Friday, August 29, 1986 Daily Nebraskan Raiders, Broncos will battle in West

Analysis by Jim Ballard Senior Reporter

When talking about the AFC's western division, usually two things come to mind: the black and silver of the Los Angeles Raiders, and the bright blue and orange of the Denver Broncos.

West this year, with both having excellent shots at making the playoffs.

The Raiders' hopes of another successful season rely on the AFC's, if not the NFL's, premier running back, Marcus Allen. The former Heisman Trophy winner led the NFL last season in rushing with 1,759 yards and added 555 vards through the air with 67 receptions.

After Allen, the Raiders' only other dumb mistakes when it really counts. offensive threat will be tight end Todd Christensen. Last year he hauled in 82 passes for 987 yards and six touchsie Hester and Dokie Williams could throwing 22 touchdowns. cause some excitement at their receiver positions.

The only problem, though, is the man throwing those passes, Marc Wilson. Wilson had a mediocre season last year and probably won't do much bet- cos are going to have to rely on a tough Kreig look better than he actually is. ter this year. Backup quarterback Jim defense to win ballgames. Plunkett is entering his 16th year and should retire. That means the Raiders ience in nose tackle Rubin Carter and tions of Kenny Easley and Jacob Green. could be relying more on former Okla- end Rulon Jones. However, Carter is but they play well together as a team. homa State star Rusty Hilger, who being pushed at his position by secondwasn't exactly dazzling in limited play-year nose tackle Greg Kagen. ing time last year as a rookie.

(besides Allen), is the defense.

Last season they finished fourth in

total defense in the NFL, and wound up level of talent may drop off a bit, but with 65 sacks.

Howie Long.

Long has emerged as possibly the best defensive lineman in the NFL, which causes him to be double and triple teamed quite often. This lets the The Raiders and the Broncos again rest of the raiders defense do its thing, should be the dominant teams in the and with guys like Matt Millen, Rod Martin, Lester Hayes and Mike Haynes defensive side of the ball. the Raiders could be tough to beat.

The Denver Broncos were 11-5 last season, the third best record in the league, and didn't even make the playoffs.

This year could be a different story. however, if Bronco quarterback John Elway can continue to put up his impressive numbers, but not make

Elway completed 327 passes last year for 3,891 yards, which was second in the NFL. He also led the league in

Elway also has some good hands to be throwing to in veteran wide receiver Steve Watson, and Van Johnson who had a good rookie season.

All-Pro Karl Mecklenberg anchors and a questionable defense. However, the thing that makes the the linebacking corps, with Pro Bowler secondary.

After the Raiders and Broncos, the out in that area.

the San Diego Chargers, Seattle Sea-Why is the Raider defense so good? hawks and the Kansas City Chiefs aren't cream puffs either.

> The Chargers have the veteran Dan Fouts, and even though he's already been in the league for 14 years and getting a little on the gray side, he can still put the ball in the air.

The Chargers are in trouble on the

Last year as a team they ranked last in the NFL in total defense. To try to solve that problem, seven of their top nine draft choices were defensive players. That included All-American tackle Leslie O'Neal out of Oklahoma State.

Seattle was 8-8 last season, and returns this year to find one of the roughest schedules in the NFL facing them. Their opponents for 1986 combined to win 57.4 percent of their games last season.

The Seahawks made a good move in downs. However, second-year man Jes- total offense with 4,144 yards, while the draft this year as they picked up Florida star John L. Williams. Williams should take some of the pressure off star running back Curt Warner.

Receiving is the major strength for Seattle, as reliable Steve Largent and Like the Raiders, though, the Bron- youngster Daryl Turner make Dave

On defense the Seahawks don't have Up front the Broncs have solid exper- any big name players, with the excep-

> The Kansas City Chiefs return again this year without an offensive attack

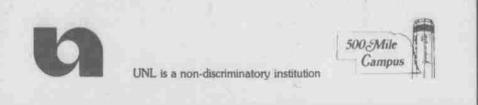
The Chiefs finished last in rushing Raiders an almost great football team Dennis Smith heading up the defensive for the third straight year, and picked up veteran Mike Pruitt to help them

Dropping one course?

