

TRANSCRIPTIONS



**Defensive Coordinator Robert Saleh
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San Francisco 49ers**

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Pro Bowl is a kind of a whatever type thing as far as voting and whatnot, but you only had two guys on a pretty good defense. Was your nose in a joint at all or not really? Were you upset by that?

“No. You know, I think sometimes that Pro Bowl thing can be a popularity vote. I think coach had a really good message that the players’ names are put to a higher standard with what you do in December and January. We are a young team that hasn’t done a lot over the last few years and we’ve got an opportunity in front of us to do something about it and really cement our names in the history of the league, if you want to say it that way. There’s a lot more guys deserving of it than just two Pro Bowls, in my opinion.”

What are the challenges that you’ve been facing these last seven games compared to the first where there’s statistically a pretty stark difference in just the overall defense’s production? Not that it’s been bad, but--?

“You know, through attrition you get guys, especially on the D-Line that they’ve gotten a lot of guys out, we’ve got to find ways to get more of a rotation going, especially for those big four. Overall, you know, we’re playing some elite quarterbacks and really even last week, we were going pretty well there up until that last drive. We were playing some pretty good defense. I was pumped for the guys. But, from a statistical standpoint, it was almost historic over those first eight games. I almost feel like we kind of spoiled people. We’ve still been playing good defense and doing all those things. It’s something that we’ve got to just continue to keep grinding and getting better with the different guys that are coming in and out of the lineup. I don’t know if I’m answering your question.”

With DL Nick Bosa, I know you mentioned how relentless he is. With how much he’s playing, what’s the balance that you need to find in terms of making sure you’re maximizing the snaps that he’s out there while still getting him off the field and getting him a blow when he needs one?

“You’re 100-percent right. That’s a challenge every week. It’s also coming from his teammates stepping up and when they’re in there, doing the right thing and getting things done. Starting in the D-Line room with myself [defensive line coach] coach [Kris] Kocurek, [pass rush specialist] coach [Chris] Kiffin, making sure we’re doing a good job getting them off the field and understanding when we can and can’t get them off and see if we can steal 15-20 reps a game. That goes for [DL DeForest Buckner] Buck, that goes for [DL Arik] Armstead, because when it comes down to crunch time, those third downs,

those critical situations, they need to be at their best. Not saying that they're not, but even then, you just want everything they've got. If we can take 15-20 reps off of them in a game, you would hope that it would translate to a little bit more."

In terms of that final drive, why do you feel the defense wasn't able to close it out? What do you regret most about that sequence?

"The final drive, any time when you're in a two-minute situation, you've got to be precise as a defense. You look at some of the stuff that happened from a communication standpoint, getting the call, getting yourself aligned, understanding the situation. When you're in a pressure, to make sure that you're playing as tight as possible so the quarterback doesn't have an out. Even in that last play of the game, making sure communication is on point so we can execute, especially in a heightened environment when things are rolling. It wasn't our best and really that's about the gist of it when you look at communication and all that."

What happened on that final play?

"So on the final play, I won't go into the full schematics of it all, but we were playing a bracket on [Atlanta Falcons WR] Julio [Jones]. There was just a miscommunication on how we were going to play it and it didn't come out the way we wanted."

One more question. Were you satisfied with the calls you made in retrospect or was there one that you would have wanted back?

"From a third-down standpoint I always look inward. We were, again, we were trying to take care of Julio and bracket him and doing all those things on all our third downs. Based on down and distance, could have coached it a lot better, especially with a young group. The young group that we had, we could have coached it a lot better. We could have been a lot more efficient because they were there. You know, they were catching it for four yards, it's like catch-tackle. They needed to be more catch-tackle-short of the sticks instead of at the sticks. Just from a schematic standpoint and the way it was coached we could have been a lot better for our players."

What's your confidence level that CB Richard Sherman will be able to play on Saturday?

"You know, if you talk to Sherm, he feels really good. Again, that goes to the performance staff and how they handle him. As long as they keep telling us that he can go and the way he's progressing, when they give us the okay, he'll step on the field."

That position can be so isolated on the field as opposed to a defensive lineman who's in traffic. Does a cornerback need to be closer to full health than another position on your defense?

"I think every position needs to be full health, to be honest with you. With what they're asked to do and all that, there's no hiding on defense. Corner, safety, D-Line, it doesn't matter. You can't hide. So, you want to be at full strength. But, obviously at this point in the year, nobody's healthy. If you can make it out there, they're going to go. These guys battle so hard and they want to be on the field so badly, especially with the season winding down the way it is and the things that we have to play for. They all want to be on the field,

so sometimes as a staff we almost have to protect them from them. If Sherman's healthy, he'll roll."

How far has he come from being here in his two years? Obviously, he was a little hindered in the beginning of his first year.

"Sherm, his leadership skills have been unbelievable. Him being a teammate has been unbelievable and from a player's standpoint, he's always had the smarts, he's always been able to put himself in position. The difference between this year and last year is I think he's regained that step to go make plays and close on the ball and do the different things that he does. From a healing standpoint, he's come a long way and he's playing really good football."

He's probably not a guy that's known for his speed, but he also doesn't often get challenged deep. What is it about his game that allows him to be a good defender against deep passes when you'd think maybe physically he wouldn't be?

"He is so smart with regards to understanding football and understanding formations and when teams are about to go take a shot on him. Is he 100-percent on it? No, in terms of playing the play. But, throughout his entire history, if you look at all the interceptions he's had, I bet half of them have come where they've tried a go-ball on him and he just goes and takes it. He played receiver in college. His depth perception is unbelievable. He becomes a receiver just as much as a receiver is. From a go-ball standpoint, I think teams have become very scared to even go his way. And because of it, it kind of shuts off half the field when it gets to that part. He can start to play a little bit more aggressively and know that he's not always going to get challenged in that regard."

