

NFL

Broncos linebacker corps won’t be at full strength Sunday

By ARNIE STAPLETON
Associated Press

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. — Inside linebacker Todd Davis says he’s optimistic he’ll play against New England this weekend after returning to practice Friday on a limited basis.

“I was encouraged by what I saw,” coach Gary Kubiak said. “We’ll see how he comes out of it in the morning and move him around again tomorrow. I think it’s kind of going exactly like we thought it was going to go leading up to game time. It was encouraging today.”

Davis was officially listed as 50-50 with a strained oblique that knocked him out of last week’s game at Tennessee. But he said, “I felt solid. I’m excited for Sunday and I think I’m going to be ready.”

Fellow inside linebacker Brandon Marshall said he hopes to play at Kansas City



New England Patriots
(11-2)



Denver Broncos
(8-5)

• **Sunday, 1:25 p.m.**

• **at Denver, Colorado**

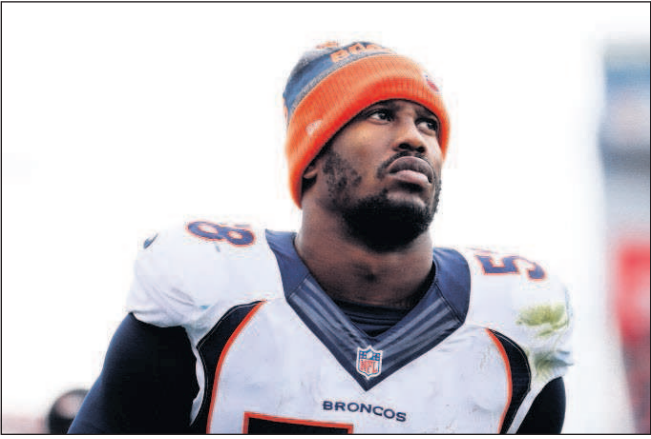
• **TV: CBS**

next week after being ruled out against the Patriots. This will be the second straight game he’s missed since aggravating a pulled left hamstring at Jacksonville on Dec. 4.

Corey Nelson will start in place of Marshall when the Broncos (8-5) host the Patriots (11-2) , and Zaire Anderson is prepared to play significant snaps even if Davis is a go.

“I’m preparing like I’m starting,” said Anderson, who drew praise for his five-tackle performance last week after Davis went out,

“He got thrown in there last week and we played our best half,” Kubiak said.



Only three teams in the AFC have double digit wins and Denver faces all of them to close out the season. Von Miller is asking the Broncos faithful for a little bit of, well, faith, saying, “let’s not sound the alarm yet.”

Still, given Denver’s strong pass rush and stout secondary, Tom Brady and the Patriots are expected to go after Denver’s inside linebackers by sending their tight ends and running backs on intermediate routes over the middle.

“They tried to test the linebackers last year, so I

Vontarius Dora from their practice squad.

“His injury just hasn’t responded,” said Kubiak, who had carried two long snappers on his 53-man roster since Nov. 25 when nine-year veteran free agent Thomas Gafford was signed.

“Congratulations to Dora. The kid has done a great job, so he gets rewarded. I think there’s a place for him. You may see him before this year is out. He’s got a bright future.”

Dora (6-4, 256 pounds) had a spectacular training camp after going undrafted out of Louisiana Tech. He had 10 tackles, eight of them solo, two sacks and a forced fumble for Denver in the preseason.

Offensive coordinator Rick Dennison missed practice all week because of a family matter but Kubiak said that won’t affect the play-calling Sunday. Kubiak and QB coach Greg Knapp were still in touch with

Dennison throughout the week as they installed the game plan.

“We’ve met every night even though he’s not here,” Kubiak said.

The Broncos have been a slow-starting team, scoring just 23 first-quarter points compared to New England’s league-best 103.

The Broncos know they have to buck that trend Sunday.

“It’s important all of the time,” Kubiak said. “We know we’ve struggled. When we have started well, we’ve played pretty well. When you look at this team, you’re playing a team that since Tom has come back, they’re the top scoring team in football and yet, they don’t give up points. Points and possessions are a premium. Red zone possessions are a premium. If you go back to our two games last year, we played some great red zone defense. Offensively, we did a good job in the red zone.”

MLB

Record 6 teams forced to pay luxury tax

By RONALD BLUM
Associated Press

NEW YORK — A record six teams are paying baseball’s luxury tax this season, led by the Los Angeles Dodgers at \$31.8 million and the New York Yankees at \$27.4 million.

