

49ers Mid-Day Clips – February 17, 2017

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Why is John Lynch doing this? Inside new 49ers GM's crash course

By Eric Branch, San Francisco Chronicle

<http://www.sfchronicle.com/49ers/article/Why-is-John-Lynch-doing-this-Inside-new-49ers-10941386.php>

Babysitter to boss: Gary Kubiak on 49ers' Kyle Shanahan

By Eric Branch, San Francisco Chronicle

<http://www.sfchronicle.com/49ers/article/Babysitter-to-boss-Gary-Kubiak-on-49ers-Kyle-10941146.php>

49ers Kyle Shanahan seeks 'violent' defenders, no 'short-term' QB

By Cam Inman, San Jose Mercury News

<http://www.mercurynews.com/2017/02/17/49ers-kyle-shanahan-seeks-violent-defenders-no-short-term-qb/>

49ers looking at Benton at offensive line coach

By Matt Barrows, Sacramento Bee

<http://www.sacbee.com/sports/nfl/san-francisco-49ers/article133441849.html>

Shanahan confirms 49ers will hire Saleh, run Seattle-like defense

By Matt Barrows, Sacramento Bee

<http://www.sacbee.com/sports/nfl/san-francisco-49ers/article133342344.html>

SHANAHAN: 49ERS WILL SHOW PATIENCE AT QB, 'DON'T WANT TO GAMBLE'

By Matt Maiocco, CSNBayArea.com

<http://www.csnbayarea.com/49ers/shanahan-49ers-will-show-patience-qb-dont-want-gamble>

SHANAHAN HIRES SALEH AS 49ERS DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR

By Matt Maiocco, CSNBayArea.com

<http://www.csnbayarea.com/49ers/shanahan-hires-saleh-49ers-defensive-coordinator>

49ers' special teams improved but were middle of the pack in 2016

By Nick Wagoner, ESPN.com

http://www.espn.com/blog/san-francisco-49ers/post/_id/23529/49ers-special-teams-improved-but-were-middle-of-the-pack-in-2016

Kyle Shanahan confirms Robert Saleh is defensive coordinator

By Josh Alper, ProFootballTalk.com

<http://profootballtalk.nbcsports.com/2017/02/17/kyle-shanahan-confirms-robert-saleh-is-defensive-coordinator/>

Kyle Shanahan: 49ers not looking for a "short-term fix" at QB

By Darin Gantt, ProFootballTalk.com

<http://profootballtalk.nbcsports.com/2017/02/17/kyle-shanahan-49ers-not-looking-for-a-short-term-fix-at-qb/>

Kyle Shanahan focusing on free agents; Lynch on draft

By Conor Orr, NFL.com

<http://www.nfl.com/news/story/0ap3000000786467/article/kyle-shanahan-focusing-on-free-agents-lynch-on-draft>

National Media

Cardinals pursuing deals with Chandler Jones, Tony Jefferson

By Kent Somers, The Arizona Republic

<http://www.azcentral.com/story/sports/nfl/cardinals/2017/02/17/arizonas-cardinals-free-agents-update-chandler-jones-tony-jefferson/98040130/>

Anthony Lynn sees untapped potential in Melvin Gordon

By Eric Williams, ESPN.com

http://www.espn.com/blog/san-diego-chargers/post/_id/19589/anthony-lynn-sees-untapped-potential-in-melvin-gordon

Everything you need to know about a Branden Albert trade, including the name of one suitor

By Armando Salguero, Miami Herald

<http://www.miamiherald.com/sports/spt-columns-blogs/armando-salguero/article133322754.html>

Falcons add Charlie Weis Jr. to round out coaching staff

By D. Orlando Ledbetter, Atlanta Journal-Constitution

<http://www.ajc.com/sports/football/falcons-add-charlie-weis-round-out-coaching-staff/xTxDTDjB1TcjSN5x7jBBtM/>

Adrian Peterson's fantasy about Giants doesn't make sense

By Paul Schwartz, New York Post

<http://nypost.com/2017/02/16/dont-expect-giants-to-chase-after-adrian-peterson/>

Local Clips – Full Version

Why is John Lynch doing this? Inside new 49ers GM's crash course

By Eric Branch, San Francisco Chronicle

Former NFL safety John Lynch recently detonated his idyllic life as though it was a wide receiver crossing the middle. The impact sent him to Santa Clara while his wife and four children stayed in San Diego.

