

SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS

TRANSCRIPTIONS



**General Manager John Lynch, Head Coach Kyle Shanahan,
RB Jerick McKinnon & C/G Weston Richburg
Press Conference – March 15, 2018
San Francisco 49ers**

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Opening comments:

General Manager John Lynch: “Welcome to everybody and a special welcome to [C/G] Weston Richburg and [RB] Jerick McKinnon. We’re proud to have you guys as Niners. I think what I’d start with is that when we set out in free agency, and there’s been a lot of work on this, way back to August, I want to thank [director of pro personnel] Ran Carthon, [vice president of player personnel] Adam Peters, all of our pro personnel staff, everybody who has put a lot of hard work on what culminated here in the last couple days. All the coaches who watched these guys at great length, and ultimately these were the top two guys on our priority list, so to land them, that’s pretty special for us. What goes into that? Well, a lot of things go into it. We talk a lot about talent and spirit. The talent, we think these guys are tremendous fits for what we do, for what [head coach] Kyle [Shanahan] does in his offense. We think these guys fit just perfectly. We’re excited to use them. And then the spirit. These are guys that we want to build our locker room around. These are standup guys and we’re very pleased to have them as 49ers. Turn it over to Kyle, then we’ll open it up for some questions, but welcome to these guys.”

Head Coach Kyle Shanahan: “He always turns it over to me after he covers it all. I’m the same. Pumped to have these guys. It always starts with the tape for me and these guys are as impressive as anyone at their position on tape and then everything else goes to the type of people they are. We talk about character and everything, when you get two guys that all I hear about is how hard they work, what they do on the practice field every day, how hard they play in games, which you can see on tape, but when I hear how they are and how they carry themselves in a building year around, is really what makes us excited to add with what we see on tape. Go ahead guys and ask away.”

Can we just start, follow up on that, Kyle, what exactly about each one of these guys fit exactly what you want out of your scheme?

KS: “I’ll start with Jerick first, when it comes to a running back, it starts with how do they run the ball? I think he’s an extremely good runner. I’ve loved him since college. It was harder to evaluate him in college, because he was a quarterback, but he was a very good running quarterback and he could throw it a little bit too. But, I always knew he had running skills and to be able to study him on NFL film where he was actually at the

running back position and to be able to see he can make people miss and he can create arm tackles and he has the strength and power to break those arm tackles. What is a huge bonus on him is when you talk about the pass game. When it comes to separating and beating linebackers and safeties in man-to-man coverage, I definitely think he's an issue for teams. I think this league, when it comes to third downs and things like that, you move the chains based off of matchups, which allows you to get points in the long run. I think Jerick is very versatile and we can do a lot of things with him. When it comes to Richburg, Weston, which I've messed up your name 1,000 times in the last month. But, Weston--"

JL: "At one point he was Reston Wichburg to Kyle."

KS: "When it comes to Weston, when you have a center in our offense that can play at the level that Weston can, it gives a huge advantage. When you have guys who can read shades on their own, when you don't need the help of the guards and things like that, the type of personnel groupings you can get into and stuff, it adds a lot to your offense. I've been around some real good ones in my career. He's put it all on tape and he looks right there with all those guys and that's why I value him a ton off the tape. Didn't know a ton about him until I turned on the tape and it was as good as I've seen. That's who we were going for from the beginning. You've got to do your homework and check into the guy and everything. Everything we found out, just from his work ethic and everything that I say that's very important to us, he's off the charts in those areas too. I think he can add a lot of things to our run game, to our pass game, and make a lot of other guy's jobs easier as it is."

How do Jerick and RB Matt Breida complement each other? Do they complement each other? How do you see them matchup-wise?

KS: "Yeah, you always want to complement each other, but it's also important to get the best running backs possible too. That's usually the way I look at it. I don't always think of, 'Alright, Breida is here. Who's the best guy we can pair with him?' I watched the tape of everybody who is available and then we try to decide who we think the best one is and that's how we saw Jerick. I think Breida is a very good back. They went to school together. I don't know if he was a freshman when you were a senior?"

RB Jerick McKinnon: "Yeah."

