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BRONCOS WR ROD SMITH, CHARGERS LB SHAWNE MERRIMAN & BROWNS K PHIL DAWSON NAMED AFC PLAYERS OF WEEK 15

Wide receiver **ROD SMITH** of the Denver Broncos, rookie linebacker **SHAWNE MERRIMAN** of the San Diego Chargers and kicker **PHIL DAWSON** of the Cleveland Browns are the AFC Offensive, Defensive and Special Teams Players of the Week for games played the 15th week of the 2005 season (December 17-19), the NFL announced today.

OFFENSE: WR ROD SMITH, DENVER BRONCOS

- In Saturday night action in chilly Orchard Park, NY, Denver wide receiver **ROD SMITH** heated up a Bronco offense to help the visitors clinch their third consecutive playoff berth in a 28-17 win against the Bills. Smith, en route to his franchise-best 31st 100-yard receiving game of his career, including playoffs, hauled in 11 passes for 137 yards and a touchdown. Getting the Broncos on track early, the Texarkana, Arkansas native made nine of his receptions in the first half, including a clutch three-yard TD catch on third-and-goal on Denver's final possession before halftime to knot the score at 7-7 at the intermission. The win lifts Denver to 11-3. Smith (10,775) now stands only 82 receiving yards shy of surpassing **GARY CLARK** (10,856) for 16th place in NFL history. A win this week at home against Oakland would earn Denver its first division title since 1998 when the team won Super Bowl XXXIV.

In his 11th season from Missouri Southern, this is Smith's first career Player of the Week honor.

DEFENSE: LB SHAWNE MERRIMAN, SAN DIEGO CHARGERS

- Facing their greatest challenge of the season, San Diego entered the RCA Dome to play the 13-0 Colts and came out a 26-17 winner, thanks in large part to a tenacious defense led by rookie linebacker **SHAWNE MERRIMAN**. The 21-year-old Merriman who leads NFL rookies in sacks (9.0) was a disruptive force in the first half as he was involved in 2.0 sacks and three other tackles for losses. In the second quarter with the Chargers clinging to a 10-0 lead, the 6-4, 272-pounder tackled **PEYTON MANNING** on a fourth-and-goal play from the Chargers' one-yard line for a six-yard loss and on the ensuing possession, San Diego drove 91 yards in 18 plays for a field goal and a 13-0 edge at the half. A Merriman sack on third-down on the Colts' first series of the third quarter enabled the Chargers to kick a field goal to extend their lead to 16-0. The win ups San Diego's ledger to 9-5, keeping their playoff hopes alive.

This is Merriman's first Player of the Week award.

SPECIAL TEAMS: K PHIL DAWSON, CLEVELAND BROWNS

- Playing 2,400 miles from home on a damp field in light rain, Cleveland kicker **PHIL DAWSON** accounted for all nine of the Browns' points in a 9-7 victory at Oakland to retire a three-game skid and to surpass the club's 2004 win total by reaching a 5-9 record. Dawson was successful from 44, 24, and 37 yards with his final kick splitting the uprights to give the Browns their first lead of the game as time expired for the come-from-behind win. The Cleveland kicker's game-winner was his 25th field goal of the season, which established a career-high. Dawson is 25 of 27 on the year in field goal attempts, placing him fourth in the NFL in accuracy (92.6 percent). Dawson is the only kicker in the league's top four who plays his home games in a northern climate outdoors.

In his seventh year from Texas, this is Dawson's second Player of the Week honor (Week 3, 2001). He is the second Browns player to earn the AFC's Special Team Player of the Week award in the past seven weeks (P **KYLE RICHARDSON**, Week 9).

2005 AFC PLAYERS OF THE WEEK

	<u>Offense</u>	<u>Defense</u>	<u>Special Teams</u>
Wk 1	RB Willie Parker, Pittsburgh	LB Gary Brackett, Indianapolis	K Josh Scobee, Jacksonville
Wk 2	QB Trent Dilfer, Cleveland	CB Deltha O'Neal, Cincinnati	P Hunter Smith, Indianapolis
Wk 3	RB LaDainian Tomlinson, SD	S Lance Schulters, Miami	K Adam Vinatieri, New England
Wk 4	QB Drew Brees, SD	LB Al Wilson, Denver	K Sebastian Janikowski, Oakland
Wk 5	QB Tom Brady, NE	DT Dewayne Robertson, NY	K Josh Scobee, Jacksonville
Wk 6	RB LaDainian Tomlinson, SD	DE Jared Allen, Kansas City	P Todd Sauerbrun, Denver
Wk 7	RB LaMont Jordan, Oakland	DE Robert Mathis, Indianapolis	K Lawrence Tynes, Kansas City
Wk 8	QB Jake Plummer, Denver	LB Tedy Bruschi, New England	KR-WR Jerome Mathis, Houston
Wk 9	QB Peyton Manning, Ind.	LB Brian Simmons, Cincinnati	P Kyle Richardson, Cleveland
Wk 10	WR Hines Ward, Pittsburgh	LB Mike Peterson, Jacksonville	P Brian Moorman, Buffalo
Wk 11	RB Larry Johnson, KC	LB Andra Davis, Cleveland	K Matt Stover, Baltimore
Wk 12	RB LaDainian Tomlinson, SD	DE Jason Taylor, Miami	KR-RB Derrick Wimbush, Jacksonville
Wk 13	WR Chris Chambers, Miami	LB Terrell Suggs, Baltimore	KR-WR Tab Perry, Cincinnati
Wk 14	RB Jerome Bettis, Pittsburgh	LB Zach Thomas, Miami	KR-PR-CB Pacman Jones, Tennessee
Wk 15	WR Rod Smith, Denver	LB Shawne Merriman, SD	K Phil Dawson, Cleveland