The separation is temporary. His family will join the new 49ers general manager at the end of the school year. But the months apart will be arduous.

That became clear last week. Lynch, 45, in a suit and tie after his introductory news conference, was asked why he'd swapped serenity for stress as he leaned against a counter in the media room at Levi's Stadium. All GM jobs are demanding, but Lynch's could be particularly grueling, at least initially: He has no executive experience and is in the midst of a front-office crash course.

Before joining the 49ers, the 15-year NFL veteran spent eight years as a well-respected Fox broadcaster and his work-half-the-year gig let him stay close to family as well as football. So why accept an all-consuming job he didn't need? The GM suggested Linda Lynch had posed the same question.

"My wife keeps on saying, 'Are you sure?'" Lynch said. "I said, 'Well, this has already started. We're in.'"

His response inspired laughter. Lynch was smiling, too, but then the grin faded and his eyes pooled with tears.

"I tell you, I've never been apart from my family," said Lynch, his voice cracking with emotion he didn't anticipate. "So it's been gut-wrenching already."

His tears, of course, make his recent decision even more vexing.

Why is John Lynch doing this?

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The answer involves the craving for competition that fuels countless athletes and often can't be satisfied after the final whistle.

As a Fox analyst, Lynch quickly ascended to the No. 2 broadcast team, but he found success without a scoreboard unsatisfying. At the end of a telecast, the nine-time Pro Bowler and four-time Hall-of-Fame finalist often fist-bumped his play-by-play partner and then ... nothing. No anguish or elation.

"He really missed someone winning and losing at the end of a game," 49ers head coach Kyle Shanahan said. "He enjoyed doing the announcing and being a part of the NFL. But the fight to go through something with a group of guys and what we go through together. It's not easy, and it's a grind for everybody, but it's worth it."

Indeed, the grind-loving competitor that lurks within the charismatic and composed Lynch has reemerged after spending the past decade in post-playing limbo.

It's fitting that Lynch rejoined the NFL by signing his contract with the 49ers on a Sunday. During his playing career, that was typically when he transformed from mild-mannered to maniacal.

For his first five NFL seasons, cornerback Champ Bailey only knew Lynch from afar as a bone-rattling enforcer who punctuated hits with screams. In 2004, however, they became teammates with the Broncos and Bailey saw there was far more to the madman than met the eye.

Lynch is the Stanford-educated, San-Diego-bred son of a successful businessman. His father, John Lynch Sr., is the president and CEO of the Broadcast Company of the Americas, which owns three radio stations, and was the CEO of the San Diego Union-Tribune. In 2006, Lynch won the Bart Starr Award, which is given to the NFL player that best exemplifies outstanding leadership and character.

Bailey was shocked: He didn't expect the thumper to be so thoughtful.

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"Man, that's what fools you about him," Bailey said. "If you meet him before you see him play, you'd never think he'd play the way he does. But, for me, I saw him play before I met him and immediately it was like 'Dang, this is not what I expected.' I expected some nut case wanting to run through every brick wall he sees. But he wasn't. Calm, collected, he had great values, focused."

Bailey gives Lynch, who is seven years older, much of the credit for his longevity. The 12-time Pro Bowl pick also played 15 seasons — partly because he noticed how Lynch cared for his body, and how his obsessive film study compensated for declining late-career skills.

"I don't know really know anyone personally that would be better suited to run a team than John Lynch," Bailey said. "I believe he could be the general manager and the head coach. That's how competitive he is and how much he prepares before he does anything."

Before becoming a GM, Lynch prepared for the job by learning from his close friend, Broncos general manager John Elway. With the Hall-of-Fame quarterback, Lynch discussed front-office intricacies and the emptiness that was prompting him to consider an executive role.

The ultra-competitive Elway returned to the NFL in 2011 when he joined Denver's front office. During Elway's tenure, he's asked Lynch to evaluate college prospects, asked him to attend draft meetings and asked him this: Why stay in TV if you can get back in the trenches?

"I think one thing that was a common denominator (between us) was what fills up your balloon?" Elway said. "Obviously, John did a tremendous job with TV. But I think - that's what I told him - I don't know how much TV fills up your balloon, but being in this position to where you're putting a football team together, a football staff together, is very satisfying. And, obviously, it's a great challenge. The next thing to playing is being in that position."

Lynch's current challenge is daunting: He's a novice who has inherited a 2-14 team with serious quarterback issues.

