

# TRANSCRIPTIONS



## General Manager John Lynch and Head Coach Kyle Shanahan Press Conference – December 31, 2018 San Francisco 49ers

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### **Do you guys have an update on OL Laken Tomlinson?**

John Lynch: “Yeah, we actually just got it off the scans. It's good news in terms of what we might have feared. His ACL is intact so that's a good thing. His MCL is torn and that's going to take some time, but I think they are talking three months as opposed to obviously what an ACL could be. That's what they had a hunch last night. They were feeling good. But, the scans did confirm that his ACL was intact. That was really good news for us.”

### **Non-surgery?**

JL: “Non-surgical, yes.”

### **What was your message to the team this morning going into the offseason and staying prepared?**

Kyle Shanahan: “Just how much better I want them to get, how much better I want myself to get and everyone in the building. I kind of talked to them a lot about, you know, the rookie slump, or the second-year slump guys have. I've seen it a lot throughout my career, so I mentioned that stuff to them. I feel personally, when I always try to get better, I do that on my own time. It's on vacation, whether you're reading something or when you get time to reflect on the stuff you really work out on your own. Then, when you get back together, that's when you practice the stuff and you go. So, I just tried to echo to the guys what is important and what I believe in. You don't just show up four months from now and be like, ‘Alright, it's time to get better.’ It's already too late. If you have that mindset, you're showing up to catch up. I always say, you're getting better or worse, and if that's the case, you're getting worse. I want all of our guys to really focus on these four months, how they are going to get better on their own and we want to see it when they get back. If guys aren't getting better, it's not really a threat, but it's reality. If you're not getting better, it's not going to be long for you.”

### **You guys were 6-10 last year and four wins this year. You look at the records and it looks like the team went backwards. Is the team better set now than it was a year ago you think for the future?**

JL: “I believe so. I think there's more competition. There will be this offseason, once we get healthy. I think we're poised to be able to add to that. I think the more we do of that and continue to add good players, the more we're able to allow guys to compete. I think we saw that at the end of this year. We fell far short of our expectations within our team this year and that's what's most important, our expectations. We fell short of those. But, I've always been taught that you look for the positives, and I think there are some positives from this season. We got to see a lot of different people play. We got to see a lot of different players who we might have not and see what they are all about and that's the only way to truly evaluate guys in this league, is to see them actually play NFL football games. We got that opportunity. You could see the young

guys push some of the veteran players and it's another reminder, something we've always known, that competition brings the best out in everyone. That's the environment we want heading into this offseason and the way you do that, you continue to add good, quality players and good, quality people."

KS: "I think it says a lot, too, that all 10 of our practice squad guys this year played on the active roster this year, nine for our team and one for another team. That's not something that you want to happen as a coach. That usually means that you have some injuries and stuff. But, those nine guys who played on our team got their opportunity because of injuries. I think they got better every week they played. They showed that they can be NFL players. I thought we did a little bit of that last year, not necessarily with all practice squad players, but with a lot of young players.

I thought our guys got better our first year here playing young guys, not always by choice at the beginning, but they get their opportunities eventually and we got better. This year it was a whole different group of guys with nine of those being practice squad guys. That's two years in a row of young guys getting opportunities because of injuries that showed they can play in this league. Now you've got two years of young guys that are going into an offseason to compete with each other. We plan on bringing in some veterans. We plan on drafting a whole new group of young guys. That now puts three years together of getting better and I expect that to show with our record."

**Before the season, we spoke about expectations and you didn't say playoffs explicitly, but it seemed like you wanted to be in that mix going into year three with you two being together. Is playoffs the expectation in 2019?**

JL: "Look, we came in here on day one and said our expectations are to be a championship team. I think we also said we are not going to put timetables on those things. I think what Kyle and I focus on is each and every day making ourselves better, making our organization better by the things we do. We have a philosophy that's rooted in our experiences that when you do that, good things happen. So, we won't put any timetable. But, we have high expectations, high standards. It is clear to say we fell well short of those this year. That was disappointing. We need to be better and we will."

