

# TRANSCRIPTIONS



**Defensive Coordinator Robert Saleh  
Press Conference – November 21, 2019  
San Francisco 49ers**

[Listen to Audio](#) | [Media Center](#)

**What would you say about Green Bay Packers QB Aaron Rodgers being as prodigious of a passer as he is, but he's also extremely good at taking care of the ball?**

“He’s been in it awhile, obviously he’s a hall-of-fame type quarterback. He just sees the field. He doesn’t panic under the pressure, he has great pocket awareness so he can buy himself some time. If you can buy yourself some time and keep yourself under control, you can make the right decisions all the way throughout the play. It’s when a quarterback feels rushed and feels like he needs to get rid of the ball faster than he wants to is when all those mistakes happen. So, for him, with his pocket presence, in my opinion, that’s why he keeps the interceptions down the way he does.”

**Obviously, you want to take the ball away, but is one of the designs of the defense that plays a lot of zone and that is usually good at rushing the quarterback with four guys, is that a way to sort of maximize your chances at getting takeaways?**

“Philosophically I believe so. Anytime you’ve got seven guys in backend just looking at the guy with the football and four guys relentlessly rushing him where they make him uncomfortable making the decisions that he doesn’t want to make, but he makes them faster than he wants to make them. Anytime you’ve got the combination, I feel like that’s where you get as many turnovers as you could possibly get. They come in bunches as they say.”

**With your background with Green Bay Packers Head Coach Matt LaFleur, when you self-scout do you this week look for things that you think that he’ll be looking for?**

“For every coordinator, you just look at everything they’ve done from the year, you look at the coaches on staff. I know they’ve got [Green Bay Packers offensive coordinator Nathaniel] Hackett who I was with in Jacksonville. You just look at everybody. Everyone’s got a personality and that always shows up on tape. And you don’t want to play the guessing game, you don’t want to overthink it because for the most part what they do, you can’t make up an entire new game plan. You’re going to do what you do best. Obviously, they’ll have wrinkles and all that stuff. We’ve just got to play great, fast defense and handle all the different wrinkles they give and play sound, good football.”

**Given how well you know him both as a person and as a coach, do you have to balance the idea of paralysis by over analysis?**

“Exactly. Just because you know somebody, their personal life, doesn’t mean you know what they’re actually doing in the building. You know what I’m saying? You don’t want to overthink, you don’t want to look back at conversations you’ve had about football. It’s not about that. It’s just making sure you stay true to who you are, see them for who they are, understand that they can have wrinkles, understand what you’re putting on tape so you can feel what they can possibly do to attack you, which goes back to every week. It’s no different than having played coordinators who have played our scheme many times over again. You try to stay as true as possible.”

**I get the sense that you are trying to keep it pretty clinical, but does the personalities, does it become personal for you when you prepare for this week?**

“No, it really doesn’t. There’s an old saying, you love your family, you love your friends, you love all that, but when it comes to competition you can throw it all away. It’s about doing everything you can to put yourself and your team and organization in the best possible light so that they can go execute the best they can. I always joke around. My mother, God bless her, doesn’t know how to play chess at all, but if she was sitting across from me, I’m going to try and get her in three moves. It’s that mindset. It doesn’t matter who you’re going against, friend, non-friend, it really doesn’t matter. You’re always trying to do your absolute best.”

**One thing I’ve noticed about them is that they pass more than any team but Kansas City on first and second down, at a higher rate, yet their rushing efficiency is still really good. Is that when you’re looking at how they operate, does that work hand-in-hand? Are they passing to set up the run?**

“I think they do a really good job of, they’ve got an RPO system so sometimes those RPOs come out as passes, we see them as runs. And so it can kind of skew the stat, I believe, the run-pass stat. But, I just think they do a really good job of taking what defenses give you, reading the box, playing good, sound football. Their running game has been emerging over the last few weeks. That back is, I don’t know where he came from, but he’s a heck of a back, very underrated. To answer your question, sometimes those stats can get skewed. You’ve just got to watch the tape, see what they’re doing and see where those runs are coming from. What’s the situation? Time in the game and all those different things can kind of play into that.”

**You guys have one of the toughest three game stretches in NFL history coming up. Have you ever had a three-game stretch at least at this point in the season where it’s basically teams that are right at the top of each conference?**

“I don’t know. If you make a playoff run the odds are you’re probably going to have to play three teams of this caliber. But, if you’re focused on all three teams at once you’ve just got to take today first, tomorrow’s next, then the next day and you’ve just got to stack up great days and then when the day comes to play the game you do your absolute best and you reset and go do it again. I wouldn’t be able to think off hand, I’d have to think about that question.”

**With DL Nick Bosa, sacks aside or lack thereof, how is he's doing and how are teams getting more attention to him now?**

"For Nick, I think Nick's doing a great job. Sometimes stats won't show up for him, but you can tell that teams are going out of their way to make sure that his stats don't show up, which mean he's affecting the game. Even though statistically it may not be showing up. Teams have deliberately gone out of their way to try and take him out of the game and it's given opportunities for other guys and that's where other people have to step up. It's a credit to him about what he's been putting on tape and now for him he's got to figure out how to defeat that because the great ones, it doesn't matter what teams do, the great ones will still show up time and time again, which he has. The sack numbers aside, not worried about that, those are kind of out of your control with regards to quarterbacks getting rid of it. He's doing a good job, his run game has been fantastic, he's still putting pressure on the quarterback at a very high rate winning one-on-ones. Stay the course, he's about to hit the grind of the season. Rookies going into the second half of the season is always a grind so he's got to trigger mentally and keep rolling."