However, the man ranked the 10th-hardest hitter in league history by NFL Network specialized in obliterating obstacles during his football career.

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At Stanford, he spent his first two seasons as a never-used quarterback, transitioned to a hybrid linebacker role as a junior and didn't start until he moved to safety his final season. The result: He left Palo Alto as a second-team All-American.

"What it really comes down to is he's extraordinarily competitive," said Tom Holmoe, a former 49ers safety who was Lynch's position coach during his senior season. "It was real early in his transition to free safety that you said 'Oh boy, he's going to take it to the limit.'"

In the NFL, Lynch was a third-round pick of the Buccaneers whose inexperience at safety partly explained why he didn't start more than six games in his first three seasons.

Tampa Bay head coach Sam Wyche had been encouraged to draft Lynch by Stanford's Bill Walsh, under whom Wyche had served as an assistant with the 49ers. Lynch was a project, but Wyche was wowed by the rookie's off-the-chart intangibles that forecast future success.

"There are players that come in and you notice their competitive spirit right away," Wyche said. "Well, with John, it just oozed out of him. He couldn't hide it. The really great players only know one speed."

Lynch earned his first Pro Bowl berth in 1997, his fifth season, and was a captain of the 2002 Buccaneers, who won a Super Bowl led by one of the best defenses in NFL history. However, Tampa Bay released Lynch in a salary cap move after the 2003 season and the 32-year-old underwent surgery to remove bone spurs in his neck.

It was his last significant challenge. And Lynch responded by morphing from injured and unemployed to seemingly indomitable. He signed with the Broncos and immediately had an I'm-back hit on Chiefs wide receiver Dante Hall, who was impaled by Lynch in the 2004 season opener. It set the tone for a career-ending, four-year run with Denver that featured four Pro Bowl berths.

"He absolutely came in (in 2004) with something to prove," Bailey said. "He didn't talk about it a lot, but you could see the fire in his eyes. ... The guy was a presence. He knew it. He just had to prove it over again that he could play."

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Now, Lynch hopes to conquer perhaps his greatest challenge.

With the 49ers, he'll attempt to resurrect a franchise while maintaining a normal life with a family that includes a 17-year-old son and daughters, Lindsay, 16, Lilly, 14 and Leah, 9.

Lynch said his children and Linda, his wife of 23 years, eventually reached the point where they shared his excitement over his new job. But it will take some adjustment.

His son, Jake, might stay in San Diego and live with Lynch's parents in the fall to play his senior season of high school football. In addition, the complications of their temporary separation were clear when plane-grounding fog in San Diego prevented his family from surprising him at his introductory news conference.

Lynch, who said he's been getting little sleep, joked he's still trying to locate his new work-life balance when asked about contacting quarterback Colin Kaepernick.

"I got chewed out for not calling my daughter before she went to bed last night," he said. "So I'm trying to get a lot of things in."

Moments later, the former NFL tough guy was fighting back tears and the moment illustrated the anguish involved in his latest task.

So, again, why is John Lynch doing this? He clearly agrees with Shanahan: It won't be easy, but it will be worth it.

Babysitter to boss: Gary Kubiak on 49ers' Kyle Shanahan
By Eric Branch, San Francisco Chronicle

Years ago, Kyle Shanahan babysat Gary Kubiak's three sons.

How did that go? Kubiak laughed during a recent phone interview.

"I remember the funniest story," Kubiak said, "one time Kyle hung one of my kids by his underwear on the doorknob."

It was harmless. Still, fortunately for Kubiak, who later hired Shanahan as his offensive coordinator, the kid grew up to be a better play-caller than babysitter.

Kubiak, the former head coach of the Texans and Broncos, has known Shanahan, 37, for more than 30 years. Kyle's dad, Mike Shanahan, was the Broncos offensive coordinator from 1984-87 when Kubiak was Denver's backup quarterback. They later served on the same staff with the 49ers in 1994, before Kubiak worked under Shanahan with the Broncos for the next 11 seasons.

Through it all, Kubiak, 55, saw plenty of Kyle, a former wide receiver at Duke and Texas who was a ball boy, attended coaches meetings, caught passes from Denver's quarterbacks and radiated a passion for football.

In 2006, Kubiak's first year as Houston's head coach, he hired Kyle, then 26, as his wide receivers coach. In 2008, Kubiak promoted him to offensive coordinator, making him the youngest in the NFL.

