

49ers Mid-Day Clips – March 1, 2017

Local Media

5 Notes from Kyle Shanahan's Combine Press Conference

By Joe Fann, 49ers.com

<http://www.49ers.com/news/ninerfeed/article-2/5-Notes-from-Kyle-Shanahans-Combine-Press-Conference/11e4623c-f461-4533-81ce-98e765ab7cbf>

Dan Quinn: Kyle Shanahan is a 'Fantastic Coach'

By Joe Fann, 49ers.com

<http://www.49ers.com/news/article-2/Dan-Quinn-Kyle-Shanahan-is-a-Fantastic-Coach/efe4c6dd-6a23-4aff-aa48-2254bcd9e28>

49ers: Safety? CB? Ward's position in question

By Eric Branch, San Francisco Chronicle

<http://www.sfchronicle.com/49ers/article/Safety-CB-Ward-s-position-in-2017-in-question-10969767.php>

49ers' Shanahan: 'We don't have an attachment to Kap'

By Eric Branch, San Francisco Chronicle

<http://www.sfchronicle.com/49ers/article/49ers-Shanahan-We-don-t-have-an-10969553.php>

Seahawks GM learned from 49ers' John Lynch years ago

By Eric Branch, San Francisco Chronicle

<http://www.sfchronicle.com/49ers/article/Seahawks-GM-learned-from-49ers-John-Lynch-10969127.php>

49ers Kyle Shanahan says Colin Kaepernick in same boat as other free agents

By Cam Inman, San Jose Mercury News

<http://www.mercurynews.com/2017/03/01/49ers-kyle-shanahan-talks-qbs-at-nfl-combine/>

49ers Kyle Shanahan, Robert Saleh commended by Falcons coach

By Cam Inman, San Jose Mercury News

<http://www.mercurynews.com/2017/03/01/49ers-kyle-shanahan-robert-saleh-commended-by-falcons-coach/>

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By Matt Barrows, Sacramento Bee

<http://www.sacbee.com/sports/nfl/san-francisco-49ers/article135781798.html>

Question to Shanahan: Is 49ers' Jimmie Ward a cornerback or safety?

By Matt Barrows, Sacramento Bee

<http://www.sacbee.com/sports/nfl/san-francisco-49ers/article135765668.html>

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By Matt Maiocco, CSNBayArea.com

<http://www.csnbayarea.com/49ers/falcons-coach-quinn-49ers-offense-defense-good-hands>

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By Matt Maiocco, CSNBayArea.com

<http://www.csnbayarea.com/49ers/report-kaepernicks-new-agents-inform-teams-he-will-opt-out>

49ERS HAVE BLANK CANVAS AT QB POSITION ENTERING 2017 SIGNING PERIOD

By Matt Maiocco, CSNBayArea.com

<http://www.csnbayarea.com/49ers/49ers-have-blank-canvas-qb-position-entering-2017-signing-period>

SHANAHAN NOT CLOSING DOOR ON KAEPERNICK'S RETURN TO 49ERS

By Matt Maiocco, CSNBayArea.com

<http://www.csnbayarea.com/49ers/shanahan-not-closing-door-kaepernicks-return-49ers>

SHANAHAN: 49ERS UNDECIDED WHETHER WARD IS A SAFETY OR CORNER

By Matt Maiocco, CSNBayArea.com

<http://www.csnbayarea.com/49ers/shanahan-49ers-undecided-whether-ward-safety-or-corner>

With Colin Kaepernick headed toward free agency, 49ers begin anew at QB

By Nick Wagoner, ESPN.com

http://www.espn.com/blog/san-francisco-49ers/post/_/id/23794/with-colin-kaepernick-headed-toward-free-agency-49ers-begin-anew-at-quarterback

With Phil Dawson's future in doubt, 49ers could need kicker

By Nick Wagoner, ESPN.com

http://www.espn.com/blog/san-francisco-49ers/post/_/id/23677/with-phil-dawsons-future-in-doubt-49ers-could-need-kicker

2017 NFL free agency: Needs for each NFC team

By Gregg Rosenthal, NFL.com

<http://www.nfl.com/news/story/0ap3000000788621/article/2017-nfl-free-agency-needs-for-each-nfc-team>

National Media

Rams place franchise tag on Trumaine Johnson for second straight year

By Alden Gonzalez, ESPN.com

http://www.espn.com/nfl/story/_/id/18797269/los-angeles-rams-use-franchise-tag-trumaine-johnson-second-year-row

History says Seahawks should avoid once-great Peterson, Charles

By John McGrath, Tacoma News Tribune

<http://www.thenewstribune.com/sports/spt-columns-blogs/john-mcgrath/article135623193.html>

Cardinals turn into treasure hunters at scouting combine

By Kent Somers, The Arizona Republic

<http://www.azcentral.com/story/sports/nfl/cardinals/2017/02/28/cardinals-turn-into-treasure-hunters-scouting-combine/98489020/>

John Harbaugh says Ravens won't use franchise tag on Brandon Williams

By Jeff Zrebiec, Baltimore Sun

<http://www.baltimoresun.com/sports/ravens/ravens-insider/bal-john-harbaugh-says-ravens-won-t-use-franchise-tag-on-brandon-williams-20170301-story.html>

Kyle Williams will be back with Bills in 2017

By Jay Skurski, Buffalo News

<http://buffalonews.com/2017/03/01/kyle-williams-will-back-bills-2017/>

Thompson takes center stage at combine

By Michael Cohen, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

<http://www.jsonline.com/story/sports/nfl/packers/2017/02/28/thompson-takes-center-stage-combine/98525428/>

Local Clips – Full Version

5 Notes from Kyle Shanahan's Combine Press Conference

By Joe Fann, 49ers.com

INDIANAPOLIS – Kyle Shanahan held court for nearly 20 minutes on Wednesday during his press conference at the 2017 NFL Scouting Combine. The San Francisco 49ers head coach was peppered with questions regarding his current roster, his coaching staff and his desire to be his own offensive coordinator.

