

49ers Mid-Day Clips – March 2, 2017

Local Media

**49ers GM John Lynch Shares Quick Analysis on Top 4 QB Prospects**

By Joe Fann, 49ers.com

<http://www.49ers.com/news/article-2/49ers-GM-John-Lynch-Shares-Quick-Analysis-on-Top-4-QB-Prospects/bb5d0574-23f0-4cb2-aa16-01e6e56edb63>

**John Lynch: 49ers could remain active before free agency**

By Eric Branch, San Francisco Chronicle

<http://www.sfchronicle.com/49ers/article/John-Lynch-49ers-could-remain-active-before-free-10972323.php>

**John Lynch says 49ers will be aggressive in free agency**

By Eric Branch, San Francisco Chronicle

<http://www.sfchronicle.com/49ers/article/John-Lynch-says-49ers-will-be-aggressive-in-free-10972058.php>

**John Lynch: 49ers will try Jimmie Ward at free safety**

By Eric Branch, San Francisco Chronicle

<http://www.sfchronicle.com/49ers/article/John-Lynch-49ers-will-try-Jimmie-Ward-at-free-10972197.php>

**49ers John Lynch digs QB draft class, free agency plan**

By Cam Inman, San Jose Mercury News

<http://www.mercurynews.com/2017/03/02/49ers-john-lynch-digs-qb-draft-class-free-agency-plan/>

**John Lynch says 49ers will be aggressive in free agency**

By Matt Barrows, Sacramento Bee

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By Matt Barrows, Sacramento Bee

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By Matt Maiocco, CSNBayArea.com

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By Matt Maiocco, CSNBayArea.com

<http://www.csnbayarea.com/49ers/john-lynch-theres-lot-2017-qb-draft-class>

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By Matt Maiocco, CSNBayArea.com

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By Nick Wagoner, ESPN.com

[http://www.espn.com/nfl/story/\\_/id/18808233/san-francisco-49ers-released-colin-kaepernick-opt-out](http://www.espn.com/nfl/story/_/id/18808233/san-francisco-49ers-released-colin-kaepernick-opt-out)

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By Jeff Legwold, ESPN.com

[http://www.espn.com/blog/denver-broncos/post/\\_/id/25287/john-lynchs-first-look-at-combine-as-evaluator-came-with-broncos](http://www.espn.com/blog/denver-broncos/post/_/id/25287/john-lynchs-first-look-at-combine-as-evaluator-came-with-broncos)

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By Staff, ESPN.com

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By Darin Gantt, ProFootballTalk.com

<http://profootballtalk.nbcsports.com/2017/03/02/john-lynch-lack-of-quarterbacks-on-roster-somewhat-liberating/>

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By Chase Goodbread, NFL.com

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***John Lynch: DeShone Kizer blew 49ers away in interview***

By Chase Goodbread, NFL.com

<http://www.nfl.com/news/story/0ap3000000788907/article/john-lynch-deshone-kizer-blew-49ers-away-in-interview>

***Bucky Brooks mock draft 2.0: Year of the quarterback slide?***

By Bucky Brooks, NFL.com

<http://www.nfl.com/news/story/0ap3000000788807/article/bucky-brooks-mock-draft-20-year-of-the-quarterback-slide>

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By Chris Mortensen, ESPN.com

[http://www.espn.com/nfl/story/\\_/id/18805629/new-orleans-saints-brandin-cooks-radar-eagles-titans](http://www.espn.com/nfl/story/_/id/18805629/new-orleans-saints-brandin-cooks-radar-eagles-titans)

***Eagles QB Chase Daniel drawing interest on market***

By Marc Sessler, NFL.com

<http://www.nfl.com/news/story/0ap3000000788920/article/eagles-qb-chase-daniel-drawing-interest-on-market>

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By Staff, CSNNE.com

<http://www.csnne.com/new-england-patriots/report-patriots-plan-release-ot-sebastian-vollmer>

***Alshon Jeffery releases curious statement about free agency***

By Adam Jahns, Chicago Sun-Times

<http://chicago.suntimes.com/sports/alshon-jeffery-releases-curious-statement-about-free-agency/>

Local Clips – Full Version

**49ers GM John Lynch Shares Quick Analysis on Top 4 QB Prospects**

By Joe Fann, 49ers.com

INDIANAPOLIS – It's the worst kept secret at the NFL Combine: The San Francisco 49ers are in the market for a quarterback.

"I don't think you need to be too transparent to realize that's a position we're looking at," John Lynch said on Thursday. "We don't have any (under contract). That's a position that's a big focal point of our preparation right now, and this week is a big part of that."

San Francisco's general manager spent several minutes fielding questions about quarterbacks during his press conference. And while some see the 49ers current situation as a negative, Lynch sees a fresh start.

"That's somewhat liberating in that you can create this thing at a position that is so critical. I think we've got a lot of great options at our disposal."

Lynch confirmed that the 49ers will meet with all of the top quarterback prospects throughout the week. (Although it's unknown exactly how many of the 60 interviews will be dedicated to the position.)

