

# TRANSCRIPTIONS



**Defensive Coordinator Robert Saleh  
Press Conference – October 4, 2019  
San Francisco 49ers**

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**What have you seen of the Cleveland Browns offense and how have they kind of transformed and moved forward in these first few games?**

“They’re a very talented group. Skill positions are up there with anyone in the league. Their back is fantastic. [Cleveland Browns QB] Baker [Mayfield] is getting into a groove. Anytime you’re a new offense going in with a new system, even though the coach is the same from a year ago, there are still nuances that are different. And so, as an offense, as you’re trying to gain control of it, they’re just going to get better. They are so talented especially at those skill spots, their O-Line is very good. It’s just a matter of time before they start clicking and they did against Baltimore.”

**In the offseason when you looked at them as a preliminary look, does it look different now? Is that kind of what you’re referring to?**

“You had [Cleveland Browns offensive coordinator Todd] Monken come from Tampa Bay so I’m sure he’s got some wrinkles in there from him. Their O-Line coach is from Green Bay so there’s some wrinkles in from him, from a run-game standpoint. Obviously, with [Cleveland Browns head coach] coach [Freddie] Kitchens, he’s got his say. So, similarities yes, but you can tell there’s different influences. They’re tying it together really nicely. It’s just a matter of guys getting into a groove with what’s happening.”

**What was the genesis of you guys doing a lot more pre-snap in terms of disguising coverages and things like that? Was that a defensive backs/passing game coordinator Joe Woods, was that something that he sort of brought to the table?**

“Joe’s brought a lot of good stuff to the table. The disguise for us, I feel like we’ve always had it. I know it’s hard to see it when you’re not winning, but when you don’t do a lot, you have to do something to disguise what you do. What we’ve been able to do is just implement more coverages in terms of being more balanced with what we have. What Joe’s brought to us with regards to technique and fundamentals and all that stuff, he’s been fantastic. He’s been a fantastic addition. We haven’t skipped a beat since [Ohio State co-defensive coordinator/secondary coach Jeff Hafley] Haf left, he’s pretty good.”

**How much credit does some of that pre-snap stuff deserve for some of the success you guys have had through these first three games?**

“Anytime you can make a quarterback have to figure it out post-snap, it’s always a good thing. Pre-snap, I don’t know, I guess you’d have to ask the other quarterbacks. It feels

like they are not able to get a beat. I thought [Cincinnati Bengals QB] Andy Dalton, he's always been really good at figuring out coverages and getting the ball out on time so he was a challenge. We had to make an adjustment at halftime to get off the field a few times on third down. For us, always challenging ourselves to make sure that they have to figure it out post snap will always be the biggest part of our game plan with regards to trying to get the quarterback to buy us one hitch and our D-Line will get home."

**We haven't asked you any questions about your job security? Have you gotten a lot smarter in the last couple months?**

"No, I don't know if I've gotten a lot smarter. Great players, make coaches look very, very good. The group that we have is fantastic. They've bought in to what we're trying to do schematically, they've bought in with the standard that we try to create. They've bought in with what it's supposed to look like on tape with regards to the speed, the effort, the violence, the technique and all that stuff. It's a big credit to them and the way they've worked. It's a credit to the position coaches, [defensive line Kris] Kocurek, Joe, [inside linebackers coach] DeMeco [Ryans], you've got [pass rush specialist] Chris Kiffin and [run game specialist/outside linebackers] Johnny Holland, [safeties] Daniel Bullocks, all of them, [defensive quality control] Brian Fleury. They've been doing a great job upholding that standard with the way we prepare the guys and our guys have been relentless every single day since OTAs started and they haven't taken their foot off the gas yet. It's been good."

**This time last year there was so much talk about how many missed tackles the defense had. Why is that so much better now and the fact that you guys haven't allowed a rushing touchdown through three games, how much pride do you guys take in that aspect?**

"I'll answer the tackling one first. [General manager] John [Lynch] and [head coach] Kyle [Shanahan] have done a great job bringing a lot of team speed to us, both offensively, defensively and special teams. Tackling has always been, the speed element has always been a big part of your ability to tackle. The tracking angles that you take, when you take a certain tracking angle you have to have confidence in your speed as an individual to close the gap as quickly as possible on the proper track. People who are not confident in their speed take bad angles because they are going for the cut off which creates all kinds of terrible tackling angles. Our team speed when you look at [LB] Kwon Alexander, you look at [LB] Fred Warner, our safeties, even at corner, with [CB] K'Waun Williams, there's a lot of team speed at that backend so they can take those tracking angles that are critical to tackling. The faster teams are usually your best tackling teams. With regard to the haven't given up a rushing touchdown, it's always prideful if you can keep them out of the end zone in any way. I've always said, I'd rather have a team throw for 500 than run for 250. It's more back breaking. I guess it's something to be proud of."