KS: "I think those are the questions everyone gets at these type of times, and just how I look at myself and how I try to get my own expectations is I never want to underachieve, ever. I always want to overachieve, but never under. You want to do as good as you believe that you can do. You hope to get lucky, also, on top of that. I look at this year and we went through some tough things this year. I look back on it and with the stuff we went through, are you going to have a great record? You have a chance to. But, odds are it's going to be tough. We only won four games. I'm not happy with that despite what's happened. I believe specifically going through the games and everything, I think we should have won seven. So, I'm down about that. That's what I'm upset with myself for in trying to find a way to get those games that you could have won a couple of those close games that you feel as a coach, just watching the tape, going into the game, that you should have done. That's how I'll look at it every year. I think when you should make the playoffs, you know that. You get disappointed if you don't. But, that is the goal, always."

**Either one or both of you, have you talked to CEO Jed York recently? Generally, what's been the word? You see coaches getting fired throughout the league today and yesterday. This is stable here. What's the communication been from Jed about the situation?**

KS: "It's been the same since it was when I interviewed with him for five hours. That's one of the reasons I wanted to come here. It's talking to ownership and being very blunt and honest about where I personally thought the team was at that time. Hearing Jed's opinions on what he thought, having a plan going into it. The stuff that we worked for contractually and things like that, it all had to do with the reality of where we are at or where we were at. We knew it would take some time. That doesn't mean that you're saying, 'Hey, it's going to take four years. Hey, it's going to take three years, or don't worry, it will only take two years.' That's not at all what you talk about. You talk about the reality of where you are compared to everyone else. I think Jed, I and John, we were very on that same page in the interview process. Everything I think we talked about, we're still on the same page. It's been pretty evident and clear. You do have opportunities to do things quicker than you want. Was very excited in our second year that we felt we did find a franchise quarterback and we thought that could accelerate some of the stuff. Unfortunately, went through a bad injury and that made it tougher. Like I said earlier though, I still think we could have won more. But, I think all that's been the same since the beginning. So, there's no huge surprise here. There's no, I know we could have won a few more games, but I also know that expectations and things like that, we've been on the same page since weeks before we got here, and nothing's changed since today."

**Do you see any significant changes on your staff?**

KS: "No, I don't see myself making any specific changes. I like our staff a lot. I think we've got some good coaches. I think there's areas we can all get better in. I have an obligation to this organization that, just like I say with any player, when you guys ask me, 'Hey, is this guy tradeable or anything like that?' I'll never say no one's for sure not. I mean, if [New England Patriots head coach] Bill Belichick became available two weeks from now and said he wants to come here, and I was told I had to let someone go to bring him in, that would probably be a smart decision to do that. I'm not going to ever say that everyone is just totally safe forever. But, what I can say is I think our staff is a very good staff and I like what our guys are, and where they can be and it's the staff I want to hold onto."

**Have you had any requests for interviews for people on your staff from other teams?**

KS: "No, I haven't, yet. It usually happens later today, though, because it doesn't happen until Mondays."

**There's been a lot of talk about defensive coordinator Robert Saleh. Will he be your defensive coordinator next season?**

KS: "Yes. I think that's what I just said. I know you're trying to get a stronger quote."

**What did you see from him? How has he grown? What gives you the sense that he's going to be the guy that could help take this defense from where it is now to a championship type of defense?**

KS: "I'm with him every day. So, I know how good of a coach he is. I know how he is schematically. I know how he is dealing with the players. I know what he can handle just with his personality and how smart he is and that's a lot. I also know that he took over a 32nd-ranked defense. I don't know what we finished up today, I haven't seen the final rankings, 13<sup>th</sup>. I think he's improved us a lot. I think we went from one of the worst defenses stopping the run in the history of football to being a pretty sound defense versus the run. I think we played a lot more sound and we've taken drastic improvements in the two years we've been here. I think he did go through a lot this year with injuries and stuff. Not as much talked about because not a lot of guys were put on IR, but to play with eight safeties during the year, to change your two inside linebackers, I think we had a lot of turnover, which is part of football. But, we need to get better at not giving up as many points, which will help the less we turn it over on offense, the more

turnovers we can get on defense. But, you know, Saleh's done a good job and I think he'll only get better."

