

# TRANSCRIPTIONS



**Defensive Coordinator Robert Saleh  
Press Conference – September 19, 2019  
San Francisco 49ers**

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**What’s your quick take on Pittsburgh Steelers QB Mason Rudolph?**

“We went through and watched all his preseason tapes, his snaps and all that. He’s poised, he really is. And I’m not doing the coach speak, he really is. I think, in my honest opinion, I do think Pittsburgh’s got a really good quarterback sitting there with him. You just watch his clips, he’s got a good arm, he’s accurate, he knows exactly where to go with the football so you can tell that’s he’s very well prepared. I’m just really impressed with his tape, much more so than I thought I’d be when I actually turned it on.”

**As a defensive coordinator when you’re facing a guy who is making his first NFL start, how do you balance between the old saying “making him play quarterback,” but also bringing pressures and trying to confuse him?**

“There’s balance every week, to me, whether you’re playing a veteran or not. Obviously, some quarterbacks are different in terms of how they handle different things. But, you always want quarterbacks to try to play the position and you try to make it as hard as you can. Whether it’s pre-snap disguise, post-snap coverage, pressure, not pressure, you go into every game trying to make sure that your looks and your disguises all keep the quarterback guessing so he has to figure it out post-snap. That’s everything for us, but for a young man like him, I’m sure they’ll have a plan. It will be interesting to see what they do. They’ve had a certain style to them with [Pittsburgh Steelers QB] Ben Roethlisberger playing and it just looks like on tape that he’s capable of handling all that stuff too. It’ll be interesting to see what their personality is on offense and looking forward to it overall.”

**What has LB Kwon Alexander shown you over the last game and the last couple of weeks that he’s so far along that maybe he can do more stuff defensively than maybe you figured he could?**

“Kwon is very instinctive. He’s a very instinctive football player and the one thing we take pride in with our scheme is that it helps players unlock all their athletic ability and allows them to play with all the instincts that they have. For Kwon, being able to count on the fact that he can take the same angles over and over again and play the same techniques over and over again. Now it just comes down to him just playing football and understanding what’s happening to him from a schematic standpoint with teams in the way that they’re attacking and being able to get to the sideline and make an actual adjustment where he can play things that he may have played wrong the series before to

make those quick changes. For Kwon, he's a quick learner, he's very instinctive and he's got so much range. For him to be able to unlock all that and show it hasn't been a fluke, that's for sure."

**Was that interception something he had learned earlier in the game?**

"That's him just, the tip where he almost had the interception, that was a few plays before, got to the sideline, talked about that one and how we needed to play that and he is quick. To be able to have a guy like that who can make those adjustments, recognize things, understand he's playing the exact same technique to make that play, teams just have to be very careful of dipping into the well twice when you are attacking his side of the ball."

**Has Kwon's speed elevated your defense as a collective unit?**

"Yeah. He plays fast. Part of that is because he's very instinctive so when he sees it he triggers and there's no hesitation. The Jet sweep would be a perfect example of him utilizing his speed where a year ago that may have turned up for nine-10 yards. That thing turned up, [LB] Fred [Warner] did a great job at turning it back, [CB] K'Waun Williams did a great job at turning it back. And when you have a guy running with all that speed and there's no hesitation, you can keep it inside a five-yard gain and now we feel good about where we are with regards to down and distance. He's pretty fast."

**What's stood out to you about DL Arik Armstead so far this year?**

"I'm not really surprised by the way he's playing. I think he's doing a really, really nice job. I've stood up here and talked about how violent he is and how strong he is as a defensive lineman. He's a very, very physical defensive lineman and he's starting to understand that if he plays with that physicality and power and just makes that who he is and his identity, he's going win more often than he loses. Very impressed with him and his mindset and the way he's taken to coaching. You can tell it's always been important to him and for a guy like him you've got to be very, very not strong in what you're teaching, but you've got to be very clear because he's a very, very smart guy. And so, if it doesn't make sense to him he's going to do what he thinks makes sense. So, to [defensive line coach Kris] Kocurek's credit, there's no grey area in the way they teach and because of it you are seeing his play take another step. As long as he can maintain that trajectory I feel like he should have a really nice year."

**What the biggest difference between CB Ahkello Witherspoon this season and last season?**

"For Ahkello, in my opinion, first it's his mindset. He's been very business-like. The big thing, to me, is the work that he put in in the weight room over the offseason. He's gotten bigger, he's gotten stronger, so where he is able to press guys at the line of scrimmage and actually keep them from getting off the line of scrimmage or at least being able to disrupt routes without disrupting himself where he's not having to lunge into people where he ends up in a trail position, he can stay on top so he can go look for the ball. For Ahkello, the mental makeup in terms of being smart enough to play the position, the foot quickness, all that stuff for us has always been there, but now the mindset of making this business-like every single day, never getting comfortable and his physical makeup of his physical strength has been the biggest differences for me."

**For those of us who haven't watched all of his snaps on the coach's film, just how good has his coverage been so far?**

"It's been really good, it has been. There's things that he can get better on, but he's been challenged constantly in the first two games. Teams are trying him. And I wish to God he would have gotten that pick-six, because you keep showing that you can get the ball as a corner, and teams are going to have to look another way. When you have two corners like [CB Richard Sherman] Sherm who can go get the ball and Ahkello who can get the ball and now they've got to look inside to the teeth of our defense, it becomes a problem. They're going to keep trying him. He's going to get many opportunities and I just feel like he's doing a real nice job and he's got to stay on it."