Here are the most important notes from the media session, boiled down “Ninersfeed” style.

1. Many analysts see wide receiver as a position of need for the 49ers. Shanahan shared his belief that San Francisco has quality receiving options, but added that there will be new faces added to the roster.

“I feel like we’ve got a bunch of good players who we feel like we can compete with,” Shanahan said. “We know we’ve got to add some, too. We’re going to add as many as we can to help our roster. We’re going to add some competition.”

2. Shanahan explained why Robert Saleh was his choice for defensive coordinator. The two spent four years together with the Houston Texans for 2006-09. San Francisco’s head coach also confirmed that Saleh will implement a Seattle-esque defensive scheme with a 4-3 base that features plenty of Cover 3 in the secondary.

“I know the path he’s taken, and the people he’s been around,” Shanahan said. “I know how valuable he was to Pete Carroll’s staff in Seattle. I know how valuable he was to Gus Bradley’s staff in Jacksonville. Saleh is a very smart guy who can understand any scheme. The Seattle-type defense is a scheme I respect a lot that’s tough to go against.

“Knowing Saleh was a possibility (as a DC), with what I knew of him as a man and what scheme he wants to run, made it an easy decision.”

3. Carlos Hyde was one of the few players that Shanahan touched on specifically. The coach expects that Hyde will remain San Francisco’s top back in 2017.

“I see Carlos being our back,” Shanahan said. “I was a fan of him coming out of college. I don’t think he’s a finished product. I think he’s got a lot more to his game, and I look forward to us bringing that out.

“Carlos was a great running back in college, and he’s already put some great stuff on tape in the NFL. That’s why I look forward to having him and working with him.”

4. Shanahan also shared his admiration for new running backs coach Bobby Turner. The two have worked together since Shanahan became the offensive coordinator of the Washington Redskins in 2010.

“Bobby is a guy who I respect as much as anyone I’ve ever been around,” Shanahan said. “He’s been a longtime running backs coach, and he’s coached a lot of great ones. He’s coached all different types of guys – different styles. He’s found some guys high in the draft, and he’s found some guys low in the draft. Bobby was born to be a running backs coach.”

5. San Francisco’s lack of an offensive coordinator continues to be a topic of conversation. Shanahan explained the rationale behind being his own play-caller for the 49ers offense.

“I think it’s important that you keep doing the stuff that got you the job. I enjoyed being a coordinator, and I enjoy calling plays. I will always do that if I feel that it helps the team.”

Dan Quinn: Kyle Shanahan is a 'Fantastic Coach'

By Joe Fann, 49ers.com

INDIANAPOLIS – Day 1 of the NFL Scouting Combine is spent with a rotation of press conferences featuring head coaches and general managers from around the league. Atlanta Falcons head coach Dan Quinn was one of the first to take the podium and meet with the media on Wednesday.

Among the topics covered by Quinn was his relationship with Kyle Shanahan. The San Francisco 49ers new head coach spent the last two seasons as Quinn's offensive coordinator, turning Atlanta into a high-scoring juggernaut.

You've seen the numbers before: 33.8 points per game, 415.8 yards per game, 58 total touchdowns and 17 pass plays of more than 40 yards during the 2016 regular season.

Quinn was very complimentary of his former colleague, detailing what makes Shanahan so unique as an offensive mind.

"They're getting a fantastic coach," Quinn began. "I've said this before, he is one of the few coaches who has a full understanding – run game, offensive line, quarterback play, receiver play. You could put him into any spot on the offense and he'd be able to coach that position. That's a rare trait. There are some guys who are so strong in one area, but he's got a real understanding of how to do the whole thing."

It was reported prior to the Super Bowl LI that Shanahan had informed Quinn of his interest in the 49ers opening. Quinn responded with nothing but words of encouragement.

"I was like, 'Hey man, do it your way,'" Quinn recalled the conversation. "'You've got a great background in different systems – whether it was in Houston, Washington, Cleveland or here. Take those experiences, let it rip in your own way, and you'll do great. I'm here if you need me, but make sure you have a blast. What else would you rather be doing?'"

Quinn has since replaced Shanahan with former USC head coach and Alabama offensive coordinator Steve Sarkisian.

The challenge in Shanahan's new role will be to replicate his success with the Falcons without the likes of Matt Ryan and Julio Jones. It will be a process, but the benchmark remains all the same.

"I never like to see anyone leave the staff, but what I can appreciate is a guy taking a risk to say, 'Hey, I want to go and give this a shot and go battle for it,'" Quinn said. "I'm excited for him and the opportunity he has there."

49ers: Safety? CB? Ward's position in question

By Eric Branch, San Francisco Chronicle

INDIANAPOLIS — Jimmie Ward was a safety at Northern Illinois and he's been a cornerback during his three-year NFL career.

Now, in 2017, Ward's position is ... yet to be determined.

Head coach Kyle Shanahan said Wednesday the 49ers haven't decided where to play the versatile defensive back in their new 4-3 scheme.

