

# TRANSCRIPTIONS



**Defensive Coordinator Robert Saleh  
Press Conference – May 29, 2019  
San Francisco 49ers  
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**Philosophically, has your defense changed at all with the change at defensive line and the talk of more wide-nine? Has anything changed from your standpoint about what you want to get accomplished?**

“No. We might look different, but philosophically, the overall foundation of the defense hasn’t changed.”

**How will you look different?**

“Just more people behind the ball, SAM linebacker not being on the ball. Which when you really look at it, I think we had right around 300 snaps of base defense during the year. A lot of it came in four-minute situations anyways. It’s a nickel-driven league and you’re at four down anyways, so just trying to make sure those two marry up where there’s more crossover.”

**What do you like about the wide-nine look and why go to it?**

“With the way [defensive line coach Kris] Kocurek is teaching, I just like the decisiveness, the lack of grey area, the conviction and the tenacity at which they play. There’s not a lot that changes. I know there’s an image and a picture that people are trying to paint, but it all comes down to conviction and teaching and what he’s trying to get done as an individual coach and individual players. Anytime for me in our system, [Atlanta Falcons head coach Dan Quinn] DQ had a certain style to him, Dan Quinn, [Jacksonville Jaguars defensive coordinator] Todd Wash had a certain style to him and Kocurek has a certain style to him. But, the common denominator to all of them is that they have such great conviction in the way they teach that it works. With Kocurek and what he’s bringing, the conviction and the ability to coach through everything that he knows with teaching that style, that’s what’s going to be most visual to the fans.”

**When you were first hired, we were asking you what’s the deal with the LEO and someone said, “Do you have to have a, kind of, elite one of those guys to make this defense work?” And you said, “Oh yeah,” and then you kind of said, “Well, we’ll get by if we don’t have that.” Anyway, do you finally feel like you have an elite one of those?**

“Our front has a chance to be special. They know it. With great expectations, usually, people rise to the level to those expectations. It’s like telling an offense to get by without a good quarterback. Our front is everything. It starts with the front, it’s a big man’s game.

Big men usually win, the talented big men anyway. To have the speed element along with [DL Nick] Bosa's power and technical side and then the inside guys that we have. [DL] Solomon's [Thomas] been looking really, really good. So, his versatility, being able to go inside, outside is going to come to fruition the way we've envisioned it. Same thing with [DL Arik] Armstead. It's a very talented group and the versatility that it's had has only been, will finally be able to come to light because of the fact that you've got [DL] Dee Ford and Bosa to be able to fill out the edges."

**While you don't have Bosa, is Armstead in that spot generally?**

"Right now, with OTAs we're just trying to make sure that everybody's getting reps. So, you might see Armstead outside, you might see him at two-eye, you'll see him at three, you'll see [DL DeForest] Buckner all over the place. It's just a really cool philosophy with the D-Line in that he's got four quarters and he's throwing them out there and you should be able to play every single spot. The way he teaches is with a lack of grey area. They're all the same, they're just, it's been good to see it come together so far. I wouldn't get caught up too much on where guys are playing during OTAs or even during training camp. The reality is, when it comes to Sundays, there's going to be a plan on how those guys are deployed."

**A lot of talk this offseason has revolved around the secondary and the fact that even after the way things went last year, you guys didn't really make significant changes personnel-wise. What gives you confidence that the secondary is going to be able to improve?**

"You know, the health is always the big deal. I'll start with [CB Richard Sherman] Sherm coming back with having now been a full two years removed from his Achilles. He looks good out there. He had a really good break up today, should've caught it on the sideline. [CB Ahkello Witherspoon] Spoon has come with a renewed mindset and he's looking like the person that we were having a lot of faith in after the first half of his rookie year. Then you've got guys who are out there competing. You've got [CB Jason] Verrett, who's just chomping at the bit to come in, and I could go through, [DB Greg] Mabin, all of them. It's an exciting group to work with if we can stay healthy. I think outside our nickel spot is gonna be, [CB] K'Waun [Williams] is good. At safety, [S Jaquiski] Tartt and [DB] Jimmie [Ward], [S] Marcell [Harris], [DB Adrian Colbert] AC, [DB Antone] Exum [Jr.], I'm sure I'm missing somebody, but it's a really talented group. There's a lot of natural competition at those spots. It's unfortunate what happened to Jimmie, but we have a lot of confidence in that group because it really is a talented group. It's just got to stay healthy."

**It was described, I think, in the initial report that Jimmie just sort of dove for a pass. Could you describe what happened?**

"It was a ball over the middle. I don't know if he necessarily dove as much as maybe getting a little bit tangled up. All those guys do such a good job of trying to stay up and it was kind of, it was a very unfortunate thing. If he had pads on, it probably wouldn't have happened. With what happened to him, they always try and keep their feet. That's the number one rule, keep your feet during practice. I'm trying to be a positive person with this whole thing in that Jimmie's been healthy as heck going into training camp his whole

career, and then during the season, he's gotten hurt. This year, it happened during OTAs, maybe it flips for him."

