

49ers Mid-Day Clips – January 10, 2017

Local Media

49ers Interview Louis Riddick for General Manager

By Taylor Price, 49ers.com

<http://www.49ers.com/news/article-2/49ers-Interview-Louis-Riddick-for-General-Manager/8fc81f49-5217-4908-892f-e0259d63737f>

Getting defensive? Despite interviews, 49ers likely to make offensive hire

By Eric Branch, San Francisco Chronicle

<http://www.sfgate.com/49ers/article/Getting-defensive-Despite-interviews-49ers-10848413.php>

49ers interview Panthers Sean McDermott, ESPN's Louis Riddick

By Cam Inman, San Jose Mercury News

<http://www.mercurynews.com/2017/01/10/49ers-interview-carolina-panthers-sean-mcdermott/>

Candid candidate: 49ers' GM hopeful Riddick's opinions are out in the open

By Matt Barrows, Sacramento Bee

<http://www.sacbee.com/sports/nfl/san-francisco-49ers/article125599239.html#storylink=cpy>

Report: Joseph to interview with 49ers – if Broncos don't hire him

By Matt Maiocco, CSNBayArea.com

<http://www.csnbayarea.com/49ers/report-joseph-interview-49ers-if-broncos-dont-hire-him>

Clemson QB Watson, a potential 49ers QB target, opts for draft

By Matt Maiocco, CSNBayArea.com

<http://www.csnbayarea.com/49ers/clemson-qb-watson-potential-49ers-qb-target-opts-draft>

Mike Nolan praises 49ers exec Paraag Marathe: 'Son of a gun is a good'

By Staff, CSNBayArea.com

<http://www.csnbayarea.com/49ers/mike-nolan-praises-49ers-exec-paraag-marathe-son-gun-good>

National Media

Cardinals stocked with options to replace Harold Goodwin, if necessary

By Josh Weinfuss, ESPN.com

http://www.espn.com/blog/nfcwest/post/_id/125343/cardinals-stocked-with-options-to-replace-harold-goodwin-if-necessary

Seahawks' maligned line now paving way for offense

By Lindsay Jones, USA Today Sports

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/seahawks/2017/01/10/seattle-offensive-line-pete-carroll/96402340/>

Giants say report that they trashed team charter is 'false'

By Joe Giglio and James Kratch, Newark Star-Ledger

http://www.nj.com/giants/index.ssf/2017/01/giants_accused_of_trashing_airplane_on_ride_back_f.html#in_cart_river_index

As Vikings move forward with Sam Bradford, Teddy Bridgewater's future remains cloudy

By Ben Goessling, ESPN.com

http://www.espn.com/blog/nflnation/post/_id/228235/as-vikings-move-forward-with-sam-bradford-teddy-bridgewaters-future-remains-cloudy

Ravens planning for LB Terrell Suggs to return next season

By Jamison Hensley, ESPN.com

http://www.espn.com/nfl/story/_id/18446449/baltimore-ravens-planning-linebacker-terrell-suggs-return-2017

Raiders OC Bill Musgrave not expected to return

By Conor Orr, NFL.com

<http://www.nfl.com/news/story/0ap3000000772568/article/raiders-oc-bill-musgrave-not-expected-to-return>

Miami Dolphins have defensive coordinator favorite in place if Vance Joseph bolts

By Armando Salguero, Miami Herald

<http://www.miamiherald.com/sports/spt-columns-blogs/armando-salguero/article125632899.html>

Local Clips – Full Version

49ers Interview Louis Riddick for General Manager

By Taylor Price, 49ers.com

Louis Riddick is the latest candidate to join the San Francisco 49ers search for a new general manager. The 49ers met with ESPN's front office insider on Tuesday. Before joining ESPN in 2013, Riddick spent more than a decade in NFL personnel departments.

He began his NFL career as a pro scout in Washington from 2001-04 before being elevated to director of pro personnel. Riddick held that position for three years from 2005-07. He then moved to Philadelphia as a scout for the Eagles. He was eventually promoted to assistant director of pro personnel in 2009 and later elevated again to director of pro personnel from 2010-13.

Riddick is a regular on one of ESPN's premier shows, "NFL Insiders," appearing as one of its main analysts year-round. He can also be seen on the network's flagship show, "Sportscenter," as well as "NFL Live." Riddick's role at ESPN has grown each year. He's now a featured analyst on the network's coverage of the first round of the NFL Draft.

After a successful playing career at the University of Pittsburgh, the former defensive back was selected by the 49ers in the ninth round of the 1991 NFL Draft. Riddick enjoyed a seven-year career with the 49ers, Atlanta Falcons, Cleveland Browns and Oakland Raiders.

