

Captain Crunch: How Von Miller earned the 'C' on his chest

Von Miller's personal goal for the 2017 season had nothing to do with counting sacks or league awards.



On the Friday before the 2017 Pro Bowl, AFC team officials walked through the locker room taking votes for game captains.

[Von Miller](#) overheard a vote for him. And then he heard another. And another. They just kept coming.

Miller, then wrapping up the sixth year of his NFL career, had not yet been a captain of his own team but was about to be selected by the AFC's elite as a captain of the conference's Pro Bowl team.

He was blindsided by the selection. He hadn't gone into that week hoping to be named a captain. He hadn't changed up anything he did. He was the same Von he'd always been.



Two days later, he walked out to the NFL logo at midfield with Philip Rivers, Joe Thomas and Eric Weddle to meet NFC captains Drew Brees, Thomas Davis, Doug Baldwin and Bobby Wagner for the coin toss.

"Especially to be with that group of guys," Miller says, "I was blown away by that moment."

But the Super Bowl 50 MVP wants to be more than just a leader for a Pro Bowl team. He wants that role on his own team.

"To go to the Pro Bowl and be around all these guys for four days and have them vote me captain is crazy," Miller says. "I would like to have that same type of impact on my teammates that I play with every single day."

This is a title he really wants, but it's not something he wants to be handed. He wants to earn it and do it the right way.

"I would love it," he adds, "... but I'm not about to lobby for it."

He didn't have to. His teammates selected Miller as a team captain on Wednesday, five days before the season opener.



If anyone would have lobbied for Miller, it would have been rookie tackle [Garett Bolles](#)👤.

Every step of the offseason and training camp, Miller was there for Bolles, either via text or FaceTime calls or in person at UCHealth Training Center. And when they were together during offseason practices, Miller pulled the rookie aside to work one-on-one.

"We worked hands, we worked stance," Bolles says. "He taught me, watched my film, told me what I need to do to get better. And then after we broke for the summer to get ready for training camp, he FaceTimed me again and was excited for the season, excited to see how I was continuing to get better."

The tutelage paid off: Bolles earned the starting left tackle job heading into the regular season. And by facing up against arguably the NFL's best pass rusher almost every day, Bolles has confidence that matches his first-round pedigree.

"He beats me and I beat him, and that's how it's always going to be," Bolles says. "Some days he's going to get me more than I get him, but you learn from those and then he'll come to you and say, 'Your hands are low,' or 'You turned your shoulders. Your hips aren't square.'

"And that just helps remind me to worry about the little things, because he tells me every single day, 'You're going to be someone special if you just continue to work on the little things and continue to get better on all aspects

of the game. And you just take one day at a time.' And I appreciate everything that he says."



Just like everything Miller does, his leadership style is unconventional. But that doesn't mean it's forced.

"It should be organic. It should be natural," Miller says. "I don't think it should take effort, because if it takes any effort then eventually you'll get tired of it. I think it should just be natural. It should just be a role that you're built for."

Miller can't really nail down exactly what it means to be a leader, but he doesn't think there's only one definition.



"I've had so many different leaders, in my eyes, in my opinion, that are great leaders, from DeMarcus [Ware] to Peyton [Manning] — all of these guys, and

it's all different," Miller says. "I feel like consistency; they've got to be consistent. That's first and foremost. ... It just falls in line after that. It's not all about leading by example. It's not all about making speeches. It's about getting people to follow you, not by asking them, but by your actions."

And through his actions, Miller displays the kind of leader he can be. He has the ability to offer hands-on guidance during drills in practice or during film study in position meetings. In his own style, he can also bring some levity to the field when it's appropriate, like when he spent some of his veteran rest day blowing the whistle at the end of reps in one-on-one drills.

That part, that's just Von being Von. If he couldn't find fun in playing football or being around the game, he wouldn't be the same dynamic player. However, that doesn't get in the way of his responsibilities, like when he speaks up during meetings to show his younger teammates a tip or two to help them avoid making mistakes.

"He just says what needs to be said," outside linebacker [Shaquil Barrett](#) says. "He doesn't just get up and say stuff that don't need to be said. He speaks at the right times and everybody listens to him because it's Von Miller. Like [Monday], we were in meetings and ... somebody didn't have a good play and he talked to them, tried to tell them what they did wrong on the play and try to help them improve that. He doesn't, like, curse you out or anything, but he talks to you man-to-man and that's a good way to be so people can accept the coaching."



In many ways, Von Miller is the same person he's always been for the Broncos. He's not trying to be someone he's not just to show he's a leader capable of wearing the 'C' on his chest.

But some Broncos can sense a change in him.

"I think Von, he's always been a leader, just in terms of what he's done on the field," Defensive Coordinator Joe Woods says. "But once DeMarcus Ware left, Von knew he had to step up and become the leader in the locker room. He does a great job. I go in their meetings all the time. He does a great job in his position meeting.

"In the defensive meeting, he speaks up now. On the field, you can hear him in terms of getting guys to do what they're supposed to do: making them run to the ball, things of that nature. But he's done a great job. Because I've seen him three years ago to where he is now. He's definitely become a leader of this defense."

Aside from the team success, that's all Miller wanted.

The proof is on a wall in the Broncos' weight room. After the team had returned to begin its offseason workout program, the strength and conditioning staff had the players write their personal goals in permanent marker.

It's not hard to find Von Miller's at the very top, and he wrote only one goal.

"Team captain."

It wasn't to record 30 sacks or to be named Defensive Player of the Year, not that he doesn't have those ambitions. It's just that this one, well, maybe this one means a little more to him.

© TEAM CAPTAIN
- von Miller

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