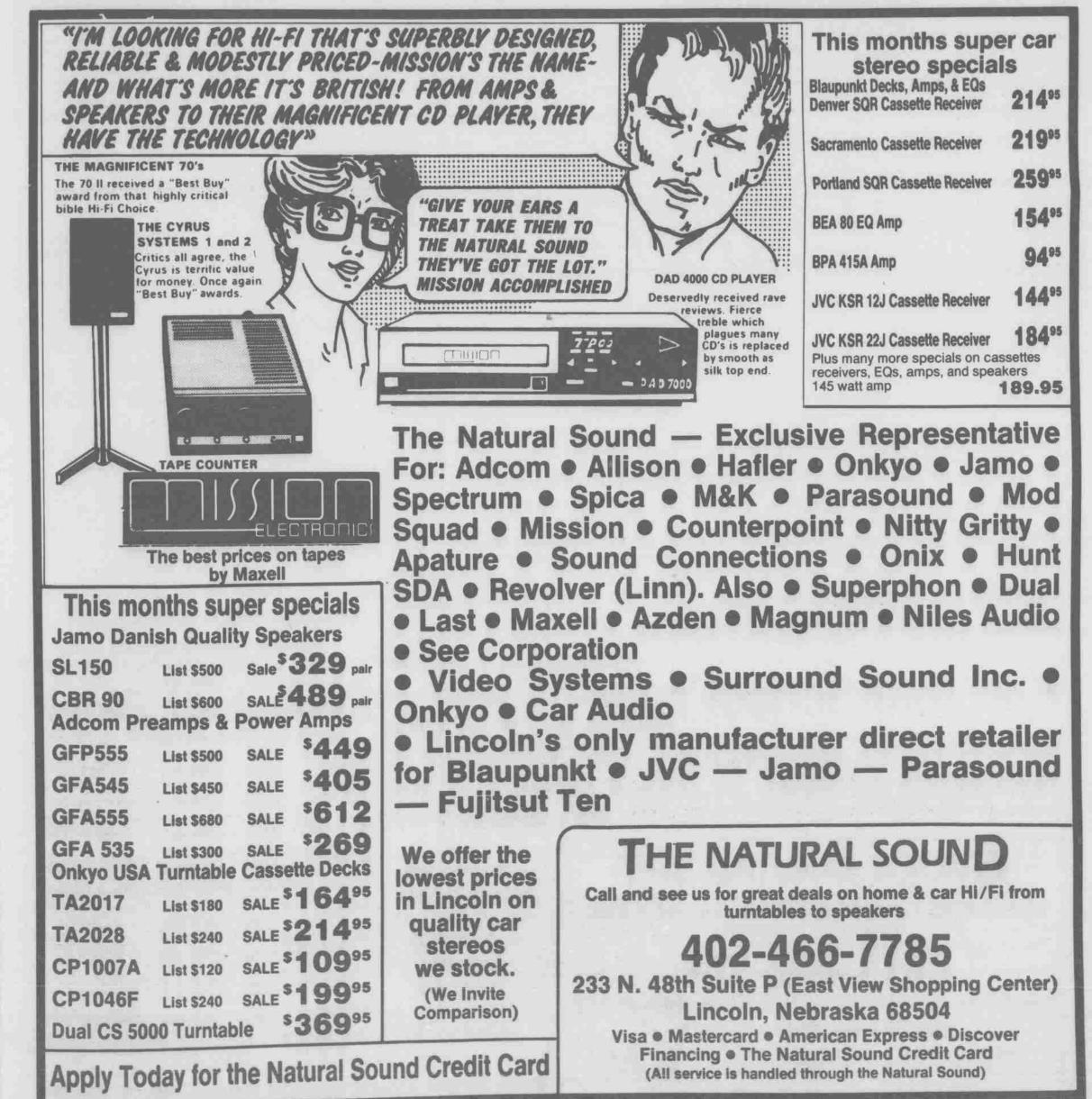
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