Some analysts have suggested that this year's draft features a weak quarterback class. NFL Network's Mike Mayock went as far as to say that he doesn't have a single signal-caller ranked in the Top-10.

On the contrary, Lynch believes there's plenty of talent among the group.

"I'm excited about (this class). I think there are a lot of different opinions as there always will be," Lynch said, acknowledging the popular sentiment among draft media. "I think these guys get a bad rap. There's a lot to like."

Lynch gave brief opinions on four of this year's top quarterback prospects, one of which could be a candidate for the 49ers No. 2 overall pick.

Notre Dame QB DeShone Kizer: "We had an opportunity (to interview) DeShone Kizer. This whole thing isn't about an interview, but if you were grading him on that alone, he blew the doors off of it. He's an impressive young man, and his film is very impressive."

Clemson QB Deshaun Watson: "The same can be said for Deshaun Watson, what he's done, putting a team on his shoulders and taking down a great champion (Alabama).

"I love winners, and he has that. There are certain guys who just carry themselves differently, have a presence about them, and I'd put him in that category. In the brief time (I spent around him), you can just see that there's a confidence, an aura that he carries himself with that's pretty special."

North Carolina QB Mitch Trubisky: "I got a note today from somebody that he measured over 6-foot-2, and so he made himself some money today I promise you. You can see, just like the other guys I talked about, why people like him. He grows on you. The more you watch him, the more you like him."

Texas Tech QB Patrick Mahomes: "He's a guy that the film is pretty special. He's a fun guy to watch, and we're excited to watch more and learn more about him."

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**John Lynch: 49ers could remain active before free agency**

By Eric Branch, San Francisco Chronicle

INDIANAPOLIS - Last week, the 49ers brought in three players, signing nose guard Earl Mitchell, cornerback K'Waun Williams and wide receiver DeAndre Carter to contracts.

This week? Don't be surprised if they sign some of their own players.

Today, general manager John Lynch said the 49ers could sign some of their scheduled free agents before the start of free agency on March 9. Among their notable free agents are kicker Phil Dawson, and wide receiver Jeremy Kerley.

"Some of those are in the process of going on right now," Lynch said. "Hopefully, we see some things in the next couple of days."

Lynch said contract extensions with players on the current roster aren't imminent. The most logical candidates are running back Carlos Hyde and defensive back Jimmie Ward, who will be entering the final year of their contracts.

Lynch suggested the current state of the roster means a wave of extensions aren't forthcoming.

"We haven't gotten there yet," Lynch said of extension talks. "Frankly, I wish we had more of those because that's something we believe in: Drafting and developing your own players and signing them.

"That's something that will be very much a part of what we do moving forward. That's part of our job -- to get the guys that warrant that."

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***John Lynch says 49ers will be aggressive in free agency***

By Eric Branch, San Francisco Chronicle

INDIANAPOLIS -- John Lynch smiled today when he was told 49ers fans have been conditioned to take a nap during the first day of free agency.

His advice for March 9?

Stay awake," the 49ers general manager said.

With a long list of roster needs, the NFL's second-most salary cap space, and a new front-office regime, the 49ers appear poised to change their conservative approach to free agency this season. Last year, they only signed one starter, guard Zane Beadles, and their only other free-agent addition was third-string quarterback Thad Lewis.

Last week, Lynch signed a starter in defensive lineman Earl Mitchell, who will play nose guard, Lynch confirmed today.

"We need players," Lynch said at the NFL combine. "We've got to get ourselves in a situation ... so that we don't go into this draft saying we have to have this. Everyone says the best way is to go in and (draft) the best players, but sometime you can't do that. You need certain positions. And we don't want to be in that position everywhere."

The 49ers have a desperate need for wide receivers and they will pursue Chicago's Alshon Jeffery, according to multiple reports.

"There are certain things that we have high on our priority list to get accomplished," Lynch said. "And we're going to be aggressive in getting those done."

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***John Lynch: 49ers will try Jimmie Ward at free safety***

By Eric Branch, San Francisco Chronicle

INDIANAPOLIS — Niners general manager John Lynch was direct today when asked about Jimmie Ward's position in 2017.

His response: The 49ers will try the cornerback at free safety in their new 4-3 defense this offseason to see if it's a good fit.

Ward, a safety at Northern Illinois, has played both nickel cornerback and on the outside throughout his three-year NFL career. He did start at safety in the 2014 regular-season finale.

"Just being completely honest, we think he's a good scheme fit for what we're doing at the free-safety position," said Lynch, a former NFL safety. "But we don't know that until you put him there. It's projecting. We think his traits, his skills, translate very well to that, but it's such an instinct position."

On Wednesday, head coach Kyle Shanahan only allowed the 49ers were considering moving Ward to safety.

The 49ers are seeking a free safety with excellent range to patrol the back end of their defense. The template has been provided by Seattle's Earl Thomas, 27, a four-time, first-team All-Pro.