Boston (\$4.5 million), Detroit (\$4 million), San Francisco (\$3.4 million) and the World Series champion Chicago Cubs (\$2.96 million) also were sent bills Friday by the commissioner’s office, according to information obtained by The Associated Press.

The Yankees are paying for the 14th straight year since the tax began, raising their total to \$325 million. New York has said it hopes to get below the threshold by 2018.

Los Angeles owes for the fourth consecutive year and like New York pays at a 50 percent rate on the amount above the \$189 million threshold. The Dodgers paid a record \$43 million for 2015, and their four-year total is \$113 million.

Boston and San Francisco

pay at a 30 percent rate as offenders for the second straight year, and Detroit and the Cubs — a first-time payer — are at 17.5 percent.

The number of teams over the threshold topped last year’s mark of four. This year’s total tax was \$74 million.

Major League Baseball negotiated the luxury tax in an effort to slow spending by large-market clubs and combined with revenue sharing has helped increase the competitive of small-market teams and those in the middle.

The threshold increases to \$195 million next year under the new labor contract, and tax rates go up, too. There will be additional surtaxes, raising the rate to as much as 95 percent for the amount above \$235 million, with the increase to be phased in for 2017 at the midpoint between the old and new rules.

Los Angeles lowered its payroll from a record \$291 million last year to just under \$255 million, which topped the major leagues for the third straight year. For purposes of the tax, which

uses average annual values and includes benefits, the Dodgers’ payroll was nearly \$253 million.

Luxury tax payrolls figure to increase slightly across the major leagues next year because of a provision in the labor contract calling for the inclusion of salaries of players sent outright to the minors starting this Dec. 1.

The Yankees’ regular payroll was second at \$224.5 million, up slightly from last year’s \$223.6 million, followed by Boston (\$200.6 million), Detroit (\$199 million), the Cubs (\$182 million), San Francisco (\$181 million) and the Los Angeles Angels (\$173 million).

Milwaukee had the lowest payroll at \$65.5 million, down from \$98 million last year. Tampa Bay was at \$67 million, down from \$77 million.

Spending on 40-man major league payrolls totaled nearly \$4.1 billion, an increase of \$200 million.

Luxury tax payrolls are based on the average annual values of contracts and earned 2016 bonuses, and

regular payrolls include 2016 salaries, earned bonuses and prorated shares of signing bonuses.

Luxury tax checks to the commissioner’s office are due by Jan. 21. Tax money is used to fund player benefits and MLB’s Industry Growth Fund. Starting next year, part of the money also will be used to fund player Individual Retirement Accounts and part will be given to teams not over the tax threshold.

Teams pay on the amount they are over the tax threshold. The tax rate starts at 17.5 percent for first-time offenders, then climbs to 30 percent, 40 percent and 50 percent in subsequent years, resetting when a club drops below the threshold for a season.

Starting next year, the tax rates will be 20 percent, 30 percent and 50 percent, with a 12 percent surtax on the amount \$20 million to \$40 million above the threshold. There will be an additional surtax of 42.5 percent on the amount more than \$40 million over for first-time offenders and 45 percent for subsequent offenders.

College Football

Dynasty ends for North Dakota State

Bison’s title streak over at five

Associated Press

FARGO, N.D. — Khalid Abdullah had 180 yards rushing, added 51 yards receiving and a touchdown and James Madison snapped North Dakota State’s 22-game postseason win streak with a 27-17 upset in the FCS semifinals Saturday night.

James Madison (13-1) will play in the FCS National Championship on Jan. 7 in Frisco, Texas.

After NDSU defensive end Brad Ambrosius was called offside on a fourth-and-19, the Dukes took a 20-17 lead on a 45-yard field goal from Tyler Gray with 11:46 to go.

A 25-yard touchdown pass from Bryan Schor to John Miller with 6:59 left made it 27-17.

James Madison outgained the Bison

FCS Semifinals



JMU

27



ND State

17

301-164 total yards in the first half. Abdullah had 175 of those yards and his 10-yard touchdown reception gave JMU a 17-0 lead midway through the second quarter. Schor threw for 242 yards and three touchdowns.

The Bison were held to a season-low 132 yards rushing. Easton Stick was 19-of-38 passing for 216 yards with an interception.

THE TAKEAWAY

NORTH DAKOTA STATE: The Bison suffered their first post-season defeat since 2010, when they lost to Eastern Washington 38-31 in overtime.

JAMES MADISON: The Dukes are making their first national championship appearance since 2004, when they beat Montana 31-21.

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