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<http://www.mercurynews.com/2017/02/03/49ers-gm-john-lynch-knocking-on-hall-of-fame-door/>

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Ron Rivera says Panthers likely to use franchise tag on Kawann Short

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Falcons center Alex Mack (fibula) limited again in practice Thursday

By Vaughn McClure, ESPN.com

http://www.espn.com/nfl/story/_/id/18608733/dan-quinn-atlanta-falcons-concerned-not-panicked-alex-mack-fibula-injury

Bill Belichick says he hasn't thought about retirement

By Mark Daniels, Providence Journal

<http://www.providencejournal.com/sports/20170202/bill-belichick-says-he-hasnt-thought-about-retirement>

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By Brad Biggs, Chicago Tribune

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/football/bears/blog/ct-bears-mailbag-nfl-draft-trade-down-20170202-story.html>

Local Clips – Full Version

The Hall of Fame case for 49ers GM John Lynch

By Cam Inman, San Jose Mercury News

John Lynch, Pro Football Hall of Famer?

A week ago, that title seemed way more realistic than “John Lynch, 49ers general manager,” which he indeed became last Sunday. Lynch could cap off a life-changing week by getting elected Saturday to the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

“It wasn’t conventional when early in my (NFL) career I struggled to get on the field and here I am this weekend as a finalist for the Pro Football Hall of Fame, and knocking on that door,” Lynch said. “So, there’s a lot of things in my life that haven’t been conventional.”

His career path: Stanford quarterback-turned-safety, Florida Marlins minor-league pitcher, nine-time Pro Bowl safety, Fox Sports broadcaster, and now, in a blink of a week, 49ers general manager and possibly a Canton-bound Hall of Famer.

Lynch is a four-time finalist, as are long-time kicker Morten Andersen, late coach Don Coryell and former commissioner Paul Tagliabue. Running back LaDainian Tomlinson headlines the list of finalists, which includes two other safeties beside Lynch: Brian Dawkins (first-year eligible) and Kenny Easley (senior finalist).

Last year, Lynch made the cut from 15 to 10 for the first time, and this marks his fifth-year of eligibility since ending a highly decorated, 15-year career as a smart and punishing safety for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and Denver Broncos.

Dallas Morning News columnist Rick Gosselin, who votes on the Hall’s 48-person selection committee, made a strong case for Lynch’s enshrinement.

“If you look at his stats, you can quibble with the Hall-of-Fame candidacy of John Lynch,” Gosselin wrote this week for TalkOfFameNetwork.com. “His 26 interceptions, 13 sacks and eight fumble recoveries come up short of the Hall of Famers at his position. But if you watch the tape and see his impact on the field, there should be no quibbles.”

Lynch made nine Pro Bowls in his final 11 seasons and he earned All-Pro honors three straight seasons. Being a role model on and off the field netted him the 2006 Bart Starr Award, the 2007 Byron “Whizzer” White Award and, quite possibly, the 49ers’ general manager job.

Jed York, the 49ers CEO, repeatedly emphasized a desire to regain a championship “culture” as he went about a four-week search for a new regime, which is expected to include Kyle Shanahan as coach once he’s done in the Super Bowl as the Atlanta Falcons offensive coordinator.

“We’re going to strive to create a culture where everyone’s working together,” Lynch said. “That’s one of my strengths. Something that I’ve done throughout my career is I’ve had an ability to bring people together.”

It shouldn’t matter to the 49ers that he had some 1,300 tackles and 13 sacks in his career. But it’s worth noting he was a Buccaneers captain when their 2002 team clobbered the Raiders 48-21 in the Super Bowl. Former teammates Derrick Brooks and Warren Sapp are already in the Hall of Fame, as is their one-time coach, Tony Dungy.

Lynch is so regarded, he went into the Bucs' and Broncos' respective Ring of Honor this past season. Could someday the 49ers put him in their Hall of Fame alongside a couple other personnel wizards, John McVay and Bill Walsh?

"I don't know that it's going to be especially difficult," former NFL executive Bill Polian, a Pro Football Hall of Famer, said on ESPN about Lynch's GM prospects. "If a player is smart — and John certainly is — and if he's conscientious — which John certainly was, because he got far more out of his ability than the ability dictated — then you've got the makings of a good GM."