"We're excited to give (Ward) an offseason to say, 'Let's give this a go,'" Lynch said. "That doesn't preclude him from playing nickel in some situations, or moving around. I think he brings some great versatility."

If Lynch sticks at free safety, Eric Reid or Jaquiski Tartt will presumably man the other safety spot. It's not clear if Antoine Bethea would fit into the team's plans in such a scenario. Bethea, who will turn 33 in July, is scheduled to count \$7 million against the salary cap.

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***49ers John Lynch digs QB draft class, free agency plan***

By Cam Inman, San Jose Mercury News

Finding new quarterbacks are obviously John Lynch's top priority as he upgrades the 49ers roster, and while he surprisingly gushed Thursday about this draft's top-four prospects, he's also intending to thoroughly explore free agency and trade options.

Unlike his tight-lipped predecessor in the general manager role, Trent Baalke, Lynch was quite forthcoming and gregarious about the first impressions he's gathered about quarterbacks at the NFL scouting combine.

"My point was: these guys are somewhat getting a bad rap," Lynch said. "I turn on the film and there's a lot to like."

Lynch didn't hesitate to give glowing yet succinct scouting reports on four of the quarterbacks the 49ers are interviewing at the combine: Notre Dame's DeShone Kizer, Clemson's Deshaun Watson, North Carolina's Mitch Trubisky and Texas Tech's Pat Mahomes

— On Kizer: "Last night we had an interview with DeShone Kizer, and this whole thing is not about an interview but if you're grading him on that alone, he blew the doors off. He's an impressive young man. His film is very impressive."

— On Watson: “You’ve seen what he’s done, putting the team on his shoulders. A great champion. ... I love winners. He has that. I spent some time around him at the Super Bowl and there’s certain guys that just carry themselves differently and have a presence about them. I put him in that category. You could just see there is a confidence, an aura he just carries himself with that’s pretty special.”

— On Trubisky: “I got a note today from somebody that he measured 6-2, so he made himself some money today, I promise you. The more you watch him, the more you like him.”

— On Mahomes: “The film’s pretty special. He’s a fun guy to watch. We’re excited to watch more and learn more about him.”

One scenario Lynch and coach Kyle Shanahan are entertaining is to pair a young quarterback with a seasoned veteran. The 49ers have the No. 2 overall draft pick behind the quarterback-needy Cleveland Browns.

Lynch noted that he is “examining a lot of guys” who will come available when free agency commences next Tuesday, as well as “other options” as well regarding trades, which he says have not yet been in the works at the combine.

Colin Kaepernick expected to opt out of his contract and leave the 49ers with no quarterbacks under contract.

“We both agreed that under the current contract it wasn’t going to work out,” Lynch said. “But we said let’s not close the door. ... As he hits free agency, that’s something we’ll keep our eyes open and we want him to keep us in mind as well.”

“... A lot of people look at it: ‘Oh my gosh, you don’t have any quarterbacks. But that also is somewhat liberating in that you can create this thing — and that position is so critical — in the way you want.’”

Of course, the 49ers need much more than quarterbacks. Lynch’s message to fans who’ve grown accustomed to past years of tepid free-agent signings: “Stay awake. We need players. We’ve got to get ourselves in a situation with certain pieces that we’ve made a priority so we don’t go into this draft saying, ‘We have to have this.’”

Lynch said the 49ers are close to finalizing contracts to retain a couple of their pending free agents. Contract extensions for defensive back Jimmie Ward and running back Carlos Hyde are not yet on the table, however, as they head into the final year of their rookie deals.

Ward, Lynch said, is a “great scheme fit at free safety,” and although that move from nickel back and cornerback isn’t official, it is something the 49ers want him to explore this offseason.

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***John Lynch says 49ers will be aggressive in free agency***

By Matt Barrows, Sacramento Bee

INDIANAPOLIS -- John Lynch had some advice for 49ers fans accustomed to dozing off during the team's sleepy free-agency period.

"Stay awake," he said.

"We need players," the 49ers general manager continued. "... Everyone says the best way to go in (is to draft) the best players, but sometimes you can't do that. You need certain positions. And we don't want to be in that position everywhere. So there are certain things we have high on our priority list to get accomplished. We're going to be aggressive in getting those guys."

Lynch's words were the latest proof of an attitude shift in San Francisco.

His predecessor, Trent Baalke, preferred to tread lightly in free agency and focus instead on the draft. It's one of the reasons why the 49ers currently have \$77 million in salary-cap space, the second most in the NFL -- the 49ers were hesitant to spend money.

Lynch already has begun to eat into that cushion. He already has signed three new players, including defensive lineman Earl Mitchell, whom Lynch said would play the nose tackle position in the team's new defense.

He indicated the aggressive approach would continue when free agency begins in earnest next week. He said there are "certain pieces" of the 49ers' rebuilding process he and coach Kyle Shanahan have made priorities.

Unlike Baalke, Lynch also spoke openly about the players with whom he is meeting in Indianapolis. For instance, he described a very successful session Wednesday evening with Notre Dame quarterback DeShone Kizer, one of the top passers in the draft.

