

# TRANSCRIPTIONS



**Defensive Coordinator Robert Saleh  
Press Conference – January 8, 2020  
San Francisco 49ers**

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**How did LB Kwon Alexander look in his first full padded practice?**

“I thought he looked pretty good. I've got to go back and watch the tape, but watched him closely during our little tackling drill that we do before practice, just to let him get loose and get comfortable again. But, he's been building, he's been working for this for a while. It's going to be cool to see him out there if he can make it out there Saturday.”

**Is it something with him where for him to play you would need to feel comfortable with him getting 100-percent of the snaps?**

“Not necessarily. [LB] Dre Greenlaw has done such a good job over the course of the year. Still want to make sure he's included in the game plan and all that stuff. But again, there's still a couple more hurdles that Kwon also has to go through. Want to make sure Dre is fully involved also.”

**How about DL Dee Ford? How's Dee coming?**

“Dee's coming along good. Same thing, he's got some things to work through this week, too, but so far so good.”

**There's different reasons for it, but you look at games when Dee has not played versus games when he has played, obviously the sack numbers are up, just the numbers overall are up. Probably not a surprise to you. Has he been as impactful on the field as you expected him to be this year?**

“Yeah, he has been. When you've got a guy like Dee Ford who possesses the speed he does off the edge, it creates so much space for the guys inside. Whenever you've got a guy outside that can create the space where you get a true one-on-one where they can't get a hand on you, there's no makeshift double-team. It just makes everybody on the defensive line better. It kind of unlocks everything. He's a major asset. That's why he's one of the best in football. That's why he was sought after after this last season. Hopefully he continues to move in the right direction and we can get him back.”

**From a technical standpoint, what is the most impressive or unique thing about DL Nick Bosa in his rookie season?**

“Well, from a technical standpoint, obviously his hand-eye coordination is some of the best I've ever been around. He can get in there really, really close. He loves close-quarter combat. His movement skills, his instincts in pass-rush, his feel in pass-rush, is beyond what a rookie feels. The scary thing is, I was talking to [defensive line coach Kris] Kocurek

today, he's only going to get better. There's so many things that he can learn from a recognition standpoint, play diagnosis standpoint, post snap. He's only going to get better. To answer your question, it's all the close-quarter stuff that he's really good at.”

**What benefit does the hand-eye coordination have for a pass-rusher like him?**

“It's really all hand-to-hand combat, getting your hand placement onto the body, chest plate, being able to swipe the hands down while moving as fast as you possibly can. Especially when you're in here really, really tight and you're trying to work a move so you can work half a man on the offensive line. It's all hand-to-hand combat, really, with the offensive line.”

**Nick was asked about rushing Minnesota Vikings QB Kirk Cousins yesterday and his answer was you're not going to be able to rush him unless you stop the run. Is that your primary message to your guys this week?**

“Yeah, this is a run-first team. You've got to be able to stop the run. They do a really good job first and second down. They're very similar to our offense in regards to play-action pass, it's max pro, it's shots downfield, boots, run game. We've got to strap up our big-boy pads and get ready to play some ball this week.”

**Does the fact that they're similar to your offense help you in preparing for them?**

“There's a familiarity just because of the concepts and all that stuff. They've got things to deal with with the back. [Minnesota Vikings RB] Dalvin Cook's unbelievable. The quarterback is really good. Their receivers are really good. The tight ends, they're a very, very talented group. From a concept standpoint, it does help that there's familiarity in that we know how to play things. There's some recall. But, we've got our hands full with the talent they have, for sure.”

**What are the challenges Cousins presents? Looking at the numbers, it seems like he avoids mistakes. Only six interceptions and he's very accurate, completion percentage. What do you see when you look at him?**

“Same thing the stats show in that he's very, very decisive with the football. He knows exactly where he needs to go. The pre-snap movement of the defense or the post-snap movement of the defense doesn't really fool him very often. He knows, post-snap, by the time he hits his back foot, where the ball needs to go, he knows where everyone is on the football field. Because of it, he can make a very smart decision. To answer your question, it's his decision making in his mind and how quick it works when he's in his drop, all that stuff. He's worth every penny they pay him.”

**CB Richard Sherman's ability to prepare for teams and sort of know what's coming based on splits and alignments and things like that, have you ever seen a player as good at that part of preparation as he is?**

“Not at corner. Usually they're out there, they just want to cover people. You get it a lot at linebacker. I think [LB] Fred [Warner] is exceptional at that stuff. [Seattle Seahawks LB] Bobby Wagner, all those guys. [Former NFL LB] Paul Posluszny in the past just from my experience. When you talk about the corner spot, he's definitely on the elite side.”

**What makes Dalvin so difficult to defend?**

“Dalvin, first off his vision through the hole, working one gap at a time is special. His body balance, his power. He's not an arm tackle type back. You've got to bring your pads with you. He's got tremendous balance, good ball security, but his vision, being able to hit the hole. When he hits it, he hits it with so much speed and power, it's very hard to expect to bring him down with an arm tackle. You've got to get your body on him. There's got to be two at the contact point every play.”

**Is Minnesota Vikings RB Alexander Mattison similar?**

“He is a good back, Mattison. He is a very talented back.”

**Nick Bosa has talked about how Kwon Alexander is like an MVP of the team because of his energy. How important is that to get that back on the field?**

“Having Kwon is exciting. He brings a lot of juice, a lot of energy. Even in practice, if there's a lull in practice, he's the first to speak up to get guys going. From a coach's view, it's very beneficial to have a guy who regardless, whether it's bad or good, his voice is projecting positive energy and trying to get people rolling. To have Kwon, aside from the player, just from the juice and the energy he brings and what he does for everybody around him, is really priceless.”