"I'm not sure yet," Shanahan said. "That's definitely stuff we've discussed because I know he's capable of doing both. So, it's more when we know our whole roster, options in the draft, free agency, what's going to be best for us. But when you have a guy who is capable of playing both, it gives you some freedom, which is nice."

The 49ers' starting safeties the past three seasons have been Eric Reid and Antoine Bethea, who will turn 33 in July and is scheduled to count \$7 million against the salary cap.

The 4-3 calls for a ball-hawking safety with sideline-to-sideline range, which the Seahawks have in Earl Thomas.

Shanahan said general manager John Lynch would probably weigh in on Ward's position this season. Lynch, a former NFL safety, was a nine-time Pro Bowl pick during his 15-year career.

"That's probably his position of choice to talk about," Shanahan said. "I would love to hear John's opinion. It's something we'll all be talking about a lot."

49ers' Shanahan: 'We don't have an attachment to Kap'

By Eric Branch, San Francisco Chronicle

INDIANAPOLIS - When Colin Kaepernick officially opts out of contract Thursday, he'll morph from 49ers quarterback to a free agent that new head coach Kyle Shanahan will evaluate dispassionately.

Noting that he doesn't have a previous relationship with Kaepernick, Shanahan said today at the NFL combine that the QB will be lumped in with all the 49ers' other options at the position. Shanahan, general manager John Lynch and Kaepernick met last week, and Kaepernick indicated he planned to opt out.

"He decided to do that and it throws him into the boat that everyone else is in, which makes it easy for us," Shanahan said. "We don't have an attachment to Kap. We look at him just like all the other guys that I'm looking at. It was good to get to meet him. And talk to him. But besides that, it's like looking at film of him like everyone else."

Shanahan noted the 49ers would have needed to make a decision about whether to keep Kaepernick if he didn't opt out. The 49ers presumably would have released him rather than pay him a \$14.5 million base salary in 2017.

"I won't close any door," Shanahan said. "We're going to look for who we think gives us the best chance to win. And who is going to help us the most. And Kap is one of those guys that's available."

Shanahan was asked if Kaepernick was a fit for his offense. He noted he once tailored an offense to fit Washington's Robert Griffin III, whose dual-threat skills are similar to those of Kaepernick.

"What Kap did to go to the Super Bowl, I ran similar offense in 2012," Shanahan said. "And that's the type of stuff that probably gives him the best chance to be successful. But you adjust to anybody. Would we do the exact same stuff for him that we did in Atlanta? That's different than what I did for other people. So with Kap's skill set, if he was your guy, you would adjust to him."

The 49ers will presumably explore trades for Washington's Kirk Cousins, 28, and New England's Jimmy Garoppolo, 25. According to national reports, neither Washington nor New England plans to trade those QBs, but Shanahan suggested the 49ers will at least test the waters, while noting he'd read the recent reports.

"I don't know what that means," Shanahan said. "You look into every possibility. The teams will talk. I take everything in this league with a grain of salt. I read stuff, but you've got to do your homework and you've got to look into everything."

The 49ers could potentially land Cousins or Garoppolo in 2018 without giving up draft-pick compensation. It will be prohibitively expensive for Washington to place the franchise tag on Cousins for a third straight year, and the two parties have been unable to agree on a long-term contract. Meanwhile, Garoppolo is entering the final year of his contract.

Shanahan was posed the question: Would it be prudent for the 49ers to wait a year so they wouldn't have to surrender draft picks for a QB?

"That's a very good point you just made," Shanahan said, smiling. "All that comes into play. Yes, you have targets of people you want. But you have to be smart and value your initial needs to the organizational needs: The immediate future and the long haul. You're always thinking of how to win now, but that can never be at the expense of the future."

Seahawks GM learned from 49ers' John Lynch years ago

By Eric Branch, San Francisco Chronicle

INDIANAPOLIS - John Lynch didn't become an NFL executive until about four weeks ago.

John Schneider has been the Seahawks general manager since 2010 and has spent 20 seasons in an NFL front office.

Despite their vast gaps in experience, however, Schneider was learning from the 49ers new general manager years ago. Today at the NFL combine, Schneider said he mined Lynch for information about the safety position in 2012. Their meeting came before the Seahawks played the Bills in Toronto, a game Lynch covered as a FOX analyst.

Lynch, a former NFL safety, made nine Pro Bowls in his 15-year career and is a four-time Hall of Fame finalist.

"I was able to sit down with him and write down a ton of notes - pick his brain about the safety position," Schneider said. "The safety position is one the harder positions in college football to evaluate. So it was great for me to be able to sit down with him and just kind of talk through 'What are you thinking.' And just get his thoughts on everything. So I got all my notes down."

The conversation didn't stop there. Schneider and Lynch continued talking in recent years when Lynch covered Seattle's games.

"He kept doing the TV thing and he'd come around and we were just able to talk," Schneider said. "Talk ball. He's just a football guy -- a football junkie. A really good person and, obviously, they're getting a great leader."

Schneider admits he didn't expect his friend to become his NFC West rival. Despite their connection, Schneider had no inkling Lynch would join an NFL front office.

"It's a pretty good job on TV I guess, you'd think, right?" Schneider said. "I was (surprised) at first, but then when you sit back and look at it -- the guy is the ultimate competitor. I would think he missed the team aspect. Working with other people. The self-sacrifice. Everything that goes into having the feeling of putting some together. Accomplishing a great goal."

Asked about 49ers head coach Kyle Shanahan, Schneider referenced Seattle's 36-22 playoff loss to Atlanta in January. Shanahan was the Falcons offensive coordinator.