Kubiak acknowledged Texans owner Bob McNair had reservations about giving a 28-year-old such a title.

"I know Mr. McNair, he was concerned -- 'He's very young' and those type of things," said Kubiak, who was 33 when he became Denver's offensive coordinator. "I guess the best answer I gave him was 'Well, I was the same way when his dad gave me the opportunity.' ... And I just had so much confidence in Kyle as a young man.

"He knew how I did things and how I wanted to do things. And yet I had so much trust in his ability to grow. And how important football was to him. So I wasn't worried about his age. From a football-knowledge standpoint, he was way ahead. There was some concern from management from that standpoint, but not from me."

Kubiak allayed some of management's fears by noting he would remain Houston's offensive play-caller in Shanahan's first season as coordinator. However, the arrangement lasted one season. Shanahan took over in 2009 before joining his dad in Washington in 2010.

"I was (the play-caller) the first year, but then I turned it over to Kyle," Kubiak said. "He did such a good job so I just let him go. I was always involved, I've always been involved in calling plays, but I had so much confidence in him. As time went on, he was doing it and doing a hell of a job ... The further we went, the more he did."

Shanahan and Kubiak haven't worked together for eight years, but Shanahan has routinely sought counsel from his friend and former boss. Kubiak has no doubts about Shanahan's passion and offensive acumen, but the rookie head coach will be tested in other areas as he remains the play-caller and has final say on the 53-man roster.

How does Kubiak, who had an 82-75 record and a won a Super Bowl as a head coach, think the NFL's second-youngest head coach is prepared for a job with myriad other responsibilities?

"First off, everyone thinks they're ready for that when they get their opportunity," Kubiak said. "That's just the competitive nature of the business. But until you get into the fire and you're still trying to call plays, and run an offense, and run a team, and discipline a team, and handle the media ... all of those things that come into play. You've got to jump in there and grow as it comes.

"But I will say this: Kyle has been around good people and he's watched them do it, none better than his dad ... And I know through my conversations with him, he's formed his own ideas on how he wants to handle things. I think he's got a head start from that standpoint because of his background with his dad

doing it for so long. But like anything else, it's going to be trial by fire, so to speak. But at least he's been able to watch some good people do it."

For his part, Kubiak watched much of Shanahan's journey from babysitter to overseer of an NFL team.

"I've seen him grow up and become a tremendous football coach," Kubiak said. "And a good person, as well."

In recognition of Black History Month, the 49ers Museum at Levi's Stadium is hosting a traveling exhibit from ESPN and the Center for Civil and Human Rights, "Breaking Barriers: The Power of Sports." The exhibit will open for public viewing starting Saturday and will remain at the museum through the spring.

In addition, the museum will be featuring "Letters to Bill Walsh," a NFL Films presentation that debuted in January at the launch of the Institute for the Study of Sport, Society and Social Change at San Jose State. The film will be airing through February at the museum's 90-person theater.

The museum's offseason hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. from Friday to Sunday. It is closed to the public from Monday through Thursday.

49ers Kyle Shanahan seeks 'violent' defenders, no 'short-term' QB

By Cam Inman, San Jose Mercury News

SANTA CLARA — Kyle Shanahan confirmed Friday that Robert Saleh is the 49ers' new defensive coordinator, saying so in a wide-ranging interview that also shed light on Shanahan's preference to avoid a "short-term fix" at quarterback.

"Robert Saleh is as smart as anyone I've been around. He studies everything," Shanahan said on KNBR 680. "He knows a lot of different systems. But he knows the true Seattle/Atlanta/Jacksonville system inside and out, as much as anyone I've been with."

The 49ers' last system dissolved into the most generous unit in franchise history, allowing its most points, touchdowns and rushing yards. The new scheme typically will feature four down linemen and three linebackers, rather than vice versa, although Shanahan cautioned about reading too much into that.

"I think all that is such semantics, to tell you the truth," Shanahan said. "Seattle has a linebacker on the ball every single play. So does Atlanta. And that's five guys on the line of scrimmage. So, whether you call it a 4-3 or a 3-4 — for the most part we call it a 4-3."

Saleh became an expert in that scheme while working as a defensive assistant at Seattle (2011-13) and Jacksonville (2014-16) after serving on the Houston Texans staff where Shanahan also was an assistant from 2006-09.

"You want violent people," Shanahan said of his ideal defenders. "You want to run and hit people to make that field smaller for everybody, especially the receivers. That starts with the safeties and corners being able to hit. It's not just about hitting. You've got to be able to cover. You've got to be smart. You're trying to get everything."

