

Super Bowl 50

# Will Peyton's dream scenario come true vs Panthers?

By **BARRY WILNER**  
Associated Press



**Denver Broncos quarterback Peyton Manning (18) stands on the field during an NFL football practice in Stanford, Calif., Thursday, Feb. 4, 2016.**

AP Photo/Jeff Chiu

SAN FRANCISCO — It's the perfect scenario, a Hollywood-type script: Peyton Manning emulates John Elway and rides off into the sunset with the Lombardi Trophy in his grip.

Will it really happen? For Manning to take the Denver Broncos to their first NFL title since the team's current general manager, Elway, did in 1999 before retiring, seems the sentimental choice across the nation.

Like Elway, Manning has had a taste of losing in the big game, going 1-2, including a lopsided loss to Seattle two years ago. Elway dropped his first three Super Bowls, then won his final two.

"I am very grateful for the opportunity," the 39-year-old Manning said. "I keep probably repeating myself but I'm honored to be a part of it, and the other three that I played in, I was honored to be a part of those as well."

Should this be Manning's

final game, he will leave as the most accomplished regular-season quarterback, owning five league MVP awards. He's had a difficult past few seasons, sidelined for 2011 entirely because of neck surgeries, then struggling in last year's playoffs and missing six games in 2015 with a foot injury.

But he also earned that fifth MVP in 2013 before falling to Seattle.

Receiver Demaryius Thomas can envision the proper ending to this drama for Denver.

"It's amazing to play for Peyton," Thomas says. "He's one of the best to have ever done it, a future Hall of Famer, and he has done so much for me. I'm excited about it, and hopefully we can get this win, and if he decides to retire then he can go out with a bang."

Standing in their way, though, is simply the best team in football.

This is the third straight season the top seeds have won conference titles. The Panthers are 17-1, have the league's most prolific offense behind All-Pro quarterback Cam Newton, and a big-play defense. That D might not match the stats of the Broncos (14-4), who ranked first overall, but it's just as

impactful. "I sound like a broken record, but yet for a dream to play out as it has through the ups and downs, it just means the world for us to get what you prepare for," says Newton, finishing off his fifth and, by far, best pro season.

"For us, the ultimate goal for this sport is to win a Super Bowl. You win national championships in college and ... you try to get drafted to a team that's going to put you in the right position to win a Super Bowl."

That's where the Panthers have arrived. Carolina is a 5 1-2 point favorite to become only the third team to go 18-1 and win the Super Bowl.

Both defenses will have their moments Sunday. Denver's is just too good to be dominated for very long, producing a dynamic pass rush led by Von Miller and DeMarcus Ware, and with superb coverage backs. Carolina's Luke Kuechly, Josh Norman, Thomas Davis (if he can go after needing surgery on a broken right

arm) and Kawann Short are game changers.

Carolina is far more likely to find balance on its offense; Jonathan Stewart is the best running back on either roster, and Newton's power and breakaway ability toting the ball are unmatched for the quarterback position.

One area the Panthers are superior, perhaps vastly so, is on the offensive line. So the Broncos' relentless pursuit of the quarterback doesn't figure to be as fruitful as it was against New England's Tom Brady in the AFC championship game.

It all adds up to Cam and Company spoiling another Super Bowl for the Broncos, leaving Manning to ponder if he wants to leave football after losing his final game.

**PANTHERS, 27-20**

2015 RECORD: Against spread: Week 1-1, Season (126-125-7). Straight up: Week 1-1, Season (162-104)

Best Bet: 8-10-1 against spread, 11-8 straight up.

Upset special: 9-9 against spread, 6-12 straight up.

# Prop bets rule the day for Super Bowl at Vegas sports books

By **TIM DAHLBERG**  
Associated Press

Jay Kornegay still finds it painful to talk about the last time the Denver Broncos were in the Super Bowl and the first snap of the game went over Peyton Manning's head for a Seattle safety.

For some reason, a lot of bettors at the Westgate Las Vegas SuperBook had put money on a 60-1 longshot that the first score of the games for the Seahawks would be that safety.

"It cost us a healthy six figures in the first six seconds of the game," Kornegay said. "Luckily we ended up making it up."

Such is the way with so-called "prop" bets, which

tantalize bettors with promises of big payoffs. Unlike point spreads and money lines they can vary wildly from sports book to sports book, and sometimes bookies can take a bath.

At the Westgate there are nearly 400 such bets on the board this year, with wagers available on everything from if Manning will throw a touchdown or interception first to whether Panthers receiver Ted Ginn Jr. has a rushing attempt.

Kornegay says at least half of what he expects could be a record-setting handle on the Super Bowl will be on the props, with the average fan betting four or five of them along with money on the traditional point spread.

Since casual fans like to bet on things to happen — the "yes" on many of the props — Kornegay and other bookies say a Super Bowl game without much action could be a big winner for them.

"In most cases the books need a boring Super Bowl, with limited scoring and limited crazy things like safeties and overtimes," he said. "I'm not saying I'm rooting for a 10-7 game, but if that happens we will do well."

Oddsbroker Jimmy Vaccaro is credited with helping start the trend toward prop bets, thanks to one big loss he took while running the MGM Grand sports book in 1985. It came when William "Refrigerator" Perry, the

bruising 325-pound lineman for the Bears who had rushed the ball a few times during the year, scored from the 1-yard-line in the third quarter of a blowout win over New England.

At 40-1 odds against Perry scoring, the book took a beating.

"We lost almost \$50,000, but it turned out to be the best money we ever spent," Vaccaro said. "Just the publicity was worth that much, and that was the catalyst to where we are now."

Vaccaro doesn't expect to lose that kind of money on any of the 270 props he has up at the South Point hotel-casino, a sports book not afraid of a little action. He is, however, getting a

lot of action on a prop on whether Manning will take the last snap of the game for the Broncos.

Bettors who think Manning won't finish the game for any number of reasons can get a 4-1 payoff if he doesn't.

"A lot of people will be rooting for an injury," Vaccaro said. "It's just a guess because who knows? But there are other reasons he might not be in the game, like being replaced by the backup if he is not effective."

Manning is a popular bet for a range of props, including whether his first touchdown pass will be at least 10 1/2 yards. Those who think he might scramble like he did on one play in the

conference final against New England can also get 12-1 for their money if he scores a touchdown himself.

At the South Point on Friday, bettors were lined up 5-6 deep as the betting started to heat up for the weekend. So far, most books have had far more money bet on the Carolina Panthers than the Broncos, who are a 5.5-point underdog.

Bettors also think Cam Newton will do well. At the William Hill chain, they've made Newton the odds on favorite to be named MVP of the big game.

Proving that bettors have memories, too, the second most favorite bet prop at William Hill is that there will be a safety in the game.

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