

TRANSCRIPTIONS



**Defensive Coordinator Robert Saleh
Press Conference – October 10, 2019
San Francisco 49ers**

[Listen to Audio](#) | [Media Center](#)

With all of the injuries on the offensive side, does the defensive side kind of take it as more of a challenge or put more on your plate than you guys have to continue what you've been doing?

“No. It is a team football game, but from our mindset, we're trying to approach everything and be our absolute best every single play. Whatever's happening on offense, it shouldn't ever have an effect on what we do defensively only because offense is an external motivation. You never want to be externally driven, you want internal motivation at all times. For us, we're internally driven on defense to go out there and put out our best performance.”

Do you and head coach Kyle Shanahan speak during the week or on Saturdays or whenever about, 'Hey, this is what we've got going on offense?' Is it intertwined, does it have to mesh at some point?

“Yeah, Kyle comes and talks to me every single day. Every day about what we're doing, what we're trying to do. We watch practice together, he watches special teams with [special teams coordinator Richard] Hightower together. I mean, like I've told you all before, he's relentless in the film room, so he's constantly making sure that we're all on our P's and Q's if you will and that we're all tied in together and we understand exactly what's happening game plan-wise and what needs to be done. He's very big on what it takes to win. And so, that is a big discussion that happens on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, all the way leading up to kickoff. He's still grabbing us and just talking through stuff. The dialogue with coach is never ending.”

The Rams have historically put up a lot of points on you guys the last couple of years. How much better equipped are you to take on that offense this year?

“You know, I don't know if it's better equipped or anything like that. They have loaded up points except for when they had that backup playing, I don't remember his name. Bring him back, no, I'm just kidding. They're very talented. All this narrative that they've taken a step back, I don't see it. They're putting up points at a rapid rate, their drop back game is better than I've ever seen it, their play-action pass and run game is still there. [Los Angeles Rams head coach] Sean [McVay] and his staff still do an unbelievable job calling plays, setting things up. When you're out of the first 15, which is always exotic with this system, it's not over. Just like with Kyle, when you're out of the 15, it's just starting. First 15, because you've got to be on it with what you've shown, what your players look like,

what holes are being filled in, and you've got to be able to coach on the sideline to make sure that all those holes that we're putting on tape are filled because that's what they're looking at. It's a great challenge for us. It doesn't matter who we have on the football field, because schematically and team-wise, this is by far our greatest challenge."

In terms of the adjustments you've made along the defensive line by using more wide-nine, it would seem like that is sort of designed to counter attack the outside zone that the Rams run. When you guys were making those decisions about tinkering the defense in the offseason, were the Rams and maybe other teams in the division part of the emphasis behind that?

"We're always, in the offseason, you're always trying to win your division first. It's the easiest way to the playoffs. Just as an overall structure of how we can get faster as a defense, I've always talked to you all about eliminating the grey area. If we go black and white, you can maximize a player's athleticism and you can maximize their speed. So, with this system that [defensive line coach Kris] Kocurek has brought in, tying it into what we do from a coverage standpoint and with our run fits and all that stuff, we've been able to get faster up front. There's an old saying that when your D-Line is running the way they do, your defense looks very fast and when your corners hit the way ours are hitting, we'll look like a very physical defense. Linebackers, you're expected to run and hit, so that's very natural. Just the overall speed and the intensity and the violence at which those guys play with up front is the greatest benefactor to the whole thing."

He's the number two pick and a very talented player coming in, but it seems like now DL Nick Bosa is already one of the best edge rushers in the NFL. Is he surpassing your expectations at this point or is he about where you thought he would be at?

"He's about where we thought. He is doing a really, really nice job, but it's no different for him. I said it to you all last week, as much as people are praising him today, he can go out and lay an egg. Same thing with the defense. We can go out and lay an egg on Sunday and they'll have people tar and feather us as we walk out of the stadium. It doesn't matter. The truest measure, consistency is the truest measure of performance, so we've got to go out and do it every single day because no matter what we've accomplished today, there's a whole line of people just waiting for us to fail so they can go talk. We've just got to be focused on us, and us means getting better, being great at our technique, being relentless in effort, being relentless with violence and just being relentless in our overall pursuit to be perfect every single play. If we do that, it doesn't matter what happens around us. Internally, we'll be able to get to where we're trying to go."

