

Do the math: Denver needs a 4-0 finish

DENVER (AP) — The Denver Broncos understand that they have to win their last four games or kiss the postseason goodbye.

At 6-6, the Broncos need to finish 10-6 to extend their season.

Last week, coach Mike Shanahan explained to the players that they had to win four of their last five to finish at 10-6. Following a 21-10 loss to Miami on Sunday, the Broncos are down to their last chance.

“To the guys without a math background, I had to point that out to them,” Shanahan said in a rare joking mood on Monday. “For the guys with a math

background, I think it was pretty elementary. We know what we have to do. I think we all know our backs are against the wall.”

But Shanahan insisted his team shouldn’t look too far ahead.

“The only thing we have to worry about is Seattle (Denver’s next opponent),” Shanahan said. “We can’t worry about anybody else. Thinking of anything other than that would be a mistake. If we take care of business on Sunday, then we’ve got a chance to look forward to the next week.”

The Broncos carried a 10-0 lead into the fourth quarter on Sunday.

Miami mounted its only scoring march to make it 10-7 with 13:45 left. On Denver’s next series, Brian Griese tried to get rid of the ball on a blitz, and the errant pass bounced off defensive end Kenny Mixon’s left thigh and into his arms. He ran 56 yards for a touchdown.

On the ensuing kickoff, Chris Cole fumbled, and Miami recovered at the 7. Two plays later, the Dolphins scored again.

“One play changed everything,” Griese said. “It was my fault. I was trying to get rid of the ball and not take a sack. If I take a sack, we probably win.”

The Broncos lost despite a season-best defensive effort that held Miami to 218 total yards.

“We did some things against Miami that nobody has done this year except for maybe St. Louis,” Shanahan said. “But we made mistakes, and it wound up costing us the game.

“Any time you give up only 12 first downs and 218 yards of total offense, you’re doing some good things on the defensive side of the ball. On offense, we controlled the line of scrimmage. We controlled the tempo of the game. We were ahead 10-zip at the end of the third quarter, but you’ve got to be able

to finish the game, and we didn’t finish it. They did. Obviously, we’re disappointed.”

The Broncos, at least, came out of the Miami game in relatively good health.

Backup linebacker Lee Woodall has a strained left hamstring and is questionable for Sunday night’s home game against Seattle.

Wide receiver Rod Smith, who missed the Miami game with a sprained left ankle, also looks to be questionable. Tests on Smith’s ankle were negative, and Shanahan said Smith will try to practice on Wednesday.

Another receiver, Keith Poole, might miss his second straight game because of bruised ribs.

Defensive end Bert Berry remains questionable with a shoulder separation, and offensive guard Lennie Friedman continues to be hobbled by a sprained knee.

Offensive tackle Trey Teague (bruised leg, strained hamstring), safety Eric Brown (lacerated finger), tight end Desmond Clark (strained groin) and linebacker Keith Burns (bruised calf, Achilles’ tendinitis) all are expected to be available this week.

Avalanche extend streak

DENVER (AP) — The Colorado Avalanche finally seem primed for a challenge.

Colorado extended its unbeaten streak to five games Monday night with a 4-2 victory over the Ottawa Senators.

Now, the Avalanche, 4-0-1 in their last five, are eagerly awaiting Wednesday night’s showdown with the league-leading Red Wings in Detroit.

“It’s always fun to play against them,” Colorado captain Joe Sakic said. “We are up for the challenge. They have been unbelievable this year. We’re starting to get into a little bit of a groove, so we’re looking forward to it.”

Sakic had four assists and Adam Foote added three as the Avalanche posted their fifth straight home victory.

In other NHL games, Chicago edged Montreal 3-2, and Calgary beat Los

Angeles 2-0.

The Stanley Cup champion Avalanche, after a shaky start to the season, have climbed into third place in the Northwest Division with 30 points. Division-leading Edmonton has 36 points.

Colorado got second-period goals from Greg de Vries and rookie Radim Vrbata to break a 2-2 tie.

Backup goalie David Aebischer, making his seventh start, had 32 saves. Ottawa’s Patrick Lalime made 21.

Aebischer faced 19 shots in the first period — the most by the Senators in a period this season — but allowed only two goals.

“It didn’t look good for us early on,” Sakic said, “but David made some huge saves, and we had a pretty good second and third period. We got more confidence after we tied the game 2-2. We had no business being in the game after the first period, except that David kept us in there and gave us a chance to win.”

Cats will play in Insight.com Bowl

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP)—Kansas State, keeping its string of bowl appearances alive, accepted a bid Monday to play Syracuse in the Insight.Com Bowl.

The game will be played Dec. 29 in Phoenix, scene of the Wildcats’ victory over Syracuse in the 1997 Fiesta Bowl.

Kansas State (6-5) fell out of consideration for a major bowl when it lost four games in a row in the middle of the season. But the Wildcats will also be motivated by keeping their string

of winning seasons alive at nine straight.

“We’re still in a position to play for a winning season or not a winning season,” said Kansas State coach Bill Snyder.

“We’re either going to be a 7-5 or a 6-6 team. There’s not a player in our program who has ever experienced a season when they won less than 11 games. There are some things they’d like to hang onto.”

No. 18 Syracuse, coached by Paul

Pasqualoni, was 9-3 in the regular season.

The Wildcats beat the Orangeman and quarterback Donovan McNabb 35-18 in the 1997 Fiesta Bowl. Kansas State’s first bowl under Snyder was the Copper Bowl in 1993, which eventually became the Insight.Com bowl.

The victory in the Fiesta Bowl was Kansas State’s first in a major postseason game and went a long way toward establishing the Wildcats as a big-time program.

Kennison retirement cut short

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP)—Wide receiver Eddie Kennison has signed a two-year contract with the Kansas City Chiefs, the team announced Monday.

Kennison, a six-year veteran, played eight games with the Denver Broncos this season, catching 15 passes for 169 yards and one touchdown.

The Broncos released Kennison in November after he told coach Mike Shanahan he had lost his love for the game and was retiring. Kennison made the announcement just 16 hours before a game, forcing coaches and backup receivers to make quick adjustments.

A few days later, Kennison said he changed his mind. He said illnesses suffered by his wife and father and disappointment over his lack of productivity on the field had led to his original statement.

Bufs keep Texas from Rose Bowl

IRVING, Texas (AP)—Just call the Colorado Buffaloes the Rose Bowl elimination squad. One week after erasing Nebraska’s road to the national title game, they knocked Texas out of the way, too.

Chris Brown ran for three touchdowns as the No. 9 Buffs turned Texas quarterback Chris Simms’ four first-half turnovers into 26 points, then held off a rally to beat the No. 3 Longhorns 39-37 Saturday night for their first Big 12 championship.

Colorado (10-2) fulfilled the vision coach Gary Barnett had for the Buffs this summer when no one else expected much from them after a 3-8 season.

Their stunning turnaround will continue in a Bowl Championship Series game, likely the Fiesta Bowl. Representatives from the bowl were in the locker room right after the win.

“When we left the hotel today, I told them we are a team of destiny,” Barnett said. “No one is playing with more heart right now. Whoever we play next, they’re going to face one heck of a football team.”

Simms’ meltdown prevented Texas (10-2) from its own storybook season.

Texas knew before kickoff that if it won, it would be in position to move up to No. 2 in the second-to-last BCS standings because Florida lost to Tennessee.

Instead, the Longhorns are likely headed to the Holiday Bowl for the second straight year, this time against No. 19 Washington.

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