

SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS

TRANSCRIPTIONS



**Defensive Coordinator Robert Saleh
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San Francisco 49ers
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What’s your impression just looking at the roster you have, the film work you’ve done, the group you’re inheriting, what do you think about the defense you guys have?

“We’re excited about it as a staff. There’s a lot of pieces to work with, especially up front. Those guys are, it looks on paper to be a really good group of guys and we’re excited to get our hands on them to see what they’re capable of doing.”

This team finished 32nd in rushing last year. It was really a big problem. Going back and looking at all of that, how much of it was maybe the coaching staff was overwhelmed or the talent, what was your assessment of all that?

“I can’t speak for last year. I do know, just looking at it, I can’t speak for what they were being coached a year ago. I know [former 49ers defensive coordinator Jim O’Neal] Jimmy is a hell of a coordinator, a hell of a football coach, and the staff he had I’m sure they were on point with exactly what they were trying to get accomplished. Moving forward, stopping the run is our number one priority. The way we align, our demeanor, the responsibility of the defensive players, we will stop the run on this defense.”

You guys need a LEO pass rusher. At this point, what have you seen from University of Tennessee DE Derek Barnett leading up to the draft?

“Derek has an unbelievable get off. It’s premier and it’s elite with his get off. He does a lot of really, really good things from a pass rush standpoint. There’s no denying his talent.”

Head coach Kyle Shanahan has talked a little bit about it, and given your background, we talked a lot about the Seahawks defense. Is that what you guys are going to try to run? Is it going to be a 4-3, similar to that? Maybe single high safety, that type of thing?

“We are a single high defense. The system you could say, it originated in Seattle. I was there from the get go. Three teams currently, Seattle, Atlanta, Jacksonville, if you’re looking at tape, all of them have their nuances and how they operate. This will be a very, I don’t want to say it will be a very different scheme, but there are going to be differences and there will be nuances within this scheme that makes it unique to us.”

A lot of people talk about it, it’s a 4-3 with 3-4 personnel. Is that sort of how you

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view it?

"I do. It's real simple, the league back in the day was heavy base. SAM linebacker, 65-70 percent of the game you'd have a SAM linebacker on the field where he'd need to perform his duties in base defense. Present day, it's almost 70-percent nickel and the nickel who doesn't get talked about as a starter, he's starting to come up as an individual piece to the puzzle. So when looking at the SAM linebacker and what they're asked to do on a day-to-day basis, 70-percent of the game their hand will be in the ground. So, we're looking for more of an edge rusher as opposed to what it was in years past with a brut SAM linebacker, a [former NFL LB] Bill Romanowski-type. We're trying to move forward from that."

Are there guys already on the roster?

"Oh, yeah. There's plenty here. [LB] Ahmad Brooks, [LB] Eli [Harold]. We just signed [LB] Dekoda Watson. If you were going to paint a picture, that's what they would look like."

You mentioned being excited about the front. Can you kind of lay out where you envision guys at least starting off as you put the pieces together?

"The cool thing with the way the front has been built in the past, they are very versatile. So you can do anything, we can do anything we want with them. They're not traditional. When you look at [DL] Arik Armstead and [DT] DeForest Buckner, they are very, very unique in the sense that they can play up and down the line however you need them to to work. We'll find what's best for them. There is no limitation to what they are capable of. It's just us trying to piece together the right combination and right position for each of them so they can best be utilized."

Have you called plays before on defense and is there someone that you learned a lot from calling plays?

"I have not. The cool thing of being in my position, at least the growth through it all, I've been able to work under a lot of really good coordinators. I'll give a lot of credit to [former Seattle Seahawks and current Los Angeles Chargers defensive coordinator] coach [Gus] Bradley and [Seattle Seahawks head] coach [Pete] Carroll. From a growth standpoint, to be able to be in all those meetings when they were talking gameplan and talking play calling and the way Pete approached things along with Gus. Last year, going through with a new coordinator, just through my experience, play calling is the least of my worries."

Where do you see a guy like LB Aaron Lynch fitting into your defense?

"Aaron, he's on the defensive line. We're going to try to keep his hand in the ground at all times. A couple years ago, when he came out of the draft, we were looking at him as a possible LEO. So, he has all the traits that you would like. Now it's a matter of us trying to work with him to best utilize what he's, in my mind, designed to do and that's get after the passer."

Who else do you see at that particular spot, the LEO spot?

“We’re looking for, there’s a lot of pieces. Ahmad can do it, Eli can do it, so you’re looking at the SAM/LEO type deal. They’re all capable. Dekoda can do it. Even Arik, he’s not a prototype, but he’s capable just from his flexibility and his--.”

Do you see S Eric Reid possibly moving more in the box?

“Yeah, Eric is going to be more of a box safety for sure.”

Is it nice to be back with Malcolm Smith and what does he provide your defense besides familiarity?

“The familiarity is a cool thing, but Malcolm is actually a really, really good football player. He was a victim in Seattle being behind [Seattle Seahawks LB] K.J. Wright and [Seattle Seahawks LB] Bobby Wagner. Two All-Pro players in my mind, especially K.J., very underrated. But, he was a Super Bowl MVP for a reason. They’ve kind of gotten away from the scheme in Oakland, and to bring him back to this scheme to where he can run and hit and do the things that he’s great at is going to be very beneficial for him and for the organization.”

You talked about the run defense being a number one priority and you’ll see it with the demeanor. What kind of demeanor are you looking for? What’s the ideal?

“Extreme physicality.”

After losing a cornerback like former 49ers CB Tramaine Brock, how do you guys plan on addressing the cornerback position moving forward with the draft and whatnot?

