

TRANSCRIPTIONS



TE George Kittle
Press Conference – January 16, 2020
San Francisco 49ers

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How would you describe the way your ankle feels?

“I feel fabulous. Thanks for asking.”

What about your ankle?

“I feel fabulous. Thanks for asking.”

How was the weather today? Did it hamper anything?

“No. Definitely don't expect that in California. It was cold and rainy, but it was fun. We made the most of it, and we had an official practice. We did what we needed to do. We got our reps in and ultimately had a good practice.”

You didn't get as many targets as usual against the Vikings, statistically not one of your big days. Can you usually tell going into a game what sort of opportunities will be available to you?

“Oh, yes and no. Based on the game plan, with the plays that [head] coach [Kyle] Shanahan draws up, but there's been games where I didn't think I was going to have a lot and I had 210 yards in a half. It really just depends on how the game goes. I'm not really worried about it. It takes care of itself. It's football.”

The linebackers against the pass might be a weakness of this team. How is the feeling of going for perhaps a big game in your career because you might have a lot of stats and receiving yards, et cetera?

“I mean, stats will take care of themselves. I'm not really worried about anything. I'm just going to go out there and try to play my best football.”

I don't know when the last time you've gone against DB Jimmie Ward in practice, probably training camp, but what makes him good at taking away explosive plays?

“I mean, Jimmie is I think one of the greatest athletes I've ever been on a team with. He's a complete freak of nature. He's incredibly fast. He's incredibly strong. He's smart, and he's incredibly physical, too. He's really an all-around player, and I think we missed a lot the last few years with him being injured. It really hurt our defense. And just the way he plays the game, too, he has so much fun doing it. He's just such a great football

player, and having him out there makes our defense a lot better, and the last time we did go one-on-one, I did beat him, so it's okay.”

If you think about it, you guys essentially created a year of QB Jimmy Garoppolo's experience for DL Nick Bosa, who just popped up at the No. 2 overall pick. What kind of trade did that turn out to be for the franchise?

“Nick's not bad. I think he's done a pretty good so far that he's been here. He's probably going to just give the NFC West fits for the next 10 years, and I'm really happy that he's on my team and I don't have to go against him every Sunday.”

Kyle has talked about his natural inclination as a play caller, check it around, but obviously he's very committed to the run game, especially Saturday when you just kind of pounded the defense into submission. I assume you enjoy that, but how much as an offense do you appreciate his ability to do it both ways?

“I mean, coach Shanahan does such a great job. Every pass play we have gets set up by our run game. Luckily, this past week we didn't have to set up the pass game at all because our run game was so efficient. But we definitely had plays out there that we just didn't call because we didn't need to call them. When you're running for four yards a carry and you rush it 47 times, you don't really need to throw the ball. So what Coach Shanahan does, the balance is always there, but he's never afraid to run power on back-to-back plays to score a touchdown. We ran on 3rd and 2 for a 10-yard gain and then we scored on the exact same play, just flipped it the next play. I mean, it's just fun to be part of an offense like that where, yeah, we have all the fun stuff like we did versus the Saints, the passes, [WR] Emmanuel's [Sanders] pass to [RB] Raheem [Mostert], but we'll run power down your throat if we want to.”

Going all the way back to college, how did you develop as a blocker, and when did you realize that you kind of liked it, and two, you were pretty good at it?

“Well, I mean, at Iowa you don't play tight end there unless you can run block, and that was something I was told as a freshman. So, I was like, ‘Well, I want to play, so I might as well take some pride in this.’ Every single day we'd do blocks and nine-on-seven for periods on end. If you don't enjoy it, then you're just going to be miserable, and so I just enjoyed it, and now I'm very prideful in it.”

The variance from the same divisional games when you face a team for the second time, do you find it easier because you've seen film on that team and you've played that team, or is it harder now that they know what you bring to the table, as well?

“I mean, yes and no. It's kind of- what's nice about it is you're used to the guys you're going against. You kind of get their moves and stuff. But defenses change, they prepare for you a lot differently. Our whole scheme from the Arizona game the first game to the second game was completely different. Most of our players were all different and stuff like that. But you know what you're going to go up against, you know the players a little bit better, so it made man-to-man coverage like, ‘Hey, I know how he's going to cover me on this one because I just went against it two weeks ago.’ But other than that, I mean, you've got to still show up and play 60 minutes.”

The regular season game against the Packers, it looked like a couple of your bigger catches came against zone coverage. I'm wondering for a tight end, what's the key, if there is one, to getting open against the zone? Is that something you've gotten better at over the last couple years?

"Yeah, I mean, getting open, I think you get better at once you start playing a lot. But yeah, I mean, zones are just kind of a feel thing. I actually got better at zone, like finding spots in zones watching [WR] Trent Taylor because I think he's absolutely incredible at it and definitely a guy that we've been missing. I would love to have him back. But yeah, it's just something you get better at just watching tape. You see where guys drop, but mostly just a feel thing. You've just got to find a soft spot, and what's awesome about Jimmy is he's got such a quick release, he's going to hit you, and you've just got to drop set and get vertical."

You said last week you expected a short story from your dad in his weekly letter. Did you get it?

"Oh, yeah, I got like 10 pages. It was awesome. I was fired up and ready to roll."

Any highlights that you can share?

"No, actually I can't. Those are mine."

What do you expect this week?

"A little bit longer probably. Yeah, he was on one last week. It was pretty fun. It was a great one. Maybe he'll share it with you guys at some point."

How does it keep it fresh?

"I mean, every week is different. It's awesome. Whether he's telling a new story, he's bringing in a new like a movie or a book that he read to me as a kid. But I mean, he just always has a different story line for every single letter, and he builds it up, and he always just crushes it. I always just get pretty fired up reading those things."

We were looking at where the tight ends are mostly a receiver, a big receiver. Do you take pride in your run blocking abilities because you are one of the best in that matter, the 49ers when you're on the field have one yard per carry more than when you're not on the field. What's your take on that?

"I mean, I take pride in my run game. That's how I grade myself in games. Passing yards and receiving yards take care of themselves. So yeah, I mean, I take pride in it. I mean, if we do better with me on the field or not, it's whatever, I'm just going to go out there every single play and try my best. We did a pretty good job of that last week."

Is it safe to say your dad, as a former offensive lineman, focuses more on your block pass catching?

"He doesn't give me too many tips on how to run routes, yeah, he does not. He doesn't focus on that. But he always gives me, 'Make sure your leverage is good, get your hands inside.' He's definitely a coach still."