

think alike; we're both very competitive in everything we do, whether it's football, golf, or whatever. Our interests are alike. I have just so much respect for him. I respect the way he coaches, the way he works, his drive, his organizational skills. He's made me a better player.

IS: What do you like best about the Shanahan offense: that it gives you three or four options and allows you to find open receivers instead of forcing you to run as you had to do pre-Shanahan?

JE: What I like best is that it's so balanced. And it completely confuses defenses—defenses have absolutely no idea what we're going to do, and I love that. We have so many different formations that the defenses don't know what's coming, and it keeps them off-balance. That's fun. When you get defenses guessing, when they have no clue what's coming, you've got them right where you want them. It makes it so much easier on me and the offense.

Mike's approach is very aggressive. He likes to get the ball in the endzone. That's my kind of system. In other systems we've run here, if running was there I had to tuck the ball underneath my arm and run. Well, I'm too old for that now, so I can dump it off and let the younger guys do the rest. I shouldn't be running so much at this point of my career. My passing skills have to be utilized, not my running.

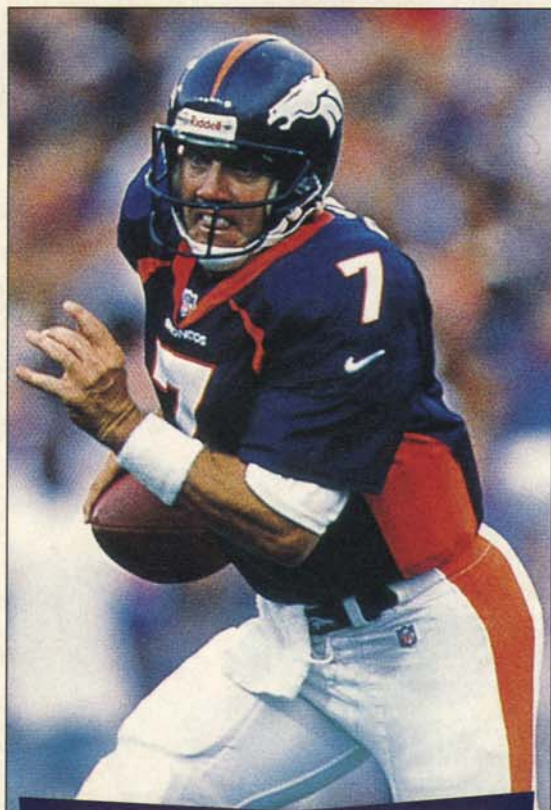
IS: Are you bitter that your other coaches—namely, Dan Reeves—didn't take full advantage of your skills?

JE: No, I'm not bitter about it. I'm just glad at this point I have a chance to play in this system. Would I have liked to play in this system my whole career? Sure. The sky would have been the limit if I had been in this system for 14 years. But instead of being bitter, I'm just glad I got a chance to play in it before the end of my career. Even though Dan and I didn't have a good relationship, and even though we didn't have the ideal system, we won a lot of football games and we were able to get some things accomplished. Just not enough.

IS: Let's take that question one step further. Are you bitter that mismanagement in previous regimes may have robbed you of a Super Bowl win and robbed you of a more impressive legacy?

JE: No, I'm not bitter about that, either. I'm not upset about the past and the Super Bowl losses. There were a few times we weren't even the best team in the conference, yet we still went to the Super Bowl.

We happened to go up against some great teams in the Super Bowl, some of the best teams in history, especially the Giants and 49ers. The disappointing Super Bowl to me was the Redskins game. We were up 10-0 and had a chance to blow them out—I think that was the one time we were the better football team, but when you give up 35 points in a span of 18 plays after you're



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up 10-0, well, it's very frustrating.

But I've stopped looking back and saying, "What if...?" Life is full of could've and should've and would've, and I've just stopped dwelling on them. You have to play the hand you're dealt and play it the best you can. I've had good hands to play with, but this is the best hand I've had so far. Now let's see how I play it.

IS: Did arm surgery this past offseason sap more of your arm strength, and will it pre-

vent you from throwing deep whenever you want and force you to rely more on shorter passes?

JE: No, it won't. I don't anticipate losing arm strength—I should have it all back by the time the season starts. I'll be able to throw the ball deep downfield just like I always have.

IS: Fifteen years later, is your arm as strong as it was when you broke in?

JE: No, it's not as strong as it used to be—but I'm more accurate than I ever was, and I throw with a little more touch. It's a better thing to pick up those two qualities at this stage than to have more arm strength. Instead of being able to wing the ball 80 or 85 yards, I can throw it 65 or 70 yards, which is plenty.

IS: How did it affect you when one of your contemporaries, Jim Kelly, retired after last season?

JE: Reality struck. We broke into the league at the same time, along with Dan Marino, so it makes you realize that there isn't much time left. It was pretty sad to see Jim retire, especially since we had gotten closer the past few years. To have the first of our trio fall by the side, it definitely hits you hard.

IS: When you open up the NFL record book, there you are, third all-time behind Dan Marino and Fran Tarkenton in passing yards, completions, attempts, and total offense. You'll easily pass Tarkenton this season in all four categories, and you conceivably could become the NFL's No. 1 all-time leading passer. You have more regular-season wins than any other quarterback in history, 126, and you're one of the most durable quarterbacks in history, having missed just nine starts in 14 seasons. What's it all mean?

JE: Not much without a Super Bowl ring. All the personal accomplishments and accolades are nice, but why do we play this game? To win a championship. You don't play for personal glory, for personal stats or numbers. All those numbers mean is that I've been around for a long time and have had some nice players surrounding me. If winning a Super Bowl isn't meant to be, that's life. I'll have to accept it. There will always be a void, but it won't ruin my life.

But I truly believe that winning a Super Bowl is meant to be, that it will happen. At one time I didn't think so. Now I do. ■