JL: "One thing I would add to that, just watching from afar and having conversations with Kyle, I think one thing we're excited about, Kyle wanted someone from that style of defense. So, we went and found Robert Saleh who was familiar with that style. That's something Kyle had gone against and he had a great deal of respect. But, you still have to make that scheme your own and that sometimes takes some time. I think what I'm excited about, I think we've grown much closer to finding who we are as a defense, our identity and I think nothing probably reflects that more than up front. I think we towards the end of this year really saw where the pieces fit. Moving [DL] Arik Armstead inside in nickel to a nickel nose. Moving [DL Solomon Thomas] Solly in to an inside player. Things kind of fell into place as to where it all fits, and that takes some time, you know, and everyone says we're going to play this defense. But, you have to make that your own and I saw that happening and I'm encouraged by that. I think once you have that, you can do everything a lot better. You can find players to fit that a lot better and I'm very encouraged about that, as I know Kyle is."

**Senior Bowl announced you guys will be one of the staffs. What are the benefits and what can you take away from it, really for both of your staffs?**

KS: "I've coached it twice. This will be my third time. Not proud of that. It's the same thing as the Combine to me. It's not as much about the players. It's not about the athletes and stuff because you can see that on tape pretty well. You can see that when we work them out. It's about being around people. It's hard in the interview process to fully get to know someone. It's hard to get tricked when you're with someone for seven straight days. That's my experience and what I've gotten the most out of it. You know that group of guys better."

JL: "I think it gives Kyle and his staff what you covet. You covet time and in this game, we're not looking for rocket scientists. We're looking for guys that can play football. We get to see them learn football and apply it to the field. You get to see them in that setting and I think it's invaluable. Like Kyle said, it's not something we're proud of being there. But, we're going to make the most of it and I think it's a really good opportunity that we're going to embrace and get it for everything that we can."

**Do you know when you find out who will be on your roster. I think it came out that you're coaching the south team. Are you able with the committee there to request specific players? How does that work?**

JL: "I'm sure that's been done before, but we are the South. I guess Santa Clara is south of Oakland, right? But, apparently there was another coin toss and we won, so that's a good thing. But, we got the south. We'll see where the rosters shake out."

**There's a lot of talk about how there's a lot of pass rushers in the coming draft and that's one of this team's needs. Have you gauged that as well?**

JL: "I think it's strong there. That's clear. There's good pass rushers in this draft. I think that's a strength of this draft. That will be. Everyone is looking for those guys, so I think we're excited. Everybody is excited for that."

**We know how aggressive you guys have been trading for QB Jimmy Garoppolo, an offer for Chicago Bears LB Khalil Mack and maybe some other things. Is this a moment you might even be more aggressive given it's going into your third year, given that you think you have maybe close enough to be within reach?**

JL: "Well, I think not because it's going into our third year. I think that's our nature, when we can improve ourselves as an organization, we won't hesitate to take that opportunity. You mentioned a couple of the scenarios. One really proved invaluable for our franchise. I think we made ourselves better. Came close on a couple other ones. We won't stop. You can't score if you don't shoot so we'll keep shooting if those opportunities are there."

KS: "That's one of the reasons we came here. I hope we never have to make a decision that's based off of because we're going into this year, a third year. I hope every decision is we're going to be aggressive because this opportunity came across and do not want to pass it up. That's what best for this team. That's why I hope something does come up like that and whether it's someone like Khalil, Jimmy, we'll be as aggressive as we can to make that happen. But, any time, you're, 'Hey, we have to be aggressive because this is the third year, that's the fourth year,' that's when you're making decisions for the wrong reasons and that's what can hurt a franchise for more than one year."