KS: "Yeah, so they know each other well. I think they are the same type of people. I've obviously been around Breida a lot and how he works and what he does, definitely have asked him some things about this guy right here. They seem very similar personality-wise in their work ethic and stuff. We've got some good running backs. We're going to have some good competition in our rooms."

What role do you envision for Jerick? Do you see him as a three-down feature back or someone who splits carries and catches passes?

KS: "Yeah, he's coming in right now and he's our starting running back. We're going to always compete and we'll see how that plays out, but obviously, we brought him here to

be our starting back. The question that you asked, I understand the question, but a lot of that doesn't, I don't totally think that way. What play are we running on the first play of the game? Every play from then on out is the same. Feature back, starting back, obviously, that's what we think of him and that's why we got him here, but you can use backs in a lot of different ways. There's lots of things you can do with them and when you have a guy like Jerick, when he's on the field, he's not on the field just to run passes. He's not on the field just to run the ball. He can do both and when you can do both, it puts defenses a lot more in a bind and gives us a lot more options."

What are you excited about as far as doing things differently now with the 49ers then you did your first four years in the league?

JM: "I'm just excited to be in the offense that I feel is a perfect fit for me. Things that coach Shanahan has done with the backs like he did in Atlanta with [Atlanta Falcons RB] Devonta Freeman and [Atlanta Falcons RB] Tevin Coleman, I see myself doing those kinds of things. For me, I feel like the scheme is right. The fit was just perfect for me. I feel like I can't be in a better situation as a player."

To piggyback on that question about your ability to carry the load. Can you be a featured back, can you be a three-down back? You'll get far more carries than you've ever have at this point in your career.

JM: "One-hundred percent. This is the opportunity that I've been waiting for, not just since I've been in the league, but since I've been playing football, period. I'm just excited to be here, be a part of this team, and push myself to be the best I can when the season is ready to kick off. Push the guys at the same position to be the best. I'm excited to be here and I just can't wait to get to work."

How difficult was the last year for you in New York and what was it about here that made you want to get your fresh start?

C/G Weston Richburg: "Yeah, anytime you're not winning, it's difficult. Some of the circumstances made it a little more difficult, but I'm very excited to be here. I think I've been very fortunate to be, my last team, with a great ownership, a great organization. I think this one is the same. Everybody I've met today has been very warm and welcoming. Just to be part of this culture, part of this environment is something I'm very excited about."

Covering you from afar in Atlanta, thinking back to your days in Cobb County and working your way up, always having to prove yourself especially throughout your career. How much does that fuel you and what does this contract specifically mean to you especially coming off the season you've had?

JM: "For me, personally, it's always been about just having that chip on my shoulder and keeping that fire inside of me to keep striving to be better every day, every year. This contract has been a blessing, a real blessing. For me, it's a circumstance where I know that I don't have to worry about anything in the future. Financially, I'm set and now it's time to be the best player I can be and I don't have to worry about anything. Like I said, it's just coming to work and I'm ready for it."

Jerick mentioned some guys like Tevin and even guys like Chicago Bears WR Taylor Gabriel that you were able to be creative with. As a coach, how much do you salivate about the flexibility and the creative options you have in this guy?

KS: "A lot. I think that's what makes him such a valuable player. He's good enough to make it as a runner alone in this league. He's good enough to make it in the pass game as just a third down threat alone, but when you can do both of those, it gives you a lot of freedom as a coach. Based off of what downs you put him in and that when you do put him in, the defense doesn't know exactly what type of plays you're trying to run because he can do it all."

Obviously, there's a lot of factors in your decision. But, looking at the 49ers, where they are, is there a sense in your mind maybe even around the league this is a team that's ready to win right now?

WR: "Watching them from a distance last year, you could see there was excitement. Even when things weren't going well, there was still excitement. Surrounded by some guys I talked to today talked about how it didn't feel like they were losing games and then when [QB] Jimmy [Garoppolo] comes in and they go on that run, it just looked like there was a lot of great things ahead and that's how I feel being here today, is excited about what's in store for us and what we can do as an offense and then as a team together."

Do you know Garoppolo at all?

