

TRANSCRIPTIONS



**Defensive Coordinator Robert Saleh
Press Conference – December 26, 2019
San Francisco 49ers**

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How was your day?

“Yesterday or today?”

We’ll go with yesterday first and then today.

“Chaotic. Always with six kids opening up gifts, a little chaotic, but blessed in every which way you could imagine.”

How do you get back into the flow of things today? Do you just pick up like a normal day?

“Still looked at that tape yesterday and all that stuff. For me, it was just another day, just did it from home. Thought the guys out there had a lot of great attention to detail and it was a good practice. Got to continue to stack days until Sunday.”

How does them adding Seattle Seahawks RB Marshawn Lynch change your week of preparation?

“For us, it doesn’t. [Seattle Seahawks RB Chris] Carson’s a big bruising back, very similar to how Marshawn is. So, the tackling plan, all that stuff, is still the same. He’s a load to tackle, he’s going to lower his pads and you’ve got to have a specific way to tackle him.”

Is there an emphasis maybe just given how he could change the emotion of a game given who he is and where the game is being played that, obviously you’re not trying to miss tackles, but we really have to make sure he doesn’t do anything a little special?

“No, I get it. It’s cool for the fans, cool for the media to talk about, but he’s another player that we’ve got to hit as hard as we can. It’s no different than Carson and the way he runs the football. It’s cool that they need the emotional boost, but we look at it the same.”

How do you see their offensive line without Seattle Seahawks T Duane Brown and how they’ve protected Seattle Seahawks QB Russell Wilson the last two months?

“I still think they’ve got good pieces there. Obviously, they’re professional athletes. I never look at a professional athlete and say he’s lesser than anything. Duane is a really, really good football player. He has been for a very, very long time. I’m sure whoever they have is very capable of being able to protect Russell and do a good job with it. That’s about the extent of it. Duane’s a hell of a football player.”

Obviously, the raw numbers show that your pass rush isn't recording the sacks that it recorded earlier in the year. What are the metrics you use to determine if your pass rush is successful and do you think it has been over the last month plus?

"So, for me, I've told you all before, I always look at how teams call games against us. If a coordinator is deliberately changing the way he's called games versus other opponents versus us, then I feel like, heck yeah, it's affecting them because they've had to actually change their game plan and change the way they approach us. Last week would be a perfect example. To call 21 boots is unheard of, not unheard of, obviously, but I think we've had 25 or so boots all year and to get it 21 times in a game tells me our rush is still very affective, teams are still worried about it. And for us, we've just got to continue to be cognizant of it and be able to go with the flow of the game and the way the coordinator's calling plays and make adjustments as quickly as we can."

How big was the adjustment that you made to get your ends upfield maybe more than crashing the line of those bootlegs?

"The first drive, I have it written down somewhere, so forgive me if it's not 100-percent accurate, but the first drive I think they had six boots for 66 yards, and then they obviously had a touchdown on that drive. For the rest of that first half, they had another five boots for around 40-yards. Long story short, in the second half, they had nine boots for 25 yards in the second half is what we had them for. We were putting people in his face even after that first drive, but they just kept calling it, which for me is a good learning experience. You always assume they've got a few boots called in the first 15 and they'll continue to call a couple boots here and there, but they're never going to make it the staple of their game plan. They just kept rolling with it, and so I was actually pumped that he kept calling them in the second half because I just didn't feel like it was working for him. It got us into a couple advantageous situations in the second half that allowed us to get a couple of big stops."

How major is it for you to make that slight alteration in your scheme?

"It's good for moving forward if it ever becomes because the easy solution is to send the guy upfield and when you're playing a zone-run scheme as efficient as the Rams are or even our offense for example, you're asking for it with regards to the run game. The easy thing is send them up the field and you start vacating gaps and you just open up a whole other can of worms. The adjustment we made, I feel like it was pretty sound all the way across the board where we were able to steal a gap. We're still working out the kinks on how that works. It is a very, very good tool to have."

Do you think that your ability to defend that kind of took that away as far as teams looking at how to defeat your defense?

"Not necessarily, because I still think teams are going to do whatever they can to protect their quarterback, which was very evident on Saturday night. They'll still be rolling out, boots, sprint pass, whatever they can, quick game, get the ball out of the quarterback's hand. We've just got to be quick to make the adjustments that we need or get the calls that we need. If they want to continue running them then keep running them. Even when you go back and watch them, we get so many boots from our office during training camp and OTAs. When you actually watch the structure of how it was being defended, we were

very clean. For the most part, guys were covered. The quarterback just kept leaking for another four or five yards or whatever, but I wouldn't put it past teams to continue trying it."

What's the counter to the quick game? What adjustments can you make or is it just something where it's like complete your passes but we're going to keep them to four or five yards apiece?

"Obviously you want to be tighter in coverage, but if a team is running quick game you want to be able to contest all of those and see if you can bat a couple at the line of scrimmage, see if you can bat a couple at the backend. And if your yards per attempt are less than, I think the number is six and a half, you're one of the best in football. If teams want to dink and dunk at four yards, we trust that we'll be able to knock one down, we'll be able to get a PBU, we'll be able to disrupt the flow of your drive to get you to a third and advantageous for us so we can get off the field. But, teams don't always want to take those check downs, but if that's the case then we've just got to continue to play tighter coverage in the backend and understand up front that the ball is coming out quick to get our hands up."

How have you weighed this week whether to go with CB Ahkello Witherspoon or CB Emmanuel Moseley?

