

TRANSCRIPTIONS



**Defensive Coordinator Robert Saleh
Press Conference – July 27, 2019
San Francisco 49ers**

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What was your takeaway from the first practice?

“A lot of energy, good communication. A lot of excitement for the first day to be back, you know?”

There was a play, I think it was just a short pass to the tight end, and he caught it at the sideline and then was stripped of the ball and that seemed to elicit a big reaction on the sideline. Is that going to be a big thing in practice? Takeaways, stripping the ball, stuff like that?

“For sure. I know every organization probably says it, but we talk about the ball every single day. It’s always an emphasis, no more than it was a year ago or the year before that prior to that either. It’s always great to get the ball from the offense. And like I said, there’s a lot of excitement, so to get the ball out, we want to break records the other way.”

How was DL Nick Bosa on the field today?

“I’ve got to go back and watch the tape. First day, there’s a lot of communication things from the back end, so I’ve got to see the tape.”

What’s LB Dre Greenlaw done that’s allowed him to get as many reps as he has so far?

“You know what, he’s got promise as a rookie. There’s going to be some things as the install gets wearing on him. He’s got good athletic movement, good instincts, more instincts than I thought he would behind the ball. You know, we’ve still got to get pads on, see how he can hold up against those linemen. He’s proving it every day by just being accountable and doing things the right way. He’s in the mix for that SAM linebacker spot, along with about four or five other guys. It’s an open position and may the best man win.”

You said SAM, is that really where you’re honing in on with him or do you want him to, obviously you want them to know all the spots, but are you really focusing on SAM with him right now?

“From a base defense standpoint, he’s still going to play nickel-WILL. They’re really interchangeable. All three of those linebackers, they’ve got to be able to play the hook, they’ve got to buzz, they’ve got to play man, they’ve got to do all of it. They’re all three, it’s just the MIKE does the most talking with the way it’s designed right now. That third

linebacker spot is wide open. And like I said, there's that whole linebacking group is working for it."

He seemed to make a few plays today and be in the right spots. Were you impressed with his instincts in those instances?

"Yeah, he popped up behind the line of scrimmage a couple times. I'll go back and watch the tape, see if it was a lucky guess or instincts, but he's building trust. He's still a rookie, though."

It's been a while for Nick since he's been able to put pads on and actually do it. How excited are you to see him do that and do you get the sense that he's really kind of been aching for it for a while?

"I know for him he's been, he was hurting in terms of wanting to be out there for OTAs. I mean, he comes from a football family, loves football, so for him, I'm excited for him. For me, he's a rookie with a helmet and no pads right now, so just want to see him get better and be deliberate in his practice and see how good he can get."

Are you ramping him up at all or is he full-go?

"They're full-go. So, they're on a schedule. The performance staff has done a great job designing a schedule for the entire team and we're adhering to it. We'll see where it goes, so."

His schedule is no different than any other guy?

"No."

You mentioned guys popping up in the backfield today. DL Solomon Thomas had a couple moments, standing right in the quarterback's face. Last season, he had a little bit of a regression. What do you expect to see from him in this camp and to kind of get back on track from what you guys want to get out of him?

"My expectation, really, for the entire group is to get a little bit better every day. I know that's very cliché for you guys, it's not a headliner, but it's the truth. There's no, what do you tell a guy that you expect eight sacks and if he doesn't get it, does that mean he had a disappointing season? For Solomon, it's just be relentless like we know he is, get a little bit better every single day and trust that your best is pretty freaking good. That's for everybody, and that doesn't just happen by you showing up on gameday. Just because you were a first-round pick or an undrafted free agent, it really doesn't matter. Showing up isn't good enough. You've got to show up with the right mindset to be able to get better. Solly, having the full offseason and going through, I'm very excited for him and really his entire family as they continue to move forward, you know?"

Where do you see him lining up?