Troy Aikman, former Dallas Cowboys quarterback and a Fox Sports colleague, said Lynch could follow in John Elway's footsteps and dispel the notion in league circles that former players can't succeed as general managers.

"What we as former players know is what a championship locker room looks like," Aikman told reporters at Fox Sports' Super Bowl luncheon. "We know what team chemistry means and the importance of that. ... I don't doubt for a minute that John Lynch will have success."

Stanford coach David Shaw, Lynch's former Cardinal teammate, agreed.

"John has never failed at anything," Shaw said. "John is brilliant, he's competitive, he's tough. He's going to surround himself with people that are like him — smart people that are tough people that are good football people."

Lynch's first hire as GM came Tuesday when he lured Adam Peters from the Denver Broncos to be his vice president of player personnel.

"He's not going to care about being the most popular guy in the room," Shaw continued on Lynch. "He's not competing to be the GM of the century."

When Lynch left Shaw and Stanford in 1993, he entered the NFL with the same work ethic, charisma and competitive drive that should serve him well as the 49ers GM, according to his former agent, Leigh Steinberg.

"He has a lot of charm and has the pedigree of what soon will be a Hall of Fame player," Steinberg said. "What were the odds that someone from a very privileged background and went to Stanford would make his way through football as a ferocious hitter?"

"He understands tough, defensive football but will be incisive in terms of judging talent and personality," Steinberg added. "He's a soothing factor to be around."

The 49ers sure could use that. Could the Hall of Fame?

Former 49ers wide receivers Terrell Owens and Isaac Bruce are also returning finalists. The 49ers have been represented in recent classes with Charles Haley (2015) and Eddie DeBartolo (2016)

Lynch hopes to launch a 49ers turnaround similar to the one he experienced in Tampa 15 years ago.

"In Tampa, we had never been to the top, but I can tell you when we won a Super Bowl I've got to believe it was a little sweeter because of where we came from," Lynch said. "I'm looking very forward to working towards that goal so we can all feel that again and we can make the 49er community proud of their team and proud of their organization."

KYLE SHANAHAN'S FOCUS SOON SHIFTS TO QUARTERBACK EVALUATIONS

By Matt Maiocco, CSNBayArea.com

HOUSTON – When Atlanta Falcons offensive coordinator Kyle Shanahan says he has no idea how he would rank the quarterbacks in the upcoming draft, he is not playing some elaborate game of subterfuge.

Shanahan said he generally does not even know the names of the players who are finalists for the Heisman Trophy, let alone compile any kind of meaningful list of the quarterbacks under consideration at the top of the draft.

“I’ve never paid attention to college football during the season,” Shanahan said Thursday. “Come March, you know everyone and you catch up to the rest of the world.”

The 49ers have a lot to figure out when it comes to their quarterback situation. Shanahan, the presumptive head coach, will unquestionably have the most powerful voice in the conversation when it comes to determining the organization’s plan of attack for the offseason.

After all, Shanahan essentially picked 49ers general manager John Lynch for the job. The two men are expected to work in collaboration to restock the team’s roster. The talent level of the team eroded under the direction of former general manager Trent Baalke, who did not draft a quarterback who was able to stick on the team after Colin Kaepernick in 2011.

The 49ers do not have a quarterback assured of returning next season. Kaepernick could opt out of his contract or the 49ers could release him to avoid being on the hook for his scheduled \$14.9 million pay. Blaine Gabbert, Christian Ponder and Thad Lewis are scheduled for unrestricted free agency.

Shanahan said he usually does not start looking at the draft until a month after the season ends. With the Falcons’ season lasting a month longer due to the team’s march through the playoffs, Shanahan will get to work as quickly as possible after his team wraps up the season Sunday against the New England Patriots in Super Bowl 51. The 49ers are not expected to waste much time in hiring Shanahan next week.

“You can’t evaluate people by watching ESPN,” Shanahan said. “You have to sit in a room and watch both copies. You got to cut it up and watch certain types of plays, certain gradable plays. It takes a long time. You don’t want to sit and evaluate 30 different guys randomly. You want to dedicate a few days to one guy, really lock in and then come back and watch it again.”

In 2014, Shanahan was new on the job as offensive coordinator with the Cleveland Browns. He confirmed he had a high grade on Eastern Illinois quarterback Jimmy Garoppolo.