**What position is DB Tarvarius Moore playing?**

"Currently, he's at, with all the injuries that we've had, he's aligning at safety right now."

**What do you consider him? Like, when the regular season starts, what would you call him? Where will he be competing?**

"We'll cross that bridge when we get to training camp. Right now, with all the injuries and all the different lineups with all the guys missing, we're trying to make sure that everybody's getting reps. That's something that we loved about Tarvarius Moore is that we drafted him knowing that he's got great versatility where he could play corner and safety. Him being back there at safety for these OTAs, if he lights it up, we'll see it."

**LB David Mayo broke up a couple passes in seven-on-sevens. How much do you expect or how much are linebackers going to be counted on to see improvement in the pass defense, especially with the new acquisitions there?**

"You'd love for the entire, with the acquisitions that were made up front, I'll start with them, the backend should see it just get faster. You guys remember the Oakland game? Where the D-Line was just wreaking havoc on those guys? If you really go back and dissect that tape, the backend just got faster and faster and faster as the game went on because they're tying themselves to the rush. It just happens naturally. With the linebackers, with [LB] Fred [Warner] having another year under his belt, having [LB] Kwon Alexander here, the battle at SAM linebacker with [LB] Malcolm [Smith], [LB Dre] Greenlaw, and [LB] Elijah [Lee] and all those guys. It's a talented group of linebackers and they'll be expected to increase productivity no different than the safeties and corners."

**What's the timeframe for Alexander's return?**

"My understanding is training camp. But again, that would probably be a question for [head coach] Kyle [Shanahan] and [general manager] John [Lynch]."

**You mentioned the slew of injuries that Jimmie's kind of suffered through the last few years. Is that becoming a point of concern for you guys that he hasn't been available from a health standpoint? Or hasn't been able to stay available, I mean?**

"There's always risk-reward. When you see Jimmie play, you see his personality, you see his leadership skills, his work ethic. If you're ever going to take a risk on somebody, he's the guy. I have faith that he's going to stay healthy this season, I do. You guys are probably looking at me like I'm crazy, but something good's about to happen for him, and it's going to be 2019."

**You mentioned Jason Verrett chomping at the bit. Obviously, it's still early on, but thus far, how has his integration into the defense been going and what is the projected timeline for him as well?**

"Verrett? So, he's going to compete at corner. When Verrett's healthy, no different than Jimmie, he's one of the top 20 corners in all of football. I mean the guy's special. So, he'll be able to come into that, he's going to insert himself into the lineup come training camp

and there's no doubt he's going to look good. His mindset, the way he carries himself, his work ethic out there with the trainers, the questions he asks in meeting rooms, kind of just his overall presence in the building has been really special. I'm excited to see him work, so it's going to be fun."

**Earlier, you mentioned the expectation that the defensive line has. What is your sense of how they've kind of embraced those expectations? Is that something that they talk about openly?**

"Yeah, no, they love it. But, at the same time, there's no complacency in the room. I mean, they are working their tails off. Whenever you all come out to practice, just watch them. They're running every snap about 30, 40 yards to the football. Then they're running their butts back to the line of scrimmage and more of training a mindset. There's a saying that your defense will be recognized as fast when the D-Line is running and your defense will be recognized as hard hitting when the safeties and corners are hitting. The D-Line is changing that mindset, that relentlessness which they're going to be expect to play. It's all happening right now through training with OTAs. They're not afraid to put it on their backs, so they're a great group of guys to work with."

**One of the things I've noticed looking through the numbers from last year is that, pressure-wise, the defensive line was pretty high up in the rankings. Then, when you look at hits, it's a little bit lower, then you look at sacks, obviously, it was in the bottom, what, seven teams? Is that a product of just not being able to finish rushing plays and is that something that you see turning around? Finishing those pressures with sacks, with what you're talking about here?**

"Those pressure rates get a little, I don't know if they get skewed or not, but I look at pressure based on the way the offense calls the football game. I believe we had 30 or so snaps of quick game during the course of the year. Where you look at a team like the Chargers or Jacksonville, or even the Cowboys, they're up there in the 90's to almost 100 snaps of quick game. That tells us that they're afraid of their pass rush. So, they're not designing routes that are where quarterbacks can take one, two and three hitches. The ball's got to come out. So, when an offense changes the way they approach us and the way they attack us, then I know that we're getting pressure on the quarterback and we're changing their entire philosophy on how they want to attack us. Even though our pressure rate may have been high, the routes that we were seeing were still longer developing quarterback hold the ball in the pocket. Eventually, you're gonna get home, but for the quarterback to be able to go through his progressions and either throw it away or take a check down, now it should just be one hitch, I can't go to my next progression because if I take that second hit, which I should be getting hit my somebody. That didn't happen as frequently as we would've liked a year ago."