Other nominees for AFC Offensive Player of Week 15 were:

- Baltimore quarterback **KYLE BOLLER**, who posted a 136.8 passer rating on 19 of 27 passing (70.4 percent) for a season-best 253 yards in a 48-3 win on Monday night against Green Bay.
- New England quarterback **TOM BRADY**, who completed 20 of 31 passes for 258 yards and three touchdowns without an interception for a passer rating of 122.8 in a 28-0 victory over the Tampa Bay Buccaneers to clinch the team's third straight AFC East Division title.
- Kansas City running back **LARRY JOHNSON**, who posted his seventh-consecutive 100-yard game with 31 carries for 167 yards and a pair of touchdowns in a 27-17 defeat against the Giants.
- Pittsburgh running back **WILLIE PARKER**, who averaged 5.8 yards per carry by gaining 81 yards on 14 rushes in the Steelers' 18-3 win at Minnesota. Parker had a 49-yard run in the third quarter to help Pittsburgh break the game open.
- Pittsburgh quarterback **BEN ROETHLISBERGER**, who managed the Steelers' gameplan efficiently by completing 10 of 15 passes for 149 yards and a 99.0 passer rating. The QB also ran three yards for a TD.
- San Diego running back **MICHAEL TURNER**, who gained 113 yards and a touchdown on eight carries for a 14.1-yard average. Turner recorded an 83-yard touchdown run for the third-longest in club history.

Other nominees for AFC Defensive Player of Week 15 were:

- Cleveland cornerback **LEIGH BODDEN**, who recorded a career-high four passes defended and added his team-leading third interception of the year as the Browns' defense limited the Raiders to a lone touchdown. Bodden added six tackles and was part of a defense that limited the Raiders to only 113 net yards passing.
- New England linebacker **TEDY BRUSCHI**, who led the Patriots with a game-high 15 tackles, including 2.0 sacks for 20 yards, one pass defended and a forced fumble. The game marked the first time this season that an opponent did not penetrate New England's 20-yard line.
- Pittsburgh linebacker **LARRY FOOTE**, tied for the team-lead with seven tackles, including one that resulted in a safety. Foote also recorded his second sack of the season.
- Pittsburgh linebacker **JOEY PORTER**, who recorded his seventh sack to tie for the team lead and notched his second interception of the year. The interception, which came at Pittsburgh's five-yard line, ended a Minnesota scoring threat. The sack gave Porter 50.5 for his career.
- Miami defensive end **JASON TAYLOR**, who had seven tackles and 3.0 sacks, which led a six-sack day by the Dolphins, in a 24-20 win against the Jets. Taylor now stands with 11.0 sacks on the season, the fourth time in his career that he attained double-digit totals for sacks. It was the second time this year and the sixth time in his career that he recorded three sacks in a game, and the Dolphins are 6-0 in those games.

Other nominees for AFC Special Teams Player of Week 15 were:

- Miami safety **YEREMIAH BELL**, who made three special teams tackles. Bell was part of a coverage unit that held the Jets to a 4.3-yard average on three punt returns. The second-year player also recovered a fumble on a botched snap during a field goal attempt that he returned 12 yards.
- Steelers punter **CHRIS GARDOCKI**, who averaged 47.0 yards on six punts, including a game-best 58-yarder. Gardocki had a 40.2 net average and placed three punts inside the 20-yard line.
- San Diego kicker **NATE KAEDING**, who was a perfect 4 for 4 in FG tries, connecting on kicks from 36, 20, 48 and 49 yards. His field goal with 8:19 remaining gave the team a 19-17 lead that it would not relinquish.

- Steelers punt returner **ANTWAAN RANDLE EL**, who returned a punt 72 yards in the second quarter to set up the game's only touchdown. Randle El finished the game averaging 17.0 yards on five punt returns.
- New England safety **MICHAEL STONE**, who led the team with three special teams tackles.