"This whole thing isn't about an interview, but if you were grading him on that alone, he blew the doors off of it," Lynch said. "He's an impressive young man, and his film is very impressive."

Before anyone starts thinking that the 49ers are zeroing in on Kizer, Lynch also had praise for Clemson's Deshaun Watson, North Carolina's Mitch Trubisky and Texas Tech's Patrick Mahomes. He will talk to all of them at the combine.

Some observers thought Trubisky would measure 6-1 or less today. Instead he was 6-2 1/8 and weighed 222 pounds, big enough to be a first-round pick.

"So he made himself some money today, I promise you," Lynch said. "You can see, just like the other guys I talked about, why people like him. He grows on you. The more you watch him, the more you like him."

Lynch mentioned transparency -- which may have been a foreign word to the previous regime -- several times during his media session. In that spirit, he went a bit farther than had Shanahan had a day earlier in saying that the 49ers were looking at Jimmie Ward as a safety this year. Shanahan merely said Ward was capable of playing safety and cornerback, his 2016 position.

"Just being completely honest, we think he's a good scheme fit for what we're doing at the free-safety position," said Lynch, who played safety for 15 NFL seasons. "But we don't know that until you put him there. It's projecting. We think his traits, his skills, translate very well to that, but it's such an instinct position."

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***49ers notes: Lynch talks about new roles for Armstead, Buckner***

By Matt Barrows, Sacramento Bee

INDIANAPOLIS -- John Lynch on Thursday confirmed that new 49er Earl Mitchell will play nose-tackle in the 49ers defense but that roles for former first-round picks Arik Armstead and DeForest Buckner still are being worked out.

One of them is likely to play the so-called 'three technique,' the defensive lineman who lines up between the opposing guard and tackle. In the 49ers' new scheme, that position usually goes to the team's best pass-rushing interior lineman.



"We're still talking about that with our coordinators, with our defensive staff," Lynch said. "Because we think that each can do it, and I think they will at times. Who's going to be there in base (defense)? I don't think we're there yet."

Lynch stressed that because nickel defenses and various packages are so prevalent, there will be opportunities for everyone to play. He said the 49ers' personnel is a good fit for the 4-3 defense -- which has many characteristics of a 3-4 -- coordinator Robert Saleh will run this year.

"One thing that I really appreciate about the job (former general manager) Trent (Baalke) did is he got players who, although they played the 3-4, I think they have scheme versatility to what they do," he said.

Lynch said he liked Mitchell, 29, not just because of his run-stopping ability but because of the effect he'll have on his younger teammates.

"I'm excited about what he's going to do for Buckner and Armstead and those guys," he said. "Because we can tell people, 'Run to the football,' but when one guy's doing it, you'd better do it or you're going to stick out like a sore thumb. That's what he brings."

Lynch also went a step further than Kyle Shanahan did a day earlier by saying Jimmie Ward would get a look at free safety, the position exemplified by the Seahawks' Earl Thomas.

Rivalry renewed? Told that Raiders coach Jack Del Rio wants to renew his team's preseason series with the 49ers, Lynch said, 'Yeah, let's do it.'

The teams haven't faced each other in the preseason since 2011 when fan violence -- two people were shot -- marred a game at Candlestick Park.

"We can get over that," Lynch said. "If we can present that in the right way, I think that's good for the league, it's good for the community. I'm a big fan of Jack's -- big fan of their roster and what they've done with it."

Re-signings to come -- Late last year, the 49ers signed two would-be free agents, tight end Vance McDonald and linebacker Ray-Ray Armstrong, to contract extensions. Several other 49ers, including 2016 leading receiver Jeremy Kerley and kicker Phil Dawson, are scheduled to become free agents next week.

Lynch said there were ongoing "discussions" with some of those pending free agents.

"Hopefully we see some things in the next couple of days," he said.

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***LYNCH: THERE ARE THINGS SHANAHAN LIKES ABOUT KAEPERNICK'S GAME***

By Matt Maiocco, CSNBayArea.com

INDIANAPOLIS – When quarterback Colin Kaepernick met with 49ers general manager John Lynch and coach Kyle Shanahan last week, the topic of the national anthem was not discussed.

"We didn't talk about it," Lynch said Thursday at the NFL Scouting Combine. "I didn't think that was important to the meeting we were having. We were having a meeting about, really, just getting to know each other. I felt like just being completely honest with each other. But that never got there in the conversation."

As Kaepernick prepares to become a free agent by opting out of his contract, ESPN cited sources who said Kaepernick plans to stand for the national anthem in 2017. While protesting racial inequality in America, Kaepernick took a knee during the national anthem.

Kaepernick recently hired agents Jeff Nalley and Sean Kiernan to help him find a place of employment for his seventh NFL season. Lynch said he has not ruled out the possibility of Kaepernick returning to the 49ers.