"We've got full confidence in Ahkello. I know he's not happy with the way he played, I know we're not overly excited about it, but he still played, before he got hurt, still played at a very, very high level and there's some things that he can clean up and he knows he can clean up. I've got faith that he's going to come out and play a really good game."

What happened on the touchdown catch you gave up to Los Angeles Rams WR Cooper Kupp, the crossing route?

"The crossing route? For me, I always try to look inward. That one was a hard one for him. You're in man pressure, there's no low hole help, it got eaten up. The way they worked, I call it a runaway route. For me, it's a very, very hard down for a corner on that one. I always look inward. I feel like I could have helped him a little bit better. At the same time, we've got to play with better technique and all that stuff. It was just a simple runaway route and man pressure that had no low plug help and it didn't get home."

How could DL Jullian Taylor's potential return impact the rotation along the interior?

"It could help a lot just to have that bigger body in there to take on some of those double teams. This is a very big offensive line and to give some of those interior guys when you look at [DL DeForest Buckner] Buck and [DL] Sheldon [Day] and all those guys, just the overall rotation to keep those guys fresh. We're pumped to get him back."

What's the process for you to determine whether S Jaquiski Tartt is able to step in and be somebody who can be close to who he was before he left the lineup?

"First off, it would come from the performance staff on whether or not he's healthy to get back with us. I know he's been practicing and trying to get back into it. As soon as he's ready to roll and when we get clearance he'll be in there."

Have you received clearance yet?

“No.”

When you’re showing your players clips for Marshawn Lynch, are you showing them mostly Raiders clips or Seahawks clips?

“It would be the closest, so your Raiders stuff.”

We always talk about noise with the offense, but does that kind of noise, like did New Orleans affect your defense? Did you have to change some things?

“No, it’s really quiet when those offenses are up. It doesn’t matter. You’ve still got to be able to communicate, whether it’s verbal or non-verbal on defense. It doesn’t really affect defensively, no.”

Back when Tartt was healthy, CB Richard Sherman more than once in postgame press conference came in here and made it a point that Tartt got recognition. He was saying that he was playing at a Pro-Bowl/All-Pro level. I’m wondering what Tartt brings to your defense that we may not necessarily see, just on first look?

“Tartt, he’s been in the league for a while. I know he’s still young, but he’s three years into the system now. His communication skills, being able to work with [DB] Jimmie Ward, the indicators, just understanding football, those are the things, just putting a calm to the defense where there’s just so much communication that he brings. When he and [LB] Fred [Warner] are out there and they’re communicating, it brings the whole defense together. Especially that front seven, including the middle-third player, the nickel, which is something that the naked eye won’t ever see. The amount of calm he brings, not to say [S] Marcell [Harris] hasn’t been able to get a little bit better every single week, which he has, he’s had major strides from game one to game two to game three, but just the overall communication, the disguise, the alignments, all the things that we ask out of that strong safety, he had been on point.”

Seattle Seahawks head coach Pete Carroll said that this week that they don’t talk about rivals, like “oh yeah, 49ers are big NFC rivals.” Obviously, you were on that side when this rivalry was really getting going. What is his approach when it comes to these type of big games against an opponent that really is kind of a rival?

“You know, [head coach Kyle] coach Shanahan is the same in regards to the approach. It’s not the Catalina Wine Mixer. You guys remember that movie? It’s not the biggest deal in the world. Not that we don’t understand what’s at stake and how exciting this can be and all that stuff. Your mindset should always be internally driven in that every day, every practice, every rep is a championship play, practice, rep, day, whatever it is, meeting. You have to approach it that way and the opponent is just secondary. When you show up on Sunday, you’re so prepared, you’re so on point, you’re so on your details and you play to the best of your ability and wherever the cards fall, they fall. To make it about them is not the approach you ever want. You want it internally driven and to understand that if you play to the best of your abilities, you’ll make the bad teams look really, really bad and you’ll make the great teams look normal. Our approach is to play our best every single play we can and see what happens.”

What are the coaching points when you're talking to the defensive line about shooting their gun against Russell versus maybe breaking down and just ensuring that he doesn't make a last second move to get past them? What's the balance you have to find there?

"There is balance. But, for the most part it doesn't matter if you're playing a pocket quarterback if you want to call it or a running quarterback, it doesn't really matter. You have to have respect to your rush lanes. You have to be respectful to the level of the quarterback when you're around the edge. You have to be respectful to the pocket push and what could happen and being tied together and what could happen if one of your guys takes an outside move and what you need to do to counter it. But at the same time, you don't want to handicap your guys into being so worried about where this guy's rushing that it just becomes what I call a mush rush where no one is really getting off their blocks and getting to the quarterback. You're very cognizant of your rush lanes and you still rush to go get the quarterback and understand what he likes to do, what are his tendencies, where does he like to escape, and you just play ball from there. Understand, he will break the pocket a couple of times. We've just got to be great in the backend. Be relentless in what we call plaster rules. Just being relentless with our plaster rules and making sure that when he breaks the pocket we find a man and stick with him. The front just has to remain relentless in their pass rush and understand that the play's not over until the whistle blows."

The first time you faced them you had a really high success rate blitzing with CB K'Waun Williams and with Fred. The second time you face a team, especially a good quarterback, does that intensify the chess match for you?

"Yeah, because you always feel like you've got to do something. You've got to be a little bit different. They're expecting certain things and you've got to be able to mix in what you did, mix in some other things. There's always a self-scout study that you've got to put to it, but at the same time it's not like you can reinvent the wheel every week."