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## Once more, with feeling

### Broncos close Mile High with 250th consecutive sellout

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DENVER (AP) -- As the seconds ticked down on a 52-year love affair between a stadium and its fans, residents of Mile High Stadium's rowdy South Stands ripped apart the bleachers and hoisted them over their heads in triumph.



Broncos defensive end Kavika Pittman and quarterback Gus Frerotte say goodbye to Mile High Stadium with the fans. AP

No need to settle for ticket stubs as souvenirs. The diehards took home 30-foot fiberglass party favors Saturday after the Broncos played their final regular-season game at Mile High.

"If we have another game at home, we're going to have to ask those people to bring the seats back," head coach Mike Shanahan joked.

Amid a sea of flashbulbs reminiscent of a Mark McGwire at-bat, the Broncos defeated the [San Francisco 49ers](#) in what could be the last NFL game at Mile High, originally called Bears Stadium when it was built on a landfill in 1948.

The gates will remain closed unless Oakland loses at home Sunday. A Raiders loss would give Denver (11-5) the AFC West title and guarantee the Broncos one more playoff game in front of their home fans.

The most hated team to take the field play Mile High can certify the stadium's final death warrant.

"We might have one more game here, so I don't want to say we're closing it out yet," Broncos wide receiver [Rod Smith](#) said. "Hopefully we can have another little party like this again."

The party started early as fans began filling the seats more than two

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hours before kickoff. Souvenir shops were swamped with people seeking something to commemorate one of the most anticipated events in Colorado history.

"It is sad because of all the history this place has," said Victor Marquez, who has sat in Mile High's rowdy South Stands for 33 years. "That history and the memories can't be taken to a new stadium."



Broncos linebacker Bill Romanowski exits Mile High Stadium for the final time after a regular-season game. AP

Marquez said he looks forward to moving into Denver's new \$364 million stadium, which looms next door. The stadium has not been named, but public sentiment has called for retaining some form of the Mile High name.

As a symbolic gesture, the final steel beam closest to the existing stadium was set in place about 90 minutes before the game.

"Progress goes on," said season-ticket holder Patti Toft of Sterling, a rural town about 125 miles northeast of Denver. "It looks like a nice stadium, but you get used to this one, and it feels kind of funny to be in the other one. It's hard to believe it's the last time."

Fittingly, the final game was announced as the 250th consecutive sellout (78,098), and the crowd was characteristically noisy during the blowout. Various handmade signs paid homage to Mile High and its fans' indomitable spirit.

"U can bulldoze the South Stands but not the fans," one sign said.

Others were more gracious, signifying simple appreciation for a steel-and-concrete monument that will become a parking lot within the next year.

"Thanks for the magic," read a banner hanging behind the north end zone.

After the game, the Broncos returned the gratitude by taking a victory lap around the field, saying one last good-bye -- just in case the Raiders spoil a playoff encore.

"The crowd was just crazy," receiver [Ed McCaffrey](#) said. "It definitely made for a great memory."

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