

Broncos, 49ers could dominate their divisions

The poor AFC will once again attempt to produce a Super Bowl winner for the first time in who knows when in 1994, and, unlike the top-heavy NFC, several teams will vie for the title that Buffalo has held for the last four seasons.

AFC WEST

This could be the **Denver Broncos'** year. The Broncos are coming off a 9-7 season, a season that saw John Elway's best year under the head coaching of Wade Phillips. Things only look to improve for the potent offensive attack of the Broncos with the acquisitions of free-agent find Anthony Miller and Atlanta's Mike Pritchard.

One hurdle that the Broncos



CHRIS METZ

will have to overcome is their inability to consistently beat inter-divisional foes, especially the rival **Los Angeles Raiders**. The Raiders own an 8-1 record against the Broncos including a 3-0 sweep in the 1993 season.

The addition of Tom Rathman should prove to be helpful, but a shaky crew of veteran signings may not be enough to take the pressure off Hostetler.

Unless the Raiders find some defense and continue their dominance over the Broncos, the silver and black may have to settle for second place in the most competitive division in the NFL this year.

The verdict is still out on the defending Western division champion **Kansas City Chiefs**. Joe Montana returns for another season as the Chiefs' signal caller, but the injury-prone Montana is always a question mark. Similarly, veteran Marcus Allen is getting up there in age, and a duplication of last year's marvelous season seems unlikely for the aging Allen.

The defense is still strong, and will be aided by Derrick Thomas, who moves back to his favored position of linebacker after posting a career-low eight sacks at defensive end in 1993.

Bringing up the rear will be the **San Diego Chargers** and **Seattle Seahawks**. The Chargers, which had been picked by many to go to the Super Bowl in 1993, suffered a disappointing 8-8 season last year and appear to be at or below that level in 1994.

With the losses of offensive weapons Miller and Marion Butts, the Chargers will rely heavily on second-year back Natrone Means to carry the load, as an uncertain passing game will once again plague the Bolts.

Seattle will continue to improve in the 1994 season, with the guidance of Rick Mirer. They will rely heavily on their outstanding defense and the offense will come in time behind Mirer, but the Hawks are not a serious threat to make the playoffs, but don't be surprised if they finish ahead of the Chargers and pull off some upsets in 1994.

AFC CENTRAL

When the **Pittsburgh Steelers** trounced the Buffalo Bills on Monday night 23-0, it looked as



KRIS HENRY

There should be no argument that the NFC has the strongest teams. All doubters should check the date of the last AFC Super Bowl win.

NFC EAST

Barry Switzer becomes the third coach in **Dallas Cowboy** history after Jimmy Johnson's soap opera departure following his second straight world championship. All the tools remain for the Cowboys to make it a perfect three for three in world championship coaches. Some depth was lost on the offensive and defensive lines, but weaknesses will be hard to find for opposing teams. Don't blame Switzer if they don't win it all — he might be the fire that keeps the Cowboys pushing for a third straight title.

Buddy-ball is back in the inaugural season of the newly named **Arizona Cardinals**. Enter smash-mouth football at its finest. Athletes don't want to play for Buddy Ryan, they want to go to war for him. Ryan spent the off-season acquiring players who thrived under his previous systems. They can contend if the Cardinals get solid contributions again from Steve Beuerlein and rookie running sensation Ron Moore. All other aspects of the team are good enough to get the job done, providing the defense keeps scoring down to a minimum.

What are the **Philadelphia Eagles** without Randall Cunningham? For the last two years, out of contention in the NFC. A healthy Cunningham returns to an outstanding group of receivers and a committee of running backs that get the job done. Look for Cunningham to return to scrambling and free-lancing in the offense because of his inexperienced offensive line. Defensively, the Eagles went through an overhaul of linemen and linebackers the past two seasons and seem to have come out of it just fine. Look for the secondary to dominate games against passing teams.

Dan Reeves is in for a rocky second season with his **New York Giants**. The Giants fortunes will be handed off to first year quarterback Dave Brown, who will then spend the season handing the football to the Giants only strength in Rodney Hampton. After Hampton, the Giants suffer from lack of talent. The glory-day Giants are no longer around and their replacements just don't have what it takes to contend.

How the mighty have fallen. The **Washington Redskins** were pathetic last year. Look for more respect but similar outcomes this season. The Redskins stole Dallas' prize offensive guru Norv Turner so the offense should be more dangerous than before. Rookie quarterback Heath Shuler will probably get the call to duty in late October.

NFC CENTRAL

Cheese-heads unite, because the Pack is back. The **Green Bay Packers** are the cream of the crop in the NFC Central division. Brett

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