



History

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Finale: One last salute

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Tough South Stands fans say goodbye with tears

By Robert Sanchez

Denver Rocky Mountain News Staff Writer

Drunken men cried Saturday.

Between the swearing and taunting that has become a fixture in Mile High Stadium's South Stands, a twinge of sentiment wafted through the air Saturday as the game clock ticked down and finally showed 0:00.

Fans hugged and cried, remembering the times they've spent together and the friends they've made over the years. For all intents and purposes, it was the last stand of The Stands.

"This is where I grew up," said Denver resident Tony Elder, 35, who has been coming to games since 1968. "It's so emotional. You have all these great people, and you never want to see them go."

The fans wear their emotions on their sleeves and consider themselves the most loyal in the National Football League. They had a hard time saying goodbye to Mile High.

Among those pulling apart their bleacher seats and trying to tear off the nearby chain-link fence were fans with foam horse heads, Broncos jerseys and painted faces.

Former teacher Ed Maj, 40, preferred to get his memories in the form of 40 autographs from those near him. The Northglenn man's T-shirt proudly proclaimed: "South Stands No. 1."

"I wasn't going to pass up the chance to let people know how important they are to me," Maj said. "It's very humbling."

During the game, the fans in the stands were as wild

High

Q&A: What'll happen to Mile High landmarks

Gene Amole: When Bill Redd, Bears Stadium ruled Denver's sporting world

Dave Krieger: Frigid night of football frozen in time, mind

Bernie Lincicome: The burning question: How to say goodbye

The stars: Rating the best Broncos team ever

Interact

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Vote: What Mile High moment is your favorite?

Thinking back: Readers remember Mile High Stadium

as ever, dishing out verbal barbs to anyone who didn't meet their standards.

When Broncos backup quarterback Gus Frerotte went down with 7:56 remaining in the second quarter, a chant of "Elway, Elway" shot up from section BB.

A deafening roar arose from the sea of blue and orange when Brian Griese took the field.

"It's an animal house, but it's the only place they could put me," 46-year-old electrician Jeff Keys joked. "The people who are here belong here for a reason."

Security supervisor William Reese, who patrolled the South Stands this season, said the fans "are just misunderstood."

"They're good people who don't hide their feelings. People say they're rowdy, but that's because they live and die with this team."

Leadville resident Joseph Martinez sat next to Reese, ringing his orange cow bell as he anchored the southwest portion of the stands with his Broncos flag.

"You can just feel the thunder below you. It's electrifying," said Martinez, decked out in a Santa hat and Broncos paraphernalia. "We are the Broncos; heck, we're Mile High."

Contact Robert Sanchez at (303) 470-3937 or at sanchezr@RockyMountainNews.com.

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