He was talking yesterday kind of about the trial and error that goes into what moves work and setting moves up for later on. I'm just curious what your role is in helping him through that and helping him understand what are the things that work in certain situations?

"Are you talking about Nick?"

Yeah, Nick.

“Between Kris Kocurek and [pass rush specialist] Chris Kiffin, they do a fantastic job just talking through with those guys, showing them tape, showing them what their O-Line looks like, showing them strengths, weaknesses, where they’re vulnerable. Not only as individuals, but in protection. They do as good a job as anyone I’ve ever been around with regards to attacking not only individuals, but protections. They’re very, very good at what they do. I try not to mess with those guys too much, I don’t want to screw them up, but they do a good job and it’s really tied into what we do coverage-wise with regards to our third down packages and our first and second down packages, we’re tying it all into coverage.”

When you watch him, do you see, I know it’s only been a few weeks, but do you see from week to week him implementing things that he’s adding to his game as he goes along in his game and is kind of figuring it out?

“With Nick?”

Yes.

“Absolutely, and that’s all of them too. When you look at [DL DeForest Buckner] Buck, he’s had three games in a row with three sacks, he’s learning how this whole thing ties together. [DL] Dee Ford has had two sacks in four games, which I know you probably expect more, but in my mind he’s done more than anything we were able to generate from a year ago. [DL Arik] Armstead looks fantastic. They are all really still not even scratching the surface with what they are capable of with regards to understanding how each one’s rushing, how they each fit in the system, how to play games together, how to blitz together, all of it. And how we’re implementing all our game day different wrinkles that we’ll show every single week. From an offensive perspective you can’t just count on Dee Ford being left, Bosa being right, you can’t count on it. We’re building our system so by the time we get to the middle of the season our hope is that all offenses see is just an overwhelming amount of different things that are all the same to us.”

A lot of the guys on defense have been talking about their pursuit of perfection and basically they weren’t satisfied with how you guys performed even on Monday night and cleaning up the little things. What exactly are those little things that you hope to improve on?

“There’s certain details that we see from a defensive perspective where it may not have been exposed on tape, but you can visually see that there’s a hole in the defense and if it’s not fixed, 99 out of 100 times it can be fixed with proper technique. And so, just making sure that guys hone in and are always looking at their technique, always looking at where their eye placement is, always understanding what they’re being asked to do and what they’re being asked to stop so that way they can be tighter in coverage. The whole idea of making sure that offenses just feel claustrophobic with regards to the way the football field feels to them. When we watch tape, our job is to try to make it feel as tight as possible to an offense and you only do that by playing with, like I said, effort, great technique and violence so that field just feels really, really small. How can you turn that 51 and a third or whatever it is, how do you make that feel like it’s 45 yards wide? You just keep trying to do condense the field and you do that with speed, effort, technique, all that stuff.”

Two-part question: What we see on third downs, how much of that is set up by what you guys do on base downs and as far as the pass rush, how is it linked to the run defense? And also, what is DL D.J. Jones' role in those base downs?

“For us, our philosophy has always been that we’re going to be as sound as possible on first and second down. We eliminate explosives, that’s the number one rule to our defense is to make sure that we’re going to eliminate explosives at all costs. You can’t be sound unless you’re sound in the run game first. On third down, it gives you the flexibility to get a little bit more exotic because you’re not worried about the run game as much. Now you can cheat coverage, you don’t have sell out with an eight-man box, you don’t have to be perfect in the run game. You still want to have an idea of where people fit, but odds are you’re playing for pass. With us, on first and second down, philosophically we’re going to play a very clean game and you can see it on tape. We’re going to play it as sound as possible with our coverages. Then when we get to third down that’s where you’ll see all the different shows, all the different exotics that we’ll create week-to-week.”

And D.J. Jones?

