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## Broncos' Bannan content in the shadows

By **Lindsay H. Jones**  
The Denver Post

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When Justin Bannan finished his senior season at the University of Colorado in 2001, he took the Regiment Award home with him from the team banquet.

That's the honor Buffaloes coaches gave to the player the team believed made the greatest contribution but received the least amount of recognition for doing so.

Sounds perfect for a defensive lineman. And perfect for Bannan, a nine-year NFL veteran defensive end who was the first unrestricted free agent to sign with the Broncos this season.

"If they play (the defense) correctly, their stats aren't going to be huge, and people need to realize that," Bannan said. "It's one of those things where you're creating a wall and just plugging everything up so the 'backers can roam and run and make plays. If the play comes to you, you need to make it, but the most important

thing is just doing your job and taking care of your gap."

Still, it has been hard not to notice Bannan through the Broncos' preseason. Just watch when the defensive starters play the next time, Sept. 12 in the season opener at Jacksonville, and Bannan will hardly ever leave the field.

He's the left defensive end in the base defense, he slides to his right to play tackle in the "nickel" formation when the team brings in an extra defensive back, and he remains in the game as the biggest defensive body on the field when the Broncos go to their "dime" defense with six players in the secondary.

In the same game, and even on the same defensive series, it means Bannan could find himself matching up against anyone from an offensive tackle to the center.

"It is kind of what I envisioned," Bannan said. "It has been a tough, hard camp for me, but it is always going to be a challenge when you come into a place new, with new teammates and everything. I feel very good, I love the guys I'm with, love this team. It has been a good experience — tough, but that's what it's all about."

In August, that much work is exhausting in training camp. But from September through December, being able to move up and down the line makes Bannan irreplaceable. The Broncos will likely carry only seven defensive linemen on

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the 53-man roster, and not all of those will make the active game-day roster of 45 players.

"Versatility is definitely something that gives Justin added value," coach Josh McDaniels said. "He's a smart player, a tough player. Really anything you give him to do, he really focuses on doing his job and he does it really well."

The Broncos liked Bannan's body of work from his previous four seasons in Baltimore — where he was a starter in 2008 and a rotational player in 2009 — enough to bring Bannan to Dove Valley as soon as the free agency period opened. Bannan never left. The Broncos are hoping Bannan will bring to Denver the toughness and attitude that has typified Ravens defenses over the past several years.

Bannan, who also played four years with Buffalo, has 5 1/2 career sacks and has played in five postseason games.

"I'm really happy we brought him in. He's added another physical dimension, along with Jamal (Williams), along with Ryan (McBean), in that first group," defensive line coach Wayne Nunnely said. "I think we've got as physical a group as I've had in the years I've been in the league."

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**Justin Bannan**

**Position:** Defensive end

**Height, weight:** 6-feet-3, 310 pounds

**NFL experience:** Ninth season. With Buffalo from 2002-05, with Baltimore from 2006-09.

**2010 projection:** CU product will be a starter at left end, but he also will play tackle in some defensive alignments.

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