Getting defensive? Despite interviews, 49ers likely to make offensive hire

By Eric Branch, San Francisco Chronicle

On the 35th anniversary of The Catch, the 49ers, whose five-Super-Bowl dynasty was built on offensive innovation, interviewed a defensive coordinator for their head-coach opening today. Their next scheduled interview: another defensive coordinator.

What in the name of Bill Walsh is going on here?

The 49ers are probably just doing their due diligence. They met with Panthers defensive coordinator Sean McDermott today and are scheduled to do the same with Miami defensive coordinator Vance Joseph on Thursday, ESPN reported.

However, it's telling that their first four interviews before today were with offensive coordinators: Buffalo's Anthony Lynn, New England's Josh McDaniels, Washington's Sean McVay and Atlanta's Kyle Shanahan. The 49ers tried with Chip Kelly, and they'll probably try again to hire a head coach who can evoke memories of their trend-setting offensive glory days.

The 49ers, of course, haven't been anything close to an offensive juggernaut in some time. Consider: The 49ers, Titans and Dolphins are the only teams that haven't ranked among the NFL's top 10 in both points and yards since 2003.

Their ignominious streak has continued in recent years partly because they've spent their first draft pick on a defensive player the past four years, and haven't used a top-200 pick on a quarterback since 2011. Their new head coach and general manager will be charged with using a high-end pick on a QB and developing him, which suggests they won't be getting defensive, despite this week's interview schedule.

49ers interview Panthers Sean McDermott, ESPN's Louis Riddick

By Cam Inman, San Jose Mercury News

Sean McDermott on Tuesday became the first defensive coordinator to interview for the 49ers' coaching vacancy.

McDermott, 42, has been the Carolina Panthers' defensive coordinator since 2011, and he's already interviewed for vacancies at the Buffalo Bills and San Diego Chargers.

McDermott follows four offense-oriented coaches — Anthony Lynn, Kyle Shanahan, Josh McDaniels and Sean McVay — to meet with 49ers CEO Jed York.

Also Tuesday, the 49ers interviewed their fifth potential general manager, Louis Riddick, an ESPN analyst who's worked in the NFL personnel departments in Washington and Philadelphia. Riddick was a 1991 ninth-round draft pick of the 49ers, and he went on to a seven-year playing career elsewhere as a safety.

With the Jacksonville Jaguars hiring Doug Marrone as coach on Monday, that leaves the 49ers coach-search competitors as the Bills, Chargers, Denver Broncos and Los Angeles Rams. Only the 49ers and Rams are believed to be pursuing McDaniels, whose only previous head-coaching gig was with the Broncos.

Last year, McDermott interviewed with the Cleveland Browns and Tampa Bay Buccaneers, who hired others while the Panthers marched on to Super Bowl 50, where they lost 24-10 to the Denver Broncos at Levi's Stadium.

The Panthers perennially ranked among the league's top-10 defenses in yards allowed from 2012-15, and they fell to 21st this season. Carolina allowed the 26th most points this season (25.1 points per game).

While they search for their fourth coach in four years, the 49ers are simultaneously surveying general manager candidates. Other candidates expected to interview with the 49ers are Vance Joseph (Miami Dolphins defensive coordinator), Tom Cable (Seattle Seahawks offensive line) and the Seahawks' co-directors of players personnel, Trent Kirchner and Scott Fitterer. Joseph's will be on Thursday if the Broncos don't hire him after his interview there Tuesday, ESPN reported.

Previously interviewed GM candidates were Eliot Wolf, Brian Gutekunst, George Paton and Jimmy Raye III.

Mike Nolan thinks 49ers should hire Brian Billick

By Daniel Mano, San Jose Mercury News

Take it from a former 49ers head coach: Brian Billick is the best candidate out there.

The thing is, NFL Network analyst Mike Nolan told KNBR, none of the teams with head coaching vacancies are looking at Billick.

Nolan, who coached the 49ers from 2005-08, said Billick, the Ravens coach from 1999-2007, is an ideal candidate.

"I will say somebody that I think would make a great head coach for any football team, and he's never interviewed anymore, and that's Brian Billick," Nolan told Murph & Mac. "Brian's the kind of guy that really knows what it takes to do the job. But he's not on the docket right now."

"Brian Billick did as good a job as anyone as far as putting a staff together," Nolan said, "working well with (Ravens GM) Ozzie Newsome and letting Ozzie do his job while Brian did his head coaching job."

That last bit is especially important considering the 49ers are also looking for a general manager.

Finding a coach and GM that get along isn't all that important, Nolan said.

"It sounds like what's really important is that the two guys get along. Personally, that's good, but (former 49ers GM) Scot (McCloughan) and I didn't even know each other when we first got together," Nolan said. "I just think that if you've got somebody that you've determined can work well with other people ... (then) they don't need to be joined at the hip."

Hire the general manager first, though, Nolan said. His suggestion: Cardinals vice president of player personnel Terry McDonough, brother of ESPN analyst Sean McDonough.