Some guys talked about maybe overthinking things, not just against the Falcons, but in past games and getting back to basics. What is the key in terms of actually just getting back to basics and not maybe overthinking things each down?

"Just as a defense in general?"

Yeah, not necessarily looking at matchups and everything, but internally maybe just overthinking things snap to snap?

"It is. Paralysis by analysis. You're always trying to make it as simple as you can for the players so they can go trigger and they can be as precise as possible. You do that by trying to make sure from a coaching standpoint you eliminate as much communication as you can so that way they can just go play, line up and go play, stop making checks, stop using toolbox checks and just go ball. But, at the same time when you do that, you kind of leave yourself open to getting schemed up pretty good. There's a balance that we've got to find for the players. Obviously, when you have a veteran group out there, guys who have been through it, you can put a little bit more on them. When you have a younger group, you've got to take a little bit off of them, but at the same time, there's a balance. And so, we've got to find it."

In terms of the matchup with the Rams here, with their line maybe being more vulnerable to the pass rush and Los Angeles Rams QB Jared Goff having a hand

injury, are you expecting them to try to come out and run the ball? Obviously, you try to stop the run first. How does that matchup look and how's their running game?

"Their running game, if they can get it going, is still good. I think they do a really good job in their zone schemes. They run a, I call it crunch, it's like a power without a puller. They run that scheme very well, so they've got a really good run game, especially crack toss. They do all that stuff. The jet sweeps. The key to that thing is just making sure that we're disciplined in our gaps, setting edges, knocking people back, penetrating with our D-Line and making sure that we're doing a good job keeping the back from being able to press the line of scrimmage so he can roll back and making sure that we're disciplined on the back side. It's always a challenge when you play the zone scheme that they've got, because they're so efficient. [Head coach] Kyle [Shanahan] and his offense are so efficient at running it and they're so good at running it that it's very important that we're very disciplined in our fits and making sure that we understand what we're trying to get done from a schematic standpoint."

If you're able to get a healthy DL Dee Ford back, do you think this pass rush can get back to close to the levels that we saw in that first half?

"For sure. Dee Ford's an unbelievable player. Anytime you can add someone like him, it ties everything together. The group though, they've been performing, even with Dee being hindered, they've been performing. Over the last three weeks we've played a team that only threw the ball 15 times I think it was, then we played [New Orleans Saints QB] Drew Brees who gets rid of the ball faster than anyone in football and then last week [Atlanta Falcons QB] Matt Ryan turned into [Seattle Seahawks QB] Russell Wilson with getting out of the pocket and scrambling. I think he scrambled four or five times and got out of what should have been sacks. We're pleased with the way the rush is going. They missed on some opportunities to bring the quarterback down on a few occasions, but we just haven't had our opportunities based on the teams we've been playing. But at the same time, they've got to understand it and continue to grind and keep going, but to answer your question, Dee Ford obviously he'd make it a lot more challenging for an offense to block us."

I know the pressure rate for Armstead, Buckner and Bosa was still really good this weekend. The third-to-last snap of the game where Armstead just ran over the guard, that's what his 58th snap of the game? I'm wondering if the coaching staff says, "Wow even when he's tired, he's that was impressive?"

"They're getting to the quarterback, they're still getting to the quarterback and I think that's why before that drive I think Atlanta had 220 yards and were averaging about four and a half yards a play, so we were playing really good defense. But again, it goes to critical situations, third down and two-minute, where the execution has to be on point which we've been very good in third down this year and for the most part in two-minute situations. But, to answer your question, Armstead, anytime those guys, there was a play earlier in the game where he just took a tight end and just took out the A, B, C and D gap. Armstead's been having a hell of a year."

Los Angeles Rams TE Tyler Higbee has had three, 100-yard games in a row. What has made him so effective down the stretch and how do you defend him?

“They’re doing a good job just getting him involved in the game plan. Obviously, they’re making it a point to give him the football and he’s been balling. We do have to be aware of where he is and understand that he’s not just a decoy, but him and Goff right now have a good relationship and they’re playing very well together.”

What sets Bosa apart from other rookies you’ve worked with?

“He’s very polished. He’s come in and the guy understands how to rush the passer, he’s got great footwork, his strength, his lower half is probably one of the strongest in the league, not just out of rookies. His hand-eye coordination, especially when he’s in close quarters is some of the best I’ve ever seen and he’s already beyond his years and he’s only going to get better. That’s probably the biggest thing that sets him apart.”

Has the identity of the Rams offense changed at all to a more of a two tight end attack that was so purely 11-personnel last year?

“They mix in both from that standpoint, personnel standpoint. They are a little bit different, but they still have a very clear philosophy on how they handle things. It’s still very obvious what they’re, not obvious what they’re trying to do, but it’s obvious from a philosophical standpoint. They are still predicated on the run. I know they haven’t had a ton of success, but they’re still going to try and run the football. They’re still going to try and blow the top off the coverage and still take their shots and they’re still going to try and play efficient, drop-back football. It’s very clear what they try to do and it’s always a challenge when you play them.”

What have you seen from DB Jimmie Ward the last few weeks and do you think he’s maybe carved out a role longer term after this year?

“Jimmie’s been playing fantastic football. He’s so versatile in what he can do. He’s one of the best cover guys in football. He’s one of the best guys in the middle in football. He just does a really good job. He’s relentless, he plays like a linebacker’s mentality, he just wants to run and hit people. As far as the future, that one’s more of a question for [general manger] John [Lynch] and Kyle.”