WR: "I haven't met him yet. I'm looking forward to that. I think the bond between a center and a quarterback is crucial and I'm excited. I think it's great that we're the same age and we've met maybe in the senior bowl, I think. I'm looking forward to working with him and getting something going."

You guys made a trade today. Obviously, you have a new center, but why move on from C Daniel Kilgore and why not give him a shot potentially at guard?

KS: "Just mainly because we see Dan as a center. I think he does also. I don't think that'd be fair to put him at guard. This situation with Dan was one of the hardest things I've gone through as a coach. I've got the utmost respect for Dan. I think he is a good player and he's even a better person. That's why this was so tough, but when we had the opportunity to add a center of Weston's caliber and improve our interior like that, when we go into free agency and we watch all the O-Linemen and how can we improve this the most? I think we all personally felt that it was the top O-Lineman that we saw out of all the inside guys. Didn't know if we could add him or not and when he expressed that he wanted to be here and it worked out, that's an obligation that we kind of have to this organization. When it comes to age and things like that and what you're getting, that's a tough decision we had to make. By no means was it easy to let go of Dan or to give him another opportunity somewhere. I wish we could sit him here and hold him and use him if we needed to, but our team has gotten a lot better today. We wanted to do very right for Dan and his wife and Miami is something that they were interested in too and something we were communicating with him and his agents on. I think it was a tough situation, but I think we all respect each other a lot and I think we all feel the same about each other. And, even though it was a tough few days, I think he's

in a very good situation for himself where he's going in and he's very needed and I know he's going to a team, just talking to [Miami Dolphins head coach] Adam [Gase] earlier today, that wants him badly. I think it ended up right for both sides in the long run."

Can you address that too, because it's not like Weston just came on the market, you knew he was going to be out there too, why sign Daniel before he could reach the market when you guys had your eye on Weston all along?

JL: "Yeah, you study these guys for a long time knowing that he's going to be free. But, we also knew that there was going to be great competition for him. We had to compete vigorously for him and there were a lot of suitors. I think with both these guys, when people talk about the compensation, well that means there were a lot of suitors and there were for each of these guys and so we knew that would be the case. We like Dan Kilgore a lot. We like what he is as a player. We love what he was for us in the locker room, as part of our setting the tone. I think that's one of the tough things about this job. When I took it I had to ask myself, and it's something that Kyle addressed with me, 'Are you going to be able to make these tough decisions?' And so, I've been on the other side of being told by a team that you care greatly for that you're not a part of it anymore. And that's something I had to accept in taking this job. And like Kyle said, it's one of the hardest things because of what he stood for and how important this place was to him. But, I think when you look at our division, you better be good in the interior. And when we had an opportunity, as Kyle said, to get the guy that was the top guy in our mind of all the options in the interior we felt like we had to jump. And then, if you look at the deal, we swapped seventh round picks. It was more about finding the right place for Danny and a great opportunity for him because of what he's given to us. Fortunately, that presented itself with Miami and I think he's in a good spot there. Like Kyle said, talking to Adam, they've got great plans for him and that makes us happy."

And you did consider Weston the best center or guard on the market?

JL: "We did. And there was a time that we thought about let's give it some time with Weston at guard, he has played guard, and keep Danny at center. But, ultimately his best position is center, both those guys' best position is center. Once we felt as strongly there we said you know what this is going to be awfully difficult, but it's something we have to do. It's in our organization's best interest. And we did accordingly."

The offense that they ran in New York is different than the one that you run. How much of it is projection and sort of forecasting how someone is going to do in a different system than you guys?

KS: "I don't think it's much. It's a different system, but you can see body movement and how they play. We have a lot of tape on Weston. Yeah, schemes are different, but there's a number of clips you can watch the center reach a shade, pass-protection no scheme is different. It's about blocking the guy in front of you. So, you can see how people pass protect. Run game is always harder, but there's enough clips in there and it's about body movement and how they block and sustaining, being able to sustain your blocks. Weston's done that in every scheme. He did it in college. That's why he was a

high draft pick. I think he's gotten better throughout his time in the NFL and I feel very fortunate that we have a center of his caliber on our team."

You said these two guys were your top two priorities. Obviously, you signed Sherman before. