

SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS

# TRANSCRIPTIONS



**Defensive Coordinator Robert Saleh  
Press Conference – September 28, 2017  
San Francisco 49ers  
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**How'd you spend the extra time with the defense? What are the issues that you have to tighten up a little bit?**

"It goes back to fundamentals and the things that we always talk about. I felt like we let a few things get away from us, from a technical standpoint. Even myself, going back and evaluating us as coaches from a defensive standpoint, what we could've done better from a play-calling standpoint and how we could've eased our players with the things that they were doing offensively, which were very challenging. It's a credit to them, the way they operated on Thursday. I felt like there were a lot of things that we could've done better, both fundamentally and schematically."

**As far as schematically, anytime you don't have sacks and people say 'Why don't you blitz more?' So is that--?**

"That will never change for me. I think we blitzed, I don't want to give a number. I don't have it on me. But, I do know that we've tried blitzing on third down and have lost. We've tried rushing three and we've lost. We've tried rushing four and we haven't had success. So, we're digging. We're digging. We're trying to find a way to give our guys a chance to be successful on third down. We had that first third down won. Again, it goes back to silly mistakes here and there. Unneeded penalties. Unneeded fundamental flaws. Every week represents a different challenge. So, blitzing is not necessarily the answer."

**Is that what you mean by that? It'll never change?**

"Yeah. It'll never change. That's all week-to-week, it really is. We didn't blitz versus Seattle and got plenty of pressure. We blitzed against [Carolina Panthers QB] Cam [Newton] and he got a 40-yard touchdown. I know the first trigger is 'No pressure, let's get the quarterback.' Well, there's other ways you can get the quarterback besides blitzing and bringing extra people."

**Some coaches believe if you can't get there with four, you bring five. If you can't get there with five, you bring six. Do you not share that philosophy?**

"Same thing, it goes back to every week representing its own challenge. You'd love to say bringing five is the answer, but if bringing five was the answer everyone would do it. Just understand the flaws of if you bring five, now you're losing one in coverage and there's a hole. So, you play a guy who's really smart, a guy like [Arizona Cardinals QB]

Carson Palmer who knows his offense inside and out. The question is, is that fifth guy worth him recognizing where that hole is voided? So, every week is a different challenge and trying to find out how to best get after the quarterback. Dallas got after him with three last week. Is that the answer? I don't know. Is it four? Is it two? Is it one? I have no idea. It all goes back on tape and every week is different."

**Looking at the Arizona Cardinals on tape and you see Arizona Cardinals WR Larry Fitzgerald still doing what he's doing 14 years in, what makes him so reliable for the Cardinals? What kind of role does DB Jimmie Ward have this time as a free safety going up against him?**

"I've never worked with Larry. I've been with coaches who have worked with him. From everything I gather, he's the definition of professional, in terms of his approach to the game, his work ethic, the way he approaches practice, studies film, takes care of his body, mentors the younger guys. Everything I've heard about Larry Fitzgerald is so much more than what he does on the football field. It's my opinion, my belief, my whole philosophy that what he is on the football field is because of what he is as a man off of the football field. It all translates, it all ties in together. Everything I've heard about Larry just shows up on the football field because of who he is."

**Jimmie Ward, he's covered him obviously from the slot to the outside. Now he's going to be a free safety defending him--?**

"Yeah Jimmie is a free. Him coming out of the middle to man somebody up. Last year he was the nickel corner. Completely different position this year as opposed to what he did a year ago. Our plan for Jimmie, I do think he has a chance to be a really good free safety. A really good free safety. How good is going to be up to him and how quickly he grasps all the concepts we're throwing at him. He's unique back there. When you have a unique guy, you don't want to mess with what you're asking him to do. You don't want to flood his mind with too many thoughts."

**Going back to the pass rush, LB Elvis Dumervil has played less than a quarter of the snaps. I know DL Tank Carradine is out so you're going to have to vary your rotations a little bit. In terms of his playing time, has that been something where you want to ramp it up as the season goes along or are you looking at it like, 'We're going against run-heavy offenses and we need to be in base more often?'**

"The first three weeks we felt like we've been playing some run-heavy offenses, for sure. Again, it goes back to us being dominant on first and second down. Or even first down, to give yourself some second-and-long, third-and-long opportunities where he can get on the field. Before the game, I think we were doing really well on first down after the first two weeks. Really, really well. The whole idea of 'Let's get this dude out here,' the more you have confidence in your first down defense, the more you can get him more reps. Thursday obviously wasn't good enough for anyone who's a Niners fan or employee or anything. But, trying to get to that and trying to find opportunities to get on the field, that's always on our thoughts."

**Presumably, DL Solomon Thomas would be the first guy in for Tank. How are you going to rotate at that big end spot and on the left side?**

“On first and second down, we’re trying to make due, I shouldn’t say make do, that’s such a terrible term, but we have really good football players on the front that are capable of doing a lot of different things. Between [DL DeForest] Buckner, Solomon, [DL Arik] Armstead, [DL] Earl Mitchell, [DL] D.J. [Jones], [DL] Xavier Cooper, [DL] Aaron Lynch, all of them, we’ve got to find a way to best utilize their strengths to put us in a position to be dominant on first and second down so we can get our four best pass rushers on the field so we can get after the quarterback on third down. So, trying to pigeonhole guys as a big-end LEO, it’s passed that point now. It’s trying to get our four best guys on the football field, to put them in a position to be successful, so we can be successful on third down.”

