

49ers Clips – February 4, 2017

Local Media

John Lynch's task: Lead 49ers while learning

By Eric Branch, San Francisco Chronicle

<http://www.sfchronicle.com/49ers/article/John-Lynch-s-task-Lead-49ers-while-learning-10907448.php>

Lynch will right S.F. ship, those close to new GM say

By Matt Kawahara, Sacramento Bee

<http://www.sacbee.com/sports/nfl/san-francisco-49ers/article130699914.html>

LYNCH'S WORK TAKES MIND AWAY FROM HALL OF FAME ANGST

By Matt Maiocco, CSNBayArea.com

<http://www.csnbayarea.com/49ers/lynchs-work-takes-mind-away-hall-fame-angst>

National Media

Lions receiver Anquan Boldin is mulling retirement

By Kyle Meinke, MLive.com

http://www.mlive.com/lions/index.ssf/2017/02/lions_receiver_anquan_boldin_i.html#incart_river_index

Dan Quinn: 'Felt good' after seeing Alex Mack go through practice

By Vaughn McClure, ESPN.com

http://www.espn.com/nfl/story/_/id/18615240/alex-mack-atlanta-falcons-play-pain-super-bowl-li-dan-quinn-says

Antonio Brown, Steelers eye deal before training camp, source says

By Jeremy Fowler, ESPN.com

http://www.espn.com/nfl/story/_/id/18615525/pittsburgh-steelers-begin-contract-talks-antonio-brown

Cowboys TE Jason Witten not ready to call it quits, but he's not sure if he'll play beyond 2017

By Brandon George, Dallas Morning News

<http://sportsday.dallasnews.com/dallas-cowboys/cowboys/2017/02/03/cowboys-te-jason-witten-ready-call-quits-also-says-sure-play-beyond-2017>

Dependability and clutch play highlight Julian Edelman's strengths

By Jeff Howe, Boston Herald

http://www.bostonherald.com/sports/patriots/2017/02/dependability_and_clutch_play_highlight_julian_edelman_s_strengths

Local Clips – Full Version

John Lynch's task: Lead 49ers while learning

By Eric Branch, San Francisco Chronicle

John Lynch was a success during his football career, but not the overnight kind.

At Stanford, he began as a never-used quarterback, moved to safety as a junior and didn't become a full-time starter until his final season. In the NFL, he spent his first three seasons as a core special-teams player before earning a starting role in 1996.

Twenty-one years later, Lynch's role as a football executive could follow a similar path: That is, the 49ers' greenhorn general manager could spend a few years developing before assuming a larger role.

Lynch is, indeed, the team's new GM, but his job description figures to differ from his peers, at least initially.

And that shouldn't be surprising. He has no front-office experience and spent the fall in television booths while his brethren readied for the start of free agency and the NFL draft.

In a nod to the novice's resume, the 49ers are surrounding him with a support staff that will include just-hired vice president of player personnel Adam Peters, who was the Broncos' director of college scouting. Last year, 49ers general manager Trent Baalke was, in effect, the team's VP of player personnel. Lynch also will lean on Tom Gamble, their assistant GM in 2016, while chief negotiator Paraag Marathe handles the majority of contract work. Finally, incoming head coach Kyle Shanahan is expected to have control of the 53-man roster.

This begs a question: What will Lynch do?

For starters, the 49ers are looking to Lynch to be a respected uniter and face of a once-proud franchise that has become synonymous with dysfunction and defeat.

In the past 26 months, the 49ers have fired three head coaches while sporting an 8-29 record. During the fall from grace, two of the team's biggest names, Jim Harbaugh and quarterback Colin Kaepernick, were the subject of unflattering national reports that are believed to have come from sources in the 49ers' front office.

Into this mess enters Lynch, a finalist this year for induction to the Pro Football Hall of Fame who was often a team captain during a 15-year NFL career that included a Super Bowl title, nine Pro Bowl berths and the Bart Starr Award, given annually to the player who exemplifies character and leadership. His reputation was burnished during his eight years as a Fox analyst. Said Jen Hale, a sideline reporter on Lynch's crew in 2011 and 2012: "If you find any skeletons, I'll be shocked."

This isn't shocking: Lynch should know plenty about the "championship culture" CEO Jed York is seeking.

In fact, Lynch already made it clear that he was wary of the franchise's culture of leaking information before he accepted the job. Lynch said on KNBR on Wednesday that he wanted to keep his interviews with the 49ers secret as a test to see if their lips remained sealed.

Lynch has acknowledged he's seeking to unite the 49ers, from the players to the personnel department.

