

TRANSCRIPTIONS



**Defensive Coordinator Robert Saleh
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San Francisco 49ers**

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CB Richard Sherman was talking last week about how you kind of put your own stamp on this defense. I'm just curious how has your defense evolved in your eyes in the time that you've been here to where you are now?

"I think it's more of a credit to the players. [Head coach] coach Kyle, coach Shanahan, obviously [general manager] John Lynch being a part of this, too, the standard that they talk about every single day, what it's supposed to look like, the vision that they've had and how it's trickled down all the way to the players is obviously everything. When it comes to defense, it's all about effort, it's all about technique, it's all about playing with violence and all that. The players have taken the message and they've really, really bought in and those guys have really made this thing come to life. As far as a stamp and all that stuff, we always talk about it's the players that make that call come to life, regardless of what happens. To their credit, they've been working at it for three years now and they're doing a really nice job making it come to life, if that makes sense."

From a schematic standpoint, when you're looking for new wrinkles and things to add, are you getting ideas just from watching tape of your guys and understanding better what they do or where do you kind of get your inspiration from?

"You know what, it's a combination of both. You always want to work to maximize the player's ability, but also what teams are doing to you, what you've seen from other teams, trying to exploit what they do, trying to exploit what you think they might do. So, there's a lot of different things that go into game planning and every week presents its own different challenges."

Seattle Seahawks QB Russell Wilson's been playing at a high level for a long time, but it seems like this season he's elevated his play to maybe that elite tier. What do you think the difference is in what he's doing from a production standpoint?

"Russell, I'll be honest, I used to love Russell when I was on his team, but he's been creating a lot of nightmares lately. His support group, Russell's always been fantastic and the early years he had a fantastic support group and the group he has working with him now, [Seattle Seahawks WR Tyler] Lockett, [Seattle Seahawks WR] DK Metcalf, the back, there's, obviously, I'm missing somebody, but they're doing a really, really nice job and it's really cool the way those guys work together, because a lot of it is Russell starts scrambling. His throws on the run and all that stuff, his stuff out of the pocket and the way they're married together, and I know they practice it all, it's almost a play and then a play

when he starts scrambling, which they work on. The way they've got that thing dialed in is what makes it very unique and what makes it special. They're just so tied together that it's very hard to defend."

What are the coaching points for you when you're going against a quarterback that works outside of the structure as often as he does?

"It's the same for us every week. I won't reveal game plan and how we teach things, but we do have a plan in place and it's just a matter of going out and executing it."

What has Richard Sherman meant to the growth of this defense, especially this season and the way he's been able to perform on the field?

"Sherm, dating back to last year, his leadership qualities are unmatched in my opinion. No matter the situation, whether he's at his ultimate high, whether he gets angry, whatever it is, he's able to bring himself to a level where he's always trying to teach, trying to get better, working with players, working with coaches, just all of us all together. He's really taken that step from just being the wisest guy in the room, just being the oldest and understanding all the different things that have happened, not only from a schematic standpoint, but helping these guys learn and understand the pro game and how to be a pro and how to practice and approach that. You can't put a price on what he's meant to this defense."

Do you think he's going to be particularly amped up for this game?

"You know what, you try to keep it as internal as possible, it's just another Championship game. If you think otherwise, that's where you can get kind of screwed up. And it's a very, very hard thing to do to keep yourself within the moment, day-to-day, to make sure that you focus on every team as a Championship team and every moment as a Championship moment. If you allow the external factors of the team, the lights, the game, Monday night, all that different stuff, you allow those external factors to seep into what you're trying to do internally, you can get out of whack. So, the message for Sherm is stay internal, stay focused, day-to-day, moment-to-moment. He's wired the right way, so I think he'll be able to stay in the moment."

Is that something you have to remind him right before the game because it is former team?

"You remind everybody, every day, no matter what. If you wait until game day to remind them, then it's too late. It's a life commitment to be able to stay focused day in and day out at the task at hand, to stay in the moment and not allow things to get too big for yourself just because it's a different set of circumstances. The circumstances are always the same, it's a Championship game. And for Sherm, and for everybody in general, you're always talking that way so that way they can stay focused on the task at hand."

You mention the pieces around Russell Wilson and now Seattle Seahawks WR Josh Gordon potentially being in the mix. What layer does he add to that Seahawks offense?

"We'll see. I know he's a very dynamic receiver. He's fantastic. It'll be interesting to see how they use him if they get a chance to use him this week. He's always been a fantastic

playmaker. It's just a matter of getting on the field and finding his role and niche. I'm sure they'll find a way if they can."

What will you guys miss most about not having LB Kwon Alexander out there?

"His energy, his juice, obviously his playmaking ability. There's going to be a lot to miss, but we've got tremendous faith in [LB] Dre Greenlaw and the guys that are going to step up in his place. Not really, obviously it's a loss, but at the same time this is like I've always said before it's the NFL, they're not going to wait, no one's going to feel sorry for you. They never ask how, they ask how many and Dre's got to step in and make sure that there's not misstep once he steps in there."