**Arik Armstead, you mentioned him a little bit earlier, falling into place and playing better. You guys picked up his fifth-year option. But, looking at that dollar amount and just his production and what he's given you guys, a full healthy season this year. Are you comfortable in saying that he's going to be back in 2019?**

JL: "Yeah, we're very excited with the way he played, like we talked about, fell into place. Now, Kyle coaches, he's the head coach of our team. He's also the game planner. So, while we spend a lot of time, this is our opportunity, we'll each take a couple of days off, we'll get back and really start to spend some time looking at our complete plan. I don't want to make any absolutes, 'Yes, he's going to be here,' all those things. But, we are pleased with the way Arik progressed and excited about his future."

KS: "All those decisions aren't as simple as how do we feel about Arik, because if it was, then yes. Arik's done a good job and you don't want to lose good players. Those decisions are based off of how do you want to balance and allocate all the money because you can't do whatever you want. What are the options out there, what's our depth chart look like and what's the best way to do it? But, if it's as simple as just Arik, then yes, we really are happy with Arik."

**You mentioned the strides the defense has made this year. It also set the record for the fewest takeaways and interceptions. Do you hold Saleh responsible for that or just chalk it up to bad luck?**

KS: "No, I think everyone has responsibility in that. Luck plays a degree of it. Those balls on the ground don't seem to bounce the right way. So, some of that would be luck, too. You can do more with scheme and you can be more risky maybe with scheme and do stuff which might get you more turnovers and might make you extremely unsound and have a horrible run defense and give up a lot of big plays. So, there's a very fine line with all that. You like to get some more players out there who can go for the ball, but I also think we have some who do and we have gone and gotten and tried to get guys like that, [CB Richard Sherman] Sherm, specifically. Everything goes into account there, not just one person. But, that's something that's very obvious that we have to improve at. It's very tough to win games when you don't get turnovers. But, it's almost impossible when you don't get turnovers and the offense turns it over. So, that's something we've got to really improve on."

JL: "My experience in this league, being around it for a long time, is that things you emphasize get done. I can tell you that I've never been in a building where turnovers are so emphasized. We talk about it on a weekly basis. We've had different people come up and give different presentations. I can guarantee you that, and I can also guarantee you, we'll look at every

possible solution. I'm doing it up in personnel. We're trying to find people who have a history, propensity to take the ball away and we'll continue to do that. I really think as we continue to put these pieces together it will happen. We started to see it happen against Chicago. You started to see the balls, some of them didn't break our way, but I think our guys got the point that once you get it going, it's like an avalanche. Now, they start just falling to you. But, first you've got to take it away. We started to see that progress and we wish it could have happened more, obviously. Not something we're proud of, but we do need to improve there."

KS: "I do think we emphasize turnovers so much that I noticed, I'm sure you guys did, too, a lot of our guys went for too many turnovers and we weren't as good at tackling. Once you see that, alright, let's go back to step one. Let's make sure we tackle and we'll worry about turnovers later. I think we do have good tacklers on our team. I don't think we played that way early on and just as coaches you see we're going for the ball way too much. We've got to tackle better and we'll worry about that secondary. I think we did get better at tackling and I think we did finished that pretty well when we were going through that. Once that does happen guys are not going for the ball as much, but you can't do both. It's not easy. You've got to get better and more experienced at it. There's a lot of savvy veterans in this league who know how to poke the ball out, but also make the tackle, too. I think a lot of our guys what we went through this year, hopefully have learned both ways and that will make them better next year."

**You mentioned the injuries a little earlier. There were a lot last year as well. Is that just randomness or do you take a step back and evaluate that and see if there's anything--?**

KS: "It's been too big of a deal for two years. Injuries are pretty random, but it's also affected us huge. So, that's something that we definitely have to sit back and really look at it from all angles and put a lot of time into. Just try to find a better perspective at it."