"We're going to strive to create a culture where everyone's working together," Lynch said. "I think that's one of my strengths. It's something that I've done throughout my career is I've had an ability to bring people together. I've been out front oftentimes. I've been named captain. On a broadcast crew, you're out

front, and I think that's a strength of mine. ... That will be something that we all understand, that we're like-minded in our pursuit of winning a championship."

Given the 49ers' recent ineptitude, their unconventional hiring of Lynch is being viewed in some circles as their latest high-profile whiff.

The optimistic view: His early role will be quite similar to how Denver general manager John Elway broke into an NFL front office in 2011. Elway, who was the vice president of football operations, had a strong support staff and didn't add his GM title until his fourth season.

Broncos president Joe Ellis told MMQB.com that Elway's hiring provided respectability to a franchise that had lost its way after appearing in six Super Bowls. Before Elway's arrival, Denver finished 4-12 in 2010 and had endured four straight nonwinning seasons.

"We were in a situation where we had to gain back the trust of the fans and the community as an organization," Ellis said. "We'd faltered a little bit for two years. And John was the right guy to come in and do the job from a football standpoint. But from a presence standpoint, in the community, his stature carried a lot of weight with the people."

As Elway has done, Lynch gradually will need to display he has a knack for identifying talent and building a roster.

Stanford head coach David Shaw, Lynch's college teammate, expects him to do just that. Why? Lynch invariably has succeeded ... eventually.

"John doesn't fail at anything," Shaw said. "John's never failed at anything. John is brilliant, he's competitive, he's tough. He's going to surround himself with people that are like him; smart people that are tough, good football people. ... He's never failed at anything, and I don't believe he'll fail with the 49ers."

Lynch will right S.F. ship, those close to new GM say

By Matt Kawahara, Sacramento Bee

One man who stood side by side with John Lynch on Sundays recalled a colleague who dedicated himself to preparation during the week.

A man who could watch film and discern the game's subtlest nuances.

A man who, on game days, though he wasn't calling the plays or grappling in the trenches, exuded a presence that inspired the rest of the team around him.

"He is a leader of men," said Kevin Burkhardt, who partnered with Lynch on FOX NFL television broadcasts the past four seasons. "I know it's a different thing (than playing), but he led us. You can ask anybody on the crew, you can ask the tape editors, the camera guys. He was our leader.

"That ability to lead men, to lead an organization – I don't think a lot of people have that. I just don't. It doesn't come along naturally."

The 49ers bet big on Lynch's ability to lead last week, when they surprised the football world by hiring the 45-year-old former star safety as their new general manager. Lynch had never held a front-office position in the NFL before Sunday. Now, under a six-year contract, he is tasked with guiding the 49ers back to competitiveness following one of the worst seasons in the franchise's storied history.

As initial shock over the selection – elevated by a covert hiring process that Lynch later admitted was calculated – wore off, opinions poured in. Skeptics cited Lynch’s lack of experience as an executive. None question his grasp of the game after playing 15 years in the NFL and eight more as a broadcaster. But assembling a front office? Running a draft? Building a roster?

It seems understood that Lynch’s newness – and that of Kyle Shanahan, the Atlanta Falcons’ offensive coordinator who is expected to be the 49ers’ next head coach – to his impending role makes forecasting his performance impossible. Still, over the past week, a contingent of NFL voices, many of them Lynch’s former teammates and coaches, combined to form a picture of Lynch as an intelligent, communicative, motivated individual whose foray into management has left them, if not overtly optimistic, at least intrigued.

Perhaps the most succinct endorsement of Lynch came from Stanford coach David Shaw. Addressing Bay Area reporters Wednesday, Shaw, who played with Lynch at Stanford in the early 1990s, acknowledged his was an “unconventional hire” to the San Francisco Chronicle, before stating why he expects the 49ers’ gamble to pay off.

“John doesn’t fail at anything,” Shaw said. “John’s never failed at anything.”

From hitting baseballs to hitting receivers

Lynch might have been a baseball player. Selected in the second round of the 1992 major-league draft by the expansion Florida Marlins, Lynch played minor-league ball that summer and considered forgoing his senior year at Stanford, where he had been moved from quarterback to safety.

Ironically, a 49ers legend helped shape his decision. As Lynch recalled during a conference call Monday, head coach Bill Walsh, back for his second stint at Stanford, “begged me to come back for my senior year because he thought I could become a Pro Bowl safety. I thought coach Walsh was crazy at the time. But he convinced me to do it.”

Walsh wasn’t crazy. Lynch made five Pro Bowls in his first 11 seasons with Tampa Bay, also helping lead the once-downtrodden Buccaneers to a win over the Raiders in Super Bowl XXXVII. Released by Tampa Bay in 2003, Lynch signed with the Broncos and made the Pro Bowl in all four of his seasons in Denver.