Shanahan envisions a defense always deploying an eight-man front that is "very tough" to run the ball against and "very sound" in pass coverage. Saleh is the team's fourth defensive coordinator in as many years, and he replaces Jim O'Neil.

— Shanahan, introduced last week as coach, has been studying potential options at quarterback through free agency, trades, the draft or retaining players such as incumbent starter Colin Kaepernick, who he's exchanged text messages with but has yet to meet.

"When you make a decision on a quarterback, you don't want that to just be a short-term fix," Shanahan said. "You want to make a commitment to somebody. In order to do that, you better make sure you're on the same page with everyone else and you put the time in, you talk to people who've been with these guys."

Shanahan said he's been staying late at work to watch film not just by himself but with general manager John Lynch and fellow personnel staff Adam Peters and Martin Mayhew.

"In order to feel good about a quarterback, I need to spend a lot of time on them," Shanahan said. "It's not always the first time you watch them. You might come back the next day, see the same stuff and feel a little different. ... It's too important a decision to just make an impulsive move."

— Replacing long-time 49er Tom Rathman with Bobby Turner as running backs coach proved especially tough for Shanahan, who idolized Rathman so much growing up that he hung a pair of Rathman's autographed cleats from his bedroom ceiling. "I had a commitment to someone else and I really wanted to work it out to keep Tom here in some capacity," Shanahan said. "I sat down with Tom and talked to him about a bunch of different ideas. But Tom, he's a running backs coach and that's what he really wants to do and is passionate about it. ... He thought it was better to look for him to look for some other places."

— Since becoming the 49ers coach, Shanahan's phone has been deluged by texts and voice mails. But it's still a music source for him, so what's on that play list?

"When I study film, I try to listen to more relaxing music, so I'm more of a reggae guy," Shanahan said. "I listen to a lot of Ziggy Marley and Mishka. If I don't mind being distracted, then I'll put some rap in and listen to Drake and things like that. But once I do that, I start listening to it too much and don't watch the film hard enough."

49ers looking at Benton at offensive line coach

By Matt Barrows, Sacramento Bee

SANTA CLARA -- Kyle Shanahan and the 49ers are looking at John Benton for offensive line coach, the only major coaching position they have yet to fill, according to league sources.

From 2003-15, Benton served as offensive line coach for the Rams, Texans and Dolphins. He spent last season as the assistant offensive line coach of the Jaguars before taking a similar position with the Broncos last month. The Broncos, however, are believed to be amenable to letting him take the 49ers' job instead. It's not known if others are in the mix for the position.

Benton was on the same Texans' staff as Shanahan from 2006-2009 and would have worked under Shanahan when the latter became Houston's offensive coordinator in 2008-09. Shanahan will serve as San Francisco's de facto offensive coordinator this year.

Houston's offensive line gave up only 25 sacks (sixth best in the NFL) in 2008 and 30 in 2009. The Texans' rushing attack finished 23rd and 11th in those two seasons.

Shanahan confirms 49ers will hire Saleh, run Seattle-like defense

By Matt Barrows, Sacramento Bee

SANTA CLARA -- Kyle Shanahan confirmed today on his KNBR radio segment that Robert Saleh will run the 49ers' defense and that the unit will resemble what Atlanta, Jacksonville and Seattle have run in recent seasons.

All operate what Seahawks head coach Pete Carroll has described as a 4-3 defense that uses 3-4 personnel. The 49ers have used a true 3-4 – in which there are three down linemen plus another two outside linebackers at the line of scrimmage – as their base defense for the past decade or so and have drafted two prototypical 3-4 defensive linemen, Arik Armstead and DeForest Buckner, in the first round of the last two drafts.

“I think all that is semantics, to tell you the truth,” Shanahan said. “Seattle has a linebacker on the ball every single play. So does Atlanta. And that’s five guys on the line of scrimmage. So whether you call it a 4-3 or a 3-4 – for the most part we call it a 4-3.”

Shanahan continued: “To tell you the way I look at it as a coach – can your halfback block that SAM linebacker on the ball? And that depends how big he is. If he’s a big guy, if he’s Ahmad Brooks, then call it a 3-4. If he’s a smaller guy like K.J. Wright ... then call it a 4-3. ... We plan on having a linebacker on the ball. And that’s five guys on the line of scrimmage. Depending on how our personnel plays out, I’ll have a better answer for you (as far as) what you want to call it.”