Instead, the Browns selected Johnny Manziel with the No. 22 overall pick, while the Patriots picked Garoppolo in the second round with the 62nd overall selection.

“Yeah, they had me look at every quarterback and evaluate every quarterback,” Shanahan said. “That’s pretty much how it is everywhere. They ask you to evaluate everyone and you give grades and you tell people who you want and you wait to see what happens.”

“I think people heard me, but the results weren’t there. I think there were a lot of people who liked Garoppolo. There were other quarterbacks we liked, too. We put a board together. We rank every one. Then, the people who make the decisions, you have to wait and see what happens. As a coach, it’s like that at a lot of places. You have to deal with what happens.”

Garoppolo could be available in the offseason in a trade with the New England Patriots. At the end of the 2017 season, Garoppolo would be scheduled for unrestricted free agency. Therefore, the Patriots could look to deal Garoppolo this offseason. Shanahan described what he liked about Garoppolo in his evaluations three years ago.

“He was a very good thrower,” Shanahan said. “Tough guy, kept his eyes down the field, could get rid of the ball fast. Really liked the person. Had a chance to go out to dinner with him and stuff. He played at

Eastern Illinois, and it was a different type of offense where you can't always evaluate with how quick they get rid of the ball. But I really thought he was a very intelligent, tough player with a good throwing motion."

In 2012, Shanahan was part of a Washington organization that drafted Kirk Cousins in the fourth round. Cousins remains unsigned for 2017, but Washington is expected to protect him with the franchise tag for a second consecutive season. Washington could place the exclusive franchise tag on Cousins to ensure he remains with the organization. Otherwise, the 49ers could make a play for him.

"Kirk's a natural thrower who's fearless," Shanahan said. "He lets it rip. Guys who are processing can go fast in the pocket and Kirk's as good as anybody at that."

The 49ers own the No. 2 overall pick in the draft. All things being equal – and if the 49ers do not add a veteran prior to then – the quarterback position would top the list.

"Everyone wants a quarterback," Shanahan said. "You just hope that there is one. You always take the guy who gives you the best chance to win. Usually that's a quarterback, but it could be a D-lineman. Everybody wants to have a great quarterback right away, but if it's easy to get one, everybody would have one. So you got to make sure to make smart decisions and do what's best for the team."

Shanahan said the first thing he wants to see from a quarterback prospect is the ability to throw the ball naturally. That eliminates a lot of prospects from the beginning, he said.

After that, there are a lot of other factors Shanahan said he considers.

"If you're born to throw and it's effortless, you can do it with ease and you don't have to think about the throwing part because everything else is so hard," Shanahan said. "And if you have that, you want a guy who's fearless. If you sit and watch the rush in this league or you're thinking about getting hit or have any hesitation, you don't have much of a chance. The game moves too fast and you have to keep your eyes downfield.

"And you got to have a certain amount of intelligence so that you can handle everything. But it's not just your IQ, it's being able to handle it under pressure and think fast and react. Once the game starts, your mind has to shut off. It's got to be a feel and you react, usually based off the preparation you did throughout the week and your natural feel of the game."

KIRK COUSINS PRAISES 49ERS FOR HIRING LYNCH, CALLS SHANAHAN 'OFFENSIVE GENIUS'

By Staff, CSNBayArea.com

Kirk Cousins earned just under \$20 million last season under the franchise tag.

He is scheduled to become a free agent, but Washington has the ability to tag him again.

New 49ers general manager John Lynch has praised Cousins in the past, and the quarterback returned the favor on Thursday morning.

"John's a smart guy," Cousins said on KNBR 680. "He's been around this league a long time. He knows what it takes to win a Super Bowl. He's done it. Been on a couple really good organizations ... down the road, they may have as sharp a guy and as experienced a guy as you can find.

"And a class act at that. I think it was a good hire and credit the 49ers for going outside the box and doing something different, and not just getting stuck in a rut of the same old thing."

When Cousins hears his name linked to the 49ers, how does that feel?

"I'll tell ya -- it's good to be wanted," Cousins answered. "So hopefully down the road, there will be people wanting me. So, we'll see how it all plays out. The unique thing with the franchise tag is if the (Washington team) chooses to place that on me, then I'm pretty much off the market.

"So we'll see what they choose to do come March 1 and the ball's in their court along those lines. Based on that, I'll react accordingly."

