

TRANSCRIPTIONS



**Defensive Coordinator Robert Saleh
Press Conference – October 17, 2019
San Francisco 49ers**

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Head coach Kyle Shanahan said yesterday that he calls you Gandhi.

“Yeah, I don’t know about that one.”

Is that not a name, does he do that a lot? I don’t know.

“They jab me around the office. There’s a lot of names, I guess, but it’s all in good heart, good fun.”

After you were kind of the star of the show, I feel, on Sunday, did you get a lot of texts? Kyle said he’s been sending memes around of you? What’s that dynamic been like after Sunday?

“From an office standpoint, it’s just good, old fashioned just jabbing, just messing with me. My family, I think, enjoyed it more than I did. Like I told you, I don’t have Twitter or anything, so I got flooded from my family. I was like, ‘Jeez.’ You know, it’s like they’re all asking, ‘Why are you going off?’ It’s no different from any other game. I’m like that every single game, but it got noticed. I guess it went viral.”

Do think that your guys feed off that a little bit?

“I don’t know. I think when you play this game, when you step inside the white lines, whether you’re a coach or a player, if you can’t trigger emotionally, then there’s something wrong with you in my opinion, at least from a defensive standpoint. It takes a certain mentality to play this game and it’s not for the soft. When it is time to go play, I’m speaking for myself, I know I’m emotionally charged, but obviously there’s a balance of being emotionally charged and still being able to see what’s happening in the game so you can make the adjustments you need to make and you can help the players with what’s happening on the field so they can go execute. Like I said after the game, I just feel like, speaking for me, I’m out there with those guys, when they have success I’m so pumped for them. If they fail on a play, I just feel so responsible to help them. I’m there on their highs, I’m there on their lows. Football’s an emotional game, so it just comes out on Sunday, I guess.”

What’s your history with being in the booth and when was the last time you were in the booth?

“As a QC, I was in the booth. When I became linebackers coach, I was down on the field, so I’ve been down on the field now for six years. I can tell you as a QC, God if, speaking

from the Super Bowl season that we had with Seattle, if we didn't blow them out of the water, I probably would've had a heart attack that game. I mean, I was amped up and you're sitting in this little box. Not for me."

But there is the tradeoff. As a coordinator, you have a better view from up there, you can really do the schematics of the Xs and Os and see what's happening more than you do on the sidelines. What is the tradeoff for you?

"The tradeoff for me, it's like a position coach, I guess. You want your position coach as the guy they hear every single day down on the field so there's no change in voices. We've got [defensive quality control] Brian Fleury and [run game specialist/outside linebackers coach] Johnny Holland upstairs and [safeties coach] Daniel Bullocks. They do a great job getting the info down to us. Johnny does a great job with the run game, Daniel does a great job with the pass game, Brian does a great job alerting me with all the different things that are happening. They're able to, when we get to the tablets, we already have a great idea of what's happening, even at field level you have a good idea. You just need confirmation and they do a great job upstairs. Their eyes are really sharp and they do a good job communicating."

You just talked about, obviously, the 2013 Seattle Seahawks defense, you guys now in a lot of these advanced metrics are off to a historical start, especially pass defense-wise. Can this defense be that good when you look at the pass rush and the talent and the coverages, do you think that's a reasonable goal to aspire to?

"You know what, I don't put goals on results. Obviously, you want to be the best team in history, you want the best stats in history, but it's not about that. It's about staying within yourself, staying internal and making sure that every time you step onto the football field, practice field, doesn't matter, you're trying to achieve your personal best. If you're focused chasing somebody else, you're putting yourself in an external world where you cap your limit. I do feel confident that if our guys stay internal and they stay focused and they stay driven and they stay relentless in what they're trying to achieve personally and as a unit, I don't think there's a limit to what they can achieve. But, capping it off by saying, we're just as good, why not better? Why not better than the best ever? The only way to be the best ever is to be your best every single day, so keep it internal, don't put a ceiling on what you're capable of and let's just see what happens."

How has DB Jimmie Ward dealt with everything that he's been through from an injury perspective and what was it like seeing that sort of release of energy from him after he made those plays in the second half on Sunday?

"For Jimmie, I'm so excited for Jimmie for what he's been through, and it's not over yet. I mean, he's got, and he'll tell you the same, he's got 11 regular season games left plus whatever happens after. Just pumped up for a guy like him who's gone through struggles, who's gone through bad luck, in my opinion, who's been beaten up by the outside world and for him to stay focused, stay positive, stay driven, just waiting for his opportunity to seize the moment, I'm excited for him. Nowhere near done, he's nowhere near a finished product and he's only going to get better."