Terry McDonough started his scouting career as an intern with the 49ers in 1989.

Could the 49ers draft Deshaun Watson?

By Daniel Mano, San Jose Mercury News

After the 49ers check finding a coach and GM off their agenda, the team could address its quarterback situation.

Clemson quarterback Deshaun Watson may have helped San Francisco in that department Monday.

Watson went out in style with a game-winning touchdown toss in the waning seconds of the College Football Playoff championship game, then declaring his intentions to enter the 2017 NFL Draft.

"I think it's my time to go," Watson said, per Associated Press. "Kind of end it with a bang."

Thus starts the speculation of the 49ers taking the two-time Heisman finalist with the No. 2 overall pick.

A majority of major mock drafts have the 49ers taking a quarterback, though North Carolina's Mitch Trubisky and Notre Dame's DeShone Kizer are also predicted as their selection.

"It's worth noting that team sources have Kizer rated higher than Deshaun Watson," reputed draft analyst Walter Cherepinsky aka Walter Football wrote. "They like Kizer because of his arm strength, mobility and upside."

MMQB.com has Watson going 10th to the Bills and CBS Sports puts him at sixth to the Jets, while both mock drafts have the 49ers picking Trubisky.

Bleacher Report, on the other hand, thinks the 49ers will take Watson.

Candid candidate: 49ers' GM hopeful Riddick's opinions are out in the open

By Matt Barrows, Sacramento Bee

On October 2013, Louis Riddick was interviewed in a story that polled NFL personnel experts on who they'd choose as their starting quarterback: Alex Smith or Colin Kaepernick.

Riddick, whom the 49ers will talk to Tuesday for their vacant general manager post, went with the popular choice.

"With Colin, I think you get the intelligence and ability to handle volume as far as the amount you can put on him mentally that gives you a lot of options week to week game-plan wise as well, with the difference being that he is willing to take more chances at pushing the ball vertically down the field, and not being so quick to simply take sacks or take off every time the read isn't clean initially," he said in the ESPN story. "There is no question the upside lies with Colin in terms of who has the higher ceiling, and with both given equal weapons/protection, Colin would be the more explosive player and the player I would choose."

Two years later, Riddick had a decidedly more pessimistic take on Kaepernick.

"It looks like the decision-making and accuracy on a consistent basis are not clicking," he said in a USA Today story, this one written after Kaepernick had a four-interception outing against the Arizona Cardinals in 2015.

"I'm starting to feel the same way about Colin as I do (Robert Griffin III)," he continued. "You never want that to be the case. The game against Arizona was terrible. I'm watching saying, 'Colin, are you blind?'"

Riddick was asked if it was so bad the 49ers should think about trading the quarterback.

"If I were in a front office, hell yeah we'd be having internal discussions about possibly prying him out of there," he said. "In a system where you could utilize him as a dual threat, definitely."

All the comments were made during Riddick's role as an ESPN analyst, one in which he is paid to be opinionated. Riddick, 47, spent seven seasons as an NFL defensive back and 13 more in Washington's and Philadelphia's personnel departments. He's said since that his directness is one of the reasons he's no longer in the league.

For the last four years, he's displayed that candor on television, in radio podcasts, in newspaper stories and on Twitter where he has posted more than 14,000 tweets.

All of which has makes him an extremely rare case in the guarded and secretive world of NFL front offices. That is, his opinions and analyses are there for the whole world to see.

Most of the time, Riddick's insights have been astute.

He's been quick to praise Patriots offensive coordinator Josh McDaniels, perhaps the 49ers' top head-coaching candidate, in recent years, and because of that many have linked them as a one-two combination in San Francisco. In March of 2015, when Frank Gore was entering free agency, Riddick said he thought the veteran running back, 31 at the time, still could be a top runner. He was right. Gore rushed for 1,025 yards this past season, the 12th most in the NFL.

Some of his takes, however, are sure to make long-suffering 49ers fans wince.

On Twitter, Riddick acknowledged he was "very high on" A.J. Jenkins when the receiver was coming out in the draft in 2012 and Riddick was in the Eagles' personnel department. Jenkins, taken in the first round by the 49ers that year, easily was former general manager Trent Baalke's biggest draft miss. Baalke traded Jenkins after just one year, and he has been out of the NFL for the last two years.

Riddick also asserted on Twitter in 2014 that offensive linemen Marcus Martin and Brandon Thomas, both of whom were selected by the 49ers in the third round that year, were "two of my favorite OL's acquired for great value due to positional versatility. ... Future starters."

Martin has started 24 games at guard and center over the last three seasons, but he's struggled when he's played and he lost his starting role this past season. The 49ers traded Thomas, who was recovering from an ACL injury when he was drafted, in 2016 and he spent the season on Detroit's practice squad.