JL: "There's an old adage in football, I don't know if it's exclusive to football, but your best ability is availability. We haven't had a lot of guys available and that's something we're looking into hard. It's been ongoing. We'll continue to do that because it's something that needs to change and I don't think anyone's to blame. We have been studying it. We'll continue to, and try to get a handle on that."

**Have you talked to any of the veteran guys, guys who have toward the end of their career, about where they stand as far as the future goes, specifically WR Pierre Garçon and NT Earl Mitchell?**

JL: "I think it's one thing Kyle and I pride ourselves on is having constant communication with these guys. So, we have communicated. I'm not going to get into specifics of what we have talked about with certain players. Don't want to have that play out, but you guys will learn. We have had good lines of communication. We have some decisions to make on some of the guys like those and we'll make those at the appropriate time."

**You said you think you could have had or should have had seven wins this season. Do you allow yourself to think that if you had your starting quarterback the whole season, how many wins would you have?**

KS: "I don't know, and I probably messed up by telling you guys seven. I was just being too honest there."

**I've never heard a coach say that.**

KS: "I just try to look at it that way. We were close in a lot of games, but there were three in particular that really bothered me. I think we should have finished them and won. I think things might have been easier if we had our quarterback. I looked at it going into this year as, I didn't

look at it as going into this year, 'Hey, we're a 10-win team.' I looked at it this year as, 'Man, I think we've got a team that I don't see anyone on paper that we don't have a chance to beat,' and I felt very good about that. It makes it harder the more guys you lose. That's really all that changes."

**How many do you think you should have won last year?**

KS: "I'm going to get myself in trouble. That was too long ago, so I can't remember."

**What were the three games you played you should have won?**

KS: "I thought we should have beat Green Bay, I thought we should have beat Arizona on the road. We should have beat them at home, too, but that goes to turnovers. But, on the road versus Arizona was the biggest disappointment. Green Bay and then the Giants."

**When you guys got here, you signed some veteran guys who could play but also brought that kind of veteran leadership. How important has it been to see some of the younger guys step into not just playing well, but leadership roles, guys like TE George Kittle and DL DeForest Buckner?**

KS: "Extremely important. When we got here, it wasn't as much on defense, but offensively, I think we changed every single player on the offense in our first year. I want to say [T Joe] Staley was the only returning starter out of all 11 guys our first year. We didn't go spend a ton of draft picks on guys. You have to bring in some people to plug in and do that. I thought guys did that, allowed us to get through that and kind of set a standard for certain guys. When you do that, you've got to have some young guys come up. Guys like Kittle, what [RB Matt] Breida did this year, our O-Line, guys brought in like [OL] Laken [Tomlinson]. [T Mike] McGlinchey was, even though he was a rookie, I consider him one of the leaders of our team. A lot of these guys have stepped up and made a role. What [LB] Fred Warner did for us this year, for him to play in all these games to battle through that as a rookie, that is pretty unheard of. The pressure at MIKE linebacker to just be the leader of the defense and the voice of the defense and to play with the physicality that position takes all year as a rookie and to still show up every Sunday, that's extremely impressive. If you don't have that stuff, it's tough to go in the right direction because we had to turn over a lot of people. In order to do that, you have to have stories like that and we've got to have more next year coming too."

JL: "I would just add there, that I think leadership, the definition I've kind of grown to appreciate about that, do you make people around you better? And that can be Joe Staley and Richard Sherman like they did all year. I think we saw it as a team. We had some young guys come in and play, particularly on defense, that made those guys around them better. They started playing with an energy, a tempo. George Kittle won the Bill Walsh Award today for embodying what a 49er should be about. But, George Kittle started that the day he left here last year. He was on a mission. So, that can come in all shapes and sizes, and can come in all ages and I think that's something that can't be lost on these guys. Everybody can lead in their own way, and you get really good when you have a team full of leaders."