"Are you trying to rub it in -- the divisional loss?" he said. "That's cool. No, he's a phenomenal play-caller. I don't know him personally. Just some of my good friends that know him brag about how his football mind is off the charts."

49ers Kyle Shanahan says Colin Kaepernick in same boat as other free agents

By Cam Inman, San Jose Mercury News

Kyle Shanahan wasn't surprised to hear Wednesday that Colin Kaepernick is opting out of his 49ers contract to hit free agency, a scenario they discussed last week.

"He decided to do that, and now it throws him in the boat that everyone else is in, which makes it easy for us," Shanahan said Wednesday at the NFL scouting combine.

With Shanahan taking over as coach and John Lynch as general manager, the new regime does not feel compelled to treat Kaepernick differently than any other potential solution to their quarterback quandary.

"We don't have an attachment to Kap," Shanahan said. "We look at him just like all the other guys we're looking at. It was good to get to meet him and talk to him. Besides that, I'm looking at him on film just like everyone else."

Shanahan is looking at a roster that has no quarterbacks under contract for 2017 once Kaepernick officially opts out of his contract, which he can do as early as Thursday to hit free agency by March 7. NFL Network first reported Wednesday about Kaepernick's intention to test the market for the first time in his six-year career, and he'll do so with new agents in Jeff Nalley and Sean Kiernan of Select Sports Group.

Also heading for free agency are the 49ers other three quarterbacks from last season: Blaine Gabbert, Christian Ponder and Thad Lewis.

So where will Shanahan and the 49ers focus their search? It's an all-of-the-above situation, with Shanahan citing free agency, trade possibilities, draft prospects and, yes, those so-called incumbents from last season.

"I'm very eager. We're all very eager," Shanahan said of finding a quarterback. "But that was important to us coming here, that we're going to make the right decision. We're not going to do something just because we're eager."

"Everybody wants their quarterback and not have to worry about that. We also want to make sure the guy you want is there. A lot of bad decisions are made for people just eager. That's something important for John and myself coming here we thought we could make decisions, it might not always be the flashiest, but we think it's the best for the organization. That's how you stay out of trouble."

A defining characteristic Shanahan seeks is a quarterback's ability to process a lot, such as how quick they react in the pocket and if they watch the pass rush.

At the combine, Shanahan said he likely won't have draft prospects study film with him simply because of time constraints. "You really just want to get to know the guys," Shanahan said.

Film, however, is "the most important" factor in analyzing players, Shanahan added. "There's a lot of pressure in this business, especially on the quarterback position. How are they going to handle pressure?"

How are they going to handle adversity. No matter how good you are, everybody is going to tell you how bad you are sometime during the year. All that stuff goes into play when you talk about, to me, one of the most scrutinized positions in sports.”

— Shanahan doesn’t have a go-to question for draft prospects. Instead, he said: “I try to get a guy to talk about himself. What do they like to do at night? Do you like to go out to bars? Do you have a drink? Do you hang out with your family? I try my hardest just to get a guy to talk like a human, because they don’t for the first 12 minutes, then you have 2 1/2 less and you finally see a guy be a normal person. They’re all so schooled up that it’s like talking to a robot. I don’t try to do much football stuff. We’ll do that later.”

— A key component of the revised defensive scheme will be to deploy a top-notch safety in the cover-3 scheme. A related dilemma is how the 49ers will use Jimmie Ward, who was converted from safety to play nickel back his first two seasons and then right cornerback last season.

“That’s definitely stuff we’ve discussed, because I know he’s capable of doing both,” Shanahan said.

49ers Kyle Shanahan, Robert Saleh commended by Falcons coach

By Cam Inman, San Jose Mercury News

While stating his Atlanta Falcons must “own” their Super Bowl mistakes, coach Dan Quinn had nothing but praise Wednesday for his former offensive coordinator, Kyle Shanahan, now the 49ers coach.

Said Quinn: “I never like to see anybody leave the staff. But what I can appreciate is a guy taking a risk, to say, ‘Hey, I want to give this a shot and go battle for it.’ I’m excited for him and the opportunity he has there.”

Shanahan brings with him widespread, offensive fortitude, Quinn said.

“He is one of the few coaches that has a full understanding: run game, offensive line, quarterback play, receiver play,” Quinn added. “You could put him into any spot on the offense and he’d be able to coach that position. That’s a rare trait.

“There are some guys who are strong in one area — might be in the run game or pass game. But he’s got a really clear understanding of how to do the whole thing.”

Quinn defended the Falcons’ aggressive approach — such as Shanahan’s debated fourth-quarter calls for passing plays — even though they blew a 28-3 lead and lost 34-28 in overtime to the New England Patriots in Super Bowl LI.

Quinn also spoke highly of the 49ers new defensive coordinator, Robert Saleh, who worked with Quinn on the Seattle Seahawks defensive staff in 2013.

“He’s really smart, No. 1,” Quinn said of Saleh. “He has a really good and rock solid understanding of the principles of playing three-deep and man-to-man.

“He’s an excellent teacher, and as a coordinator that’s a really important thing, especially when you’re first putting the whole thing together so everyone has a clear understanding and they’re all on the same page. So I think he’ll do a fantastic job.”

Quinn has had nearly a month to mourn an epic Super Bowl defeat, in which the Falcons blew a 28-3 lead and lost 34-28 in overtime to the New England Patriots.

“We got our asses knocked down on the canvas,” he said. “You get back up. You go fight again.”