Kaepernick, meanwhile, is polarizing among 49ers and there's a fair chance he won't be on the team no matter whom the 49ers hire at general manager. But he also happens to be the only quarterback currently signed for the 2017 season.

One assertion on which Riddick will get no argument from 49ers fans. He said recently on ESPN's "NFL Insiders" show that the 49ers roster needs a "massive overhaul" at "some very, very, very important positions."

The Twitter Chronicles of Riddick:

* "Devey and Pears. Not even close to being good enough to be dependable starters."

-- October 22, 2015

* Jaquiski "Tartt is a very intriguing blend of football IQ, competitiveness, athletic skill, & versatility. Makes a strong group even stronger."

-- May 22, 2015

* "Very impressed by what #49ers are doing. Jimmie Ward the best, most versatile DB in this draft (along w/Kyle Fuller)."

-- May 10, 2014

* "as you know, was very high on (A.J.) Jenkins coming out in the '12 draft as well, so will be following his development closely"

-- July 24, 2013

* "Ray Ray Armstrong continually showed up at LB for the #Rams. Favorite of mine during his early years with the #Canes"

-- Aug. 11, 2013

Report: Joseph to interview with 49ers – if Broncos don't hire him

By Matt Maiocco, CSNBayArea.com

The 49ers are reportedly scheduled to interview Miami Dolphins defensive coordinator Vance Joseph for the team's head-coaching job.

But the Denver Broncos might have something to say about that.

Joseph, who is scheduled to interview Tuesday with the Broncos, is considered a top candidate to replace Gary Kubiak, who resigned after the team's final game of the season.

Joseph will interview with the 49ers if the Broncos do not hire Joseph before that, ESPN reported.

Joseph, 44, began his pro coaching career with the 49ers as a defensive backs coach from 2005 to '10. After coaching the secondary with Houston and Cincinnati, Joseph was hired as defensive coordinator this season on Adam Gase's staff with the Dolphins.

49ers interviews

Wednesday, Jan. 4

Buffalo interim head coach Anthony Lynn (coach)

Thursday, Jan. 5
Green Bay director of football operations Eliot Wolf (GM)
Green Bay director of player personnel Brian Gutekunst (GM)

Friday, Jan. 6
Minnesota assistant general manager George Paton (GM)
Atlanta offensive coordinator Kyle Shanahan (coach)

Saturday, Jan. 7
New England offensive coordinator Josh McDaniels (coach)

Sunday, Jan. 8
Indianapolis vice president of football operations Jimmy Raye III (GM)

Monday, Jan. 9
Washington offensive coordinator Sean McVay (coach)
Carolina assistant general manager Brandon Beane (GM)

Tuesday, Jan. 10
Carolina defensive coordinator Sean McDermott (coach)
ESPN analyst Louis Riddick (GM)

Thursday, Jan. 12
Miami defensive coordinator Vance Joseph (coach)

Sunday, Jan. 15
Seattle offensive line/assistant head coach Tom Cable (coach)

Monday, Jan. 16
Seattle co-director of player personnel Scott Fitterer (GM)
Seattle co-director of player personnel Trent Kirchner (GM)

Clemson QB Watson, a potential 49ers QB target, opts for draft

By Matt Maiocco, CSNBayArea.com

After a remarkable performance against a defense that was talked about as being among the best in college football history, Clemson quarterback Deshaun Watson announced he is turning pro.

"It's my time to go," Watson told reporters Monday night after leading Clemson to a 35-31 victory over previously unbeaten Alabama in the national title game.

The 49ers own the No. 2 overall pick in the draft. If the 49ers have not filled their need for a potential franchise quarterback after the first seven weeks of the new league year with a free agent or trade, Watson figures to be in the conversation as an early draft pick.

Watson completed 36 of 56 passes for 420 yards and three touchdowns against Alabama. He also gained 43 yards and a touchdown rushing.

The winning points came with :01 remaining when Watson found Hunter Renfrow on a 2-yard touchdown pass to cap a nine-play, 68-yard drive that took 2 minutes, 6 seconds.

As Clemson's full-time starter in 2015 and '16, Watson completed 67.4 percent of his pass attempts while averaging 8.1 yards per attempt with 76 touchdown passes and 30 interceptions.

North Carolina's Mitch Trubisky, who also figures to get consideration for the No. 1 quarterback in the draft, announced Monday he is foregoing his senior season, too.

Texas A&M pass-rusher Myles Garrett is widely considered the top NFL prospect in the draft. The Cleveland Browns have No. 1 overall pick. ESPN recently reported, citing a source close to the situation, the Browns have an "astronomical grade" on Garrett.

Mike Nolan praises 49ers exec Paraag Marathe: 'Son of a gun is a good'

By Staff, CSNBAYArea.com

Jed York and Paraag Marathe were apart of the team that interviewed Mike Nolan in January 2005.