**What's the key for him moving forward to make sure he maintains that?**

"Consistency. Consistency is the truest measure of performance. And so, mentally he's got to maintain that mindset and make sure that he approaches every day like he's got something to prove. He's got to keep a chip on his shoulder and if he does that he's going to have a really nice year and he can have a really nice career."

**With the way the guys are playing on the outside, have you given much thought or why haven't you given the thought to moving CB Jason Verrett to nickel?**

"You know, for Jason, he's very talented, no question. We've been trying to bring him along slow. I'm not going to rule out nickel for him. It's a completely new position for him, he's never played in there. In terms of all the different techniques that we ask those guys to play with. I'm not going to stand here and say that it is an impossible thing to do, it's just not something with all the nickels we have between K'Waun Williams, [CB Emmanuel] Moseley, [DB] Jimmie Ward, his health and trying to get him back to speed has been the biggest focus of the organization and he looked good yesterday in practice. We've just got to continue working with him and see if we can get him on the field."

**If Jimmie Ward's healthy, is he your top nickel?**

"We'll cross that bridge when it gets there, for sure."

**Did DL Ronald Blair III look more like former NFL LB Lawrence Taylor or former NFL DE Deacon Jones on Sunday?**

"Well, we said it, right? If you like winning, you like Ronnie. If you don't, you don't. He's just a model of consistency, man. I love Ronnie. I've gushed about him up here and I can do it for another 15 minutes if you all like. You guys know how I feel about him. He looked fantastic and he's looked like that, to me, his entire career, it just goes unnoticed when he's not the big name, he's not the big draft pick. But, he's your lunch pail, gets things done, makes things work, get people lined up. He does it all. I'm happy we have him."

**That seemed to be like a lunch pail performance?**

"No, he's a playmaker. People have never noticed it. Again, it goes back to just the overall, you know last year and years past, we've always challenged our DEs that if you get blocked by a tight end, shame on you. So, these guys have taken that to heart. They're playing with great technique on those guys, and so if they try to block them with the tight

end, it's a challenge for those tight ends. I'm not saying that a tight end can't block them, that includes all of our D-Linemen, but they're playing with a speed and physicality that we've been hoping to see out of that group, him included. It's coming to fruition, and again, for all of them, they've just got to maintain that consistency."

**How has DB Tarvarius Moore been in the first two games?**

"Tarvarius has been good. To me, he's a rookie at the position because of the, even if he was playing corner, just the fact that he's on the football field, just whenever a young guy, he's had some really nice plays, he's had a couple of plays that he knows that he wishes he could have back. But again, he's still getting better, he's still progressing the right way. So, we've got to continue working with him, coaching our butt off with him and putting him in a position to make plays."

**How do you expect the Steelers offense to attack your defense on Sunday?**

"That's been the big question for us. Thankfully, and with our scheme, we don't make stuff up. We'll take whatever they throw at us. I mean, they could very easily go big and run crunch all day or they can go empty like they've done with Ben and throw the football all day. I think Rudolph is capable of doing both. We'll figure it out within the first 15, I'm sure, on Sunday."

**They've got 13 personnel, not a lot of teams run as much as they do. What are the challenges that the linemen sort of present?**

"From a lineman standpoint? It doesn't create a problem for us. You just know that it's time to get your big boy pants on and get ready for a fun day, in my mind, of grinding in the trenches. Not to say that they can't throw deep when they go 13 personnel, but to me when a team comes out in 13 personnel, they're speaking to you. And I kind of like that language."

**What are they saying?**

"Let's go."

**You talked about his poise, about Mason Rudolph's poise, and there's that one play where it looked like he was getting ready to throw the ball to the ground and he ended up giving it the sidearm toss. What did you see on that one?**

"It's the same thing. I watched his fourth preseason game against Carolina and people can disregard that, but I think he was in for 16 snaps, threw the ball 14 times, something like that. Just go through that tape if you guys are bored and you guys want to watch it. He's at the line, he's very poised, IDing coverage, IDing his hot throws, taking his five-step drop. He's got great vision to the backfield to move people, throw it exactly where he needs to put the ball. He's quick with his reads, so the ball's getting out of his hands. If his first read's open, it's out. He's very capable of playing quarterback and it's our job to try to make it harder on him."

**49ers fans, they traveled well in Tampa Bay and they also did in Cincinnati. Do you have any expectations at home here at Levi's Stadium or any words for the fans?**

“Got to get loud. Got to get loud. There’s no more excuses, right? Everyone talks about Seattle having an unbelievable homefield advantage, but I know this stadium can get loud, too. When we’ve got guys, especially for us up front, we need that advantage of the quarterback not being able to go with a hard count. He’s got to go with a silent count. If we’re loud and they have to go silent, I have faith in our pass rushers to beat their linemen off the ball. So, come on.”

**Along those lines, do you guys practice on defense with loud and not being able to hear?**

“Until our fans give us a reason to, we don’t have to. The fans have to get loud.”

**Sounds like a challenge to the fans.**

“Oh yeah, absolutely.”