"So, you guys are going to see from a D-Line standpoint, and I wouldn't make too much of it for all you guys, you're going to see them all over the place. The philosophy of our system is to throw four guys out there and wherever they land, they play. Solly has great versatility to go inside, outside, [DL Arik] Armstead can go inside, outside, [DL Kentavius] Street can go inside and outside, [DL DeForest Buckner] Buck can play three and nose,

so can [DL] Jullian [Taylor]. I mean, they're going to be everywhere. The design of it is to make sure that we are rolling and coming at it in waves and trying to create and utilize the versatility that our defensive line has."

You guys have said in the past that you saw Solomon and Arik as base ends and inside in nickel. Has there been some philosophy change there?

"No, it doesn't change. I guess what I want to make sure I say is if you're going to draw up a perfect situation, they would be base and nickel three. But, you're going to see them throughout camp getting that work in because they've got to be able to get the work in to be able to play. Once we get to gameday situations, you'll start seeing more isolated roles, if that makes sense, or defined."

You said in the spring the plan with DB Tarvarius Moore was fluid in terms of whether he'd be at safety or corner. Has he started to solidify himself at safety and what do you like about what he's done back there?

"He did a nice job in those couple of weeks he played free safety. I felt like it warranted him getting more of an opportunity, especially with [DB] Jimmie [Ward] still on the mend for a couple more weeks. Got some guys back at corner, too, that allowed some flexibility to do that, too. Again, he's shown good progress. He's got a long way to go with regards to that position, but he does look comfortable back there, so keep it rolling and see where it goes."

General manager John Lynch and head coach Kyle Shanahan talked a lot about culture yesterday. They said it's time to stop building culture and it's time to win. You're very conscious of culture, you have lots of mantras. How would you describe the culture that you guys have built here the last couple of years?

"You know what, I feel like Kyle and John have done a fantastic job with regards to building trust. One of the most fragile things in a human relationship is trust and Kyle and John have done a great job kind of building that. If you can build a culture of trust, you can then transfer it to a culture of accountability, because you trust that the heart's in the right spot. So, through accountability when teams start to coach themselves and it's done with a good heart or trusting measures, it seems to take off. Being able to hold yourselves accountable starts with being able to trust each other, and I feel like that's what John and Kyle have done a great job of doing throughout the first couple of years. They are right, it's time to hold everyone accountable. Let's go get something."

With Solomon, I think he definitely looks a little bit different than last year. Stronger, but he said he was lighter. He said that last year he was like 280, this year probably around the weight he was most comfortable at, 270. Have you seen more quickness from him? Physically, where do you feel he's at this year versus last year?

"Solomon, the athleticism and all that stuff, to me, is not different to me. The clarity at which he's playing is going to be what's evident to everybody. The decisiveness is what's going to be clear to everybody. When he can eliminate gray area from his life, he'll be able to showcase all that athleticism that he had coming out of college. Right now, we don't have pads on, so all of it's good, but being able to transfer that onto pads and continue in the direction he's going is going to be the next step for him. Right now, he is

playing with a clear mind. There's not much gray area in his play and he's having some success. We'll just keep it going, right?"

You mentioned the mental clarity. The last time we talked to Solomon, he spoke a lot about how healthy he got mentally from dealing with all the stuff last season and whatnot. How much do you think that's playing into, you know his mental clarity these days?

"Anytime, I mean I'm sure it would relate to all you guys, if you've got something going on in life you can't exactly focus on your job. The mind controls the body, whether it's in great pain or doesn't matter. The mind is always going to push the body to do more than it's capable of doing, or it can pull it back from doing more than it's ability. The clearer the mind and the less gray area you live in, the better you can operate physically. He's gotten to a great point, he's in a great spot in life right now with the D-Line and coach [defensive line coach Kris] Kocurek creating black and white in his play, hopefully he'll be able to maximize himself physically."

Kind of a broad question, but why was it important to tinker with some of the things you were doing basically at all three levels of the defense, making some changes? Was it just being able to do more? Does it play to your personnel a little bit better?

