

SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS

TRANSCRIPTIONS



**Defensive Coordinator Robert Saleh
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San Francisco 49ers
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We talked about the sacks last week, they came. We also talked about DL Solomon Thomas last week and I felt that was kind of his breakout performance. Do you feel that really helped his confidence, doing it in the game?

“For Solomon especially. [DL DeForest Buckner] DeFo has been consistent. He’s got to find consistency. I’d love to say that was the trigger point. There’s no doubt in my mind he’s going to have struggles, but like I said last week I’ll never waiver off of this, if he works the way he does, that consistency will come.”

Do you think he benefits from playing more now that, not something that you guys want, but with DL Tank Carradine on IR it’s kind of force-feeding Solomon a little bit more?

“I’ll be honest, I haven’t checked the snap count. I don’t think it was any different.”

He played 69, the same as DeForest.

“Did he have 69? We’ve got to get off the field. Obviously, always reps, that was his fourth game as a rookie, so the more reps he gets, that’s natural progression. Especially for somebody who works hard. There’s some people who can get a lot of reps who will never get better because they don’t put in the work. He puts in the work. He puts in the effort. He puts in the film study so he will naturally get better. I’m excited to see what his ceiling is.”

What was the thought process of playing him mostly at LEO and DL Arik Armstead at Big End?

“It’s like we talked about last week, trying to get our players in the best position to be successful. Trying to put our four best out there. The whole LEO, Big End, that whole thing to me, especially on base downs, is not the case right now. It’s trying to get our best four on the football field so we can be a functional defense against the run. That’s our standard. We’re going to stop the run first before anything. For you guys, moving forward, the whole LEO, Big End thing, it’s not a name right now. It’s about putting our best people on the field so we can be successful.”

To go along that same line, are you still looking at players and where they fit?

“Always. Every week we’re trying to evaluate to make sure of the best combination. To be honest with you, if you look at the first three weeks of the year, you’d see in base

defense Arik Armstead playing a six-technique. You'll see Solomon playing a six-technique. You'll see them both to the open side. If you look at last week, it's the same thing. We were playing a little bit different of a front against Arizona compared to what we did over the first couple of weeks. So, they're still performing the same techniques which is why for first and second down it's not even me thinking positions. It's not even in my head. It's more trying to get our guys out there so we can operate."

At one point will you think of positions or are you still feeling out these guys and figuring out--?

"For sure. Because there are going to be guys who are very unique to a certain skill set. Again, it's always our job to make sure that they're maximizing that skill set. So yeah, in time, for sure."

Is Indianapolis Colts QB Jacoby Brissett much more of a mobile challenge than Arizona Cardinals QB Carson Palmer for you guys this week?

"I guess so. Carson doesn't move much. He is. He's not as much of a run threat as [Seattle Seahawks QB] Russell [Wilson], or [Carolina Panthers QB] Cam [Newton]. But, I think Brissett is a really underrated quarterback. The guy can make every throw. He sits back there. He sits back there tall, strong. He does have good patience. And, he can throw everything. Against Seattle, he made a couple of throws that were pretty impressive. He's a pretty good quarterback back there. He's only been there what, about a month now? Since they traded for him. About a month and a half. Like everyone else, as he gets comfortable he's only going to get better."

Has S Jaquiski Tartt played well enough that, I know S Eric Reid hasn't come back yet, but when Reid is healthy are you going to have to figure out ways to get Jaquiski back on the field, just by way of how well he's played?

"No question. It always goes back to our whole philosophy of getting our best 11 on the football field. At all cost. Finding a way to put people in position. It's a great problem, one we'll cross when we get there for sure."

How do you evaluate Jaquiski these last couple of weeks?

"He's pretty good. He does everything you want. Physical. Plays fast. Plays smart. Obviously, he'll even tell you he's got to clean some stuff up in his game. He's getting even better at communicating and talking with the underneath defenders. His communication with [DB] Jimmie [Ward] is really good. His communication with the corners is really good. I've been impressed with all those safeties to be honest with you."

You mentioned the Colts game against the Seahawks from Sunday night. You and the Seahawks run similar defensive schemes. Obviously the players are different, but how does that particular game help you game plan for this upcoming game against the Colts?

"It always helps, to look from a familiarity standpoint. We've played those guys twice a year for the last four years, too. So, familiar with the opponent. Familiar with what they

do. I think the coordinator's fantastic, really strains our coverage. So, there is familiarity. It's always good to see what they do versus like opponents. It does help."

With Buckner playing the way he is, are you seeing more double teams that he's facing? If you're not, do you anticipate seeing more?