Shanahan: 49ers will treat Kaepernick like other free-agent QBs

By Matt Barrows, Sacramento Bee

INDIANAPOLIS -- Kyle Shanahan said he and the 49ers have no "attachment" to incumbent starting quarterback Colin Kaepernick and will analyze him like every other free agent, trade target and draft pick they are considering.

That's because Kaepernick is expected to opt out of his current 49ers contract, perhaps as soon as Thursday. That would put him in a position to be a free agent for the first time in his career when the new NFL year begins March 9. It also would leave the 49ers with no quarterbacks signed for the 2017 season.

"We don't have an attachment to Kap," Shanahan said. "We look at him just like all the other guys we're looking at. It was good to get to meet him and talk to him. But besides that, we're looking at him on film just like everyone else."

That Kaepernick, 29, will enter free agency is not a surprise.

He indicated as much to Shanahan and general manager John Lynch during a meeting last week in Santa Clara. Earlier this week, he hired new agents, Jeff Nalley and Sean Kiernan of Select Sports Group, a move he foreshadowed last year when he restructured his contract so that he would have the option of free agency. Nalley handled that deal.

Shanahan said he and Lynch were blunt during their meeting with Kaepernick: There's a chance he could return to the 49ers under a new deal -- "I won't close any door," Shanahan said -- but that the team is not making any commitment to him.

"We just told him straight up, 'We're throwing you into the pool with all the other guys,'" he said. "We've got to evaluate all the free agents, the trade possibilities and the draft. And whatever we think is the best scenario, that's the way we're going to go."

Three other quarterbacks who were with the 49ers in 2016 -- Blaine Gabbert, Christian Ponder and Thaddeus Lewis -- are scheduled to become unrestricted free agents next month.

Earlier in the week, Washington placed the exclusive franchise tag on one possible trade target, Kirk Cousins, while another, Jimmy Garoppolo, reportedly won't be traded by New England.

Shanahan said the team still would do its homework on any quarterbacks who could be available in a trade. But when it was noted that Garoppolo and Cousins likely would be unrestricted free agents next year and that the 49ers might be able to attain them without giving up any draft picks, Shanahan smiled and said, "That's a very good point."

Kaepernick will join a free agency class that includes two quarterbacks, Atlanta's Matt Schaub and Chicago's Brian Hoyer, that Shanahan has worked with in the past.

"Everyone tries to get guys that have been in their offense before," Shanahan said. "But that's not a requirement. That's just a bonus. You get the best guys available. If they've been in your offense before -- great."

Kaepernick was unhappy with the 49ers during his injury-riddled 2015 season and asked to be traded earlier in 2016. But one of the sources of that irritation, general manager Trent Baalke, is no longer with the team while Kaepernick has repaired his relationship with another, chief strategy officer Paraag Marathe. Sources close to Kaepernick have said he is "very open" to returning to the team for the upcoming season.

He started 11 games last year and seemed to get better as the year went on. He finished with 16 touchdown passes against four interceptions and a 90.7 passer rating. That was his highest mark since the 2013 season (91.6), which ended with a 49ers loss to Seattle in the NFC championship game.

Shanahan said Kaepernick would be most effective in an offense similar to the one Shanahan ran in Washington in 2012 when Robert Griffin III was the quarterback. A rookie that year, Griffin finished the regular season with 3,200 passing yards, a 102.4 passer rating and another 815 yards on the ground.

"That probably gives him the best chance to be successful," Shanahan said Kaepernick.

Question to Shanahan: Is 49ers' Jimmie Ward a cornerback or safety?

By Matt Barrows, Sacramento Bee

INDIANAPOLIS -- Kyle Shanahan is keeping his options open as to one the big questions about the 49ers' new defense: Is former first-round draft pick Jimmie Ward a cornerback or a safety?

"I'm not sure yet," Shanahan said Wednesday. "But that's definitely the subject of discussion. Because I know he's capable of doing both."

That Ward, a college safety who was a starter at cornerback last year, could be switching back to safety underscores how important the position is in the 49ers' new defense. The team may see Ward in the mold of Seahawks Pro Bowler Earl Thomas, a free-ranging safety with the instincts and athleticism to cover ground deep down field in the passing game and the aggressive nature to wallop ball carriers in the running game.

"Yes, we're going to play a lot of Cover 3" defense like Seattle's, Shanahan said. "When you play a lot of Cover 3, you do want that guy in the middle of the field who's a very good player."

He said Ward's versatility gives the 49ers "freedom" when it comes to free agency and the draft.

The 49ers selected Ward, 25, out of Northern Illinois with the 30th overall selection in 2014. He played the role of nickel cornerback and backup safety his first two years in the league before being moved to outside cornerback last season. He remained in that role even after the 49ers' starting free safety, Eric Reid, tore his biceps midway through the season and was lost for the year.

"We think Jimmie's our best corner," head coach Chip Kelly said at the time. The defensive backs coach who served under Kelly last year, Jeff Hafley, will remain in that position this year.

Ward missed half his rookie season with a stress fracture in his foot. Last year he missed three games with a quadriceps injury before being placed on injured reserve in mid December with a shoulder issue and missing the last two games. He also suffered a concussion Nov. 20 against New England but did not miss the following week's game at Miami.

The 49ers have several other safeties under contract for next season, including Reid, 25, Antoine Bethea, 32, and Jaquiski Tartt, 25. If Ward played free safety, it's likely that Reid or Tartt would take over the strong safety role that big-hitting Kam Chancellor plays in Seattle.

A move to safety by Ward would make Tramaine Brock and Rashard Robinson the most likely starters at cornerback with Keith Reaser, Dontae Johnson and Prince Charles Iworah other options. At nickel, Will Redmond and newcomer K'Waun Williams are the likeliest candidates.