**With Sherman's preparation, again, is that something that is only unique to just a very small group of people, innate ability, or is that something that maybe could be taught or picked up?**

“I think every player, every human, can relentlessly work towards whatever they're trying to get. The ceiling that you're capable of will only be capped by what you're mentally placing on yourself. So, I guess to answer your question, I do think that everyone is capable. It's just whether or not you're willing to actually go the extra mile to go do it. Some might have to work harder than others, but I still think it's capable in everybody.”

**How did your interview with the Browns go and what was that experience like?**

“I'll be honest. I'm very grateful for Cleveland coming out here and their hospitality and all that, but I'm so locked in on Minnesota. With respect to everybody, I'd like to keep it about them.”

**Do you understand what Minnesota Vikings offensive coordinator Kevin Stefanski's imprint on the offense is? A lot of talk about Minnesota Vikings assistant head coach/offensive advisor Gary Kubiak and his influence on how it's so similar to what head coach Kyle Shanahan does, but is there something unique about what Stefanski brings to that?**

“I'm sure there is. You see a lot of the concepts that Kubiak did, has run back when he was coordinator, head coach, all that stuff. I'm sure Stefanski, through his years, has put some wrinkles in there, too. There's definitely a foundation that we're very familiar with that comes from what Kub's been in the past. It's a really good system.”

**You moved from CB Ahkello Witherspoon to CB Emmanuel Moseley last week in the game. Can you talk about how they've been in practice so far this week?**

"They've been practicing really well. They both have. They're both competing and looking for an opportunity to play."

**Ahkello obviously has had back-to-back games that probably weren't the best. How will you make that decision? Will you look very hard at those last two games or is it strictly going to be a practice thing?**

"I do. I'll be honest, when you look at it on the surface level, it's very easy, right? There's Ahkello, there's a guy catching the football. People don't really understand what happened for that to happen. They don't understand whether or not somebody actually busted for and he may have been making up for somebody and shouldn't have been there in the first place. Ahkello actually, when you go back and look at that tape, played a pretty good football game. There were a couple of situations where he got caught in a bad situation. Either way, his ability to put those to bed and compete his tail off will always define whether or not he can finish and play games at his best. But, to say he played a poor game against Seattle, I'll be honest with all of you, it would be inaccurate."

**What have you seen from NT Earl Mitchell and what do you sort of expect out of him this week?**

"Earl, you kind of see like a little fountain of youth out of the man. He's excited. He doesn't talk much, so it's hard to get words out of him. He's excited to be here and we're excited to have him."

**Coming back to Witherspoon real quick, on his final play when he gave up the touchdown, what was the breakdown on that play?**

"On the final play, they gave us four strong. For a corner, he's thinking slant, just play your technique and don't guess, don't overanalyze, just play your technique, stay on top and you'll be in good shape. He was going to play a play, didn't get the play he was looking for. Usually at corner it's costly."

**Obviously, they play the same position in the same scheme, but they're very different size-wise. Are they different from a size and skill set perspective that maybe you evaluate the matchup as much as anything or just about who is playing better at the moment?**

"You're talking about Spoon and Moseley?"

**Yes.**

"I think the whole size thing is great only if you can cover. Moseley can cover. Spoon can cover. They both do a really nice job. It doesn't really matter matchup-wise to me because you saw Moseley handle [Seattle Seahawks WR DK] Metcalf earlier in the season. DK is a big boy. It's whether or not you can cover, you can use your length, you can use your leverage. Really it just comes down to them putting in a couple really good days of practice and just competing and then we'll get to Saturday."

**Why was he benched?**

"I'll keep that one in-house, if you don't mind. I'm sorry about that one. Yeah, I'll just leave that one alone."

**What are some of the challenges that you have facing Minnesota Vikings WR Adam Thielen, Minnesota Vikings WR Stefon Diggs, who are both interchangeable from outside, inside slot? What are the challenges and how confident are you in being able to contain them?**

"They both pose tremendous problems in the fact that Adam is a really, really good route runner. So is Stefon. Really strong at the catch point. But, either way it's still a challenge because they both can win one-on-one matchups. They can both gain separation. They can both catch the ball pretty easily. They're both very powerful receivers. It's always a challenge because you can't account for everyone on the football field. There are going to be times where we've got to win the one-on-one battle. It's going to be crunch time, it's going to be a third-and-six, whatever it is, and you've got to win. It's always a challenge with all the weapons because you've still got to deal with [Minnesota Vikings TE Kyle Rudolph] 82, you've still got to deal with the back, you've still got to deal with Kirk. They've got a lot of talent on that offense. But, just being mindful, we can take them away with certain coverages, but there are going to be points in the game where we've got to win a one-on-ones and that's going to be our greatest challenge."

**Given Some of the games you've had against the run where you've struggled against Baltimore and Arizona, there were quarterbacks that could also run. Is Minnesota more of a direct challenge, sort of a less deceptive challenge, more of a take it on at the point of attack team?**

"Yeah, it is more of old school, grind-it-out offense. When you look at the Shanahan system and the zone scheme, going way back to the Denver days with [former NFL RB] Terrell Davis and all that. They're a very physical bunch, they really are. So, the challenge really is we've got to do a good job setting edges, filling gaps and making sure the back doesn't have a lane to run through."