"I'd anticipate seeing more. We noticed it a little bit towards the end of the game. Especially in that two-minute drive where the line slide just went to Buck. They were just sending three over there. He's starting to get attention and the attention's only going to get greater. Which is why it's so important for the other three to find their niche and come along and catch up. So, that way they can't just focus on him. And if they do, someone's got to make them pay. He's playing at a level that offenses won't be able to ignore him any longer."

You said you've obviously faced the Colts two times a year when you were with the Jags. How have they used Indianapolis Colts RB Frank Gore over the years and how are they using him this year?

"I'll piggyback on what [head coach] Kyle [Shanahan] said. I do think he's one of the more underrated backs of our generation. He doesn't get enough credit for the things he's been able to accomplish. He's still a tough S.O.B. He'll still run downhill. He'll still put his face right on you. He's still pretty good out of the backfield. He's still a dynamic running back and he's still able to create when there's nothing there. From a scheme standpoint, I've always felt, I don't want to say they're the same, but they do utilize him in a way to maximize his strength for sure. He's downhill."

More of a situational guy now though where he's only playing a couple of downs rather than all three?

"I don't know if I'd say that. They've got a good rotation going. They've got some guys. I still think he's capable of doing everything they need him to do."

Is he the best pass blocking running back that maybe you've prepared against? And, is that something that alters the way a defensive coordinator enters a game?

"He is an unbelievable pass blocker. That's without question. That's even in the past always preparing for him. It doesn't really change. We'll still take our linebackers over him."

What's the plan with CB Ahkello Witherspoon? How is he doing right now? Was the plan always that he was going to be a little bit of a late bloomer just because he didn't have a lot of football in his background?

"The plan for Ahkello is, he's been working his tail off. His technique has been improving every single week. The way he's been operating and the way he's been going since OTAs really progressing, there's no doubt he's going to end up on the field sooner than later. There's no doubt."

When you talk about Solomon and the way he works, he just has to be successful. I assume everyone works fairly hard, what distinguishes him, what makes him special in that category?

“To me, he doesn’t have an ego in terms of it doesn’t matter the situation. It doesn’t matter if he’s playing, if he’s looking at a card, it doesn’t matter if he’s running scout team O-Line, he’s going 100 miles per hour. He’s got a mindset of, the biggest example would be if he’s the six-technique for the show team, he’s going to play six-technique like he does for us. And when you have a guy who takes reps and steals reps, I call them free reps, you have a free rep on a six-technique, you take advantage of it and you work your technique and you operate in that regard the entire time, which is something Ahkello is also doing over there on the scout team where he is just working his read technique and his corner and press technique. They haven’t been wasting. It’s not a jack around period. And when you have a player with that mindset who’s going to take advantage of every time he’s on the football field, he’s going to execute the technique that you’re asking him to execute to the best of his ability. That’s why they get better, for sure. And of course, to piggyback it or to add to it, [defensive backs coach Jeff] Hafley and [defensive line coach Jeff] Zgonina do a great job pulling those reps out to make sure that they all do see them. So, they are constantly being coached and they know they are being coached, and because of it they take ownership.”

You’re new to calling plays. I thought you called a great game against Arizona. On that final drive, you didn’t bring pressure until they were in field goal range already. If you could do it again, would you be more aggressive earlier in that drive?

“That’s a fair question. Early in the drive, just mindset-wise, in my mind, a check down is a five-yard gain. That’s why I call it the kill zone. We should be foaming at the mouth when that ball comes down there. And we had our opportunities. You don’t anticipate two check downs getting a combined 20-yards. That’s bad ball, very bad ball to be honest with you. And we recognize that part. Would I do it over again? I don’t know. Every situation is different. I do feel like those guys played their tails off for four quarters. Really, really, controlled the tempo of the game and really dictated the game and had a chance to blow that thing out of the water again. One drive, one drive just pissed it all away. Excuse my language. Every situation is different. Every situation is different. The last drive not withstanding for sure.”

Is that where you see the 69 snaps come into play?

“Yeah. Even less. I mean, we were good on third down, good in the red zone, good all the way across the board, great against the run. At that point Carson, after four quarters, I think he had a 70 quarterback rating, 250 yards and no touchdowns. So, we felt like we played a dominant football game. Just that last drive, I’m evaluating that still and trying to process it through my mind.”

What were your thoughts about Indianapolis Colts S Malik Hooker before the draft?

“Ball hawk. Rangy, good speed. I’m not exactly sure what he’s doing over there. I heard he has a couple of picks.”

Three.

“Three? Does he? Shoot.”