On Tuesday morning, the former 49ers head coach was asked if York and Marathe need to simply "get out of the way" and let the football people make the decisions in Santa Clara.

"After they pick a guy, definitely. But in the process, they're the ones making the decision," Nolan said on KNBR 680. "They've done this a few times. Everyone is very hopeful that they get it right, but obviously they've failed a few times so they're saying, 'You've screwed this thing up a few times, so please get out of the way.'

"I believe they're asking the right questions ... they need to make the best decision based on all the information. They're gonna get all the information, believe me. I have all the trust in the world.

"I think Paraag, personally, I think he's one of the best at the job he does ... as far as the cap and contracts and really putting together all the information -- I'm just telling you, the son-of-a-gun is good.

"I have absolutely zero questions in my mind how good he is. But the two of them have to put their heads together and pick the right guy."

York and Marathe need to pick more than just one guy, as the 49ers are in the market for a head coach and a general manager.

"I think they're headed in the right direction, they're just gonna have to pull the trigger on the right guy."

Nolan believes the 49ers should hire the GM first and the head coach second.

Dwight Clark celebrates 35th anniversary of 'The Catch' with Clemson national title

By Nick Wagoner, ESPN.com

For former San Francisco 49ers wide receiver Dwight Clark, there's something about ringing in the new year that brings good fortune.

On Sunday, Clark celebrated his 60th birthday. On Monday night, he was in Tampa to see Clemson, his alma mater, win the college football national championship in thrilling fashion. On Tuesday, he celebrated the 35th anniversary of "The Catch," the game-tying 6-yard touchdown he caught from Joe Montana in the 1982 NFC Championship Game that set up the game-winning extra point to send the Niners to the Super Bowl.

And as if all of that wasn't enough, the play call that ended with Clemson quarterback Deshaun Watson hitting wide receiver Hunter Renfrow for the game-winning 2-yard touchdown against Alabama on

Monday looked awfully familiar. In the Eastern time zone, Renfrow scored his touchdown on Jan. 10, exactly 35 years after Clark made "The Catch."

The play that afforded Watson the chance to throw or run for the score and sprung Renfrow with the pick/rub play had a striking resemblance to the play in which Montana found Clark. That play, called simply "sprint right option," differed from the Clemson touchdown only in how it finished, but not in how it was designed.

In the Niners' version, Montana's first read was supposed to be receiver Freddie Solomon, who was supposed to shake loose via pick, just as Renfrow did. Earlier in that game, Solomon had scored on a similar play.

"There's all kinds of versions of how we had practiced it, where we practiced it, when -- everybody remembers it a little bit different," Clark told the 49ers website in 2013. "The way I remember it is, we had practiced it during practice maybe once, and then Bill [Walsh] kept Joe and I after practice during training camp, and he said, "This is what we're going to do; we're going to try to pick the defender that's covering Freddie, hit him, touchdown. If that doesn't work, then keep rolling, you can run in if it's open. The third option would be to roll to the right and throw it high enough where it goes out of bounds or Dwight can jump up and catch it. But don't throw it low, don't throw an interception. We won't call this on fourth down. Give us another down to make a play."

But Solomon slipped the second time, which threw off the timing and forced Clark to run his route in the back of the end zone, faking left and then tiptoeing along the back right corner of the end zone.

Montana was flushed from the pocket, and as he faded backward and was hit, he lofted a high pass to Clark in hopes he could come down with it. Clark's leap and fingertip grab remains one of the most famous plays in NFL history for not only its degree of difficulty, but also for how clutch it was in a big moment.

It also set in motion a series of events that established the Niners as one of the NFL's dominant franchises for the better part of the two decades that followed.

"What I love about it the most is that it's connected me with 49ers fans for the rest of time," Clark said in 2013. "I didn't realize at the time that people would keep talking about it. But they not only talk about it, they pass it down through the generations. I'll be at an autograph thing, there'll be a 10-year old kid saying, "You're The Catch."

On Monday night, after watching Renfrow haul in the national-title-winning catch while playing the role of Solomon, Clark told CSN Bay Area that the player in his position never had a chance -- much like Solomon didn't -- in 1982 because the player running his route "got pushed to the ground."

Although it didn't play out exactly how "The Catch" did, it was just another sweet victory in early January for Clark.

49ers interview ESPN's Louis Riddick for general manager opening

By Chris Biderman, NinersWire.com

The 49ers Tuesday announced the interview of ESPN analyst Louis Riddick for their vacancy at general manager created by Trent Baalke's firing.

Riddick, who's been with ESPN since 2013, spent time as the director of pro personnel with Philadelphia and Washington. He held the position for three seasons with the Eagles in 2010 through 2013 and with Washington in 2005 through 2007.

Riddick was drafted by the 49ers as a defensive back in the ninth round in 1991. He played seven NFL seasons for Falcons, Browns and Raiders before moving into scouting with Washington in 2001.