Known for his punishing hits on ballcarriers, Lynch also made an impression on teammates. Brad Johnson, the quarterback who roomed with Lynch when both played in Tampa, told 95.7 The Game this week that Lynch was “respected by everyone” and “always looking for tips, looking for clues.” He recalled Lynch regularly rising for early-morning workouts – even at the Pro Bowl.

“That’s who he was – he was a workaholic kind of guy,” Johnson said. “You almost had to slow him down at times.”

Lynch is a fourth-time finalist for the Pro Football Hall of Fame and could cap a banner week if he is among the enshrinees announced Saturday. He referenced the path of his playing career on Monday’s conference call.

“There’s a lot of things in my life,” Lynch said, “that haven’t been conventional.”

Deep football insight

In a way, that made Burkhardt a fitting broadcast partner. Burkhardt had been reporting on the New York Mets before joining FOX in 2013 to do play-by-play for NFL games. Paired with Lynch as an analyst, the two quickly became the network’s No. 2 team.

One aspect of working with Lynch, Burkhardt said in a phone interview, surfaced during their preparation for calling a game.

"I'd always learn something about the team, and learn something about football, that I didn't know, I didn't catch from watching and that certainly hadn't been talked about or written before," Burkhardt said.

Burkhardt offered a recent example. Before calling the Falcons' win over the Seahawks in the NFC divisional round, Lynch called Burkhardt over to a film monitor and pointed out a strategy that Shanahan, the Falcons' offensive coordinator, had used in Atlanta's previous meeting against Seattle.

"The Seahawks don't normally blitz much, but they started to blitz more this year than they ever had," Burkhardt said. "And (Lynch is) like, 'Most teams are going to do this in protection, or they're going to keep a back in to help protect, to stop the blitz.'"

"He's like, 'Watch what Kyle does. He brings in a two-back set. And he throws (running backs Devonta Freeman and (Tevin) Coleman out on a route. So now you're blitzing – but you are dead if you don't get to the quarterback.' And sure enough, in the playoff game, that bore fruit, because (Seattle) did it a couple times and got torched on it."

Burkhardt said in recent years he had chatted with Lynch about the latter's interest in a front-office job, and "I think I thought at some point he would be running a team." Still, for many, the news was unexpected. While the 49ers interviewed some publicly known candidates for their GM role in recent weeks, they kept Lynch's candidacy largely quiet.

Later, Lynch admitted he'd requested that from the 49ers, who in recent years have been known for information leaks, putting his potential new employer to the test.

"I made a big deal that this stay quiet," Lynch said on KNBR radio. "Part of the rumors are things fly out of that building. So I wanted to see, could I trust that building? So that was part of my thinking."

'He's going to be fine'

At the same time, Lynch said he was open with the 49ers about his limitations. Multiple times during Monday's call with reporters he stated, "I know what I don't know." His background has already led some to posit a spectrum for his success, with two recent GMs at the poles.

One is John Elway, the Hall of Fame quarterback who became Denver's executive vice president of football operations in 2011 and from 2012 to 2015 led the Broncos to four division titles and two Super Bowls, including a win in Super Bowl 50. Though new to NFL management then, Elway did have some previous experience in a front office, as a co-owner of the Arena Football League's Colorado Crush.

Lynch has been open about Elway's influence on him, which included inviting Lynch to observe the Broncos' operation during a recent offseason, and indicated in a recent TV appearance that Elway may have helped plant the seed of his career change in his mind.

"He always challenged me," Lynch said on FS1. " 'This is something you need to do. You can do this – and you can do it well.' "

The other is Matt Millen, a former linebacker who went directly from a FOX booth to the Detroit Lions' front office in 2001. In seven-plus seasons with Millen as their top football executive, the Lions went 31-84, firing Millen three games into the 2008 season, which they finished 0-16.

Millen told The Associated Press this week that he was surprised by how little the GM role involved football strategy. "What you had to do," he said, "was manage your people so you could get the right people and manage your coaches so you could perform at the highest level. It's a people job. It's about human capital."

Is Lynch prepared for that role? Yes, according to Jon Gruden, his former coach in Tampa Bay.

“Forget about his talent as a player, the statistics, the longevity, the durability, the instincts and all that stuff,” Gruden told the East Bay Times. “He’s a leader of men, and he’s a great communicator. And those are two things that are critical at the general manager position.

“Most importantly, he’s got a great work ethic, and he’s charismatic. If you’re a leader, can communicate and have a great work ethic, those are the things you’re looking for. He’s going to be fine.”

