

SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS

# TRANSCRIPTIONS



**Defensive Coordinator Robert Saleh  
Press Conference – November 2, 2017  
San Francisco 49ers  
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**Do you have any update on how LB Reuben Foster is doing out there and whether you can expect him this week?**

“He’s going just like last week, trying to get through practice, stay healthy, and show us that he can do it both mentally and physically. It’ll lead up to game day just like it was last week.”

**Last week was a game day scratch. How did that throw off your defensive--?**

“It didn’t. [LB] Brock Coyle did a great job preparing. Every player is responsible to prepare as if they’re the starter. Underrated being that [LB Mark] Nzeocha came and had to get called up. So, he had to play. When someone’s called, you don’t skip a beat. That’s the expectation. I thought those two did a great job.”

**I think we were all expecting a lot out of Reuben this year. Halfway through, what do you see ahead for him the second half of the season?**

“It’s all growth for Reuben. He’s been very unlucky with the injuries that he’s had. He’s definitely not injury prone. That didn’t even cross my mind. He’s just been very unlucky and very unfortunate, some of the things that have happened to him. Once he gets his body back, the improvement is just going to skyrocket. It’s just a matter of getting him going.”

**CB Ahkello Witherspoon said yesterday that he thought when he was inactive through the first four weeks of the season, during practice sort of served as a second training camp for him and he thought he really played much better during that span than he did in training camp. Do you agree with that and what do you think was the biggest difference between his play during practice then and in August?**

“We talked about it here with you all during the first four weeks of the season when questions popped up about him. The deliberateness at which he practiced. You could say it all the way across the board, but he completely took to the idea that every rep is a championship rep and that preparing yourself doesn’t just happen. You don’t play well on Sunday just because you showed up. You play well on Sunday because you took every rep possible. When he was on the show team, implementing all the techniques that we teach, and then when it was his turn with our defense he took every single rep like it was a championship rep. You could see that and his evolution mentally as well as

physically. He hasn't even scratched the surface either. I really think he's got a great amount of potential. It's just a matter of whether or not he keeps that same mindset of growth. When you've got someone who's internally driven like that you just admire and watch."

**On the interception, it looked like he anticipated the dig route. Was that the plan on that play, to anticipate the dig, or was that him reacting to what the receiver did?**

"[Defensive backs coach Jeff] Hafley does a great job coaching those guys. You're always trying to coach anticipation, coach indicators, coach stem release, the release of the receiver. You're trying to coach all of that. For a rookie to go in and study the way he does and really put himself in that position, because he ran the route for him, he knew what was coming, he understood the D&D, he understood the release and he just saw the big picture. Because of that he was able to run the route for him. You coach it, but not everyone gets it. For him to be where he is right now, like I said he hasn't even scratched the surface. But, he's moving in the right direction."

**What's D&D?**

"Down and distance."

**Not to just repeat what Ahkello told us yesterday, but one of the other things he talked about was that, you're talking about his mindset, kind of getting his mind right to focus on every single play whereas in college maybe he was able to kind of just get away with stuff because of his athleticism. Is that something you see in a lot of young players? How hard is that to coach that out of them? That, 'Hey everybody at this level is as good as you are or better.'**

"We're in a generation of entitlement. All of them. Whatever generation we're in, the millennials. I don't know what it is, but everyone just seems to be entitled and they need to be re-taught that nothing is given. You've got to go earn it and take it. That old school mindset is kind of dwindling away from our generations, our youth I guess you could say. For those guys to continue to show them what it looks like, show them what they need to get done, and having [CB] Leon [Hall] in the room, [DL] Elvis Dumervil, and all the vets that we do have, to show them that they got to that point not because they showed up, but because they worked deliberately at their craft. For all those rookies to see that and understand that that's what it looks like, that's what I need to be doing and then to train themselves to do that. There is a training that goes on. Some people are gifted with it or have been trained that way their whole life and some people need to figure it out."

**How does that challenge you as a head coach, maybe the way the youth of America has changed over the years since you started in this business?**

"I'm not sure as much. I guess because I like to think I'm a little young. So, a little more in tuned. But, I can imagine, it's different for sure. I look at just my personal mindset like, 'Damn. I never would've done that when I was younger.' It is a challenge. But, that's how we get to coach. If players were perfect then there would be no use for coaches."

