

TRANSCRIPTIONS



**Defensive Coordinator Robert Saleh
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San Francisco 49ers**

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What's DL Nick Bosa's ceiling?

“His ceiling? You know what, I guess to be determined. He'll be as good as long as he puts out that same effort and same mindset and takes control over the things he's got control over and find ways to get better every single day. Who knows what his ceiling might be.”

In training camp when we asked you about Bosa you were kind of like, 'We'll have to see.' Were you holding back? I think I know the answer, but did you know if he could stay healthy something like this could happen?

“I don't know if anyone expects it from a rookie to be like that. The challenge for him is always going to come back to consistency. Not just consistency of what he's been doing, but consistency in terms of finding ways to be better so he can continually improve and keep linemen off kilter with regards to how they are going to approach him from game-to-game. He's been doing a great job. He's been healthy, but his mindset is what people don't talk enough about. In terms of the way he approaches practice, his deliberateness, the way he attacks his body with regards to rehab and doing all those things and taking care of it. He's been good. He's just got to keep on going.”

The first third down on Sunday, the first Bosa sack, I noticed that when Carolina Panthers RB Christian McCaffrey split out, CB Richard Sherman pointed something out and it seemed a secondary had it totally on lock. I'm not sure if you remember that exact play, but was that a good example of Sherman and the secondary creating a bit of a coverage sack?

“Absolutely. It was between him and [DB] Jimmie Ward. Jimmie Ward was out there just communicating the route concept that they were running, we were able to lock it down and take away [Carolina Panthers QB] Kyle Allen's first read and once that happens then it's on the pass rush. Our thought process is if you give the D-Line a hitch from the quarterback, they'll get home. Those guys are doing a really good job identifying route concepts, identifying pre-snap indicators, playing concepts that they've been seeing on tape and because of it, coverage has been able to get a lot tighter. You can do that when you've got faith in the fact that once coverage-wise being tight, you've got faith that the D-Line will get home, you can play a lot tighter.”

Nick after the game was very nonchalant and didn't really seem all that excited about what had just happened. He said he was excited, but he doesn't really emote that. How does that play just in the meeting room or behind the scenes the way his personality is?

"He's very even-keeled. He's not putting on a show. That's him. Every day is a great day. Every day is normal. He's never too high, never too low. He's got a very consistent personality and I think that's what gravitates people to him. He does not have a look at me persona to him. He always deflects. He's a sharp kid and ahead of his years for sure."

It never seems like just the way he's acting that he's not engaged or anything like that?

"No. If you know the person then you know he's fully engaged."

LB Fred Warner seems more authoritative in getting guys lined. I know those are always his responsibilities, but how much growth have you seen from him just in terms of quarterbacking your defense?

"Even dating back to last year to be honest with you, towards that second half of the year, his command of the defense and getting people lined up, you think about all the different, all the turnover from a year ago in terms of people, especially in the backend, it came down to him getting a lot of those guys lined up and being on point, trying to make sure that we can get consistent in the backend. He's even gotten stronger with that so we've been able to put more on him in terms of getting things lined up with some of our pre-snap disguises and the way we want things to look based on formations and all that stuff. He's been fantastic. But again, around him, not to take away from the guys around him, they've all done a great job stepping up their game. [S Jaquiski] Tartt and Jimmie Ward do a great job communicating, Sherm does a great job from that corner spot communicating. [CB Emmanuel Moseley] E-man's been stepping up, [CB Ahkello Witherspoon] Spoon's been good. Just collectively as a group, not to take away [LB] Kwon Alexander too, obviously he's the quarterback and it all starts with him and he does a phenomenal job. Major improvement from a year ago, but it started last year. Now we've just got to keep on rolling."

How does that help you, being able to put more on him? Does it free you up to do other things?

"It frees you up to be more versatile with your play calls I guess you could say. So, you're not always stuck in a play call. He can get you in and out of stuff and you can give him options based on formations that he sees and it's really for the whole entire backend. He does a really nice job. He's really got full command on the huddle."

What challenges does the Cardinals running game present?

"It has a lot of challenges because the quarterback can run. He's a dynamic player, he's extremely fast. He's not afraid to pull it and run. He's got those young legs where he's not afraid to take a hit. Just the element of the quarterback being involved always presents more of a challenge."

Are there ways in which their spread-out formations make Arizona Cardinals QB Kyler Murray even more dangerous as a runner just because of the way they pull the defense apart?