FALCONS COACH QUINN: 49ERS' OFFENSE, DEFENSE IN GOOD HANDS

By Matt Maiocco, CSNBayArea.com

INDIANAPOLIS – Atlanta Falcons coach Dan Quinn believes the 49ers' offense and defense have capable people charge.

Quinn, speaking Wednesday at the NFL Scouting Combine, has worked on the same staffs with 49ers head coach Kyle Shanahan, who will run the team's offense, and defensive coordinator Robert Saleh.

Saleh, who served as Jacksonville's linebackers coach the past three season, spent one season on the Seattle staff when Quinn was defensive coordinator.

"He has a really good and rock-solid understanding of the principles of playing three-deep and man-to-man," Quinn said of Saleh. "He's an excellent teacher. And, I think, as a coordinator that's a really important thing, especially when you're first putting the whole thing together so everyone has a real clear understanding and they're all on the same page. So I think he'll do a fantastic job."

Shanahan did not hire an assistant to serve under the title of offensive coordinator. Instead, he will assume those duties with the 49ers while also overseeing the entire operation as head coach. Shanahan has been an NFL offensive coordinator for eight seasons, including the past two under Quinn with the Falcons.

"He is one of the few coaches who has a full understanding – run game, offensive line, quarterback play, receiver play," Quinn said of Shanahan. "You could put him into any spot on the offense, and he'll be able to coach that position. That's a rare trait. There are some guys who are so strong in one area. It might be in the run game or so strong in the pass game. But he has a really clear understanding how to do the whole thing.

"I never like to see anybody leave the staff, but what I can appreciate is a guy taking a risk to say, 'Hey, I want to give this a shot and go battle for it.' So I'm excited for him and the opportunity he has there."

REPORT: KAEPERNICK'S NEW AGENTS INFORM TEAMS HE WILL OPT OUT

By Matt Maiocco, CSNBayArea.com

INDIANAPOLIS – Quarterback Colin Kaepernick will become a free agent for the first time in his six-year NFL career.

Kaepernick's new agents, Jeff Nalley and Sean Kiernan, informed all 32 teams on Tuesday that he will, as expected, opt out of his contract to become a free agent, the NFL Network reported.

Kaepernick was scheduled to make \$14.9 million in salary and bonuses for the 2017 season. If he did not opt out, the 49ers were expected to release him to avoid being on the hook for his scheduled pay.

The 49ers do not have a quarterback under contract for the upcoming season. Kaepernick is coming off his best season since 2013 – his first full season as the starter. Kaepernick completed 59.2 percent of his passes with 16 touchdowns and four interceptions. Quarterback ranks as the team's top need for the upcoming season.

"Do we have some places – probably the ultimate position, quarterback – where we need to improve? Absolutely," 49ers general manager John Lynch said on KNBR last week. "And we're committed to doing that."

Blaine Gabbert, Christian Ponder and Thad Lewis are also scheduled to be free agents.

49ERS HAVE BLANK CANVAS AT QB POSITION ENTERING 2017 SIGNING PERIOD

By Matt Maiocco, CSNBayArea.com

INDIANAPOLIS – With the expected formality of Colin Kaepernick opting out of his contract, the 49ers have no quarterbacks lined up for the 2017 season.

Coach Kyle Shanahan said he is lumping free-agents-to-be Kaepernick, Blaine Gabbert, Christian Ponder and Thad Lewis into the same category with all the other quarterbacks who will be available for the 49ers this offseason.

“We don’t have anybody on our roster, so I throw them all in the category of everybody else who’s a free agent and the possibilities going into the draft,” Shanahan said Wednesday at the NFL Scouting Combine.

“Those are the guys we’re comparing who you see in the free-agent market, who there is in the draft and trade possibilities and guys on the roster last year is who we’re picking from.”

The free-agent signing period begins on March 9. Over the next eight weeks, Shanahan will also be busy evaluating the crop of rookie quarterbacks – a process he is just now beginning, he said.

“I’ll spend this week getting to know these guys and watching a lot of tape back in the hotel room and have an idea of who everybody is, just from the interview process,” Shanahan said.

SHANAHAN NOT CLOSING DOOR ON KAEPERNICK’S RETURN TO 49ERS

By Matt Maiocco, CSNBayArea.com

INDIANAPOLIS – The 49ers’ organization has gotten a fresh start with a new coach and a new general manager.

And the team’s decision-makers are also starting with a new set of eyes to chart the course for the team’s future at quarterback.

“I won’t close any door,” Shanahan said of the possibility of re-signing Colin Kaepernick, who is expected to opt out of his contract and become an unrestricted free agent.

“We’re going to look for who we think gives us the best chance to win and who can help us the most. Kap is one of those guys that’s available.”

Kaepernick’s decision to become an unrestricted free agent is a formality that will not force the 49ers to release him in order to avoid his scheduled \$14.9 million pay for the 2017 season.

“There had to be a decision made on Kap, and mainly he made that decision,” Shanahan said Wednesday at the NFL Scouting Combine. “If he wouldn’t have, we would’ve had to make a decision. But by that happening, it throws him into the boat with everyone else. It’s not that you’re deciding to part ways or not, he decided to do that. It throws him into the boat everybody else is in, which makes it easy for us.

“We don’t have an attachment to Kap. We look at him just like all the other guys that I’m looking at. It was good to get to meet him, talk to him, but besides that, we’re looking at him on film like everybody else.”