Saleh was the Jaguars linebackers coach last year under head coach Gus Bradley, a former Seahawks defensive coordinator. Shanahan coached in Atlanta under Dan Quinn, who also used to run Seattle’s defense.

“Robert Saleh is as smart as anyone I’ve been around,” Shanahan said. “He studies everything. He knows a lot of different systems, but he knows the true Seattle-Atlanta-Jacksonville system inside and out, as much as anybody I’ve been with.”

Saleh, 38, has been at the 49ers' headquarters in Santa Clara all week, but the team has yet to announce his hire. For a look at how the 49ers' current personnel might fit the defense Saleh will run, [click here](#).

SHANAHAN: 49ERS WILL SHOW PATIENCE AT QB, 'DON'T WANT TO GAMBLE'

By Matt Maiocco, CSNBayArea.com

Coach Kyle Shanahan and general manager John Lynch arrived together with the 49ers under six-year contracts.

The length of those contracts suggests the two top football people atop the organization will be afforded plenty of time to turn the 49ers around.

And Shanahan said Friday morning he and Lynch plan to exercise patience in charting the future at the quarterback position.

“You’re not trying to commit everything to one year,” Shanahan said on KNBR’s “Murph and Mac Show.”

“Yes, you want to win right away. That’s the goal of everybody. But you don’t want to do that at the expense of hurting your future. You don’t want to gamble. You want to be aggressive in everything, but you got to do what’s right. You have to build your team the right way and that’s what I mean by being patient.”

Shanahan added, “If we can build this the right way, it could be right away. It could be in this first year. It could be in the second year. But that depends on what’s available. And what’s available is through trades, it’s through free agency and it’s through the draft. And we’ll explore all three of those.”

The 49ers own the No. 2 overall pick in the draft. But seven weeks before the 49ers have the opportunity to add players through the draft, the start of the new league year on March 9 marks the beginning of free-agent signings and trades.

Quarterbacks Jimmy Garoppolo and Kirk Cousins are among the veteran starters who could become available early in the offseason. Regardless of which veterans the 49ers acquire before the draft, Shanahan said the team will not lock into selecting a quarterback early in the draft.

"If there is a quarterback there that we believe can match that criteria and we believe he can be a franchise quarterback for us, of course, you don't hesitate on that," Shanahan said. "But if you don't see that and there are other good players – if there's a pass-rusher, a linebacker, if there's an O-lineman, whatever it is – you need to get the best player possible who can help your team for the next 10 years.

"The worst mistake you can make is you take a guy who isn't that good of a player or not worthy of that and the expectations change. You put a guy in a position that is really unfair to him and you set your organization back and then you try to commit to a guy who really, it's unfair to him because he shouldn't have been put in that position. You have to study these guys hard. "

Shanahan said he and Lynch are continuing to study the players the 49ers already have under contract. That includes Colin Kaepernick, who can opt out of his contract in March and become an unrestricted free agent.

If Kaepernick does not opt out, the 49ers would be expected to release him – whether or not they ultimately wish to re-sign him – to avoid being on the hook for his scheduled \$14.9 million pay for the 2017 season.

Shanahan said he has communicated with Kaepernick via text message and figures to meet with him at some point.

"The players are all off," Shanahan said. "Some guys have randomly stopped by. We have time. It's their vacation time, except for guys who've been rehabbing and stuff. Anybody who stops by, my office is always open and (I'm) available."

SHANAHAN HIRES SALEH AS 49ERS DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR

By Matt Maiocco, CSNBayArea.com

New 49ers coach Kyle Shanahan on Friday confirmed former Jacksonville Jaguars linebackers coach Robert Saleh will be his defensive coordinator.

Saleh, 38, faces a tall task. The 49ers defense last season under coordinator Jim O'Neil was one of the worst in league history.

While staggering to a 2-14 finish, the 49ers' defense ranked last in yards allowed, rushing yards allowed and points allowed. The 49ers surrendered 6,502 yards and 480 points – the eighth- and tied for ninth-worst figures, respectively, in NFL history.

"Robert Saleh is as smart as anyone I've been around," Shanahan said on the "Murph and Mac Show" on KNBR. "He studies everything. He knows a lot of different systems, but he knows the true Seattle-Atlanta-Jacksonville system inside and out, as much as anybody I've been with.