When you're preparing for Washington and Washington Redskins QB Case Keenum didn't play or practice yesterday, Washington Redskins QB Dwayne Haskins took a lot of the first-team reps, but Keenum is supposed to start. Because you have two backup quarterbacks for the scout teams, do you have one do each guy and how does that go?

"No, we go off of what we see on tape. Like I've said before, our scheme is set up to take on anything that a team gives us. We've just got to be ready to make an in-game adjustment if it so happens, but we go off of what we see on tape based on what we think will happen to us, based on what has shown to happen to us and from there we'll go play. Teams usually reveal themselves within the first 15 plays of the game and after those first 15 we can get a handle of what it is and we can go play even faster. For us, we're going to do what we do. Not to sound arrogant, obviously there are always game plan specific stuff that we do to change things up, but it's not chasing ghosts with regards to who's playing quarterback or not. We're just going to stay focused on the task at hand and whatever they give us we'll go play and make the adjustments that we need to."

What kind of job are QB Nick Mullens and QB C.J. Beathard doing as the scout team quarterbacks?

"They always do great. A lot of time they're the better quarterback than what we're actually going to play. Those guys are priceless. Coach said it a long time ago, you just don't give away quarterbacks in this league when you have them, which is why we have three on our roster. They are three starters in our mind."

I know it's probably impossible to fully do this, but taking the pass rush out of the equation, have you been able to do different things coverage-wise this year just given the continuity that you've had with the guys in the secondary? How's the secondary playing on its own? I know the pass rush has helped, but how have you been able to improve the defensive backfield?

"It's very hard to separate the two. It goes hand-in-hand when you've got rush and coverage. There's times where the coverage has saved the rush and then there's times when the rush has saved the coverage. I've brought up the points where the rush has saved it. Those guys, when they execute, and the best part about the whole thing really is that we're not chasing the routes that we had to defend a year ago. Like I told you, teams, we'll know our pass rush is affecting teams when they change the way they call football games. By us not having to chase some of the most exotic concepts that you can possibly see to defeat zone coverage we can play more deliberate, more on our roles, more with the vision on the quarterback knowing that the rush will tie to the coverage and we can all be the same. Obviously, they're not going to win 100-percent of the time, but that's where the guys who are playing have tied themselves so much to what we're asking of them in coverage that they are able to defend all those exotics because they know that they can just see it coming now. They can tell when teams are really trying to take a shot. I know the Rams towards the end of the game tried to take a shot at us. I think it was somewhere in the fourth quarter, they ended up throwing a check down. The overall rush and coverages so hand in hand to say one is better than the other or one is operating, they are operating cleanly, but that's because the rush is operating the way it is and vice versa. I hope that makes sense and I answered your question."

Because you've had so much success just rushing that front four, how much freedom has that given you to be exotic either when you do dial up a blitz or with your coverage?

"You still want to have the element of the ability to go blitz and do all that stuff. If you're just always rushing four, they could pick it up. You never want them to know where you're at all the time. You have to change it up. Like I've told you all before, third down is where we can get exotic and change our different looks and all that stuff. With third down, even though we have four really good ones, we still need to make sure that the offensive line and the running back or the tight end if they keep them in have to account for the nickel, the safety, the two linebackers along with the four defensive linemen because if they do, when we go show and come out, that line will be a lot looser for those four. The looser we can make the offensive line, the better our rushers are going to be able to go get the quarterback. Always trying to mess with their protection rules and their fronts and trying to attack, just make sure we are being the aggressor with regards to protection."

What are the differences in Washington Redskins TE Vernon Davis now as you prepare for him versus maybe when you were on Seattle's staff and preparing for him then?

"I think [Washington Redskins interim head coach Bill] Callahan said it best, the guy's ageless. He still looks like he's got all that speed. He had that really cool play in the opening game of the season where he looked like Vernon of old. I still remember a couple years ago he got us for a big one when we were in man coverage. He still looks really good. I know he hasn't played in a couple weeks, but what he's been on tape, he still looks fantastic to be honest with you."

Kyle said after the game Sunday that if he was allowed to he would have worn a Jimmie Ward jersey on the sideline. Is there a jersey you would wear if you could?