**Foster and DL Solomon Thomas both missed time during the offseason. Do you anticipate they'll be a little more durable next year if they go through an entire offseason and training program here?**

"For sure. You look at Reuben, he spent his first few months here rehabbing his shoulder. By the time he gets to camp, now you get a couple of injuries and so they're taking extra reps. It's a cumulative effect. All the different things that've happened. It's just been unlucky, it's been unfortunate. Especially for a rookie. But, yeah I do anticipate that when he does get a full offseason and your body is in tune with itself and it's clicking, I do think he'd be much more fortunate next year."

**Pretty small sample size, but how did you feel S Eric Reid played linebacker last week? Is it kind of regrettable that you've got to move him back so soon?**

"I thought he was awesome. I'm sure there's a couple plays he wants back. But, you look at a guy like Eric and he's so locked in. He's very smart first and foremost. Like we talked about, he's got such long arms and he is very physical. It was very natural for him in there. His run reads were a lot better than I thought they'd be. His zone drops were good. His run-pass recognition was good. I thought he did a really, really good job. If he did have to play eight games in there I think he'd be a force in there. I think he'll be a force as a safety. A guy like Eric, it's plug and play with a guy like him. He's a pretty good football player."

**Is that something you may revisit in the future?**

"It depends. We'll never shy away from trying to fit our best 11 football players on the football field. Right now with the combination that we have, it's trying to get him at strong safety. Again, one of those combinations because of the injury to [DB] Jimmie [Ward]. I hate moving people. You don't want to move people. Hopefully we can get a stretch of games where we're playing with the same guys over and over again so they can learn to communicate with each other. Keeping my fingers crossed for it. Ideally, hopefully we do not have to move anybody any more for the rest of the year. But, in the event something does happen, we'll always keep our minds open to that."

**You seem to like S Jaquiski Tartt at strong safety, but he made some nice plays at free safety earlier in the season. What does he do well at that particular position?**

"Tartt's got really good feel back there. He does. He may not have the elite speed, but he's plenty fast enough. He's very physical. He understands angles and tracking. So, he can take that middle of the field track. And, he delivers a shot. If people are working down the middle and Tartt's in the middle you better keep your head on a swivel. He's very smart, so he can communicate. And he understands the quarterback so he can sit back there and read the quarterback and still be able to take care of his seams and his posts. Tartt just has a very natural feel back there. Very comfortable with Tartt as a free safety."

**How was Jimmie playing before he got hurt?**

"Jimmie was doing well. For a guy who didn't have any training camp, missed the first couple of games of the year, to come in and progress the way he did, I thought he was

doing a really good job back there. It's unfortunate that we lost him because I do think he could be a pretty good free safety."

**Was DL Leger Douzable playing all along the line? It seemed like he was lining up on different spots on Sunday.**

"I'm not sure if he played every spot, but we're at a point now where they all need to know two, three spots. [Defensive line coach Jeff] Zgonina's doing a great job working the rotation, trying to make sure that they are staying fresh and trying to make sure that they're being used to their strengths. To answer your question, he was being used a little bit."

**Seems like a smart guy.**

"Very smart."

**In the league a while, is that really valuable given where the roster is right now, to have somebody who can adjust?**

"For sure. Douzable, he has been around a while. Credit to [general manager] John [Lynch] and our staff to be able to find guys like him and [DL] Tony McDaniel, and guys who we can plug in and play and be able to do the things that we need them to do to be able to go out on Sunday and fight."

**At this point, the guys you line up there is going to look a lot different than it did on the defensive line in the season opener. A guy like Douzable I feel has helped you kind of bridge that gap. It seems like you're probably going to need contributions here from guys who weren't on the roster here at the start.**

"For sure. I think we're down to three. You've got Dumervil, you've got [DL DeForest Buckner] Buck, and you've got [NT] Earl Mitchell. But, we get [DL Ronald Blair III] Ronnie back, so that will be a big help hopefully as he continues to work through the week and leading up to gameday. Everything looks good so far. But, we are, we're going to get contributions from people we haven't gotten from the first time we played. Like I said to ya'll a while ago, the NFL will never stop for anyone. There's no excuses and no one really cares who's hurt and who's not. At the end of the year, they're going to ask how many. They don't ask how."

**What does DL Datone Jones bring to the defense?**

"He's got some explosiveness. He is a smart player also. He will strain the defensive line which is always important to us. He doesn't always look to take the easy way out. He has the mental capability to work in different spots. He will strain, which is a really good trait if you're a D-Lineman. Those are the things he does right now. We're still learning him. We've had him all 14 of days about. Excited to see what he can progress into."