**In terms of Solomon Thomas, when I’ve watched him on tape, it seems like he was consistently working into the chest of the offensive tackle. Is that the technique that you’re coaching or would you prefer him to work an edge?**

“You always want him to work an edge. I don’t know where it came from. No, you want him working an edge, for sure. I’ve said it up here before, the second hardest job for a rookie is to be a D-Lineman. Aside from being a quarterback, is being a D-Lineman, going through the struggles of the grind. They’re such bigger, stronger, faster athletes that he’s going against and trying to find his niche. That is a hard job for him. He’s going through growing pains. My thoughts have not waivered and my opinion of him has not waivered in the sense that he’s going to be special if he continues to work the way he has been working.”

**It seems like perhaps not a coincidence that you played 79 snaps in Seattle and then four days later you didn’t have the greatest defensive performance. Not that you can measure it, but how much do you think fatigue played a factor in that?**

“No excuses. The Rams played 75 snaps the week before also. Is it hard? Yeah. Did they have to do it? Yes.”

**They gave up 39.**

“They did. That’s a bad example. It’s mindset. It’s mind over matter. It’s the will to just drive and grind. It’s a grind. Every team is exposed to Thursday Night Football. The week before, Houston and Cincinnati had a defensive slug fest. So, there’s no excuses. We didn’t play well enough on defense at all. I do have great faith in the defense and I cannot wait, I cannot wait for Sunday to see what we’re made of.”

**How does their offense change without Arizona Cardinals RB David Johnson?**

“I don’t think it changes much. I think [Arizona Cardinals RB Andre] Ellington is still every bit as good of a receiver as David Johnson is. They still have great skill players. Carson is still a hell-of-a quarterback and [Arizona Cardinals head coach Bruce] coach Arians is a great offensive mind and puts his players in a position to be successful. I don’t think it changes much. I don’t think their philosophy changes at all. I still think they pose a lot of problems. Like I said, I’m just excited to get a chance to go against them.”

**One more question about Solomon Thomas. You had him rushing from the edge a lot in this previous game. When he was drafted, general manager John Lynch**

**talked about him kicking inside on passing downs. Do you feel he's out of position on the edge or do you like him more there or are you just trying to find something for him?**

"We're trying to get our best four on the field. I think Solomon could be a good edge rusher, but I don't disagree at all with John. I think he's going to be premier inside rusher when it's all said and done, so we do need to find ways to get him inside to rush the passer a little bit more. When you look at the guys we have, with Dumervil, [LB] Eli Harold, [LB Dekoda] Watson, Solomon, Buckner, Armstead, there's really good pass rushers, and trying to find a way to get them all on the field at the same time and which combination is going to work, we've got to continue to work through that."

**You talked about Elvis, how would you assess his play just through three games here?**

"He's been good. I think someone told me a stat that he's up there four-three edge rushers in terms of pressures per pass play. I don't know what the exact number is, but it came from analytics. He's getting after the quarterback. He had a sack last week on that first third down and it was negated by a penalty. He's providing juice off the edge. We've just got to take advantage of our opportunities when we get a one-on-one. People inside are getting one-on-ones and Buckner will win, but somebody will fall off. It's close. I wish you guys would just watch the all 22, it's so freaking close for those guys and if they continue to just freaking work there's no doubt in my mind the sacks are going to come in bunches and all that stuff will happen. The consistency, the way we rushed against Seattle was awesome. It wasn't up to par, and they'll say it too, it wasn't up to par with the Rams. But, continue to grind and I think more often than not as we continue to work as a group and they get comfortable with each other it's going to be more consistent rather than not."

**How much of it is individual and one man beating the guy in front of him as well as the collective, two guys working together?**

"It's a combination of both, but in football it always comes down to a one-on-one. Somebody every down will have a one-on-one in pass rush and you have to win. In football, unfortunately, if you're not winning you're losing, period. With pass rush, you see the consistency or lack thereof in Week 1 to Week 2 to Week 3. We need to find a way to be consistently creating one-on-ones as a staff to see if we can create more one-on-ones and then as a defense, winning those one-on-ones when we get the opportunity. That's not just for the D-Line, that's for the DBs and the linebackers."

**With the pass rush struggling, would it be fair to say DeForest is exempt from that just based on his numbers it seems like he's generating?**

"DeForest is dominating. And those sacks are going to come in bunches for him. I know he hasn't gotten the sacks yet, but if he keeps doing what he's doing and he keeps operating the way he is, there's no doubt in my mind that he's going to flood the gates open. My comparison would be [Atlanta Falcons LB] Vic Beasley. And I know they are two completely different people, but Vic Beasley through four games last year, so 16, 20 games if you include his rookie year, wasn't getting much production on the quarterback, but you could feel some of his presence and then the last whatever

number games he just opened the flood gates with sacks. I think [Oakland Raiders DE] Khalil Mack had three his rookie year. You're getting to the quarterback, but you're a step short. He's going to find that step. There's no doubt he's going to find that step if he keeps working and the doors will just blow wide open and it'll also give an opportunity to the people around him."