"From a nickel standpoint, the whole league has really gone to a one back spread. I shouldn't say the whole league, but the majority of the league. To be able to be more fluid between base and nickel where we're not as predictable in base, where in nickel, we're a little bit more diverse. To be able to have that fluidity so there's more carryover and crossover so we can play teams in base when they're in nickel if we need to, we can play teams in nickel if they're in base personnel if we need to. We can be more versatile from a personnel standpoint, but keep the structure of our defense. So, the very small changes we made are really designed to utilize our personnel and to be able to create fluidity throughout the entire system so teams can't just jump in and out of personnel groupings to dictate what coverage we might be in. We can continue to dictate what coverage we're in like we have been able to do in nickel, if I'm making sense."

You haven't had a chance to see much of CB Jason Verrett playing football, but just being around him over the last few months, what are your kind of impressions of his personality that makes you believe that he can perform?

"With Verrett, he's got a tremendous mindset. I'm trying to make sure I say this the right way, he's a dog. That's the best way, he's just a down to earth grown man, and there's no B.S.ing him, there's no nonsense. It is this is what we've got to get done and this is how we're going to do it and get out of my way or I'm going to run you over type of a feel to him. He's a grown man when you talk to him. Just have a conversation with him, you're like, 'Damn, that's as real as you can get.' Excited to have him here from, not only as a player, but from a leadership standpoint and what he brings to that room is a toughness. It's a good personality."

Can you give me an example, something?

"Not right now. The interaction has been, we've had some interaction, but the more and more I talk to him, I might be able to do an impersonation by the end of training camp."

We saw Verrett across from WR Marquise Goodwin today. Is there any plan to ease him in a little?

“Yeah, Verrett, [LB] Kwon [Alexander], all those guys who missed OTAs are kind of on a different schedule than the rest of the team.”

As far as DL Ronald Blair III, you’ve talked about how much you liked him through the years. Why is he, and there’s not many holdovers left from the past regime, but why is he a guy that stuck around, because he’s not the most likely candidate?

“Ronnie has, I joke with the guys, and anyone whoever talks about Ronnie, so I’ll say it here: if you like winning, you like Ronnie Blair. If you don’t like winning, then you don’t like him. It’s a very simple concept, but Ronnie does everything right. He’s very versatile, he’s a very good football player, very instinctive and he is going to do things, he just finds a way to win. You give him a one-on-one situation, he finds a way to win. You give him a job responsibility, he finds a way to put himself in an advantageous position, so he’s got great versatility and instincts. He works hard, he stands for all the right things, he’s a great leader. Talk to him about the backend and he’ll give you a dissertation on how to play cover three. I mean, the guy’s unbelievable. So, Ronnie, if you like winning, you can write as many stories as you’d like about him.”

T Joe Staley said after practice that Nick Bosa has really good hips and that’s what makes him hard to block. Can you sort of elaborate on what he might mean by that, about Bosa’s hips?

“So, Bosa wins in close quarters. He needs, he wants you close to him, as close as possible. Then he just has an ability to flip his hips, get skinny all in close quarters, where most people need space so they can knock arms down and they can create angles for themselves. The closer, which guy, was it [former boxer] Mike Tyson, the closer you got, the more trouble you were in? I mean, he just loved to be in there tight. It’s the same thing. He just gets in there tight and then he can work his body, has hand-eye coordination and all that is pretty good. On the flipside though, he’s going to have to figure out how to win in space. As a rookie, I guess he got Joe a couple times today, but Joe is a seasoned vet, and he’s going to find out very quickly how O-Linemen adjust in this league tomorrow when Joe stalemates him. I know it’s exciting for him, but he’s still just a bobblehead running around until we get pads on. He’ll get a chance tomorrow to see his game and see where it evolves with Joe making his adjustments. But Bosa, he’s got a chance to be great, but he’s got to take every day and just understand that he’s got to evolve his game, otherwise, he’ll figure it out real quick.”

You talked about close quarters. Does that mean he’s a fit as a wide-nine, or is that an adjustment for him?

“No, it’s still a fit, because he’ll close space in a hurry. When they close space, those O-Linemen, they can’t help but create combat. When he’s in a combative situation, that’s where he excels.”