When asked why he would not just tell Kaepernick that the 49ers are moving on without him, Lynch answered, "Because we're not there yet. We don't have any quarterbacks."

Kaepernick had a solid statistical season while making 11 starts for the 49ers last season. He threw 16 touchdowns and four interceptions for a passer rating of 90.7. Kaepernick also rushed for 468 yards.

"In a general sense, I can tell you, there are things that Kyle likes about his game," Lynch said. "It would be foolish to say, 'Hey, we're done with this.' So I feel real good. We told him exactly where we're at and part of where we're at is we're not closing the door on that situation."

"He's going to choose to do what he's going to choose to do, but let's not close the door on this. That's the reality."

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**JOHN LYNCH: THERE'S A LOT TO LIKE IN 2017 QB DRAFT CLASS**

By Matt Maiocco, CSNBayArea.com

INDIANAPOLIS – The 49ers will meet with at least the top four quarterback draft prospects this week at the NFL Scouting Combine.

Although the draft is two months away, 49ers general manager John Lynch has already been impressed with what he has seen. The 49ers' top two picks are set for No. 2 and No. 34 overall.

"I think these guys are somewhat getting a bad rap," Lynch said Thursday. "You turn on the film, and there's a lot to like."

The 49ers met Wednesday night with Notre Dame quarterback DeShone Kizer. By the time the combine concludes, the 49ers will also have held 15-minute interviews with North Carolina's Mitch Trubisky, Clemon's Deshaun Watson and Texas Tech's Patrick Mahomes.

"This whole thing is not about an interview, but if you were grading him on that alone, he blew the doors off," Lynch said of Kizer. "He's an impressive young man. His film is very impressive."

"I think the same can be said for Deshaun Watson. You look what he's done, just putting a team on his shoulders and taking down a great champion. Trubisky, Mahomes, I think it's a very talented draft class at that position. We're very excited about those guys. I don't think you need to be too transparent to realize that's a position we're looking at. We don't have any. That's a position that's a big focal point of our preparation and this week is a big part of that."

Kizer (6 foot 4¼) was the tallest of the quarterbacks invited to the combine. Watson checked in 6-2½. Trubisky checked in over the 6-2 1/8.

"He measured over 6-2, so he made himself some money today, I promise you," Lynch said of Trubisky.

"He grows on you. The more you watch him, the more you like him."

Mahomes was the shortest of the quarterbacks at 6-2.

"He's a guy the film is pretty special," Lynch said. "We're excited to watch more and learn more about him."

Watson has the most decorated college career, leading Clemson to the victory over Alabama in the national championship game. Lynch said he spent time around Watson during Super Bowl week in Houston.

"There are certain guys who just carry themselves differently and have a presence about him," Lynch said. "I'd put him in that category in the brief time you could just see there's a confidence and an aura that he carries himself with is pretty special."

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### ***LYNCH PROMISES 49ERS WILL BE AGGRESSIVE IN FREE AGENCY: 'STAY AWAKE'***

By Matt Maiocco, CSNBayArea.com

INDIANAPOLIS – Before the start of the new league year next Thursday, the 49ers hope to make some deals with some of their own scheduled free agents.

The 49ers have 18 players scheduled for unrestricted free agency, including quarterback Colin Kaepernick, who is expected to opt out of his contract. While the 49ers are expected to take things slow with Kaepernick, general manager John Lynch said there is some urgency to get other deals completed.

"Some of those are in the process of going on right now," Lynch said. "Hopefully, we see some things in the next couple of days."

Among the 49ers' top scheduled free agents are kicker Phil Dawson, and wide receivers Jeremy Kerley and Quinton Patton.

The 49ers have already invested more in veteran free agents than a year ago. The 49ers last week signed defensive tackle Earl Mitchell to a four-year, \$16 million contract. Mitchell became available when the Miami Dolphins recently released him.

The start of the free-agent signing period under former 49ers general manager Trent Baalke was usually a slow time for the franchise. Lynch promised a more-aggressive approach when nearly \$90 million in cap room.

"Stay awake," Lynch said.

The 49ers want to fill needs in free agency, so the organization can avoid the shackles of drafting for need.

"We need players and we've got to get ourselves in a situation with certain pieces that we made priorities and certain type of guys so we don't go into this draft saying, 'We have to have this,'" Lynch said.

"It's the best way to go in and take the best player, but sometimes you can't do that. You need certain positions and we don't want to be in that position everywhere. So there are certain things we have high on our priority list and get accomplished. And we're going to be aggressive in getting those done."

#### **49ERS FREE AGENTS**

Unrestricted

--QB Colin Kaepernick\*

--QB Blaine Gabbert

--QB Christian Ponder

--QB Thad Lewis

--RB Shaun Draughn

--RB DuJuan Harris

--WR Jeremy Kerley

--WR Quinton Patton  
--WR Rod Streater  
--TE Jim Dray  
--OL Andrew Gardner  
--K Phil Dawson  
--DT Glenn Dorsey  
--DT Tony Jerod-Eddie  
--DL Chris Jones  
--LB Nick Bellore  
--LB Gerald Hodges  
--LB Michael Wilhoite

Restricted

--OL Andrew Tiller  
--DB Marcus Cromartie  
--CB Chris Davis

Exclusive rights

--DL Mike Purcell (tendered)  
--LB Carl Bradford (tendered)

\*-Expected to opt out of contract.