**Joe Staley mentioned that during the game after each drive they were checking in and figuring out how many yards away Kittle was and it felt like everyone was juiced up to see him get that. Is that indicative of the respect he commands and being captain in year two?**

KS: "It was a really cool feeling just because the game was rough, and there wasn't much positive with it. Especially the way we started out, the offense turning the ball over four times when that team was playing for a lot, when they have that good of an offense anyways. For us to spot them 21 points like that, I thought that's it was doomsday almost. To watch our defense

there in the second half, a bunch of guys are going out, a bunch of guys are really banged up and having to just play through it and they are just trying to run it down their throat just to end the game and they have such a big lead. I'm watching our guys and there's not much left and to sit there and call a couple guys over in the timeout and be like, 'Hey, guys, if you can stop them, because they think we are just going to run it down anyways.' But, they are not aware at the time, but, 'Hey, guys, if you can stop them here, we will throw the ball if we need to get Kittle nine more yards. We'll get it to him if you guys can stop them.' To say that to the guys, and to watch everyone and to watch [DB Antone] Exum [Jr.] just blitz on his own and just to do whatever they could because once we said that to them you could see it in their eyes. Everyone on the bench was yelling for it and stopping them on that fourth down. It was a big moment. It was a bad feeling. There wasn't much to be happy with, but when the guys saw that, you see that energy turn up and watch them fight to give Kittle that opportunity. It was such a good feeling to give Kittle what he deserved. But, he couldn't have done it without the defense, too. Everyone really enjoyed that and felt good about it."

JL: "The coolest thing about Kittle too, there's more in there in terms of his will. But there's things that he can develop in his game that can make him an even stronger player. That has George excited. It has us very excited. But, I think the biggest lesson for our team, you watch that guy, that guy outworks people by the way he comes, and it starts not only out on the field, but the way he prepares his body. He's learned that in short order and that makes you really proud."

**How exactly do you know that there were nine yards? Is there somebody upstairs that's tracking Kansas City Chiefs TE Travis Kelce's game? How does that get relayed down?**

KS: "Media guys."

**Did you have contact with him during the game?**

KS: "No, that would be illegal. I don't know, they tell someone and they get it to people and someone tells me and usually irritates me at first. Like, that's not what we're worried about right now."

JL: "Kittle's mom had it."

KS: "I didn't want her to get pissed at me again."

**Last year, you guys were pretty clear that you were not interested in Hard Knocks coming in. Once again, you were among the handful of teams that cannot turn down a request by the NFL. What's your stance on Hard Knocks coming in this summer if they ask?**

JL: "You had to go there."

KS: "It's a hard, hard, bad stance, Hard Knocks. You will see the worst entertainment possible by me."

**Talking about leadership in the locker room, you both were familiar with Richard Sherman. Did he even prove himself to be more valuable when he came in here?**

JL: "I had a good visit, as did Kyle, today with Sherm. I've just got a lot of respect for the way he handled himself. First and foremost, he's working through a very tough, getting his body right. The way he battled through that, we knew early on it wasn't perfect. The thing that has me excited, I think he hit a point, it was just about Bye week, he came out of that and I think you could see it. He felt better. He was in a little better mood because pain is not a comfortable thing



and I think the pain kind of just went away. I think it showed and reflected in his play. But, we couldn't have been more happy with the way he was in terms of using his experience, his championship pedigree to bring up and to bring up those around him, not only in his room but throughout the team. You can see what has made him a special player over the years. You think you know, but you never truly know until you're around someone and we got to see it firsthand."

**What about on the other side, would you feel comfortable next season going into training camp with Richard Sherman on one side and DB Tarvarius Moore and CB Ahkello Witherspoon battling, competing for the other starting job or do you need to add more there?**

JL: "You know, we're in a league right now that throws the ball a whole lot so you can't be strong enough at that position. All those players you mentioned, we're extremely excited about Tarvarius. He got an opportunity to go play and I think he showed some really good things, but I think that's going to be great competition between he and Ahkello. We'll see. Like I said, we're still in the early stages, but you know, we've been studying the free agents available. We've obviously been studying the Draft and that's a spot I think you just keep adding that. You have to be strong there."