

Broncos welcome Luke Kellerman for a special day a year after he inspired 'Fight Like A Bronco'

Two years ago, Luke Kellerman was diagnosed with cancer. A year later, his efforts resulted in the Broncos' "Fight Like A Bronco" campaign, and on Friday he came to practice for a special day.

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. — On this cool Friday morning, the sun felt particularly nice as it began to rise over UCHealth Training Center.

But as Luke Kellerman, an assistant turf manager for Sports Authority Field at Mile High, watched practice, the sun had not quite reached the sidewalk around the field where he was sitting in his wheelchair.

His friends in the turf department surely wouldn't have minded him sitting on the field in the warm sun, but Kellerman, now a little more than two years removed from receiving a cancer diagnosis, is still careful to preserve the grass.

That's who he is, and he refuses to bend the rules for himself, even now.

"My job is ingrained in me," Kellerman says. "That field, it's for Broncos players. When I go to work, I don't walk on the field. I walk on the track or I walk on the sidewalk out here. It's just a respect thing."


After all, it had been bad enough that he had been on the grass however briefly for a reception from all the players,



coaches and most of the football staff. They had presented him with a football autographed by the team, and in turn he had thanked them for all their support as they formed a circle around him. They then urged Kellerman to break down the huddle before individually offering words of encouragement and appreciation.

And then Kellerman promptly returned to the shade, as cold as it was.

All of the day's events were a complete surprise to Kellerman, who had expected a simple visit with his colleagues in the turf department. But usually they park on the north side of the facility, and this time his wife, Katie, pulled into the south lot by the main office entrance.

Kellerman knew something was up, but he had no idea what was to come — not the conversations with President of Football Operations/General Manager John Elway and President and CEO Joe Ellis; not meeting "Sunday Night Football" broadcaster Cris Collinsworth; not receiving a team-autographed football from [C.J. Anderson](#); and certainly not speaking to the entire team.

"Usually when I come and hang out with the turf guys here, I drive in the back and I park by the turf shop and we talk grass," Kellerman says. "Today, my wife was pulling in and was like, 'Nope, you have to park here.' So I was like, 'Well, something is out of my hands. OK.' So I don't really know. I know [Executive Vice President of Public and Community Relations] Patrick Smyth had a hand in the pot. I know [Senior Manager of Community Development] Liz Mannis had a hand in the pot. There was a lot of hands.

"I feel lucky that this is an organization that has a lot of hands that care about me."

But this is also a man who cares a lot about this organization.

Kellerman had joined the Broncos in September 2010 as a seasonal turf technician, but then a full-time employee left right as the season was about to begin, opening up a spot for Kellerman.

"They needed somebody and they needed someone they knew was serviceable at the time," Kellerman says. "Basically that is what I was. I was serviceable. I was still really green. But over the years, I got a degree, I got all this other stuff. It helped out a lot, but it's all about getting your foot in the door and taking the most of that opportunity. They let me run with it at this awesome organization."

Then in September 2015, he found out he had colon cancer.

Not long after that, as preparations began for the Broncos' Salute to Survivors Breast Cancer Awareness game, Kellerman had a realization.

"I was sitting there talking to [former Vice President of Community Development] Cindy Kellogg and I realized we don't do anything for me," Kellerman says, "and it's not that it's a bad thing, it's just that the NFL is such a huge, huge organization that we can do something for men and still touch women at the same time. There's no reason why we can't."



After the season, Kellerman drafted a brief proposal to get the wheels moving. It was proposed as "an addition to the NFL's 'A Crucial Catch'" on the cover and aimed to launch a campaign similar to the league's initiative that at the time focused on early detection of breast cancer and raising awareness and funds to fight breast cancer.

Seven months later, the Broncos announced "Fight Like A Bronco," a campaign recognizing all survivors of cancer. It also included three \$20,000

donations — one to Susan G. Komen Colorado, and two to the American Cancer Society to support pediatric cancer research and colorectal screenings.

"I was expecting much slower, but it was just something that took off. It boomed," Kellerman says. "... I mean, they had something together by our cancer game last year, which was 'Fight Like A Bronco.' This year, it's nationwide."

The NFL received similar feedback to Kellerman's, [perhaps most notably from NFL player Devon Still](#), whose daughter Leah survived Stage 4 neuroblastoma. In 2017, "A Crucial Catch" expanded to recognize those fighting multiple types of cancer.



More than ever, the NFL and its teams are reaching people to try to reduce cancer risks, and that's all Kellerman ever wanted when he first wrote the proposal.

"Hopefully it just reaches people," Kellerman says. "That's the only goal. It was nothing selfish or anything having to do with any other alternative motives behind that. For me, my only goal was to just get it out there. We're talking about a \$9 [or] 10 billion organization every year, and every year we have the potential to reach millions and millions of people. And without actively trying to do that, even for just one game a year, we [wouldn't be] doing our job."