

## BRONCOS



**Brandon Marshall**, center, kept busy during his one-game suspension, including visiting the Rev. Leon Kelly's Open Door Youth Gang Alternative program last week. Marshall says he's in great shape physically and mentally and ready to help the Broncos, starting Sunday when they face the San Diego Chargers. San Diego drubbed Denver in its two meetings last season.

DARIN MCGREGOR/ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS

# Marshall back at right time

Receiver could help avenge past two Chargers routs

By Lee Rasizer  
ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS

ENGLEWOOD — While the New England Patriots and San Diego Chargers said goodbye to a couple of their biggest stars, the Broncos were reintroduced to one of theirs.

Receiver Brandon Marshall wore his trademark headband, a Barack Obama T-shirt bearing what might actually have been a life-sized portrait and a wide grin as he returned to Dove Valley on Wednesday off a one-game, league-mandated suspension.

"It went by pretty fast," Marshall said of his absence, the result of violating the NFL's code of conduct. "I did my best to stay in shape mentally and physically."

Marshall noted he spoke frequently with quarterback Jay Cutler to keep up with the playbook and the happenings around the team. He did some charity work. And he stayed sharp by training in Golden at Next Level Sports Performance with Jim Keller, who previously worked

10 years as a Broncos assistant athletic trainer.

Marshall also watched some TV — specifically, the Broncos' 41-14 road victory against the Oakland Raiders on Monday night without him.

"I was a true fan," he said. "I was throwing things."

Now, he's back to catching. And despite the Broncos' scoring barrage in the opener, which included 441 yards and a breakout performance by rookie receiver Eddie Royal, Marshall's a welcome addition.

"We got by without him. Eddie had a great game. We kind of attacked one guy, so we didn't have to have 'B' out there," Cutler said, alluding to Raiders cornerback DeAngelo Hall, who covered Royal. "But this game, we're going to need him, definitely."

The Broncos scored only six points last season in two blowout losses against San Diego, even with Marshall available during his 102-catch, 1,325-yard receiving season.

Having Marshall back at least puts the Broncos in a better position than the Patriots, who must adjust to life without quarterback Tom Brady, and the Chargers, who must move on without Pro Bowl linebacker Shawne Merriman. Both players are gone for the season.

Marshall has 15 games, if healthy, to recover from his self-inflicted setback, which he insists is behind him.

"Hopefully, he'll be playing at the same level that he was playing in the preseason," Broncos coach Mike Shanahan said.

Marshall made 10 catches for 139 yards and two touchdowns in nine quarters with the starting offense in August.

But he demonstrated daily during training camp he might be ready to improve on his 2007 start with his ability to get deep and fight through press coverage.

"Every guy that's a playmaker, every explosive player you can put on the field, is to your advantage," Chargers coach Norv Turner said of Marshall's return. "And with Royal coming out and playing the way he did the other night, it just gives you another guy you've got to contend with."

Watching at home, Marshall was ecstatic about Royal's performance, which he said makes the Broncos offense "dangerous."

"The good thing about it is we've got an O-line that's strong and a running game that's successful and a bunch of tight ends that can go the distance," Marshall said.

"Now, teams can't roll coverage to my side or double me. And if they go Cover-2 (splitting two safeties deep), we're just going to pound the ball. So I'm excited to have him. But I've been saying that from the first time I've seen him. He's a great talent."

Marshall's no slouch himself.

He led the league in yards after contact last year with 319. He had 37 receptions in the final month of the season. And his 102 catches overall were the second most in Broncos history for a season, trailing only Rod Smith's 113 in 2001.

Marshall already has promised record-breaking numbers, even while missing one game.

"I'm just excited about this year," he said. "And there's a lot of excitement to come."

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### Marshall's back

■ To see a video from the Brandon Marshall's news conference, go to RockyMountainNews.com/extras. Also, see a video looking ahead at the Broncos' game with San Diego.