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Broncos release tight-end Graham

By Mike Klis*The Denver Post*

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Daniel Graham proved it's possible to go home again.

A life-changing perspective, though, was attained after he recently traveled about 7,000 miles away from home.

Sure, Graham was disappointed to learn Wednesday he had been released by his hometown Broncos in lieu of a \$1 million roster bonus that would have been due tonight.

But a recent goodwill tour with U.S. Army troops in Iraq stripped away what little self-pity Graham may have felt.

"Hey, it's a business," Graham said. "There's a lot worse things going on."

Graham is not at war. He just visited it during Super Bowl week. Graham had accomplished a rare football achievement by starring at all three

local levels — Thomas Jefferson High

School, the University of Colorado and the NFL Broncos.

The New England Patriots selected Graham in the first round of 2002 draft. He was the Patriots' starting tight end when they won Super Bowls after the 2003 and 2004 seasons.

A free agent after the 2006 season, Graham, now 32, signed a five-year, \$30 million contract with the Broncos, for whom his father, Tom, had once played. Graham made it through four of those five seasons, collecting roughly \$24.8 million. Besides the \$1 million roster bonus, Graham was scheduled to make a \$4.2 million salary in 2011.

He will likely catch on with another team at a reduced rate. Graham's departure means the Broncos will be searching for not one but two new tight ends during the offseason. Graham was primarily considered a blocking tight end, but the team got little receiving production out of that position after Tony Scheffler was traded last year to Detroit.

Besides releasing Graham, the Broncos also extended second-round tenders to restricted free-agent kicker Matt Prater and linebacker/special teams captain Wesley Woodyard. The "second round" designation means that while Prater and Woodyard can sign with another team, that team would have to compensate the

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Broncos with a second-round draft pick.

Blog: All Things Broncos



The Denver Post's NFL reporters post analysis, notes and minutiae on this blog devoted to the Denver Broncos.

players. The Broncos had been trying to negotiate a contract extension with Vickerson and Thomas.

Teams do not give up second-round draft picks in exchange for kickers or backup linebackers.

Restricted free agency comes with a nice pay raise. The second-round tender means Prater and Woodyard will each draw \$1.835 million salaries in 2011. Each played last season on the three-year minimum salary of \$550,000.

The Broncos also extended what figures to be meaningless, \$1.2 million, restricted free-agent tenders to right tackle Ryan Harris, defensive end Kevin Vickerson and defensive tackle Marcus Thomas.

The players' union considers the tenders to Harris, Vickerson and Thomas to be pointless because those three players will become unrestricted free agents with a new collective bargaining agreement. Still, it shows the Broncos are interested in retaining the rights to those

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[Home](#) > Broncos cut tight end Graham

Broncos cut tight end Graham

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The Denver Broncos released nine-year veteran tight end Daniel Graham on Wednesday and made qualifying offers to five restricted free agents, including right tackle Ryan Harris and kicker Matt Prater.

John Elway, the team's chief football executive, praised Graham for his character, the leadership and play he brought the Broncos for four seasons.

"We're thankful for everything Daniel Graham did for the Broncos and the Denver community. Tough to let him go. We wish him the best," Elway tweeted.

Graham grew up in Denver, where his father, Tom, played linebacker for the Broncos from 1972-74. He was a 2002 first-round draft pick of the New England Patriots after a standout career at Colorado and joined the Broncos in 2007.

Graham's play slipped last season, when he had 18 catches for 148 yards but dropped a number of passes.

Elway also announced on his Twitter feed the qualifying offers the club made Wednesday to Harris, Prater, linebacker and co-captain Wesley Woodyard and defensive linemen Kevin Vickerson and Marcus Thomas.

Three of them missed significant time with injuries last year.

Harris suffered a high ankle sprain in the preseason finale and missed much of the first half of the season before starting the final eight games. The Broncos improved a league-best 1.8 yards a carry after he was reinserted into the lineup in Week 10.

He also protected southpaw Tim Tebow's blindside when the rookie quarterback started the final three games of the season.

Prater made 16 of 18 field goals and scored 76 points before missing the final month with a groin injury, and Woodyard dealt with leg injuries much of last season.

Thomas had 36 tackles last year and joined Rubin Carter (1975-77) as the only interior linemen in Broncos history to start every game during his first three seasons. Vickerson joined the team as a free agent after his release by Seattle and started 12 games, collecting 52 tackles and two sacks.

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**ESPN.com:** AFC West[\[Print without images\]](#)

Wednesday, March 2, 2011

Broncos feel need for change at tight end

By Bill Williamson
ESPN.com

It was not a shock that the [Denver Broncos](#) have released tight end [Daniel Graham](#).

Graham -- a Denver native son of former Bronco Tom Graham -- was given a big-money contract by former coach Mike Shanahan in 2007.

Graham, 32, has seen his production dwindle. He was signed primarily to be a blocker in the running game. But his age and contract had forced Denver to move on. He had 18 catches in 16 starts in 2010 for 148 yards. He had 102 catches for Denver in four seasons.

"Our organization is extremely grateful for the character, leadership and high level of play that Daniel Graham brought to the Broncos during his four seasons with this team," Broncos Executive Vice President of Football Operations John Elway said in a statement released by the team. "Beginning at Thomas Jefferson High School and throughout his time at the University of Colorado and as a Broncos team captain, Daniel always has been embraced and respected by everyone in Denver ... We are thankful to Daniel for all of his dedication to the Broncos and this community, and we wish him all the best."

Denver will likely look for both a blocking and receiving tight end in the draft and free agency. One possibility could be Carolina's [Jeff King](#). He is a good blocker who new Denver coach John Fox liked while he coached the Panthers.

I don't think Graham will be a high priority on the open market, but possible suitors could include both Kansas City and San Diego. Graham played for Kansas City general manager Scott Pioli and the Chiefs would use a veteran blocking tight end. San Diego could also be interested in adding a blocking tight end.