Return to a winning culture?

The 49ers have finished a season 2-14 three other times in franchise history. One of those was Walsh’s first as head coach. Two years later, they won a Super Bowl, starting a heady run of five championships in 13 years.

Recent times have been leaner, outside of three consecutive NFC title game appearances from 2011 to 2013 under coach Jim Harbaugh. And for Steve Young, the hiring of Lynch represents an attempt by the 49ers to hearken back to the type of culture Walsh created.

“I think (Lynch) learned a ton of what fell out and came out of the roots of what the Niners did in those years,” Young said on KNBR this week. “It feels like we’re getting back to that rooted-ness, and I’m happy about that.”

In a statement announcing Lynch’s hire, 49ers CEO Jed York lauded his new GM as a “Hall of Fame-caliber man, one who people are compelled to follow.”

Where exactly Lynch will lead the 49ers is unknown. Of his qualifications for the job, the most valuable may also be the hardest to quantify.

“I’ll tell you this,” said Burkhardt, the FOX broadcaster. “We’re doing these games on Sunday, and of course we’re all wanting to kick (butt) and do a great job for ourselves, for our team, all of that. But I felt like Sunday, I needed to do a good job for him.

“Look, I’m obviously going to push myself anyway. But he just gave it that other level. You felt like you’re inspired by him, and you need to try to up your game to be around him. I don’t think a lot of people have that quality. It’s just different.”

LYNCH'S WORK TAKES MIND AWAY FROM HALL OF FAME ANGST

By Matt Maiocco, CSNBayArea.com

HOUSTON – John Lynch has been in this same position on three previous occasions, but this year it feels a lot different.

He has not been consumed this week with thinking about his chances of making it into the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

No, something else has occupied his mind for several days.

But all it took was the sight of 71 men wearing the gold jackets they earned through their distinguished NFL careers to make him realize how his life could change on Saturday afternoon. Lynch is among the 15 modern-day finalists that will be discussed by the 48-member selection committee on Saturday. A maximum of five former players from the modern era will be selected for induction into the Hall of Fame.

Lynch, who was hired as 49ers general manager on Sunday, is back in Houston to take part in a reception Thursday night and a luncheon on Friday. He said he had to excuse himself on several occasions to take work-related calls.

"This is my fourth year of being a finalist," Lynch told CSNBayArea.com on Friday amid the Super Bowl activities in downtown Houston. "In past years, as this draws near, it's very different because it's absolutely out of your control. There's nothing you can do. That's unusual. So there is some angst, particularly when the weekend comes.

"But until I went to the reception last night and was around all the guys, I hadn't thought of it once."

Lynch made it into the top-10 last year before the final cut was made to the five individuals who were selected into the Hall of Fame.

Lynch, who earned nine trips to the Pro Bowl in 15 NFL seasons as a hard-hitting safety with Tampa Bay and Denver, has been trying to touch base with candidates for presumptive coach Kyle Shanahan's staff.

CEO Jed York is not allowed to officially hire Shanahan, the Atlanta Falcons' offensive coordinator, until after the season concludes with Super Bowl 51 against the New England Patriots on Sunday.

"Because our head coach, we're not able to name him yet, I've been handling a lot of that -- interviewing coaches, just getting our list, here's what we're going to do first," Lynch said. "It's been non-stop.

"Next week could be a fun week, in terms of a lot of movement."

Lynch has already strengthened the organization, he believes, with the addition of Adam Peters to serve as 49ers vice president of player personnel. Peters previous worked in the scouting departments of Denver and New England.

"Getting Adam Peters was a huge hire for me, because he's someone I know and trust and value, as do many people in this league," Lynch said. "So that was a great head start."

Lynch developed a strong rapport with Peters when Lynch took part in Broncos meetings and prospect evaluations, which included a trip to the NFL scouting combine, prior to the 2013 draft.

"That month, month-and-a-half, I actually sat next to Adam every day," Lynch said. "Those are long meetings. I'd listen to him and we'd talk in between about players. I just saw way back then, he's a guy who's highly respected in the league. I firmly believe in two, three years, he would've been a GM. He was on that track, at least."

Broncos general manager John Elway has also assigned Lynch special projects in recent offseasons, such as evaluating the draft-eligible safeties. Still, Lynch is fully aware he will face a stiff learning curve.

"Watching John (Elway) and John talking to me, he's told me, 'You can do this; you know football,'" Lynch said. "That's what I told Jed from the beginning. 'Look, there will be a lot of things I'm learning.' But what I do know football, I know people and I know how to lead. And the rest I'll learn."