**Why are you confident that CB Emmanuel Moseley is ready for this massive talent in covering Cleveland Browns WR Odell Beckham Jr.?**

"E-Man's got a great mindset to him. He's not afraid of anything and that's the number one prerequisite for a corner is you can't be scared. He's also got a very short memory so if he does get beat he's able to line up as if nothing happened and keep grinding."

There's no fear in his football game, he's shown over from last year, making it as an undrafted free agent and then this year really just taking hold with K'Waun missing OTAs just grabbing his spot on the roster by the neck. When we put pads on, his physicality, his mindset, his football IQ, his work ethic, all of it, it just kept growing on coaches and for us we just have a tremendous amount of confidence in him."

**How big of a challenge does he face? Real perspective, how good is Odell Beckham Jr.?**

"Odell is one of the best in the league, but we've got faith in our guys in regards to if you play your technique, you do what you're supposed to do with regards to eliminating your biggest issues, don't give up your cheap explosives and make tackles, stay on stop, play great fundamental defense, we feel pretty good about the way it will all work. With regards to Odell and him, it will be a great challenge for him. But, I've got faith in our guys."

**Who's going to start at free safety?**

"At free? That one's still being decided."

**You've been in the past pretty upfront that DB Jimmie Ward is one of your best 11 players. Is Jimmie Ward still one of your best 11 players?**

"I do believe he is still one of the best 11. His versatility allows us the ability to use him in many different ways and I guess everyone will find out on Monday."

**How do you balance making that decision just given the fact that the defense has been mostly successful for these first three games versus knowing how good Jimmie Ward is? I assume that there's the idea that you don't want to upset what's already happening.**

"The challenge for everybody in this organization, whether it's player, coach management, it doesn't matter. If you become complacent just because you've won, it'll create loss. Our job is to find ways to get better even through victory. So, it's always trying to find a way to get a little bit better every single day as we go out on the football field. If Jimmie Ward gives us the ability to get better then he's going to get used. I would hope that everybody understands that."

**With DL Nick Bosa, I think he's played something like 56-percent of the snaps. If he's healthy, is he somebody that you want to be up there with maybe DL DeForest Buckner as somebody who gets 70 to 80-percent on a given day?**

"One day for sure, I guess. We've got, knock on wood, a good amount of depth and such a good rotation with all those guys that there's no need to wear any of them out. The first day I ever stood up here, the idea being that you want those guys to have less than 700 snaps on the year, all of them. If we can create that rotation where they are all getting equal reps and they are all fresh and we can come at them in waves, that's the most ideal situation. Even if he is 100-percent healthy, you still want to create the same environment in terms of, if you're on the field you give us everything you've got and then when the next guy goes in while you're getting your breather, he's giving everything he's got and get ready to go back on the football field and do the same thing you just did. Come at them

in waves and try to keep their snap counts down so they can exert that energy instead of having to keep it in the store bank, if that makes sense.”

**I realize this wasn't your decision per se, but why is it important to get S Marcell Harris up on the 53 man?**

“Marcell's got, he's a big-bodied safety, he's got great athleticism. He came in here last year, if you look at Marcell's story, he missed all of his last year in college, and then he gets to us and he misses all of OTAs, he misses a majority of training camp, he goes on IR, he misses the first 10 games of the season, so he starts the last six. You think about him starting NFL games without really practicing if you really want to see it, he practiced for two weeks in two years and started six NFL football games and did a really nice job. He just brings a lot of energy, a lot of speed, a lot of violence, a lot of good things that you want out of that strong safety spot. To have him up is a good thing. Losing [DB Antone] Exum [Jr.] is always hard because of what Ex means to us in terms of leadership and all that stuff. But, a lot of faith in what Marcell can do both defensively, and I'm sure special teams, too.”

**What's your scouting report on Baker Mayfield?**

“Baker, you could see that he's getting into a groove, especially if he can get into a groove early. He's got really good arm strength, he's got great pocket awareness. He's always looking downfield to find open guys. He's not just scrambling to run, he's scrambling to throw. He's starting to get a rapport with his receivers, understanding the offense and what it's asking of him and he's going to be a good one. For him, it's just stay the course and get better every single day.”

**What is Cleveland's offensive identity?**

“Their identity, obviously with [Cleveland Browns RB Nick] Chubb, they've got a really good run game, they run some RPOs in there, which is right through Baker's wheelhouse in terms of what he did back in college. It's an easy way to get the ball to the receivers who are special, like I've talked about. I'd give them a run-first mentality. You could just feel that part, and if you try to stack the box, it's pitch and catch to the receivers. If you try to play soft, they're going to run it right down your throat. It's a great challenge for us on early downs to try to win up front and hold up on the outside.”