The 49ers are simultaneously conducting the search for a new head coach after firing Chip Kelly following a 2-14 finish to 2016. CEO Jed York has said he's looking to pair a general manager and coach that can work well together and "are going to be fighting for each other."

Riddick as a pundit on social media has been effusive of his praise of Patriots offensive coordinator Josh McDaniels, who's emerging as a favorite to land the coaching position. The two are believed to be linked to San Francisco's openings.

The 49ers would offer their coach and general manager a blank slate, with some \$87 million in cap space and no burdensome contracts – including at quarterback. Colin Kaepernick is expected to opt out of his contract after restructuring his deal in October while Blaine Gabbert and Christian Ponder are un-signed for 2017.

It was reported Monday by NFL Media that Packers executives Eliot Wolf and Brian Gutekunst were the favorites to land San Francisco's general manager vacancy.

The 49ers' other GM candidates are Minnesota assistant GM George Paton, Colts vice president of football operations Jimmy Raye III, Panther assistant GM Brandon Beane and Seahawks executives Scott Fitterer and Trent Kirchner.

Paton was interviewed Friday, Ray Sunday and Beane Monday. Interviews with Fitterer and Kirchner are expected to happen in the coming days.

Kansas City assistant GM Chris Ballard was blocked by the Chiefs for interviewing for the position last week. Patriots director of player personnel Nick Caserio declined an interview over the weekend. It was reported he was advised to "steer clear" of the opening.

Should the 49ers take Clemson star Deshaun Watson in NFL draft?

By Chris Biderman, NinersWire.com

Deshaun Watson might have catapulted himself toward the top of NFL draft boards with his performance Monday against Alabama.

The question the 49ers will have to figure out is whether or not Watson is worth the No. 2-overall pick in the upcoming NFL draft – or if they should consider him later if he doesn't get snatched up by another team.

Watson was stellar late in the upset win over Nick Saban's top-shelf defense, orchestrating a game-winning drive and throwing a touchdown pass to receiver Hunter Renfrow with one second remaining to avenge last year's loss to 'Bama in the national title game rematch.

In his two games against Alabama, Watson amassed 941 yards of total offense, threw seven touchdown passes and one interception. He ran for a score in last year's title bout.

San Francisco faces obvious questions at the position with all three of their quarterbacks from 2016 facing the possibility of free agency. Colin Kaepernick can opt out of his contract next month after restructuring his deal in October while Blaine Gabbert and Christian Ponder are un-signed for 2017.

"You can't take anything away from Deshaun Watson. He was outstanding and he deserves all the credit and all the acclaim he's getting," ESPN draft analyst Mel Kiper said on "NFL Insiders" Tuesday.

“But I think you differentiate college to the NFL. Remember, 99 plays (Monday) night they ran against that Alabama defense. They wore them out. The previous year, they ran 85 against Alabama – same exact thing happened.

“. . . I look at Deshaun Watson right now and say borderline first-round pick. He’s battling right now . . . you think Patrick Mahomes, Texas Tech, DeShone Kizer, Notre Dame, to see who will be the second quarterback taken behind Mitch Trubisky of North Carolina.”

We took a long look at the Watson-Trubisky comparison before the national championship game. Trubisky was only the Tarheels’ for one season, while Watson was Clemson’s starter for two. The latter, of course, took his team to the title game both years.

Watson is considered the more athletic of the two prospects, while Trubisky is the more accurate thrower. He completed 68 percent of his passes and threw 30 touchdowns to six interceptions. Watson: 67 percent, 41 touchdowns, 17 interceptions. Both are 6-foot-3 and in the 220-pound range.

Overall, the upcoming quarterback class isn’t considered very strong or deep. Neither Trubisky nor Watson are assured to get taken early in the first round. But that could change given the inflated value at the position.

With the second pick, there’s a good chance the 49ers try to identify the best player available, regardless of position, which could be Alabama defensive lineman Jonathan Allen, Texas A&M pass rusher Myles Garrett, Alabama linebacker Reuben Foster, Clemson receiver Mike Williams, Michigan defensive back/linebacker Jabrill Peppers or a slew of other prospects.

Another enticing option might be trade back four a bounty of early-round selections to help rebuild a roster that’s eroded talent in recent seasons. Or, the 49ers could trade back to acquire assets to trade for a quarterback like Jimmy Garoppolo.

But San Francisco, for now, must focus on finding a general manager and coach duo to make those decisions first.

The draft is in 108 days as of this writing, which gives us plenty of time to look into the Watson question more closely before picks are made.

Blank canvas: Long rebuilding effort awaits 49ers after miserable 2016

By Chris Biderman, NinersWire.com

The 49ers enter the offseason in phase one of a massive reconstruction project.