"(We) went through a hard interview process with him. I wanted to see where he's come in the last eight years that we haven't been together, and it was extremely impressive. I'm very confident in Saleh. He's helping me put together this defensive staff. He's going to build a scheme and we're going to try to get players to fit that scheme. But we also know we're going to adjust to the players we have, too."

Saleh coached linebackers with the Jaguars the past three seasons under Gus Bradley. Saleh and Shanahan coached on the same staff with the Texans for all four seasons Shanahan worked under head coach Gary Kubiak.

The 49ers targeted two experienced coaches before hiring Saleh. The 49ers made a push to hire former Jacksonville head coach Gus Bradley before he opted to join Anthony Lynn's staff with the Los Angeles Chargers.

Shanahan also was interested in hiring former 49ers defensive coordinator Vic Fangio, but the Chicago Bears would not allow him out of his contract, sources told CSNBayArea.com.

Saleh (pronounced SAHL-uh) started out as a defensive intern with Houston in 2005 before moving up to defensive quality control ('06-'08) and assistant linebackers coach (2009-10).

From 2011 to '13, Saleh worked with the Seattle Seahawks as defensive quality control coach. In Saleh's final season with Seattle, he worked under Falcons head coach Dan Quinn, who was the defensive coordinator. Saleh also worked two seasons while Bradley was the Seahawks' defensive coordinator.

The 49ers will technically play a 4-3 defense, but Shanahan explained there are certain elements of the 3-4 built into the scheme.

"It's a 4-3, which I think all of that is such semantics, to tell you the truth," Shanahan said. "Seattle has a linebacker on the ball every single play. So does Atlanta. That's five guys on the line of scrimmage. Whether you call it a 4-3 or a 3-4, for the most part, we call it a 4-3, just to tell you guys the way I look at it, as a coach.

"Can your halfback block that Sam linebacker on the ball? And that just depends how big he is. And if he's a big guy and he's Ahmad Brooks, then call it a 3-4. If he's a smaller guy like K.J. Wright, who's not that small, but you're going to put your back on him, then call it a 4-3. There's really no difference. It's the same kind of fronts.

"In a 3-4, sometimes they one-gap, sometimes they two-gap. But we plan on having a linebacker on the ball. That's five guys on the line of scrimmage. Depending on how our personnel plays out, I'll have a better answer for what you want to call it."

49ers' special teams improved but were middle of the pack in 2016

By Nick Wagoner, ESPN.com

SANTA CLARA, Calif. -- When the San Francisco 49ers do as expected and officially hire Richard Hightower as their fourth special teams coach in as many years, he will inherit a group that showed improvement in 2016 but still has work to do if it's going to become one of the league's best.

Dallas Morning News NFL writer Rick Gosselin released his annual special-teams rankings this week, a list that takes into account all facets of special teams and assigns a number score for each team. The team with the lowest score earns the highest ranking.

As you'd expect from a unit that was neither excellent nor abysmal in 2016, the 49ers checked in at No. 16 in Gosselin's rankings with 353.5 points. For basis of comparison, the Philadelphia Eagles ranked first with 226.5 points while the San Diego Chargers were last at 514 points.

This represented fairly substantial progress for the 49ers under first-year special-teams coach Derius Swinton. Swinton's group might have been mostly nondescript, but it was much better than 2015, when the Niners ranked 27th, and 2014, when they were 23rd. This year's group also lined up closely with the

composite rankings done by the folks at Football Outsiders, which improved the 49ers' rank to No. 17 from No. 27 in 2015.

On the plus side for the 49ers' special teams in 2016, kicker Phil Dawson once again was Mr. Reliable, save for a couple of late-season hiccups. He missed just three of his 21 field goal attempts and was 33-of-34 on extra points. The punt return team also was solid, finishing 10th in the league with an average of 9.39 yards per attempt, and the kickoff coverage unit excelled, finishing fifth in opponent yards per kick return (19.75).

On the negative side, the 49ers were average or below in most punting categories, most notably finishing 28th in expected points added per punt. They also had the most special-teams giveaways of any team in the league with four and finished 25th in kickoff return average.

Overall, 2016 was a step in the right direction for the 49ers' special teams, and considering the amount of injuries they had that forced special teamers into starting roles, that there was progress at all was a good sign. A return to health and some savvy roster moves should give Hightower the tools to keep the Niners' special teams on an upward trajectory in 2017.