**The analytics community, numbers people will say that the effectiveness of the running game doesn't impact how affective an offense can be using play action. Do you think play action is more difficult to defend when a team is running the ball well or is there not really a relationship there?**

“It's a lot harder, to me, if an offense is running the ball very well, because like I've told you, the worst thing you can have as an offense is jamming it down your throat. You have to do something, I just feel as a coach, you have to do something to stop them. If you don't do anything and you just let them get chunk yards and you let them run for 180, 200 yards, it's just back breaking because it's exhausting when you're just allowing 600 pounds to lean on your three technique. You're allowing all that weight and all that force and all that grind to happen down in and down out. As a coach, I'd feel very irresponsible.”

Yeah, the more aggressive you get to stop the run, the more vulnerable you are at play action. They do work hand in hand, to me anyway.”

**In regards to last year, you were under some fire. Going through that bit of adversity, did you learn anything about yourself? What was that experience like when people are saying what’s wrong with you?**

“You know, I’m being honest when I say this, I don’t pay attention to it. I don’t have social media, I wouldn’t have known my job was under pressure unless you all told me. I have an obligation to the organization to try to get these guys ready to play, try to get coaches all on the same page, try to get the guys ready to play on Sunday and anytime I’m thinking about myself and my job security I’m taking away from my ability to focus on what’s important now, and that’s the players, that’s the coaches, that’s the organization. I’m being very honest when I can tell you that I don’t think I learned anything because I think every day is a dog fight and every day you’re trying to prove yourself as a person. The growth, for me, is trying to be the best coordinator I can be every single day, and that’s really what I’ve learned over the last two years is different ways to approach this as a coordinator.”

**You don’t have family members texting and calling?**

“They do. They do, especially my brother.”

**Did you hear about a certain Sports Illustrated article that came out, I think it was last week?**

“Yeah, family sent that one out. But like I said, in this profession, you get, as much as they love you today, they will put you on a pitchfork and light you on fire tomorrow. So, I don’t care. It doesn’t matter, because the bottom line is winning, playing great defense and finding a way to get this team where it hasn’t been in the last few years.”

**Going back to the angles in tackling and tying to RPO, how important is the eye discipline through your defense and how do you feel DB Tarvarius Moore’s angles in tackling have been through the first three games?**

“Tarvarius can get a lot better at angle tracking. His issue isn’t tracking. There’s two types of tracking a middle-third safety has to take. There’s the get on course, which is when the ball is thrown, they get on course to eliminate if one of the DBs loses a one-on-one and it’s that middle-third safety’s job to get on course and knock that thing down so it doesn’t crease us. Then, the second part is tracking in the run game, where if the ball does break the front seven or the box, his job is to track near hip and tackle that so that way those runs don’t become explosive. That’s why he’s called the eraser. He erases all the mistakes that happen in front of him. So, for Tarvarius, the tracking in the run game is really good. He’s got to improve his tracking out of the middle of the field when he gets on course. When the ball is thrown, eyes before feet, get on course, track the near hip and tackle. That’s something he’s working on. Daniel has been working with him, him and Joe Woods, and he’s going to get better at it. He’s a young man, so I’ve got a lot of faith in him. Eye discipline is always, we say, I’ve always talked about football’s a piece of C.A.K.E., don’t make it harder than it has to be. C.A.K.E. is call, alignment, key and execute. Key is your eyes, put your eyes where they need pre-snap, put your eyes where

they need to be post-snap, and when that ball is thrown, put your eyes where they need to be so you can go tackle. So, as long as you've got great eye discipline, and you're putting it where you need to be, you'll have faith in your athleticism that you'll be able to make the play."

**You talk about tracking, is that an area where Jimmie Ward excels?**

"Yeah. He's good. Jimmie's pretty good at tracking."

**Talking about the run game and pass game, the two plays were pass plays with the Cincinnati Bengals WR John Ross III and the Pittsburgh Steelers WR JuJu Smith-Schuster play, those are, basically he's trying to tackle guys who are runners at that point. Is there a difference?**

"There is, because in the run game, you've got, it's coming out of a shoot. So, you're using the bodies in front of you as leverage. But, when you're out in the open field, a get-on-course tackle is very hard and it's something that you've got to have great faith in your speed, which he has tremendous amounts of speed, and you've got to have great eye discipline and ability to transition and put yourself on course and stay on that course no matter what and just throw. And if you do that, 99 out of 100 times you should get him down. And it's something that he's working on. He's going to be a good one. He's just got some things to work on. Excited for him to get better."