Cousins threw for 4917 yards in 2016 and amassed 29 touchdowns (25 passing and four rushing) against 12 interceptions. He made the Pro Bowl.

In 2012 and 2013, the 2012 fourth-round pick played under presumptive 49ers head coach Kyle Shanahan.

"I've always been a big fan of Kyle's," Cousins said. "I've always spoken very highly of him from the day I was picked. And he called me right after the draft and preached belief in me and encouragement ... I loved his system right away and saw it successfully run with Robert Griffin. I've seen it now run successfully with Matt Ryan.

"Kyle adapts his scheme to the players he has. He's just an offensive genius ... his decisions over time have proven to be right. I'm a big fan of his -- always will be."

Is Cousins open to playing on the West Coast?

"From the day I left college and entered the draft, you have an open mind," Cousins said. "You're gonna go where the job takes you and see how far this game can go before you hang it up.

"I have an open mind. My wife, even more importantly, has an open mind. She's ready to do whatever it takes. We both love Washington but we're ready to do whatever it takes."

The 49ers are scheduled to play at Washington next season.

Kyle Shanahan excited about 49ers' hiring of John Lynch

By Nick Wagoner, ESPN.com

SANTA CLARA, Calif. -- By now, the San Francisco 49ers' intention to hire Atlanta Falcons offensive coordinator Kyle Shanahan as head coach and his desire to take the job is one of the worst-kept secrets in the NFL world.

And while the Niners and new general manager John Lynch have to be somewhat cautious in what they can and can't say about Shanahan because of tampering rules, the presumptive next Niners coach has no such limitations going the other way.

Shanahan has been front and center for big media sessions several times this week as his team prepares for the New England Patriots and Sunday's Super Bowl. Many of the questions thrown his way have been about the 49ers and, of course, their surprising choice to hire Lynch as general manager.

It's a decision that Shanahan had a hand in after joining CEO Jed York and executive Paraag Marathe in interviews with Lynch and the two other finalists (Minnesota's George Paton and Arizona's Terry McDonough) in Atlanta last weekend.

Despite the fact that Lynch has never worked in a personnel department before, Shanahan clearly was unfazed by that inexperience.

"I get that it's new to him," Shanahan told reporters earlier in the week. "But if I'm going to bet on anybody, I'm going to bet on John Lynch. He'll have to learn some stuff as he goes, just like we all do, but you're going for the person. John Lynch has succeeded in everything, and that excites me about him.

"The people who know him know how special of a guy the 49ers got."

During his introductory news conference Monday, Lynch detailed how his hiring came about, a process that prominently involved Shanahan. After broadcasting the NFC divisional playoff game between Atlanta and the Seattle Seahawks, Lynch and Shanahan had a conversation in which Lynch expressed possible interest in joining the pool of general manager candidates.

Shanahan passed on Lynch's interest to York and he was added to the mix in what became something of a clandestine endeavor. The Niners hired Lynch on Sunday evening.

Of course, the 49ers can't officially hire Shanahan until after Sunday's Super Bowl, though it seems to be nothing more than a formality at this point.

From the beginning of the search for a coach and a general manager, York made it clear he wanted there to be a strong rapport between the two people in those jobs. It remains to be seen how they'll work together, but judging by their initial comments about each other, there's little doubt they're starting from a good place.

"I thought he was the catch of this head coaching cycle," Lynch said. "I really did. I think it's one of the best years I've seen a coordinator have. But, when I talked to [Falcons quarterback] Matt Ryan and the players on this team, they spoke of the leadership and the presence that Kyle had in front of that room. I think that in this league, again, I get to see a very global outlook of the league and there's a lot of really good coordinators, but there's some that really separate themselves. I just thought Kyle, he really did that this year. He has impressed me for a long time. This year he put it all together. And it wasn't just calling plays. It was setting up plays and he was doing things and as soon as I got in front of him and saw the other part, his philosophies and how they marry with mine and all those things, it just got me really excited. So, those are my thoughts on Kyle."

Shanahan offered similar sentiments about Lynch.

"I believe any time you have a smart guy who's very talented and has extremely high character and has no problem working extremely hard; I feel when you have a person like that who has all those qualities, and you give him the time, it's a matter of time before he figures it all out," Shanahan said, according to CSN Bay Area. "And John, as anybody who met him, he's as impressive as a human being as there is. He's succeeded in anything he's done."