“D.J. on first and second down just being a big part of it, his explosiveness at that two-eye spot, his power, his strength, all that stuff, I think he’s a problem in there for guards and centers who try to double team him and all that stuff. He’s a good player and he has pass rush ability so if teams do try to play-action pass or just drop back on first and second down, he is strong enough and explosive enough to create some pocket push in there so our ends and our three-technique can go work also.”

Do you think a defensive line can set the tone or form the identity for an NFL team?

“Yeah. I think I said it up here last year, somebody asked me how important would a good pass rusher, or an edge rusher, do for the defense? I equated it to an offense needing a good quarterback. And I say it that way because the most important position on the football field is the quarterback and the only position that can really disrupt a quarterback is the defensive line, if you really think about it. You can be a team that constantly blitzes to disrupt the quarterback, but you’re just leaving a bunch of holes in your coverage. But, if you can do it with four and you can make that quarterback uncomfortable, you can play a very sound coverage in the backend and speed up his process. That’s where you get quarterbacks making bad decisions. But, the defensive line, it’s our philosophy anyway, when you look at other defenses, they might have other philosophies all the way around, but for us and our system, that defensive line is everything.”

No disrespect to the edge rushers that were here the last two years, but you quite clearly didn’t have anything like that. Were you waiting for these additions?

“You know what, Kyle, [general manager] John [Lynch], [vice president of player personnel] Adam [Peters], [vice president of player personnel] Martin Mayhew, they’ve done a great job. They’ve been very patient. You know, it would have been very easy to go draft people that we weren’t completely sold on in the first two years. It would have been very easy to go trade for people that we weren’t completely sold on. It’s a credit to them and really the York family just to understand that it takes great amounts of patience when you are trying to build a roster the right way. They really were relentless every year trying to get the right fits for the defense, the right fits for the offense, the right fits for

special teams. It just so happened that this year the stars kind of aligned and we were able to get the pieces we needed. I've said it to people, I think one of the best things we have done all offseason was Kris Kocurek, bringing in his system and the way he speaks to those guys and his clarity and how he teaches that D-Line, eliminating any grey area that they might have. And because of it, you can have a wealth of talent and it won't really matter unless you can put all those pieces together and get them playing to their maximum ability."

Did you share their patience during those drafts and those offseasons?

"I have a tremendous amount of faith in Kyle and John and they say there's two types of people, there's those who believe they need to see it before they actually believe it will happen, and then there's people of faith who see it without ever having to see it. They know that it's possible without ever having to see it. I'm a man of faith and I knew that it would happen eventually."

Obviously, you expected a turnover turnaround here at some point, but other than just normalization here, what do you attribute to the kind of avalanche that you've got here in the first four games?

"I think we are getting the bounces. You think about the play on the goal line. We didn't do anything special, we actually screwed up the coverage and it bounced off of 11's hands and right into [CB] K'Waun's [Williams] hands. That didn't happen a year ago. Special teams got a takeaway, that didn't happen a year ago. We just were unlucky, even though special teams forced a lot of turnovers, fumbles last year, it just wasn't happening for us. But, at the same time, [CB Richard Sherman] Sherm has always played a very smart style of football, just using him as an example. He ran the route through film study, I think it was 11 running that route too and he ran the route for him, 11 aborted mission and then Bosa had pressure so he had to get rid of the football. But, if you actually go back to last year, Sherm ran the route for a lot of people last year, quarterback just never got rid of the ball. He didn't have a lineman hanging on him. Where this year, that's happening. So, quarterbacks have to get rid of the football, they have to make the decision quicker and either that or they are taking sacks or in one of the cases [Cleveland Browns QB] Baker [Mayfield] fumbled. It's all rush and coverage tying together and when you're confident in your rush you can start playing smarter on the backend level and you can start getting tighter."

What's been your assessment of S Jaquiski Tartt?

"Tartt's been great. He's very smart, I love him. His strengths are his instincts. He's very, very smart, he's got a high football IQ. He's got great speed, great violence, all that stuff. If he can stay healthy, he'll have a really nice year."