“That process is still going. I’m sure management has an unbelievable plan and they’ll clue me in when they need my opinion, but right now I’m just focused on the guys that are here in the building.”

Going back to the LEO spot, can you just shed some light on what traits you’re looking for at that position? Not necessarily players, but just--?

“I’ll name some names that have been LEOs in the past, even if they haven’t been attached to this system. People who have been attached to this system, you’re looking at [former Seattle Seahawks DE] Chris Clemons, [Seattle Seahawks DE] Cliff Avril, [Jacksonville Jaguars DE] Yannick Ngakoue, [Jacksonville Jaguars DE] Dante Fowler, [Atlanta Falcons LB] Vic Beasley. People outside of the system, you’d look at [Denver Broncos LB] Von Miller, [Oakland Raiders DE] Khalil Mack. Back in his heyday, [former 49ers LB] Charles Haley would have been a guy that would have been a LEO.”

So, this defense needs an elite piece like that?

“Oh, yeah.”

How do you define that position? What are the responsibilities of that position--?

“Real quick, I don’t know if needing one per se, but we’ll find one. But, go ahead and ask your question.”

How do you define that position? What are the responsibilities of the LEO?

“He is your premier pass rusher. We do everything we can to get him to the open side. His hair is on fire, just get after the quarterback.”

Talking about the LEO position, Gus Bradley specifically said he liked his LEO players to be certain height and weight. As far as his 40 speed, 4.6 or 4.7, does that sound about right?

“I’m a little, I don’t want to say I’m a little different because you do have a parameter. But, there’s a million ways to skin a cat and they all come in different shapes and sizes. To put a cookie cutter on it would be doing halfly and general injustice.”

Can this defense finish top-15? I don’t want to put expectations on it, but they were 32nd last year. It was really bad. Can you guys make a turn around this year?

“I never put a number on it, and the reason why we never put numbers on it is because you never want to get lost in numbers. If we show up every day, we operate the way we’re capable of and we do the things we’re supposed to do and we operate as men and we operate in our style, we’ll get better. How much better? I can’t tell you.”

Is LB NaVorro Bowman going to be the MIKE? Is he going to be the guy with the green dot, calling all the plays, or have you maybe thought about maybe switching him? Kyle just said one of two spots, I assume that’s either MIKE or WILL, probably not SAM.

“Yeah, the MIKE-WILL, they’re interchangeable. So, if you look at Seattle, their WILL linebacker, K.J. Wright, is 6-4, 245 pounds. If you look at Jacksonville, the WILL linebacker was 6-3, 215 pounds. If you look at Atlanta’s MIKE linebacker, he’s 220 pounds. Bobby Wagner sits at 240. So, there’s no height-weight parameter. But, what there is, is one person can communicate and the other one might be able to communicate, but one is better than the other. Let’s just put it that way. So, whoever--.”

MIKE?

“The MIKE linebacker, that’s right. And so, whoever can communicate the best will be the MIKE linebacker and the two best will play.”

49ers general manager John Lynch had talked about at the combine, it sounded like you were pretty committed to at least starting DB Jimmie Ward at safety and seeing how he did during the offseason program. Is that still the plan or did the Tramaine Brock situation change that?

“We’re going to see how everyone moves. Like I said, we haven’t been able to go on the field with them and once we start getting a chance to get out there, we’re going to see what everyone is capable of doing. And, Jimmie is a very, very versatile athlete. He can play corner, he can play safety and whatever is best for the organization is exactly what we’re going to do with Jimmie.”

What about LB Tank Carradine, he’s had to fluctuate his weight, body analysis going from 280 all the way to 295 and he had to drop down to 270s. Where do you see him fit in your scheme?

“Tank is a, he can whip some tight ends. So, if you’re looking at a traditional 4-3 scheme, that six-technique, that’s kind of where we see Tank with the ability to pass rush inside. Now, I don’t want to put that stamp on him now, we’ll see him move. But, if I was painting a picture in my head, that’s what Tank would be.”

How much are you working with the scouting staff to really sort of define exact roles you’re looking for and how much tape are you watching?

“We’re watching a lot of tape for when the group does want to ask us our opinion. But, we’re on a, I don’t want to say need-to-know basis, but when management wants our opinion, we’ll be ready to give it to them.”

Has John Lynch asked you to provide kind of a blueprint of what you’re looking for, the style of player, the kind of player, the size of player for each position?

“We did early, when we first got here. We had our draft profile and we did paint that picture for them to help us get on the same page as quickly as possible.”

Are you pretty specific?

“There’s certain roles that are very specific. I shouldn’t even, specific in their style. Like I said, there’s no cookie cutter to a player, but there is a style that we’re looking for and we were able to paint those pictures for management. Hopefully we were able to do it pretty well too.”

You just mentioned six-technique. Is that the same position as a LEO or are they different?

“They are different. The big end, six-technique, he’s taking on more of the tight end. He’s more to the solid side of the defense and nickel is more of a, he’s to the strong side if you’re looking at it from a run standpoint to the tight end.”

Curious to hear your perspective, Kyle Shanahan the leader, day one, 100-percent attendance. He hired you. This guy’s leadership style, what do you think?

“Of Kyle?”

Yeah.

“Kyle is very matter of fact, he treats them like men, which they are, and I think Kyle is very clear and to the point and very honest. And, he’s very direct with the guys. And, I think as an athlete, as a man and as a person in general, all you can ask for out of another human being is to be direct and honest and that’s exactly who he is.”

(Inaudible)

“[Defensive quality control coach] DeMeco [Ryans]? DeMeco is probably going to be a head coach one day. So, I’ll be asking him for a job I’m sure long from now. He’s got that type of football I.Q., that type of presence and is as knowledgeable as it gets.”