“It should not overly concern us. We feel good about our team speed. With the ball always being in the middle, the field will always feel smaller for those guys. His speed is definitely a problem and we’ve got to do a good job defensively making sure that we’ve got great angles throughout the day to make sure that we keep him in the shoot.”

Can you talk about striking the balance between, against a team that runs a lot of 10-personnel, maintaining your personal packages and what you’re good at versus adjusting to what they do?

“With 10-personnel, we have the versatility to either play with our standard nickel group or we can go dime with [DB] Tarvarius Moore, getting him on the field because of Jimmie Ward’s versatility, but for us we’re going to play our game. We feel comfortable with how we match up. Whether they’re in 10 or 11, it doesn’t really matter, we can still get calls that create the matchups that we need to be able to go play our defense. It does pose a problem, but not something that needs to be panicked over.”

Going back to kind of what you just said, do you have to rush Kyler a little bit differently than maybe some of the other pocket-type quarterbacks because he’ll go 20-yards deep in the pocket before he makes a throw?

“I don’t think you rush any quarterback differently. To me, you’re always respecting the level of the quarterback, you’re always trying to keep them in the shoot, you’re always trying to make them play quarterback. You never want to just run past a quarterback to give them wide open B-gap lanes. You never want to take underneath and lose contain. There’s always a respect to how you rush every single passer and making sure that the four D-Linemen are in concert together, making sure that you keep him in the pocket as much as possible. Obviously, he is going to escape, but when he does escape how much are we pursuing on the front, staying alive, making sure that we’re on edges so that way we can get off blocks easily so we can pursue also. It doesn’t matter whether he’s a statue or a quarterback like he is, a runner. You still always have respect to the pocket and how you rush.”

We saw interaction between your guys and the fans on Sunday, asking them to get loud, to be a part of the game. What’s the emotional impact of that and the actual sporting impact of that?

“From a defensive perspective it’s huge. The louder our fans get, and they’ve been phenomenal, especially on the road. They’ve been very loud on the road. The coolest moment is when the Rams had to go silent count. If we can get a team to go silent count, it will only help the defensive line in terms of being able to get off because now they’re just keying the ball, they’re in better position and they can fire off. You have the chance to get off the ball faster than an offensive lineman would, you almost know the count, you should know the count better. The louder they get, obviously they feed off of that energy, but it really helps in terms of the defensive front when an offense has to go silent, that only helps us. With our front, any edge they get will only help them.”

Do you coordinate the celebrations of the defense as well?

“No. [laughter]”

But, when you see that, Arizona Cardinals head coach Kliff Kingsbury today was talking about how that kind of fits into what a defense should be, that everybody is enjoying the successes of one another. What’s your feeling on that and is it something you encourage your guys to do?

“Football’s an emotional game. From a defensive perspective you’re really playing for one another. You have to play for one another. You have to trust one another. Everybody, and this is really just team-oriented in general, there has to be a standard at which you operate on a day-to-day basis and the quicker everybody can get on the same page with what that standard needs to look like, what that standard feels like, the quicker the entire organization can be on the same page and you can have everyone moving in the same direction. And when everyone is moving in the same direction and success starts to happen, you can’t help but feel love for the man next to you and appreciation for what that man’s doing next to you because you know that he’s feeling the same for you. That all goes to a standard that these players have done a great job buying into and really turning into policemen themselves and making sure that that standard is not just pay-to-play, but every single day with how they are on the field and off the field. That’s really a credit to [head coach] Kyle [Shanahan] and the way he’s operated this whole organization.”

When you look at your defense, do the players, do the individuals, do the people have to be compatible with each other and like each other to do that?

“I think that’s the best part about football. These guys come from every different walk of life. You’ve got some who had a silver spoon and you have some who had to go through heck to get through life. So, they’ve all had different ways they’ve gotten here. But, that’s the beauty of a football locker room, there is no judgement. You’re judged on how you play, how you operate, how you are as a pro and how you are to one another. When you have respect and regard for the man next to you, your locker mate, you can’t help but want to go fight for him. I don’t know if it’s about compatibility as much as, and this goes back to Kyle and [general manager] John [Lynch], bringing in people with the right heart and the right mindset. Where’s your heart, what is your intent, what is it you’re trying to get done in football. And if you bring that collection of people it doesn’t matter where you’re from or if you like apples and another one likes oranges. It really doesn’t matter. It’s what goal are you all trying to achieve and are we all on the same page, are we all on the same boat trying to get to the same spot. If you can match all that together then you can have a special group.”

