

# TRANSCRIPTIONS



**Special Teams Coordinator Richard Hightower  
Press Conference – June 4, 2019  
San Francisco 49ers  
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**Just kind of go over your new punter P Mitch Wishnowsky and what he brings to you and the whole team?**

“Yeah, our new punter, we’re very excited to work with him. He has shown some promise out there so far on the practice field. Obviously, his college tape was phenomenal and we’re just really excited to work with him.”

**You guys looked at a lot of punters in the run-up to the Draft. What made Mitch kind of separate himself from that group?**

“Yeah, we looked at a lot of them. His tape is really what separated him. Mitch just did an outstanding job over and over, showing that he was a weapon on tape and is someone we feel comfortable about adding to our group. We’re excited to get to work with him.”

**What has he shown you so far? It’s only been a couple weeks, but--?**

“He’s shown that he’s a great holder, he’s shown that he can kickoff, he’s shown that he can pin opponents deep, he’s shown that he has the poise and the mindset to do what you want that position to do. And it’s still early. We haven’t played a game. So, he’s still got to do that in the game and he’s excited to do that. He’s harder on himself than anyone is. So, those are the things that excite us about him.”

**Can you describe how you break down tape of a punter? Do you have a stopwatch and I assume you’re taking hang time and things like that?**

“Sure, so when you break down a punter, first thing you want to look at is his steps. What type of punter is he? Is he two-jab, is he a one-jab, is he a three-step punter? What type of punter is he? Does he catch the ball in front of himself or does he catch it in the back? Those are some things that you look at. You also look at him catching the ball, molding the ball. We did about 200 of those today over there on the jugs. So, we just look at fundamentals and then you get into if a guy can directionally punt, left, right, can he punt down the middle? What things are he good at? Is he good in the plus-50 area? Just things like that, basically, to try to take a returner out of the ball game, the things you look at.”

**How eager were you to get him? I mean, the fourth round is the earliest a punter’s been drafted in quite some time. Were you feeling antsy at that point in the Draft and saying, ‘We need to get him now before somebody else scoops him up?’**

“I think when it comes to that stuff, we’ve done preparation and our homework and Draft meetings and all that stuff, so we had where we liked him, and we were very excited to get him where we got him.”

**With K Robbie Gould not being here, do you keep in touch with him at all during this time, follow his social media posts? What kind of interaction have you had with Robbie and what’s he missing not being here?**

“Yeah, I keep in touch with all my players, whether they’re here now, former players, players that are current players, because I care more about them than football. It’s just, I love my players, and I think you can ask any of my players that question. But, in terms of in touch, not in touch, all that stuff, those guys know that I love them. They all know that, and they know I’m gonna push them and demand the most out of them. The best thing about that is it’s kind of really already been spoken on with [general manager] John [Lynch] and [head coach] Kyle [Shanahan] and I really don’t have any more to add on that, other than I know that Robbie’s a pro, he’s a pro’s pro, and he’s a delight to coach. That kid is always ready. He’s a pro’s pro, I can tell you that.”

**How is K Jon Brown doing just as his replacement right now at camp as kicker?**

“Are you talking about Jon Brown?”

**Yeah.**

“Yeah, Jon Brown’s doing well. Yeah, he’s working his tail off. He’s got a strong leg. The thing about Jon is he has to just develop as a kicker, which everybody had to do, even Robbie had to do. Everybody has to do that until they get their chance. He’s done a phenomenal job up until this point. But again, he’s still got a long way to go, as we all do. We all work and we’ve all got a long way to go. Me as a coach, I’m sure you guys as reporters, if you ever get complacent, then that’s when you get replaced.”

**You mentioned Mitch’s holding duties. How much chemistry does there need to be between the holder and the guy who’s gonna be kicking? Is that a concern now because Robbie’s not here right now?**

“Yeah, I’ve dealt with this in my career before. In terms of an operation, it’s kind of like a quarterback-center exchange, kind of like the same thing, [QB] Jimmy [Garoppolo] and the centers do before practice. It’s the same thing. So, those guys are working on that right here, right now. It’s a chemistry thing. With some people, sometimes it’s just a kick and go. It’s definitely not easy, just like your jobs are not easy to do, but it’s definitely doable.”