Kyle Shanahan confirms Robert Saleh is defensive coordinator

By Josh Alper, ProFootballTalk.com

The 49ers haven't sent out an official announcement that Robert Saleh will be their defensive coordinator, but head coach Kyle Shanahan took care of confirming the reports earlier this week that the former Jaguars linebacker coach is going to be running their defense.

Saleh worked with Shanahan in Houston from 2006-09 and Shanahan calls the coordinator "as smart as anyone I've been around" in the NFL. Saleh went on to work for Seattle after leaving the Texans and then worked with former Seahawks defensive coordinator Gus Bradley in Jacksonville, which leaves Saleh with a strong knowledge of what Shanahan calls "the true Seattle-Atlanta-Jacksonville system."

"It's a 4-3, which I think all of that is such semantics, to tell you the truth," Shanahan said on KNBR, via CSNBayArea.com. "Seattle has a linebacker on the ball every single play. So does Atlanta. That's five guys on the line of scrimmage. Whether you call it a 4-3 or a 3-4, for the most part, we call it a 4-3, just to tell you guys the way I look at it, as a coach. ... It's the same kind of fronts. In a 3-4, sometimes they one-gap, sometimes they two-gap. But we plan on having a linebacker on the ball. That's five guys on the line of scrimmage. Depending on how our personnel plays out, I'll have a better answer for what you want to call it."

Personnel will obviously be significant for a unit that finished last in both yards and points allowed, although Shanahan's offense can help out by putting the defense on the field less often than they were in 2016.

Kyle Shanahan: 49ers not looking for a "short-term fix" at QB

By Darin Gantt, ProFootballTalk.com

The 49ers are supposed to meet with Colin Kaepernick soon, as both sides try to determine if the incumbent quarterback is a fit for new coach Kyle Shanahan.

But Shanahan said during an interview on KNBR 680-AM that no matter which quarterback he picks for this year, the goal is to find someone to lead the team for years to come.

“When you make a decision on a quarterback, you don’t want that to just be a short-term fix,” Shanahan said, via Cam Inman of the San Jose Mercury News. “You want to make a commitment to somebody. In order to do that, you better make sure you’re on the same page with everyone else and you put the time in, you talk to people who’ve been with these guys.”

Shanahan said he’s exchanged text messages with Kaepernick, but hasn’t met with him personally. But he has been working overtime with new General Manager John Lynch and personnel staffers Adam Peters and Martin Mayhew looking at all their options at the position.

“In order to feel good about a quarterback, I need to spend a lot of time on them,” Shanahan said. “It’s not always the first time you watch them. You might come back the next day, see the same stuff and feel a little different. . . . It’s too important a decision to just make an impulsive move.”

There have been mixed reports as to whether Kaepernick might opt out of his contract — and it’s reasonable to wonder whether the 49ers want to stake themselves to him. The rest of their depth chart (Blaine Gabbert, Christian Ponder, Thad Lewis) is headed for free agency, giving Shanahan a chance at a clean slate.

Kyle Shanahan focusing on free agents; Lynch on draft

By Conor Orr, NFL.com

With a brand-new general manager learning the NFL's business side, the San Francisco 49ers will have to figure out how their first-time head coach will split his time with John Lynch this offseason.

On Friday, that first-time coach, Kyle Shanahan, gave a window into what both are up to at the moment.

"We're watching a lot of film, which, we're doing a lot together and a lot separate," Shanahan told KNBR on Friday. "John and the whole personnel department are going through the draft stuff right now. Which, me and the coaches aren't yet at the draft. We're watching our own players and free agents. We'll get to the draft really starting in Indy..."

Shanahan, who added that he's also overseeing new defensive coordinator Robert Saleh's installation of the Seattle Seahawks' defensive system, has a lot on his plate but does not seem overwhelmed by the burden.

Had Shanahan's father, Mike, not been in the business for so many years, there might have been concern about thrusting a 37-year-old into the spotlight. At least the far younger Sean McVay has defensive coordinator Wade Phillips, and a tenured general manager like Les Snead to lean on. Last month, I wrote a piece about the white-knuckle period that encounters a first-time head coach after he's hired. On top of assembling a staff, preparing free agent lists and polishing off the playbook, you have to decide who you are as a leader.

For now, the transition seems to have gone as smooth as possible, with both Lynch and Shanahan assuming fairly standard roles. The key will be whether or not they emerge in Indianapolis at the combine on the same page.