**Watching Solomon Thomas against the Eagles, early in the game he was going against Philadelphia Eagles T Halapoulivaati Vaitai at left tackle. It seemed to me he was again working into Big V's chest. Then you moved him to one technique and I thought he was really giving the center a lot of problems with his quickness.**

**He beat him once and hit Philadelphia Eagles QB Carson Wentz really hard. Where'd you get the idea to use Thomas that way and is that something you would consider doing again in the future when he comes back from injury?**

"It was part of our third down package going in. Thought we had a really good plan for him on third down. Solomon getting in there at the center is trying to get Buck in there, trying to get Solomon, just trying to get some quickness on their particular center and their left side. Is it something? For sure. You're always trying to look for an advantage and try to put your best players in position to attack whatever you perceive as, not necessarily a weak link, but an advantage for us."

**This time around facing the Cardinals, they have Arizona Cardinals RB Adrian Peterson. How's he looking and what's he brought to their offense?**

"AP man, God bless him. I don't know how these guys do it. I look down like, I wonder if I could still run."

**Does he look like he can still run?**

"Hell yeah he does. I bet he still makes noise too when he's running. He runs so freaking hard that you can hear him on the sideline. When you watch the tape, he runs hard. He still has great vision, Hall of Fame vision in the backfield. If you're a linebacker or a stack defender and you get nosey, or a D-Lineman and you get a little bit nosey, he's going to find that crease. He'll go zero to 60 pretty quick. He still has it. He's still very physical. I think he's in a really good place right now with the run-game system that they have where they just hand him the ball, find the open gap, find the undisciplined defender and hit it and he will definitely hit it."

**Were they missing that element without Arizona Cardinals RB David Johnson the first time around with you guys?**

"From a run game standpoint, to me anytime you can add a guy like Adrian Peterson, a lot of teams are missing that element when you compare it to Adrian Peterson. I think their backs are still pretty good, but when you're talking about a guy like Adrian Peterson I don't care what his age is, I don't care what he's done in the past. I look at the tape and I still think he can run."

**How did QB Jimmy Garoppolo look yesterday in practice?**

"I was so focused on the D, dead serious. Maybe I'll take a step back and look another time this week."

**You said you can hear Adrian Peterson running from the sideline. You mean pads colliding?**

"He's grunting. It's awesome."

**With guys, specifically McDaniel and CB Leon Hall because they're 30-something guys and they weren't here, when you have guys like that, is it relatively easy? Do they say, 'Oh yeah, I got this' just because they've been in the league so long? Or is there still kind of a process with even those older guys?**

“For those older guys, they’ve seen everything. So that part’s easy. You can show it to them and they can relate to a lot of things that they’ve had in their past. Like I said, it goes back to John and [vice president of player personnel] Adam [Peters] and [senior personnel executive] Martin [Mayhew] and all those guys to find those guys to be able to make it easy for us during the week so they can get in there and play on such short notice. A guy like Datone, Douzable, McDaniel, to come in and be able to work along the defensive line and know exactly what those techniques are, because they have played them before. There’s not a lot of teaching. They do understand offense. They do understand line splits. From that regard, there are a couple of nuances that are unique to us. But, they’ve been around so long that it does make it easy.”

**Jimmie since 2014 I think has four fractures. I’m just curious, from a coaching standpoint, obviously you can get hurt at any position on the field, but going into the offseason can he change his body? Do you guys think about a position switch again where maybe he’s not going to be so often in high impact scenarios. Is there anything a coach can do in that scenario?**

“I don’t have an answer for that right now. Wherever you are on the football field you’re subject to high impact. Even our corners. When you’re playing a team like Arizona, they’re going to get a full dose of Adrian Peterson this week. It’d be something to look at in the offseason for sure, but definitely don’t want to move Jimmie.”

**You mentioned earlier that a full offseason would help Thomas and Foster. Would a full offseason help Ward and maybe a few more pounds as well?**

“Yeah it would. He missed all of training camp. You come in, last year I read an article about it, it was science of the body and all that. It talked about if you wait a week or two weeks during your off-time to prepare for the season then you won’t be in peak condition until the first game of the year. If you wait until training camp, you won’t be in peak condition until midway through the year. There’s just a trickle-down effect. Based on the 40-day vacation they get. For Jimmie to miss, I know he pulled his hammy during training camp so you can’t possibly be in top physical shape after all that time missed in training camp. So, I do think there’s a trickle-down effect to it where your body just kind of wears down. To get a full offseason, to get the 40 days, to get your training camp, no doubt it can only help.”