CEO Jed York is tasked with laying a new foundation after a miserable 2-14 season that resulted in the canning of coach Chip Kelly and general manager Trent Baalke.

That’s why the 49ers ranked 23rd (second-to-last) in the USA TODAY’s NFL Rebuild Rankings. Only the Browns, who finished 1-15 are ranked worse. From USAT’s Michael Middlehurst-Schwartz:

After firing Chip Kelly and Trent Baalke in yet another reset, San Francisco appears to be aimless. The last-ranked defense is in disarray. Yet the 49ers may be lured into investing in a young quarterback, especially if Colin Kaepernick departs. With a multi-year rebuild ahead, owner Jed York needs to find the right general manager and coach pairing to establish the proper culture.

The rankings were created to illustrate which teams were in the best shape heading into 2017. Not surprisingly, the Raiders and Giants, two playoff teams eliminated in the first round over the weekend, rank first and second, respectively.

It's clear the 49ers are taking a long-term approach to reconstructing their football operation. They currently have no coach, general manager or quarterback.

However, it could be a good situation moving forward if York finds the right coach and general manager combination to take the reigns. The 49ers are expected to have some \$87-million in cap space and 24 unsigned players once the new league year begins, according to Overthecap.com. That doesn't include Colin Kaepernick.

Kaepernick is expected to opt out of his contract and test free agency after restructuring his deal in October. That would allow a new coach and GM to find a new quarterback of their choosing, either through the NFL draft, free agency or trade. San Francisco has the second pick in the upcoming draft.

With an entirely blank canvas to work with, San Francisco could be an advantageous landing spot for their new coach and general manager – if York handles the situation correctly. This round of hires will be a critical moment for York after he fired three coaches following the last three seasons.

Patriots Josh McDaniels reportedly “has had the inside track” to fill the coaching vacancy – where he could be paired with ESPN analyst Louis Riddick. McDaniels might also be the best candidate to lure Tom Brady's backup Jimmy Garoppolo in a trade to solve the question at quarterback.

Additionally, up-and-coming candidate Sean McVay, Washington's 30-year-old offensive coordinator, “crushed” his interview with San Francisco's brass Monday, per NFL Media. McVay has strong ties to the 49ers' organization through his grandfather John, the general manager throughout the team's run to five Super Bowls in the 80s and 90s.

It's also been reported by NFL Media that Packers executives Eliot Wolf and Brian Gutekunst are the favorites to fill the general vacancy. Both executives have a strong track record with Green Bay, building a team that's reached the playoffs in eight straight seasons and nine of the last 10.

Report: Josh McDaniels 'has inside track' to 49ers coaching job

By Chris Biderman, NinersWire.com

As the 49ers' search for Chip Kelly's replacement goes on, one candidate continues to be mentioned as the favorite.

Patriots offensive coordinator Josh McDaniels, who reportedly finds San Francisco's opening the most appealing of the jobs he's interviewed for, “has had the inside track” on filling the vacancy, according to The MMQB's Albert Breer:

Josh McDaniels has had the inside track, and my understanding is that he preferred the Niners' situation to the other two he interviewed for, because this is a from-the-ground-up situation. No bad contracts, pick your own QB, high draft picks... it's basically like an expansion team. And there'll be a new GM coming with you, too. If McDaniels gets the job, it could be Lou Riddick filling that role.

McDaniels, 40, has done good work with Tom Brady as the Patriots offensive coordinator the last five seasons.

The thinking is McDaniels has had time to learn from his mistakes from his brief tenure as Broncos head coach from 2009 to 2010, when he was one of the youngest coaches in league history.

McDaniels went 11-17 before being fired after a 3-9 start to his second season. The Broncos with McDaniels at the helm traded away Jay Cutler and eventually brought in Tim Tebow.

There were rumors of discontent behind closed doors and in Denver's locker room, while sideline tirades caught by television cameras painted a grim picture of McDaniels' relationship with his players.

McDaniels then spent 2011 as the Rams offensive coordinator before going back to the Patriots and Bill Belichick. McDaniels interviewed with Los Angeles and Jacksonville for their coaching vacancies. The Jaguars hired Doug Marrone on Monday.

The 49ers' other known coaching candidates are Washington offensive coordinator Sean McVay, Falcons offensive coordinator Kyle Shanahan, Bills offensive coordinator/interim head coach Anthony Lynn, Panthers defensive coordinator Sean McDermott, Dolphins defensive coordinator Vance Joseph and Seahawks offensive line coach Tom Cable.

Lynn interviewed last Wednesday, Shanahan Friday, McDaniels Saturday and McVay Monday. Interviews Joseph and Cable are expected in the coming days.

It was reported by NFL Media that McVay "crushed" his interview with the 49ers.

McDaniels can't be hired until the Patriots season is over. He's unable to have a second interview until the Patriots are eliminated from the playoffs, or during the bye week later this month between the conference championship round and the Super Bowl.