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***If Colin Kaepernick didn't opt out, 49ers would have released QB***

By Nick Wagoner, ESPN.com

One way or another, San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick was going to become a free agent this offseason.

Kaepernick's representatives informed teams earlier this week that he would be opting out of the final year of his contract with the 49ers. The first day Kaepernick was eligible to do so was Thursday, and it's just a matter now of making it official.

But even if Kaepernick had decided not to exercise that option, he would not have been back with the 49ers under the terms of his current contract. Niners general manager John Lynch told Sirius XM radio on Thursday afternoon that the team would have released Kaepernick had he not elected to opt out.

"Kap is going to opt out," Lynch said. "We had a great conversation with him. We had a great meeting and I think we had a very frank and honest discussion, and what we both agreed was that under the current construct of the situation, everything, the contract, it wasn't going to work. That's not to say that further on in free agency that he may look at us and we may look at him as an option."

While the Niners aren't closing the door on a reunion with Kaepernick, they aren't exactly ignoring any of their quarterback possibilities at the moment. That's because as things currently stand, the Niners will have zero quarterbacks under contract for 2017 when the new league year begins on March 9.

Upon opting out, Kaepernick will join Blaine Gabbert, Christian Ponder and Thad Lewis as 49ers quarterbacks set to explore the free-agent market. Because of that, Lynch and coach Kyle Shanahan are ready and willing to acknowledge that finding help for the game's most important position is the top priority, by any means necessary.

"We are looking at every option," Lynch told Sirius. "We need to. Free agency, there's some viable options there. I'm excited about this draft class. I think a lot of people have criticized these guys. As I watch them, I get excited. I think with the No. 2 pick in the draft, that's a valuable asset and it gives us a

lot of options at our disposal. One thing Kyle and I have talked about, when you have no quarterbacks, it's not an ideal situation, but what it does, it allows us to go get people.

"Obviously there's constraints but it allows us to form it in the way we want. We aren't taking other people's stuff that maybe we aren't thrilled about. We can go say 'Hey, these are the guys we want to play with.' There are some challenges there as to who is available and whatnot but again, free agency is an option, the draft with the No. 2 pick is certainly an option and other picks down the line. And then being bold and exploring other options is always available and viable for us as well."

One oft-discussed option that would fall into the "being bold" category is attempting to acquire Washington Redskins quarterback Kirk Cousins. Washington placed the exclusive franchise tag on Cousins earlier this week, effectively denying him the opportunity to even negotiate with other teams. That means that if the Redskins decide to part with Cousins it will come via trade and with a presumably hefty price.

Lynch said Thursday he has not had any discussions with the Redskins about Cousins to this point but did say he has great respect for him and reiterated, "All options are available to us."

Earlier on Thursday, Lynch spoke highly of some of the top quarterbacks in this year's draft class. The Niners interviewed Notre Dame's DeShone Kizer on Wednesday night at the scouting combine in Indianapolis, and Lynch said Kizer "blew the doors off" the room with an impressive performance. He also had positive things to say about what he's seen from the likes of Clemson's Deshaun Watson, North Carolina's Mitch Trubisky and Texas Tech's Pat Mahomes.

During his media session at the scouting combine on Wednesday, Shanahan said he hadn't yet had a chance to dive into the top of the college prospects but offered some insight into what he's looking for at the position.

"Really, how quick they process things," Shanahan said. "You can tell talking to people who's capable of processing a lot, but the smartest people aren't always the best quarterbacks either. You can over process things. So, it's how quick they react in the pocket. Do they watch the rush? Are they fearless? If they're watching the rush at all and things like that, it's very hard to make the reactions you need to make in this league with how quick these windows close. So, you want to see how quick their decision-making is. Not on the board, but in the pocket when they're under duress."

No matter the avenue, the Niners will be adding multiple quarterbacks over the next couple of months. It's just a matter of how they go about doing it.

"I just know that both Kyle and I from the start -- I think what makes the relationship so good and we have got to keep it this way -- but we have just been together on everything," Lynch told Sirius. "We understand how critical that position is and sometimes you have to be bold to secure a guy that you think is a franchise guy and we're both willing to do that, and there's a number of different ways that we can and we're exploring all those options right now."

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### ***John Lynch's first look at combine as evaluator came with Broncos***

By Jeff Legwold, ESPN.com

INDIANAPOLIS – This might be former Denver Broncos safety John Lynch's first trip to the scouting combine as an NFL general manager, but it isn't Lynch's first trip overall to the event since he closed out his playing career.

The newly minted San Francisco 49ers general manager was among the Denver Broncos' personnel and scouting staff one previous time in Indianapolis at the invitation of Broncos executive vice president of football operations/general manager John Elway.