**What attracted you to defensive backs/passing game coordinator Joe Woods?**

"So, Joe comes from, his original background is Tampa, [Florida Atlantic University defensive assistant] Monte Kiffin, cover-two, which is kind of where this whole thing kind of derived from also with [Seattle Seahawks head coach] Pete Carroll and Monte Kiffin. He came highly recommended from [Los Angeles Chargers defensive coordinator] Gus Bradley and all the different guys that have worked with him. He's extremely detailed.

He's got great eye for technique and coaching, so it'll be seamless in terms of what he'll be asking of those DBs because it's right in line with what we teach and our scheme."

**Did you come out of last season thinking we needed to make a change there? Is that just how it developed?**

"No, [Ohio State co-defensive coordinator/secondary coach Jeff] Hafley had an opportunity to be a D-Coordinator at Ohio State, which is an awesome privilege for him, so that was, I don't want to say it was forced, but with Hafley going to Ohio State, it opened up the door to get Joe."

**Another question about the wide-nine before stopping the run. Do you think the way the game's played now, so many teams, like you said, you're in nickel a lot now, teams don't have a traditional fullback and just trying to run it down your throat that it's probably more functional now than ever and just easier on your linebackers the way teams play offense?**

"With the wide-nine? It's like I said--."

**Does it concern you as a linebacker coach?**

"No, it doesn't. With the way the game is played, it's a four down game anyway. It's that relentlessness and the style that they play that is the most intriguing. You still have a three technique, you still have a shade, you still have a five, it's just do you play a six or a nine? That's all we're talking about. It doesn't really change that much in my mind. There's some certain runs that we may get, but overall, just from a, getting off the ball, getting vertical and creating penetration. To answer your question, it does. I do feel like it lends more to the way the league has kind of evolved."

**Defending that quick passing game, how important is safety continuity to that and how much did the lack of safety continuity hurt in that regard last year?**

"Just overall backend, even now, the amount of communication that needs to take place, and when you're in and out of the lineup, you're changing positions because you're trying to fill in people, the volume of your voice is projected on the confidence of your knowledge of what you're being asked to do. If you're quiet, you're probably not exactly sure, and that's what happens when you're in and out of the lineup. You're changing positions and you're being asked to do different things, you're just not going to be sure. The continuity, not only with yourself to be confident and do the same thing over, over, and over again, but then to be able to project your voice so that way the person in front of you knows what you're doing, you're able to talk to the corners, and there's just overall communication. That's always very, very important, especially in a scheme like ours where we may not do very much, but we are always talking to one another about formation, indicators, and the subtle adjustments that we make to put ourselves in the best position to succeed."

**Has the rise of the jet sweep influenced your move to the wide-nine? Is that a good defensive alignment to stop that play?**

"That wasn't one of the reasons why. The jet sweep is an issue play, I think it's a cool, little play to be honest with you. Going through offseason studies, I think we're gonna have a decent handle on it. It was more just to tie in more to what teams are actually

doing to us and the fact that, again, 300 snaps of base defense isn't very much when you're looking at the grand scheme of things. So, to be able to tie those two in together so we can play ball. And that doesn't mean that we can't get the SAM on the ball, we still can very easily. Depending on personnel, it's just something that we're working through OTAs and training camp."

**How steep is the learning curve for Nick Bosa and what's he missing at this point?**

"Just overall reps. For him, you'd love for him to be out there just so he can go through and get his reps. For those guys, maybe I underscore the D-Line every once in a while, but it's just the mindset and all that stuff that he's missing, just get his legs under him. He hasn't played football in a year. To get his sea legs back, if you will. That's what I feel like he's missing, but I'm not worried about him being able to catch up."

**Obviously, you upgraded at edge rusher position. Without an elite guy the last two years there, was there a ceiling or a limit on how good the defense could be?**

"I feel like we have a really sound, a very, very sound scheme. I feel like scheme-wise, the way it's built can keep yards at bay, you can play with good yards per play, you can play functional, sound defense. When you don't have, when you start inserting playmakers like Dee Ford, Bosa, Buckner, giving him more space, Armstead, who I think is going to have a really nice jump this year, same thing with Solomon. When you start implanting those guys, now you get to your efficiency downs, like third down, red zone, takeaways, where there's more pressure being put on the offense to make quicker decisions, to fit balls in tighter windows, to do things out of their character. That's where these guys are gonna make the biggest difference. When a quarterback can just sit back there and they're very comfortable and can survey what they're seeing and make the right decision every single time, your third downs, it's going to be rough on third down. It's going to be rough in the red zone, it's going to be hard to take the ball away. I would imagine for an offense it would be no different if they didn't have the quarterback. You can generate yards all you want, but in efficiency downs where it's all about precision, third down, red zone, keeping the ball in your hand, I would imagine, I don't know the stats, but I would imagine it would be very hard for them without that guy throwing the rock around. Same thing for the defensive line. They're the lifeblood of our system, so I feel like we've got a good one. We should hopefully see a much more efficient defense."