What were your nerves like on the first night of the draft with Nick Bosa being on the board and Arizona picking number one?

“I guess you could say anxious, I don’t know if that’s the word I’m looking for. I was excited for it to get going. There was a lot of speculation obviously that Arizona was going to take Kyler. Kyler, don’t get me wrong, is a fantastic quarterback, but we have our own guy too. It was just one of those if they took him we felt really good about getting who we thought

was the number one defensive player in the draft. I wasn't quite sure until his name was called so it was exciting to be honest with you."

What were your nerves like? Did you think there was a possibility that he would go number one?

"I'm a negative Nancy, so I'm always thinking that it's going to go on the wrong end on the stick until it goes positive."

When you were a young coach coming up through the NFL ranks, it sounds like one thing that really helped you advance was your use of technology. Are you still hands on with a lot of that and what are some of the technology platforms that you're using these days?

"I try to be low maintenance with the video guys and even [defensive quality control coach] Brian Fleury so they can go operate and go do stuff for other people that need help or even for Brian Fleury so he can go study tape and bring us information that we can use instead of wasting his time on a computer. I feel like I've become efficient enough where I can handle all that stuff on my own without wasting anyone's time and still be able to get all my work done at the same time. I don't know if I'm answering your question. It's helped, it still helps, but I look at it more as a tool to allow other people to go operate and do things that can help the organization get to a spot that it needs to get to."

It's not even halfway through the season and DL Arik Armstead has already exceeded, nearly double, his career high in sack totals. Obviously, the talent has always been there, but what do you attribute the fact that he's finally showing up on the stat sheet like that?

"I think for Arik, he's always had work ethic, he's always had a tremendous mindset. Sometimes being the smartest D-Lineman in the room can backfire on you, especially if you have grey area in the way you're seeing things. I think having [defensive line] coach [Kris] Kocurek with him who is completely black and white in how he coaches and very detailed and very specific with how he wants them to take on blocking combinations and how they approach each play all the way across. Arik has completely bought into that and he has bought into a style that coach Kocurek and really everybody in this organization believes he can be and it's showing up play-to-play. He's playing exactly the way he's being asked to play and he's showing his dominance and I only think he's going to get better."

Kyle mentioned earlier how it's kind of a short week, you've got to cram a lot in. How does going against a first-year head coach and a first-year quarterback add to the challenge of that or does it in some way make it easier because there's less to go over?

"No, it's a challenge. This is not a simple offense. They've got a lot of cool designed plays, they do a lot of things, having the quarterback-run game is a problem, so on a short week you're actually more comfortable going against a system that's been in place for a while because you have a good feel for what is going to happen. Them being new, new quarterback, not having a lot of tape is always going to be an issue, especially on a short week."

Is DL DeForest Buckner still your best player and can you describe the impact he's having this season? It seems like he's doing a lot of the dirty work.

"DeForest had, I think he had two sacks slip from his fingers and then a couple of the guys cleaned it up in the game. Buck is filling up the stat sheet, he's playing his tail off and he's going to have his days where he goes off. I still think he's one of the better interior defensive linemen in football. He's still, obviously, one of our better football players, if not our best football player. He's everything you want out of a professional. And for Buck, his opportunities are going to come. He had a couple last week that just slipped through his hands and we could all see on tape, if you just sit there and dissect it, the guy is a piece of work in there. He's hard to deal with."

You mentioned not having a lot of tape on Kyler. Obviously, another elusive quarterback in this division, Seattle Seahawks QB Russell Wilson. Do you take anything from that, the experiences playing against him and kind of game plan around that and the fact that they both are elusive and they can get out of the pocket and scramble?

"The experience there is that the play doesn't start until he starts moving around. Obviously, he's a good quarterback, he will throw on schedule, but a lot of the stuff that he's going to do and create, a lot of their explosives are created with him creating off-scheduled things. That's what makes him difficult to defend. That's where the strain on the D-Line to rush and the strain on the backend to cover and when we do bring pressure, the strain on the pressure to respect the rush lanes and the strain on the backend to stay in coverage, keep everything in front, obviously, and tight, so he can't just make easy throws that are where all those explosives get created for him."