

SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS

# TRANSCRIPTIONS



**Defensive Coordinator Robert Saleh  
Press Conference – August 29, 2017  
San Francisco 49ers**

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**With you, how many roster spots would you say could be determined?**

“For Thursday, there’s still plenty to discuss and all that. I don’t want to put a number on it because everything is still fluid. So, to give you a number, that wouldn’t be fair.”

**What kind of avenue do you have choosing the defensive players? Obviously you’ve got to work with head coach Kyle Shanahan, but when it comes down to it, where are you in that process?**

“[General manager] John [Lynch] and Kyle do a great job including everybody in that whole process. They listen to our opinion and I do believe they do take our opinion seriously. But, in the end it always comes back down to them.”

**Last time we spoke, we talked about the depth that you have on the defensive line. In general you said it’s a good problem to have. I wanted to ask specifically about the edge rusher position. It seemed like you guys got a ton of contributions from LB Aaron Lynch, from DL Elvis Dumervil and from DL Arik Armstead on Sunday. In that position, when you have so much production from those guys, is that a chance for you to mix and match them at other positions as well, to make sure they all see the field?**

“It is a good problem. We feel like we have three to four pretty good edge rushers. We’ve got three to four pretty good inside rushers with [DL] Solomon [Thomas], Arik again, and [DL DeForest Buckner] Buck being on the inside. But, to try to mix and match and just make sure that they’re in the greatest position they can be in to showcase their skill. You never want to put someone somewhere just for the sake of putting them somewhere. It’s our job as coaches to always find the best spot for them that can showcase their ability. The hard part is trying to find a way to get them all on the field at the same time.”

**You just mentioned Arik in with the interior rushers. So, is he kind of a guy that you look at with the ability to do both, including that LEO position?**

“For us with Arik, the way we see him is he’s an outside guy on base-downs, on run situations, 50-50 calls. His greatest strength as a pass rusher will be inside on third down in our vision. Will you see him outside? I think so. You can see him outside too because he does have that flexibility where he can do both. His greatest pass rushing strength in our opinion would be inside.”

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**I can't imagine that LB NaVorro Bowman likes coming off the field. So what's it like when you have to tell him that whenever a sixth DB comes in there, that he's coming off?**

"That won't be all the time. It's preseason. We wanted to try some new things. Another opportunity to get the rookies some reps. I thought the package looked cool. It could easily be Bowman in there. It could be [LB] Reuben [Foster]. They could rotate. Again, it's our job to make sure that we get the best 11 on the field at all times. Yeah, he's a major competitor. At halftime he was giving me some good ideas of how to make that thing evolve even more. I love Bowman. That is not something that is set in stone."

**That dime package, is that something that you plan to feature a lot? Is it depending on who the opponent is?**

"It does. Again, I say this a lot up here, but it's not an indictment on any of the linebackers as much as it is a testament to [S Jaquiski] Tartt who's a pretty darn good football player. Again, it's our job to try to find a way to get him onto the football field so our matchups are clean."

**In passing situations, do you want Buckner, Armstead, and DL Solomon Thomas on the field together or do you envision rotating them in the interior?**

"That would be a week-to-week thing. I think we had them all on the field at the same time this past week. Trying to work a spinner deal, that could pop up easily during the season. So again, it's all week-to-week to try to put our guys in the best position so they can be successful."

**Reuben Foster is the only linebacker in that set. Is he calling signals too?**

"Yeah."

**So he's got the green dot?**

"Yeah, only one person can have that so he'd have to get signaled in."

**How did Tartt do at free safety in the game?**

"He did good. Tartt has been performing very well over the course of the preseason since he's come back from his injury. He's deserved every right for us to really think hard and try to find a way to get him on the football field."

**Can you tell much in these practices how sharp DB Jimmie Ward is coming back from basically a month off?**

"I go off the trainers. He looks good to me. I know there is something with pregame. From all indications that I've received he's good to go and he's still on course."

**Did he practice at all last week?**

"He had individual with [defensive backs coach] coach [Jeff] Hafley, and he looked good during individual. He's just got to get his wind back and he's got to get conditioned again, but he's a very smooth athlete."

**Can you tell if he's on point mentally?**

"I trust he's on point. There's still stuff that he's going to have to clean up. But, he's been doing everything he can from a mental standpoint to prepare himself."

**The defense gave up a high completion percentage but not many long passes. Were you pleased with that? Is that the design of the defense?**

"It is. If you look at everyone who runs our system, 65-percent completion percentage, 60 to 65-percent. That's throughout the entire, Seattle, Jacksonville, Atlanta. It was probably a little too high. We like our guys to compete a little bit more on some of those comebacks. But, the little five-yard throws is not going to kill us. That's kind of the design of the defense."

**One of the players has said that's what they like about the defense, not a lot of play calls, maybe 10 or 12 at the most. Does much change then at the start of the regular season? Is it much more added?**

"There's more awareness. There's more things that we'll do from a coaching standpoint to help our players prepare. It still comes down to running and hitting and playing with great vision and being violent on the football field."

**Those two pass plays, the one with CB Rashard Robinson and then CB Ahkello Witherspoon, are your corners taught on those balls to go for the hands or to get their head around and try to find the ball?**

"Depends on the position they're in. If you look at Rashard, he was in a trail position. So, right there you're thinking chest to chest, hand to hands. If he's in lead position he can turn back and try to find the football. If you look at Rashard, he was in trail. Ahkello was in the same position and a young guy, he kind of got caught in the moment. He needs to stay composed, understand his technique, work chest to chest, go hands to hands and I feel like he would've been in good shape."

