sparked by Montee Ball's bruising 45-yard run on the first play.

The Chiefs, scoreless since early in the second quarter, replied with a drive spanning 17 plays and 80 yards and finished by Charles' leaping touchdown.

A 31-yard pass play to Knowshon Moreno was offset by a 15-yard unnecessary roughness penalty. The Broncos got a first down on the play, but punted to give the Chiefs possession at their own 8-yard line with 3:32 remaining.

The first half was flooded with big scoring plays -- the biggest being Davis' kick return -- but the dam was broken on defense.

After the Chiefs drove to the Denver 2-yard line to open the game, Smith was picked off in the end zone by Broncos linebacker Wesley Woodyard. The Chiefs got the ball right back, however, when Thomas bobbled the ball to Demps for an interception. Smith then found Hemingway, who made an over-the-shoulder catch for a 17-yard touchdown catch.

Manning and the Broncos then went 79 yards and Decker beat Flowers on a 41-yard touchdown to tie the game at 7-7 on the first play of the second quarter.

Davis' return followed. He built a head of steam twice -- first after catching the ball in the back of the end zone, then after he ran into a teammate making a block. Davis took the ball to the right sideline and out-ran the last Bronco with a chance to catch him, cornerback Tony Carter.

Manning's second interception went to Marcus Cooper, who stepped in front of Decker on an underthrown pass near the right sideline three plays into the ensuing possession.

An 8-yard touchdown pass to Bowe was called back because of a penalty, but Fasano scored two plays later on a 12-yard pass he corralled with his left hand to give the Chiefs a 21-7 lead just 4:03 into the second quarter.

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"They came out hot and made some plays early and we did a good job of persevering," said Manning.

After a couple of punts, a 42-yard pass to Decker set up Moreno's 3-yard touchdown on a swing pass to draw the Broncos within 21-14 with 4:16 remaining in the first half.