"Can I cut a piece of all of them and make one big jersey? I'd do that."

What was going through your mind when DL Solomon Thomas got that big sack of Los Angeles Rams QB Jared Goff?

"Excitement for Solomon. Talk about what he's been through. And he's been grinding, we've been able to play him inside a little bit more with having [DL Nick] Bosa and [DL Dee] Ford here. He's getting better every single week. He plays his tail off. He's doing some really good things. I think his snap count last week was up there in terms of what he's had. For him, he's only going to get better in my opinion, but I was just really excited for him because you could just see in his excitement how big of a deal that was for him. Now he just needs to stack it up, continue building off of it and keep getting better."

Talking about Solomon's play time, was that a matter of just keeping him out there because he was effective or was that the plan going in?

"Well, [DL] D.J. [Jones] had gotten hurt and he got an opportunity to get a few more reps and that's what led to all that stuff. When he was rolling, and it is part of the hot hand, he was rolling, he was doing really well and we just kept it rolling. [Defensive line coach Kris]

Kocurek thought he was doing a great job and just kept going with the plan and so he's going to have another opportunity to seize that moment if D.J.'s not able to play again."

You've got a lot of young guys kind of experiencing success for the first time. How important has CB Richard Sherman been in kind of keeping them grounded but also keeping them motivated to not put a cap on themselves?

"You know, Sherm's growth from his rookie year when I was there as a QC until now has been, I mean he may say he's always been the same, but I promise you he's a wise man, you know? He's awesome. He's a pleasure to have. He's been everything and more that we've expected from a leadership standpoint. To answer your question with those young guys, we addressed it to the defense earlier this week that for the most part everyone in that room has seen the worst of the worst that this organization has had over the last couple of years. They have been told they're not good, they have been told that they shouldn't be here, they have been told that they should all be cut, we have all been told that we should be fired. So, don't forget what it's like to be on the other side of the fence and don't think that just because you're being patted on the back that you are going to continue to have success. We got to this point because we've been working our butts off through adversity, through all the trials and tribulations that go with losing. Don't forget what it took to get here and don't forget what it's going to take to keep it. So, their mindsets are all in the right spot. They are absolutely grinding. They're focused and they are excited to get out there on Sunday."

How much did the loss of the nose tackle make Solomon Thomas more active? You said that because of D.J. Jones' injury.

"It's like what we talked about during OTAs and training camp. It's four quarters. It's throw them out there and let's go play football. It's four D-Linemen. They all know every single spot. You could see [DL DeForest Buckner] Buck in there, you could see [DL Arik] Armstead in there, you could see them all in there and it doesn't matter. It's our philosophy that if we put four D-Linemen on the football field, you have to know and play every single technique. So Solly, at that moment, got an opportunity to get in there and play just as a change up and he was having success so we kept it rolling. So, that's really the genesis behind it. It doesn't really matter who's out there, you should be able to go play it."

Was he significant in the adjustment against the run? Obviously, you guys made one to start stopping them.

"Solomon? They all were to be honest with you and by all I'm talking about the coaches and the players. To get everybody together, Johnny Holland in the box talking about the run game and Kocurek, [pass rush specialist Chris] Kiffin, everybody just talking about what we just saw, where the breakdowns were and what we needed to get done. Then getting it to the players and, thankfully, the offense had a really nice drive to give us that opportunity to go through that. But, to be able to get it to the players and then the players to go execute it to perfection because it is hard to do some of things that they did without really getting much practice at it and then it showing up in the game. So, credit big time to the players to be able to go out there and execute it with no panic and to be able to put all that stuff to bed so they can get back to their normal game and go play. It's really great by the players."

You talked earlier about an offense having their script, like a first 15 or whatever. Do you guys have a script too of defenses that you want to show early in a game to see how a team reacts?

“No, we’ve got our game plan. We have an idea of how we want to present ourselves, if you will. But, for the most part we don’t go into a game with 50,60, 70 calls. We have our defense, this is that we are. And really, it’s more of what have they put on tape, what do we need to do to stop it and what kind of things do we want to show within that first 15 so we know how to respond when they get out of the first 15, basically. So, we are just really clued into the first 15 to see what the game is going to be about and how we can make changes to make sure that we can play.”

Is it just a reaction?

“It always is. Yeah, just to see how they approach us, what type of game plan they’ve come up with, what type of routes have they run, runs. And then from there, once we are out of the first 15 we can start really honing in and dialing in our coverages.”