**So both of those plays, they did what they were supposed to do as far as not turning around to look for the ball?**

"Correct."

**You said a couple times, all gas no breaks, extreme violence are your mantras. But, that probably doesn't mean much if you don't have players that have a certain degree of intimidation. Do you feel like Reuben Foster and S Eric Reid give that to your defense? I feel like they were kind of going back and forth with some really decent sized hits on Sunday.**

"[LB] Austin Calitro, he had one. It doesn't get as much fanfare because it happened in the fourth quarter. It's mindset. I think every player can be gifted with that mindset to just go straight all gas and have that intent to physically impose your will on another human being. That's mindset, that's not skill. Going to those two who are physically gifted and who have that mindset, those are things that you can see on tape and we feel like our scheme allows them the freedom to be able to play in that style."

**Are those tone setting type plays? Especially the first snap of the game goes for minus five. Reid had a couple third down stops that were early?**

“I believe it is. You look at the course of a breakdown when offenses are watching literally four, five, six game breakdown. If you’re putting six to seven clips of that, you’ll figure there was three in the first half, throw three more in the second half. That’s six. Over a five game breakdown there’s 30 shots. I promise you the other team is noticing that and they enter the game looking for those big hits. If they’re looking, I don’t think those dropped passes Minnesota had was a coincidence. I think the tone was set early. There was traffic. Dropped passes happen, that’s also part of the system. Those are things that we count on. You break concentration because you are trying to keep your head on a swivel. As long as we can keep that moving and keep that going in the direction which it felt real good on Sunday, I feel like we’ll accomplish what we’re trying to get done.”

**You mentioned that Bowman, talking about the evolution of the dime package or other packages, his suggestion involves him being in the packages?**

“Oh yeah. He’s awesome. Every day he impresses me. The way he works, the way he takes care of his body, the way he operates day-to-day. There’s a reason why he is who he is and the reason why he’s had so much success. I would expect nothing less from him to want to be on there. So it’s, and again, we’ve just got to be creative and try to find a way. We have a good problem.”

**I think the subtext of all this, “Hey, he’s coming off in dime is he’s 29, he’s had two major leg injuries so he can’t cover anymore?”**

“No, he can cover. He covered against Kansas City. He covered against Denver. Like I said, it was more of a testament to Tartt to try to get him on the football field. The third preseason game, there’s wasted reps if you look at it. Could you still see that same group in Carolina? You could. Could you see it with Bowman? You could. It just depends on the things that we need to do to put our guys in the best position to be successful.”

**You mentioned when LB Malcom Smith got hurt that Reuben just needed reps. Now that a few weeks have passed, where are you at in terms of how he has developed within this system and his grasp of the defense particularly, I would assume he’s not going to play a bunch on Thursday?**

“For rookies, I feel like he’s in a pretty good spot. There’s still a lot more he can learn. There’s still a lot of detail that he needs to master, especially fundamentally. But, if you can run and hit you can disguise a lot of flaws and Reuben can run and hit.”

**Back to the depth along the defensive line, DeForest played something like 1,000 snaps last year. Do you have a number in mind that’s kind of a limit that you would ideally want your defensive linemen to be capped out on this year?**

“I’m glad you asked that because sometimes you get caught. I don’t want to put a number on it. We have a vision of what we’d like to see, but sometimes you get into a pickle. So, with DeForest, there’s so many injuries a year ago that they were probably stuck playing him. So, it just wasn’t an ideal situation for the year, especially with all the

injuries they suffered. If you look at the history of our system, Seattle, Jacksonville all go through it. But, the year we won the Super Bowl in 2013, I think [Seattle Seahawks DE] Michael Bennett had 650 snaps. You want to minimize the amount of snaps they take and the more bodies you have the more you utilize them so that way they can be fresh and you can come at them in waves. And to put a number, I can't put a number on it. But, shoot I think in Jacksonville we had eight D-Linemen, or six or seven D-Linemen, I can't put a number on it, but around 5-700 snaps. So, you want to get guys working and keeping each other fresh, complementing each other's games where a guy like Tank is a great complement to a guy like Solomon, because they are so different. A guy like Buckner and whoever ends up complementing him. So, it just keeps on going all the way through that process. That's the vision. You'd love to have it work out that way, but there's some things that might be out of your control once the season starts rolling."

**What did you see from LB Aaron Lynch as the game was winding down?**

"One more time please?"

**What did you see from Aaron Lynch as the game was winding down?**

"I saw a guy who was exhausted and fighting. That was the cool thing about Aaron, he checked his ego at the door. He was fighting his tail off and son of a gun, that little quarterback, he just kept running. But, Aaron created a lot of pressure on the quarterback and I was impressed with how hard he fought, especially in the fourth quarter."

**What do you like about LB Dekoda Watson?**

"His speed. He's got great speed off the ball. And that speed isn't anything if you don't have power to go with it. So, he can convert his speed to power, get underneath the pads of an offensive tackle and really collapse the pocket. So, from that part, I also like the fact that teams do have to respect his speed. So, when he does get off the ball it does create space for the inside guys who we feel are very, very talented. So, if you have a guy who can create space on the inside just by his speed then you have a chance to create pocket push, collapse the pocket and get guys winning."