**Are there technique things that you can tell a defensive end when he's getting chipped by a running back or a tight end, that sort of thing?**

"Yeah, there's always teaching. We're going over it every week with [defensive line coach Kris] Kocurek and how to get it don't and what we can do. Every week presents a different week on how teams chip and how teams approach us, but I feel like we've got a good plan moving forward."

**How do you make the decision with CB Ahkello Witherspoon to start? What's going to go into that decision given how well CB Emmanuel Moseley has played and given that Ahkello has been off for so long?**

"For the last, I think three or four weeks, I can't tell. Everything's groundhog's day, but we've had a Thursday night game, then we had like 10 days off, or not 10 days off but then we had a Monday night game and then you go through a walk-through last week. We really haven't been able to put together a string of practices. And so, for Ahkello to have yesterday, today, got to go see the tape, tomorrow, to put in three great days of practice where it looks like he's knocking off the rust, he looks like he's got his feet under him and he looks like he did before he got injured. Those are the decisions that coach is looking at and I'm trying to help him out with too."

**If he does start, do you have a quick trigger on replacing him if there is a circumstance where it does look like he is a little bit rusty?**

"I don't know if quick trigger is the word. You never want to play that quick trigger. If you make the decision, you roll with it. Now, obviously if it gets out of hand you have to help him somehow, but I've got full faith that if Ahkello steps on the football field he's going to do exactly what he did before he got hurt."

**How well has Emmanuel Moseley played in his absence and has he played well enough, so well that it's given you the luxury to not rush Ahkello Witherspoon back?**

“Emmanuel’s played very, very well. He’s proven that he’s a starter in this league, without question, which is exciting for the future and all that stuff. Does it provide a luxury? I don’t know if it’s a luxury as much as it is for Ahkello, like ‘Hey, you don’t have to rush out. There’s a lot of football left.’ So, he’s out there just deliberately working to get back so he’s 100-percent. But yeah, to answer your question on Moseley, he’s played very, very good football.”

**If DL Dee Ford is unable to go, head coach Kyle Shanahan said it would be an internal thing if you have to make a move. Do you anticipate that would be DL Jeremiah Valoaga or would you consider potentially pushing DL Solomon Thomas out, seeing DL Arik Armstead outside more? How do you approach that?**

“Those are all things that we will approach later in the week once coach makes his decision.”

**What’s your overarching take on the slip in run defense this year? Is that something that you expected with the surge and the focus on the pass rush or is that something that concerns you with these good rushing offenses coming up?**

“You know what, sometimes, and I guess I’m looking from a biased standpoint, but from an efficiency standpoint, and I know this is going to sound crazy, but the run game is not as bad as it looks. I think [Carolina Panthers RB Christian] McCaffrey in the second half of the blowout had a 40-yard run. Cleveland had a 40-yard run. The backs the last two weeks have averaged less than four yards per carry. I think [Seattle Seahawks RB Chris] Carson had three-eight a carry, but the quarterback scrambles for 20, he has a couple of runs. The young kid got out on a couple of quarterback runs, but for the most part, we’re able to keep the back in check. So, I look at more true conventional run game. What’s happening? Our worst game, by far, was Thursday night. I think that kind of got away from us, but when you look at the raw numbers, the raw numbers aren’t very good, but if you look at an efficiency standpoint and are we stopping the run when they’re giving it to the running back and all that stuff? I feel like it’s not as off as it was in year’s past. With what we are playing, yeah I guess you would say when you have leads and stuff and you’re trying to go get the quarterback, a run could sneak out on you.”

**One more follow up on that. Is the wide-nine or the alignment, I had read that there had been some concerns that potentially there could be more rushing lanes in the middle. So, when you’re rearing back to get after the quarterback, have you seen any of that maybe effect some of the run defense in a negative way?**

“No, we’ve gotten hit on a couple of designer runs. Like the McCaffrey run went for 45 for a touchdown was a designed run that really attacked the perimeter of the defense. We had a couple of crack tosses that attacked the perimeter of the defense. We had a couple of draws that you’re sinking in coverage and D-Line is rolling. They caught us in a couple of draws which I feel good about moving forward. So, they’ve kind of gotten us on designer runs, but when teams actually just run the football, I feel really good about it. Arizona game we got caught on a gap scheme having the wrong fit, but it’s things that I feel like we’ve got control over that we can fix. Our guys aren’t getting mauled, we’re not gapped out, we’re not unsound. It’s just a matter of us knocking out the designer runs and being very, very, very disciplined in our run fits.”

**What do you mean by designer run?**

“A designer run, that’s just something that you just haven’t seen before.”

**Mostly a gimmick?**

“I don’t want to call it a gimmick because they are pretty cool runs. It’s a non-traditional run that just pops up out of nowhere and you knock it out and you move on to the next one.”

**What kind of impact has everything that DB Jimmie Ward’s had to go through, including four coordinators in four years, all the position changes, the injuries, how much of an impact has that background had on him being who he is now, the player he is in your defense?**

“Jimmie, I think, whenever you go through what Jimmie’s gone through, all those tough times, I believe it’s going to do two things to you, it’s either going to make you fold or it’s going to make you stronger. Jimmie’s gotten nothing but stronger through all of this. He’s become smarter, he’s become more versatile, he’s become more relentless because it’s very important to him because he understands, if anyone understands, take a guy off the field for any reason and I promise you they’ll do everything they can to get back on the field. Being on the field, he doesn’t take it for granted. Jimmie, in this building, there has never been a doubt the type of football player he is. It’s just a matter of him being able to stay on the field. Still got a little ways to go, but I think he’s shown the entire world what type of a player he is and as long as he can stay healthy, he’ll continue to do it.”

**Are you going to see Matt LaFleur before the game? Have dinner Saturday night or anything?**

“No. I’ll probably see him before kickoff, but not dinner. Maybe if they came out earlier, but I guess they changed the schedule.”