

# JACK DOLBIN:

## Not one of the Anonymous People

By Harold Aurand Jr.

When Jack Dolbin was born on November 12, 1948 just about everyone who knew his family knew he'd be fast. His father and grandfather had both been captains of the Penn State track team. His grandfather had even once been co-holder of the world record in the hundred yard dash. What was unexpected was that Jack would be able to use his family's gift for speed to earn himself a successful career in the National Football League. After several false starts, though, Jack Dolbin became a popular player for the Denver Broncos, and the team's leading receiver in Super Bowl XII.

Jack Dolbin first tasted gridiron success at his hometown high school in Pottsville, Pennsylvania. As a star running back he was selected to play in the Big 33 Game, and went to Wake Forest on an athletic scholarship. Dolbin continued to play running back for the Demon Deacons. While he had a solid career, he wasn't chosen in the NFL draft. Instead he spent 1971 with the semi-pro Pottstown Firebirds. When the NFL still didn't come calling, Dolbin decided to get on with his life. He moved to Lombard, Illinois and began taking classes at the National College of Chiropractic. His football career was seemingly over.

In 1974, while still a chiropractic student, Jack Dolbin heard the new World Football League was putting a franchise in nearby Chicago. Although he hadn't played in three years, Jack decided to try out. He won a position as one of the Chicago Fire's starting wide receivers. In his rookie year he caught 54 passes for 942 yards and 7 touchdowns. Dolbin also caught the eye of Denver Bronco scout Jack Worth. The next year, while the World League crashed and burned, Dolbin was suiting up as a starting receiver for the Denver Broncos.

The Bronco team Dolbin joined had a long and frustrating history. Although they were charter members of the AFL, Denver had never been to the playoffs. Because they were in the Rocky Mountain Time Zone, they received little national media attention. During Dolbin's career, that began to change. After a losing season in 1975, the Broncos went 9-5 in 1976. Head coaches John Ralston and Red Miller slowly assembled the pieces of a successful football team. Lyle Alzado, Tom Jackson, and Randy Gradishar spearheaded what became known as the "Orange Crush" defense. In 1977, Red Miller brought in quarterback Craig Morton, and installed a precision offense. Dolbin, Haven Moses and tight end Riley Odoms became the main receivers in a solid passing attack.

With Morton at the controls Denver got off to a good start in 1977, winning their first five games. Week six was an away game in Oakland. Dolbin thought it was the turning point in the season. The Broncos won 30-6, taking over sole possession of first place in the AFC West. Dolbin later said: "That's when things started happening. Everybody started taking note of us. Writers from the East Coast started coming to our games in Denver. Even Brent Musberger and Howard Cosell started talking about the Broncos. To give you an idea of how the rest of the football world viewed the Broncos we didn't have one Monday Night game that year, and we didn't have one player on that team that was in the Pro Bowl the year before. It was a team of anonymous people."

The Broncos continued to roll over opponents. They finished 1977 with a 12-2 record, and won the AFC West. Red Miller's precision offense only committed eight turnovers the entire season, and, according to Dolbin, the receivers only dropped one pass. 1977 was also Dolbin's best personal season with the Broncos. He caught 26 passes for 443 yards and three touchdowns.

In the playoffs Denver beat Pittsburgh 34-21, then Oakland 20-17 to earn a spot in Super Bowl XII. They were the first two playoff games in Denver's history. Dolbin caught a 34 yard touchdown pass from Craig Morton to clinch the win over the Steelers.

Denver's lack of playoff experience hurt them in the Super Bowl. Dolbin and many of the other players complained of being overwhelmed by media attention and off the field demands. For players used to

Rocky Mountain isolation, it was a big change. The Broncos' opponent, the Dallas Cowboys, had no such problems. They were used to being the center of attention. From the opening snap Dallas' flex defense began to overwhelm the Bronco offensive line and quarterback Craig Morton. Denver's precision attack, which had only made eight turnovers the entire regular season, had seven in the first half alone. The Broncos finished the game with only 35 net yards passing. Dolbin was the team's leading receiver, with two catches for 24 yards, but it was a hollow achievement in a 27-10 loss.

Denver rebounded in 1978, winning their second consecutive AFC Western Division title. They were eliminated in the first round of the playoffs by Pittsburgh. Jack Dolbin didn't know it, but that was going to be his last full season with the Broncos. A knee injury suffered during the early part of 1979 ended his career. Overall, Dolbin caught 94 passes for 1576 yards and 7 touchdowns for the Broncos. While the numbers appear modest, he had been consistent, taking the field for 67 consecutive games. His last entry in the Denver media guide described him as someone who "combines durability and toughness with exceptional speed, and has become one of Denver's most popular performers." More importantly, Dolbin had helped turn the Broncos into a winner. From a team which had never been to the playoffs they became a postseason regular, and the transformation started with him at wide receiver.

Today Jack Dolbin lives in his native Pottsville. He is a respected chiropractor and member of the Pottsville Area School Board. His son, Josh, played wide receiver at Villanova, but didn't stick with the Philadelphia Eagles after a free agent tryout.