You run a strict left cornerback, right cornerback scheme and I think they did that in Seattle when you were there too. What do you see as the benefit of that and are there ever times when you're tempted to move Richard around on somebody?

"There are philosophies. Our philosophy has always been that, the best way I can explain is it takes 10,000 hours to master a task that's the old saying in the books that have been coming out. It takes thousands and thousands and thousands of reps to get really, really good at one thing. If you are able to replicate what you are being asked to do day-in and day-out play-in and play-out, all these practice reps, all your individual reps, all your game reps, every single rep that you could possibly, all your mental reps, you can get a lot better than if you were jumping left, right and moving all over the place. For us, it's always been in that philosophy that we're going to get so good at what we're being asked to do that regardless of what we're being asked to do that regardless of what you try to do we're going to out execute you and by doing that it's all about the development of the player and understanding that through time you will get better as long as you stay deliberate in your approach and you take every rep like it's a Championship rep and you just trust through the process of time you'll always get better."

In the preseason you talked about how Dre was almost too instinctive at times and LB Azeez Al-Shaair needed to work on his alignment. How much growth have you seen from them since the preseason to this point?

"They've had really good growth. Dre's done a really nice job because he's had reps, he's had game reps, he's been able to go through it. He's got to continue to stay consistent and go through all of it. There are going to be some new things that happen to him. He's a rookie, he's seeing real life, game action. I mean he did it in Tampa, but he's going to get tested and how he bounces back from that, how he responds to it, how he plays those moments are going to be all learning experiences. Even if he does well, it's going to be a learning experience. He's got to stay focused, stay on this task, execute the techniques, make sure that this thing doesn't get too big for him and go execute and I think he will."

Richard Sherman was pretty upset about the way things went in the second half of that Arizona game. Do you share a similar sentiment and what was your takeaway just from how things ended after halftime?

"I do. We've kind of spoiled ourselves over the first seven games, the defense that we've been playing. If you really look at that game, it wasn't terrible. It wasn't up to our standard. Anytime you can hold an offense under 300 yards and 20 points, that's a good day of

defense in this league. Consistently, you'd be top-five across the board if you were able to do that week-in and week-out. The 90-yard play is the one that just made me so darn upset because it's just a combination of things that happened and that's the one that just makes everything look like it was a really bad day. Were we our best? Absolutely not. Can we be a lot better? Absolutely. Is it easy to fix? I do think so and it's stuff that we've been working on this week and we've just got to go execute."

Because you guys have been able to jump to big leads, a lot of teams haven't been able to stick with the run but they've had success. Are you concerned about the run defense and if so what are the things that you're seeing that are causing problems?

"For us and the run game, we've had a couple of misfits where the ball has been squeaking out on us. To me, they are fixable. It's not anything from a schematic or execution standpoint, for that matter. It's just being a little bit more decisive with how we play things and I think we'll get better because to be honest with you there's some new things that we've been getting, run-game wise, that guys aren't used to seeing. As the year goes, as we learn, as we see the way teams are attacking us, we'll get better and better in the run game. So, I'm not hitting their panic button on it, but obviously it is an area of emphasis to make sure that we are still stout against the run because to be a good defense you've got to be able to stop the run first to make teams one dimensional."

Are you able to say an example of something that they're giving you that you haven't seen?

"No."

Just checking.

"Appreciate you, though."

Was Arizona Cardinals QB Kyler Murray good preparation for Russell Wilson, and if so, from that game, are there points you could make about "this cannot happen?"

"Always, when we are going with a mobile quarterback, but it doesn't change anything. You still have your fundamentals, you still have your rules. They are obviously at different stages in their career. Russell's going to be, not Russell, Kyler is going to be a fantastic football player, he really is, and Russell is obviously already there. So, there is carryover, but they are still very different in how they approach things. Their styles are a little bit, there's little nuances to their styles that make them different. Just Russell is so far advanced because he's been in the league, he's seen so many things. Not that Kyler can't get there, but Russell is just playing at a different level right now."

What's CB Ahkello Witherspoon's status?

"He's working through stuff with the performance staff and that's going to go all the way up until game day."

You were in Seattle during the peak of this rivalry between, obviously, Seattle and San Francisco. What do you remember from that time and how big is this game re-sparking this rivalry once again?

“I remember it. I’m going to be honest with you, the message has always been that it’s just another Championship moment. I know it’s cliché and I get for the fans and the media and everyone around it, it gets very exciting, but in-house, and even in this building, not to disregard the team because they are a very good football team, but they are another Championship team just like Arizona was, just like Carolina was, Pittsburgh and everybody else we’ve played and just like whoever we play next week will be. So, approaching it that way, you close your mind off to the media and the fans and all the hype because if you allow yourself to succumb to it, bad things happen. So, they are another championship team that we’ve got to go play against.”

Do you use the outside chatter, you know, people saying that you guys haven’t played a good quarterback yet, do you use that in motivational terms to your guys?

“No. Same thing. It’s an external motivator that doesn’t do anybody any good. It’s not about what people say, it’s about the person that’s got the ball in his hand and it’s about focusing on your job and staying within the moment so you can play at your absolute best.”