**How much time would Gould need to develop that chemistry with Mitch do you think?**

“I think that it depends on the kicker, not just Gould, it depends on any kicker. That’s more specific to the kicker. As long as you have a really good holder, which we feel like Mitch is, absolutely, he’s a really good holder. He’s absolutely one of the best holders that I’ve seen coming out of college. That’s what gives us confidence in his holding. He takes a lot of pride in his holding, too. That’s what makes a good holder, too. He’s really done well

at it. But again, he's got a long way to go. We still haven't played a game yet, so. But, he's working his tail off at it, I can promise you that. It doesn't concern me."

**A layman would just look at a holder and say, 'Oh, he's just grabbing the ball and he's putting it down, what's there to it?' What do you see that makes him stand out in that facet of the game?**

"That's a good question. First of all, they've got to have really good hands. They've got to have really good hands to be able to catch the ball first, but they also have to be able to catch the ball and actually put it down on the spot where they caught it. When you screw kickers up is when you catch a ball and you had the spot here, but you catch it and then I move it off of where my finger was. I want to catch it and put it right back down on that spot, because that's the area that the kicker's looking at. He has done that over and over again and has been really good at it. We film all that stuff and make sure that it's on the spot. The better the snap is, a lot of times, the better the hold is. We've got guys that are really snapping well right now and giving him laces, so it's been a good, smooth transition for Mitch in that way."

**Since that's such a detailed thing, is that hard to evaluate as far as the guy's college tape to see how good of a holder he is? Do you have to interview people to kind of get an idea of how good Mitch was?**

"Well, I just look at the tape. So, I look at the tape, I look at every hold he's had since he's been in college, every single one of them. I look at all of those. To some people, it's boring, it's 200-plus holds. I look at the Combine and our staff with [assistant special teams coach Michael] Clay and [assistant special teams coach Stan] Kwan, they do the same thing and we look at it over, and over again. We just evaluate the guy, and we do that with all the guys, not just Mitch. We do that with every single guy, and to be honest with you, when I first started, it was very hard for me to see. I was trained by two 30-year veterans the first time, my first seven years of my career in [former NFL special teams coordinator] Joe Marciano and [Pittsburgh Steelers special teams coordinator] Danny Smith. Those guys taught me, and I'm just lucky to be around those guys. Now, we can see it a little better. You've still just got to work at it. It's just like anything else, you've got to work at it over and over again. That's what we strive to do. We strive to be the best we can be so we can help the offense and we can help the defense, so that we can put a winning product on the field. That's what drives us every day."

**How do you evaluate where things stand as far as punt returning and do you have to dial things back with WR Dante Pettis given that he's probably going to have an expanded role with the offense this year?**

"No, in terms of punt return, we're going to play the best guy back there. That's been Coach Shanahan's philosophy and that's our philosophy. As long as we do a good job blocking up front, we have returners that can help us in the back. I think those guys know that, and we actually worked on punt return today. They are so eager to prove themselves. I mean, you've got [WR] Trent Taylor, we've got Dante Pettis, we've got [DB] D.J. Reed [Jr.], we've got [WR] Richie James [Jr.]. Whoever wants the job, it's open competition. That's what I love about this game is that guys can go out and put their best foot forward

every day and work their tail off and whoever is the most relentless guy is going to win that job.”

**As far as punt returns, have you incorporated wide receivers coach Wes Welker into the coaching? I saw him back there today. Is he an asset that you can lean on there?**

“He’s a huge asset. He has over, I think, 270 punt returns in this league. I told the returners, if they don’t use that nugget, then I don’t know what they’re doing. He’s been in all the punt return meetings. He’s actually been in all the special teams meetings in general. Wes has been a great asset to this organization, and for sure to the punt return team. He’s awesome. I mean, he’s got a great attitude. He teaches those guys along with [offensive quality control coach] Taylor Embree back there, both of those guys work on that. I mean, I feel so fortunate to have those two guys back there coaching the punt returners.”