Kaepernick met last week with Shanahan and general manager John Lynch at team headquarters in Santa Clara. During that conversation, Kaepernick intimated he would opt out of his contract, Shanahan said. The 49ers told Kaepernick he would be evaluated like all the other quarterback options this offseason.

"We told him straight up, we're throwing you into the pool with all the other guys," Shanahan said. "We have to evaluate all the free agents, the trade possibilities and the draft, and whatever we think the best scenario is the way we're going to go. But Kap's in that. He's involved in that. Just like anybody else."

Kaepernick started 11 games for the 49ers last season and posted his best statistical season since 2013. Kaepernick completed 59.2 percent of his pass attempts with 16 touchdowns, four interceptions and a passer rating of 90.7. He also rushed for 468 yards.

Shanahan said there are no issues with designing an offense that accentuates Kaepernick's strengths.

"What Kap did to go to the Super Bowl, he ran similar offense to what we did in 2012," Shanahan said, referring to the Washington offense during Robert Griffin's rookie season. "I think that's the kind of stuff that gives him the best chance to be successful."

"You'll adjust to anybody. Would I do the exact same stuff I've done in Atlanta? That's different than what I've done for other people. So it's going to always change. But with Kap's skillset, if he was your guy, you'd adjust to him."

The 49ers have discussed all the quarterback options, including trades, Shanahan said. Washington's Kirk Cousins and New England's Jimmy Garoppolo might not be available in trades. Even if they were, the price would be exorbitant.

But if the 49ers were to wait a season, it's possible they could be available as free agents and the 49ers would not have to surrender draft picks.

"All that comes into play," Shanahan said. "Yes, you have targets of people you want, but you have to be smart and value your initial needs with the organizational needs in the immediate future and the long haul. You're always thinking about how to win now, but that can never be at the expense of the future, too."

While the 49ers feel urgency to fill their need at quarterback, Shanahan said the decision must be calculated to provide the best long-term results for the organization. Both Shanahan and general manager John Lynch are on six-year contracts, which implies there will be patience to allow them to build.

"I'm very eager," Shanahan said. "We're all very eager. But it's important, coming here, we're also going to make the right decision. We're not going to do something just because we're eager. Everybody wants your quarterback and you want to not have to worry about that. But you also have to make sure the guy that you want is there. A lot of bad decisions are made by people who are just eager."

"John and myself came here and we knew we could make decisions might not always be the flashiest, but we truly think it's best for our organization. That's how you stay out of trouble."

SHANAHAN: 49ERS UNDECIDED WHETHER WARD IS A SAFETY OR CORNER

By Matt Maiocco, CSNBayArea.com

INDIANAPOLIS – Jimmie Ward made the transition from reserve safety to starting cornerback last season.

Where he lines up for the 49ers in 2017 has yet to be determined, coach Kyle Shanahan said on Wednesday.

"I'm not sure, yet," Shanahan said at the NFL Scouting Combine. "That's something that'll be discussed because I know that he's capable of doing both. When we know our whole roster and our options in the

draft, free agency, what's he going to be best for us. But when you have a guy who's capable of playing both, it gives you some freedom, which is nice.

"Any time you have a guy versatile like him, as a coach, it gives you more options. You just have to make sure whatever options you choose, you're doing best by him and best by the team, also."

Ward started eight games in his first two NFL seasons as the team's nickel back after being a first-round draft pick in 2014. Last offseason, the 49ers moved him to cornerback, where he started 10 games. Ward missed three games with a quadriceps injury and was placed on injured reserve late in the season due to a shoulder injury.

He could serve as a key piece in the 49ers' new scheme under defensive coordinator Robert Saleh.

"When you play a lot of cover 3, you do want that guy in the middle of the field to be very good player," Shanahan said.

"When we look at overall roster and how it looks after free agency and the draft, and get Jimmie in and talk to him, that'll help us make our decision."

Shanahan said general manager John Lynch will also be involved in the decision. Lynch was a nine-time Pro Bowl performer as a safety with Tampa Bay and Denver. He was a Hall of Fame finalist.

"I'd love to hear John's opinion, and that'll be something we're all talking about," Shanahan said.

With Colin Kaepernick headed toward free agency, 49ers begin anew at QB

By Nick Wagoner, ESPN.com

SANTA CLARA, Calif. -- From the moment quarterback Colin Kaepernick signed a reworked deal with the San Francisco 49ers that allowed him to opt out of the final year, there was never any doubt that he was going to take advantage.

Now that Kaepernick and his new representatives have informed all 32 NFL teams that he will be testing free agency for the first time in his career, we no longer have to deal in hypotheticals. Kaepernick will examine all options for his next NFL home.

For the 49ers and coach Kyle Shanahan, the quarterback search is officially on. With Kaepernick set to opt out, the Niners no longer have a single quarterback under contract for 2017. When free agency begins on March 9, Kaepernick will join Blaine Gabbert, Thad Lewis and Christian Ponder as 2016 Niners quarterbacks on the market.

With Shanahan and general manager John Lynch in place, there's a real chance that none of those quarterbacks return to San Francisco. None of them have experience in Shanahan's system and it's fair to wonder whether any of them fit the mold of what Shanahan is looking for at the position. It's worth noting Kaepernick is open to a return to the Niners, though it would have to come at a reduced price and probably isn't an option until he examines other possibilities.

Although Shanahan has had success at various NFL stops with different types of quarterbacks, he hasn't always had a major say in who his quarterback was going to be. Now, as a first-year head coach, Shanahan will be able to have ultimate input in what the 49ers' quarterback room will look like.

