

NFL Football: NFL Game Summary - Denver at Baltimore

Article from: Sports Network

Article date: October 1, 2002

Final Score: Baltimore 34, Denver 23

Chris McAlister returned a missed field goal 108 yards for the longest play in NFL history, as the Baltimore Ravens earned their first win of the season by stunning the Denver Broncos, 34-23. Todd Heap had five catches for 84 yards and two touchdowns for the Ravens (1-2), who had scored just seven points combined in their first two games of the season.

With one second left in the first half, Denver's Jason Elam set up for a 57-yard field goal. The kick went wide left and fell way short, allowing McAlister to catch the ball deep in the end zone. With Denver off guard, McAlister ran the missed field goal all the way back for the touchdown, ending the half with Baltimore ahead 31-3. "That's the way we practice it," McAlister said. "I watched and hung in the end zone and let my guys set up the wall. All I saw was purple jerseys and green until I hit the end zone."

Previously, the longest play in NFL history was a 106-yard kickoff return that was done three times, the last by Roy Green of the St. Louis Cardinals against Dallas on October 21, 1979. Al Carmichael also did it for Green Bay versus the Rams on October 23, 1956, and Noland Smith accomplished the feat for Kansas City on December 17, 1967, against Denver.

"Gary Zauner does a hell of a job with our special teams," Ravens head coach Brian Billick said referring to McAlister's return. "That's something that you spend time with and it very rarely comes up, but it is orchestrated. Gary deserves a lot of credit for putting those guys in the mind frame to change gears (for a return after the miss)." Brian Griese completed 35-of-53 passes for 328 yards with a touchdown and three interceptions for the Broncos (3-1), who outscored the Ravens 20-3 in the second half, but still suffered their first defeat of season. Griese, who started despite an injured ankle, also ran for a score.

The Ravens trailed by three points after the opening 15 minutes, but set a new team record for points in a quarter with 31 unanswered points in the second frame. Chris Redman threw for 152 yards and two touchdowns on 13-of-24 passing with no interceptions for the Ravens, while Jamal Lewis ran 25 times for 78 yards and a score. Late in the first quarter, the Ravens got the ball at the Denver 46 following a 15-yard punt return by McAlister. Redman then culminated the march with a play-action pass to Heap for a 23-yard score, giving Baltimore a 7-3 edge early in the second.

The Ravens again gained great field position after Ed Reed blocked a Tom Rouen punt. Baltimore started with the ball at the Denver 13 and four plays later Lewis ran for a two-yard TD to extend the lead to 14-3 with 10:25 left in the half. Baltimore increased its advantage to 17-3 with 1:57 left in the half on a 23-yard field goal by Matt Stover. The drive was aided by five Denver penalties that accounted for 51 yards. After being hit with a pass interference penalty, Deltha O'Neal bumped an official in protest of the call and was subsequently thrown out of the game while being flagged for unsportsmanlike conduct.

On the Broncos' ensuing possession, Ray Lewis intercepted a Griese pass and returned it to the Denver 36. Redman followed by throwing a 33-yard pass to Heap, who made an acrobatic catch. The two connected again three plays later, as Redman found Heap for a three-yard TD pass that pushed the Baltimore lead to 24-3 with 18 seconds to go in the half. Robert Tate returned the second half's opening kickoff 64 yards before being tackled by Elam at the Denver 33, which led to a 41-yard field goal from Stover that padded Baltimore's cushion to 34-3. "I knew Brian would have those guys ready to play. They were ready to play tonight," said Broncos tight end Shannon Sharpe, who had nine receptions for 75 yards in his return to Baltimore.

Denver then ran off 20 straight points to make things interesting. The Broncos cut the lead to 34-10 on their next drive, as Reuben Droughns ran the ball in from one yard out with 8:44 remaining in the third. Denver then trimmed the deficit to 34-16 with 1:24 left in the third on a two- yard TD pass from Griese to Patrick Hape. However, the two-point conversion attempt failed. With 4:42 remaining in the fourth, a one-yard TD plunge by Griese pulled the Broncos within 11 at 34-23. The Broncos mounted another threatening drive that advanced the ball to the Baltimore 26. On a 4th-and-1 with 1:53 to play, the Broncos elected to go for the field goal, but Elam missed a 44-yard attempt, sealing the win for the Ravens. Elam kicked a 39-yard field goal with 5:45 left in the first quarter to put the Broncos ahead 3-0.

Game Notes: McAlister's return was the longest of a missed field goal in league history. The previous mark was 104 yards by Aaron Glenn of the New York Jets against Indianapolis on November 15, 1998...The Ravens' previous record for points in a quarter was 24, which they did against New England in 1996 and Cleveland in 2000...Denver's Ed McCaffrey had eight catches for 90 yards...Baltimore now leads the all-time series, 2-1.