Riddick is expected to be interviewed Tuesday for the vacancy created by Trent Baalke's firing last week. It's been reported by NFL Media that Packers executives Eliot Wolf and Brian Gutekunst are the co-favorites to become the 49ers' new general manager.

Mike Nolan advises Jed York to hire the GM first

By Kevin Jones, KNBR.com

Former 49ers head coach and NFL Network analyst Mike Nolan joined the Murph and Mac show on Tuesday, and there was a ton to glean from the interview.

First things first, Nolan regrets being hired before general manager Scot McCloughan back in 2005, and strongly advised Jed York to do the opposite this time around. McCloughan ended up outlasting Nolan, who was fired midseason in 2008.

"Hire the general manager first for this simple reason: It's always players first — always" Nolan said. "It might even be first through 10. Players first. Because great players make a coach look like a hero. But it's not the other way around. A great coach sometimes, if you don't have the right guys on the field, you can be as good as you want — it's hard to get a win on Sunday's."

Also, Nolan isn't quite sure why one of York's biggest priorities is how well the head coach and general manager get along. Nolan provided some background information on why he hired McCloughan. Hint: It wasn't his personality.

"I hired Scot. I was looking for somebody that I felt was the best at picking players. Because that is ultimately the job of the general manager," Nolan said. "I don't care what else he can do. I mean, he might have the worst people skills in the world — if the guy knows a player and can pick the right guy, that's what we were looking for and that's what I was looking for."

"It sounds like what's really important is that the two guys get along. You know, personally, that's good, but Scot and I didn't even know each other when we first got together. And they are looking so much for that. I just think if you've got somebody that you determine can work well with other people, and they've proven they have people skills and will do that...They don't need to be joined at the hip. If they grow together, like any marriage, they can be successful."

There were reports that Paraag Marathe was meddling in the football operation during Nolan's tenure with the 49ers from 2005-2008, even sitting in on coaches meetings. But Nolan had positive things to say about Marathe's role as Chief Strategist.

"Listen, Paraag, I think he's one of the best at the job he does," Nolan said. "I'm not talking about (hiring coaches), but as far as the cap and contracts and really putting together all the information, I'm just telling you, the son of a gun is good. I have absolutely zero questions in my mind how good he is."

Nolan also detailed how his interview process went back in 2005. The 49ers flew all of the candidates out to St. Louis to keep everyone in a central location. Dr. John York, Jed York and Marathe were a part of the interview process. John is not a part of the process this time around.

"We interviewed the night before briefly," Nolan said. "Then the next day we had a long eight hour interview to go through all the different scenarios of a lot of different things. That was the way we did it at that time. Like I said, I think it's very similar now. I would like to think they've become better and progressed at it. That's not necessarily something you want to get good at because as you know and I know, that means you're doing it a little more than you'd like."

"I think a lot of teams miss the mark on what it takes to do the job. And so therefore, there's a lot of questions involved in it that I don't think personally have a whole lot to do whether you'll be good at the job and whether you'll fit the situations there...The disappointment sometimes is that you kind of think, you know, if you guys were hitting the mark, I'd be more excited about this job. But you're asking questions about things that really won't pertain to me being successful or not."

Nolan can relate to just about every candidate the 49ers have interviewed — Josh McDaniels, Kyle Shanahan, Sean McVay, Anthony Lynn and Vance Joseph. Nolan himself was a longtime defensive coordinator with the Giants, Redskins and Ravens before becoming the 49ers' head coach. He explained the biggest difference in making the leap.

"When you go from a coordinator to coach, you go from a big brother to a Dad," Nolan said. "And any of us that have children know that's a huge change. To have no responsibility, basically just walk around the house and do what you want and maybe scream at your brothers and sisters. As opposed to having to go around the house and lay down the law. It's just entirely different. Some guys are great big brothers but they aren't very good Dads."

What about York and Marathe — do they need to back away from the football operation?

"After they pick a guy? Definitely," said Nolan. "But in the process, they're the ones making the decision. I will say this: They've done this a few times. Everyone is very hopeful they get it right. But obviously, they've failed a few times. So what's everyone saying? You've screwed this thing up a few times, so get out of the way."

"I'll say this: I believe they are asking the right questions. This is very much like a personnel guy. A lot of the personnel guys will accumulate all of the information in the world on players. They'll have notebooks on guys. But they have a hard time seeing through the information to say, 'This guy's the guy.' That's what they are in the process of doing. They need to make the best decision based on the information. They are going to get all of the information, believe me, I have all the trust in the world."

"But the two of them have to put their heads together, obviously, and pick the right guy. They're going to ask the right questions in my opinion, and they're going to likely have a guy in the room that can do the job. It's just going to come down to when they're sitting there looking at him, 'This guy's the guy we want.'"