While Lynch, a network television analyst at the time, was denied access to some of the combine activities, he said he did get a feel of the process for personnel evaluators. And that is exactly what he is in his new job.

“One time I did come here ... I got to see the players work out and there’s a lot of value – a lot of people say, ‘You can see it all on film,’ but I always think in person is better,” Lynch said Thursday at the combine. “That did give me a snapshot and make me a little more familiar with the surroundings once I got here.”

Lynch has also sat in on some of the Broncos’ pre-draft meetings in recent years and had broken down game video on safeties at times during those years. Lynch also said Thursday that Elway, a longtime friend, was also one of the key voice’s in Lynch’s whirlwind courtship with the 49ers.

From first interview to his hire, it was less than a week before he was the 49ers’ general manager. Asked Thursday if he consulted with Elway to make a decision about taking his current job, Lynch said:

“Many times, just through our friendship, he’s one of my better friends in the world, from that perspective long before I thought about doing this. ... But I believe it was on a Tuesday I had my first discussions [with the 49ers], by Sunday I was hired, but he was one of the people I leaned on during that week. It wasn’t a lot of conversations, it was probably two, but he was, as always great counsel to me, very familiar with the situation and provided a lot of wisdom.”

Even as a player, including his four seasons with the Broncos, Lynch had always showed plenty of interest in the draft. Each year he was well-versed in a long list of prospects and often could express what kinds of players he would seek if he were constructing a team.

“I would always spend six, seven hours watching the draft,” Lynch said.

Lynch finished out his playing career on a Broncos’ team coached by Mike Shanahan, whose son, Kyle, is now the 49ers coach. Lynch said Thursday he and Kyle Shanahan had already developed a quality working relationship.

And he joked that his opinions on personnel weren’t so readily accepted by Mike Shanahan when Lynch was still a safety.

“[Mike] Shanahan didn’t listen much when I gave him suggestions,” Lynch said with a smile.

The 49ers have the No. 2 pick in the draft and with Colin Kaepernick headed for free agency, the team will have no quarterbacks on the roster under contract for the 2017 season.

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***NFL Rumor Central: 49ers, Browns, Jets like Tyrod Taylor***  
By Staff, ESPN.com

With NFL free agency approaching, several quarterback-needy teams will be scouring the market. And one signal-caller who could be available is Tyrod Taylor, if the Buffalo Bills opt to release him.

Rumor Central If Buffalo does decide to part ways with Taylor, there are three teams in particular that have interest in the 27-year-old: the San Francisco 49ers, Cleveland Browns and New York Jets, according to Vic Carucci of The Buffalo News.

Taylor signed a six-year, \$90 million extension with the Bills last offseason, as they were prepared to make him the quarterback of the future. But after missing the playoffs for an 18th straight year, the team

blew things up. The Bills relieved Rex Ryan from his head coaching duties and hired former Carolina Panthers defensive coordinator Sean McDermott to run the show.

Taylor is coming off a season in which he accounted for 23 total touchdowns -- 17 passing, six rushing -- and only six interceptions. His 2015 stats nearly mirrored 2016.

Kyle Shanahan is now the head coach in San Francisco, and he'll be searching for a quarterback to develop -- similar to what he did with Matt Ryan over the past two seasons in Atlanta. Kirk Cousins has been a popular name mentioned for the Niners, as Shanahan worked with the quarterback while serving as offensive coordinator in Washington from 2012-13. But the Redskins placed an exclusive franchise tag on Cousins on Tuesday, which will prevent teams from speaking with him unless they allow it.

The Browns have been through an astonishing 27 different starting quarterbacks since 1999. While Taylor isn't a star at the position, he could help fill a void for the time being. Robert Griffin III didn't necessarily solidify the starting spot last season, and coach Hue Jackson may be ready to look elsewhere.

As for the Jets, Taylor would be a young option for a team that has experienced turnover-heavy quarterback play in recent years. Ryan Fitzpatrick was third in the NFL with 17 interceptions in 2016. While he gets sacked a lot -- an NFL-high 42 times last year -- Taylor does a remarkable job of protecting the ball. He has just 12 interceptions in the past two seasons and only 15 total turnovers for his career.

Taylor, who is coming off a groin injury, was recently medically cleared by doctors. That means the Bills could save themselves \$30.75 million by choosing not to pick up his option and cutting him on or before March 11.

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***John Lynch: Lack of quarterbacks on roster "somewhat liberating"***

By Darin Gantt, ProFootballTalk.com

New 49ers General Manager John Lynch said Thursday he planned to explore every avenue for finding a quarterback — which is probably smart since he doesn't have any on his roster at the moment.

With Colin Kaepernick opting out of his deal and the rest of them (Blaine Gabbert, Christian Ponder, Thad Lewis) unrestricted free agents they probably didn't want anyway, the 49ers have a completely blank slate, which forces them to be flexible.