That could mean making a trade and signing two free agents. It could mean signing three free agents. It could mean a free agent and two draft picks. The permutations are many but regardless of how it plays out, the first order of business for Shanahan is finding at least one quarterback who represents an upgrade over Kaepernick.

If indeed the Niners and Kaepernick's relationship has come to an end, it's incumbent on the 49ers to do better. That's true of any position when you allow a player to leave but especially at quarterback. On the surface, a look at Kaepernick's recent production might indicate that finding someone better shouldn't be that difficult, but it's not that simple.

In 2016, Kaepernick started 11 games and had his best statistical season since 2013. The 49ers were just 1-10 in his starts, but his 90.7 passer rating was his best in three years and put him at No. 17 among quarterbacks in the league. In itself, that production is middle of the pack, but it was still a dramatic improvement over 2015 when he was 31st. He also had the sixth best touchdown to interception ratio in the league and was first among quarterbacks in yards per carry.

That's not to say there wasn't room for improvement, but it was still better than a chunk of the other starting signal-callers around the league. So, as the Niners' search for quarterback solutions marches on, that performance should serve as a baseline for what the Niners hope to get from their next starter.

With Washington placing the exclusive franchise tag on Kirk Cousins on Tuesday, that option seems to be off the table, at least for this year, barring the type of outrageous trade offer the 49ers are unlikely to make. Wednesday also brought the news that the New England Patriots intend to hold on to Jimmy Garoppolo rather than trade him, thus removing another potential immediate option.

So, where do the 49ers go from here? Veteran Matt Schaub, who worked with Shanahan in Houston and Atlanta, seems like the likeliest option as a veteran who can help install Shanahan's offense and serve as a backup or even a short-term starter in a pinch. Schaub is also set to be a free agent on March 9.

Other quarterbacks expected to be available include Chicago's Jay Cutler and Brian Hoyer and Tampa Bay's Mike Glennon. Like Schaub, Hoyer has experience in Shanahan's offense from their time together in Cleveland. None are likely to be a long-term answer, but we already know the Niners are willing to be patient to find that guy.

This week, Shanahan and Co. are in Indianapolis with the rest of the NFL world getting a closer look at this year's crop of draft prospects. There's no doubt quarterbacks like North Carolina's Mitch Trubisky, Clemson's Deshaun Watson, Notre Dame's DeShone Kizer, Texas Tech's Patrick Mahomes and others will garner much of the team's attention over the next few days.

As is always the case with draft prospects, there are no sure things. But if nothing else, with a clean quarterback slate in front of him, Shanahan can take the canvas and make it look however he wants -- with or without Kaepernick.

With Phil Dawson's future in doubt, 49ers could need kicker

By Nick Wagoner, ESPN.com

SANTA CLARA, Calif. -- The free-agent market is scheduled to open March 9 and teams may begin negotiations with those poised to hit the market beginning March 7. We'll count down to that with a position-by-position look at what the San Francisco 49ers have in place, who is set to hit the market, what they might need and who might fit the bill.

Position: Special teams

Under contract: P Bradley Pinion, LS Kyle Nelson

Pending free agents: K Phil Dawson

What's needed: With Pinion and Nelson, the Niners have a reliable duo for those two spots for the foreseeable future, though an uptick in performance from the punt team would be welcome. The real question here is who will be handling the kicking duties in 2017. Dawson indicated after the season that he wanted to sit down and take some time to evaluate his options. There's still the chance he'd be open to returning, or he could potentially look to move to a team that might give him a chance to win before he calls it a career. Latest week, Dawson posted a picture of weights with the caption "Ain't quite done yet," perhaps revealing his intent to keep playing.

Dawson was his usual steady self for most of 2016, though he had a few hiccups near the end of the season. He certainly looked the part of a kicker who can still get the job done should the Niners look to bring him back.

If the 49ers want to explore other options, there are plenty to explore. Restricted free agents Cairo Santos and Brandon McManus were mostly solid as field-goal kickers last season though Santos has had some issues with extra points over the past two years. Assuming they both receive tender offers, the Niners might not be interested in offering what it would take to pry either of them loose.

Among unrestricted free agents, Philadelphia's Caleb Sturgis, Seattle's Steven Hauschka, Los Angeles' Greg Zuerlein and Houston's Nick Novak are among the options who could be available. Hauschka has been strong on field goals but struggled on extra points last season, missing six. Zuerlein has an incredibly strong leg and improved on his accuracy issues in 2016.

As with every position, the 49ers could always opt to address their kicking needs in the draft or with an undrafted free agent. Whether it's re-signing Dawson or creating competition from outside the building, they're going to have to make a move here this offseason.

Possible fits: Cairo Santos (Kansas City/restricted), Brandon McManus (Denver/restricted), Caleb Sturgis (Philadelphia), Steven Hauschka (Seattle), Greg Zuerlein (Los Angeles Rams), Nick Novak (Houston).

2017 NFL free agency: Needs for each NFC team

By Gregg Rosenthal, NFL.com

San Francisco 49ers: Quarterback, wide receiver, edge rusher

New coach Kyle Shanahan and GM John Lynch don't have to be picky. There are few areas on the 49ers' roster that couldn't use refurbishing, although the offensive line and secondary can get by for now. Shanahan was given a six-year contract primarily to fix the passing game, and he's nearly starting from scratch, other than wideout Torrey Smith. San Francisco won't have the luxury of waiting until the draft to find a quarterback, although any pursuit via trade of Kirk Cousins or Jimmy Garoppolo will impact how high they take a signal caller.