

SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS

TRANSCRIPTIONS



**Defensive Coordinator Robert Saleh
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San Francisco 49ers**
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When you look at the first five days of practices, what are the major obstacles that you have when implementing your scheme? Where do you feel like the emphasis has to really be in the meeting rooms and on the field?

“For us in this defense, because we don’t do a lot of scheme, but emphasis will always go back to fundamentals and representing the style that we’re trying to create.”

How has that been going?

“It’s been going good. The guys have bought into the system. They’re working every day on the details that we’re asking them to do. It’s been really well.”

You’ve had an undrafted rookie safety out there with the first team unit today. Obviously you have injuries there, but is that also an indication of how well he’s done, how quickly he’s picked things up?

“It is with injuries, but it is still a testament to him and the fact that he’s been able to prepare himself from OTAs until now, to give himself that opportunity. You never want to use the cliché of next man up, but he’s taking advantage of his opportunity, I’ll say that.”

He didn’t have the greatest 40 time coming into the draft. When he’s out there do you see a lack of speed?

“His 40 time and his play speed don’t match. So, his 40 time is not a concern.”

What have been some of your early impressions of DL D.J. Jones?

“D.J. has been well. He’s been doing very well. He’s showing a lot of the stuff that he showed in college. He’s showing that the game’s not too big for him. He needs to continue to work on his fundamentals and the things that we’re asking him to do, but from a strength standpoint, the effort, the strength, he’s got all those tools. Now it’s just a matter of understanding how offensive linemen play in this league and the little tricks that they have, so that way he can do his job better.”

A couple reps the last couple days when you put LB Reuben Foster and LB Ray-Ray Armstrong in with the first team, what’s to be gained from them?

“Just having a rotation with the linebackers to make sure that everyone’s getting reps. We’ve got a good group of backers, just making sure that everyone gets an equal opportunity to be seen exactly the same way.”

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How has Reuben looked in your eyes and how quickly do you think he can start getting reps with the second team?

“Reuben, he has a lot of flash plays. The best way I can explain with Reuben is he’ll get his opportunity when he absolutely, absolutely deserves it. The credit really goes to the backers in that room also, that they also deserve every opportunity that they’re getting as well as him. As a group, we’re just trying to work through it and make sure that we do our best to evaluate and give them all an equal opportunity to be evaluated.”

When he and Ray-Ray are both out there, who’s WILL and who’s MIKE?

“Ray-Ray is playing MIKE.”

What’s been your assessment of CB K’Waun Williams so far in the starting nickelback role?

“He looks good. You know, he’s been doing everything we’re asking him to do. He plays hard, he’s very smart in there, and he’s added to the competition. It’s a good little competition we’re having at nickel and it’s going to be good to see this thing play out.”

DL Arik Armstead seems to be making his transition pretty well at his spot. How are you seeing him come along?

“Same thing. We’re so early into camp there’s a lot of guys flashing and a lot of guys look good and those guys have really worked their tails off to get into the shape that they’re all in. They’re really working hard in practice to put really good stuff on tape. Early assessment if I was to give it to you, we’re excited about him, sky is the limit for Arik and he’s doing everything he can to take advantage of this opportunity.”

Before CB Keith Reaser got hurt, were you planning to let him and CB Dontae Johnson rotate from day to day, or is that just by series? How have you planned that to work?

“We let our position coaches handle that one. But, again, it’s all part of the rotation to make sure, at the end of the day you’re going to see guys with the ones, you’re going to see guys with the twos, you’re going to see guys with the threes and it’s not an indictment on who’s doing poorly, but it’s more of a chance to let those threes get their look at playing against ones. If we let D.J. just wreak havoc on the threes and we never give him a chance to see what he looks like on [C Daniel] Kilgore, then that’s not fair to the organization and the team. So, we just want to make sure that we get guys in certain spots to make sure they’re getting the equal evaluation that we need as an organization, to make the best assessment we can.”

When you guys selected CB Ahkello Witherspoon, one of the knocks on him that even general manager John Lynch talked about was his physical play, his willingness to kind of stick his nose in there, into the action. What have you seen from that? Is he improving that area and obviously that last play on goal line RB Carlos Hyde kind of didn’t know--?

“I’m not worried about that last play. They’re not tackling drills, and that caught him off guard. We’ll see when we’re actually allowed to tackle and I have full faith that Ahkello’s

going to do exactly what he's been coached to do. He's not a coward by any means. He will get in there, he will tackle. He's been showing up in run fits, he's physical with his hands at the line of scrimmage. So, we're excited to see what shows up on game day. We think it's going to be pretty cool."

But, you coach guys up in practice to defend themselves on a play like that?

"To always work. Always keep your head on a swivel, I guess. You never know. What we talk about is that every rep is a tackling rep. For him, he missed an opportunity to get down low and just go through the motions of a tackling rep. For corners, obviously they're never going to tackle high where they're putting that shoulder through the sternum. You know, that's just not their style. They're more below the waste and obviously he can't do that here in camp with our backs. They have a style, they have a plan and they always have to understand that they're always working through that plan every single rep."

NT Earl Mitchell seems to be hard to block since the pads have gone on. Is he making a case, is he lobbying you to remain on the field as a pass-rusher in nickel situations?

"He hasn't said anything to me. Earl is exactly what we thought he'd be. Plays his butt off, works hard, is very strong, and is very hard to block. Everyone's going to get a chance to rush the passer. We're a defense where we're in a mindset that we want fresh bodies rotating at all times throughout the game. You might see him in there rushing the passer every once in a while, but we're hoping that by the end of training camp and preseason we can come at them in waves."

DL DeForest Buckner, it looked like a left ankle, got it re-taped, was it kind of just a precautionary thing?

"I haven't been told anything yet."

I'm guessing that you haven't coached a front with this much collective height. What does that give you as a coach, option-wise when you have so many guys over 6-6?

"They're awkward to block. So, that's what it provides. They're just so different than what a guard sees week in and week out and it's hard to simulate. Then all of a sudden here comes this six-foot-seven, powerful, great leverage, great fundamental technique, great hands, and he's just awkward to block. Also, when those quarterbacks are trying to throw in the check down in that kill zone that we always talk about, it's hard to get it over those trees. They take up windows. It's been a cool experience to see it all happen from OTAs until now. I don't know if it gives you options, but it definitely is a cool tool."

Do you find yourself emphasizing pad level with those two guys specifically?

"No doubt, no doubt. Their pad level is always going to be something that we've got to stress because as soon as they get high they lose all that power and all the things that they have that they can use to their advantage. But, when they can create that leverage they're very, very hard to block."

How has DL Solomon Thomas looked in his first reps?

“He’s working his butt off too. But, through five days, you know he missed all of OTAs, so he’s doing a lot of good things. He looks good, he’s working hard, he had a really good play down there moving the ball on the screen, coming off the stack. As he gets comfortable and starts understanding offensive linemen and the things that he needs to do to maintain his gap and his leverage, he’s just going to get better.”