"A lot of people look at it: 'Oh my gosh, you don't have any quarterbacks,'" Lynch said. "But that also is somewhat liberating in that you can create this thing — and that position is so critical — in the way you want."

This week, that begins with the top college prospects, one of which they may be looking at with the second overall pick in the 2017 NFL Draft.

Lynch said they've already met with Notre Dame's DeShone Kizer and that "he blew the doors off" their meeting last night.

But he also praised Clemson's Deshaun Watson ("A great champion."), North Carolina's Mitch Trubisky ("The more you watch him, the more you like him.") and Texas Tech's Patrick Mahomes ("The film's pretty special."). It wasn't a deep dive, but he said he liked the class of them in general.

"My point was: These guys are somewhat getting a bad rap," Lynch said of the top quarterbacks here this week. "I turn on the film and there's a lot to like."

Lynch said he was looking at free agency and "other options" while assembling a depth chart, and didn't discount the possibility of bringing Kaepernick back as part of the mix.

"We both agreed that under the current contract it wasn't going to work out," Lynch said. "But we said let's not close the door.

"As he hits free agency, that's something we'll keep our eyes open and we want him to keep us in mind as well."

Of course, they'll be looking at everyone, unless new coach Kyle Shanahan is really planning on revolutionizing the game.

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***John Lynch: I would never question McCaffrey's commitment***

By Chase Goodbread, NFL.com

INDIANAPOLIS -- Highly publicized decisions by former LSU RB Leonard Fournette and Stanford RB Christian McCaffrey to sit out their respective bowl games will subject the two 2017 NFL Draft prospects to questions from NFL personnel who are bothered by the move, according to new San Francisco 49ers GM John Lynch.

Fournette and McCaffrey were both hobbled by injuries in their final college seasons last year. They sat out the Citrus and Sun Bowls, respectively, and both filed for early draft entry as juniors. Criticism followed, and Fournette later said his bowl absence wasn't his own decision.

But based on Lynch's remarks, that doesn't mean he won't have to answer for it.

"I think you understand their perspective, but I don't necessarily think it's a positive thing for college football. This is such a team sport -- I know there are people that I've talked to here that that really bothers," Lynch said Thursday at the NFL Scouting Combine. "I'm fortunate. With one of those players, I happen to know the young man (McCaffrey). So I would never question his commitment to team, but other people will. Some of these kids are going to have to weigh that moving forward."

Baylor RB Shock Linwood, who was not invited to the combine, also passed on the BU's appearance in the Cactus Bowl.

After former Notre Dame LB Jaylon Smith suffered a devastating knee injury in the Fiesta Bowl following the 2015 season, it should come as little surprise that some draft prospects are now thinking twice about risking injury in a bowl game. Smith slipped to the second round of last year's draft as a result, to the Dallas Cowboys, and missed the entire 2016 season.

Lynch sees a trend ahead.

"I think it will affect football going forward for many years to come," he said.

It will no doubt be among the trickier topics that come up in personal interviews that NFL clubs conduct with the two star rushers at the combine. Their answers might or might not be satisfactory, but if Lynch is correct, teams had better get used to asking the question.

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***John Lynch: DeShone Kizer blew 49ers away in interview***

By Chase Goodbread, NFL.com



INDIANAPOLIS -- DeShone Kizer passed an important early phase in his performance at the NFL Scouting Combine, at least where John Lynch is concerned.

The former Notre Dame quarterback met with the San Francisco 49ers on Wednesday night, and the club's new GM said Kizer "blew the doors off" in the exchange. The 49ers hold the No. 2 overall pick in the 2017 NFL Draft, and are among several clubs holding a top-10 pick who have a need at the quarterback position.

"This whole thing is not just about an interview, but if you were grading him on that alone, he blew the doors off. He's an impressive young man, his film's very impressive," Lynch said Thursday. "I think the same can be said for Deshaun Watson. You watch what he's done, just putting a team on his shoulders and taking down a great champion. (Mitch) Trubisky, (Patrick) Mahomes, I think it's a very talented draft class at that position, one we're very excited about."

Along with impressing one of the clubs that needs a quarterback most, Kizer also stood apart from the quarterback field with his size during Thursday's measurements at the combine. At 6-foot-4 1/2, 233 pounds, he proved to be the biggest of the combine's QB prospects. And Lynch wasn't shy about acknowledging that the club is in the market for a young passer.

"Look, I don't think you need to be too transparent to realize that's a position we're looking at. We don't have any (quarterbacks), so that's a position that's a big focal point of our preparation right now," Lynch said.

Kizer and the rest of the quarterbacks will go through passing drills on Saturday at Lucas Oil Stadium. If he stands out there as much as he did for Lynch on Wednesday night, his decision to enter the draft early as a third-year sophomore will begin to look all the smarter.

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***Bucky Brooks mock draft 2.0: Year of the quarterback slide?***

By Bucky Brooks, NFL.com

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Malik Hooker - S, Ohio State: John Lynch resists the temptation to reach on a QB to select a dynamic centerfielder with outstanding instincts and ball skills.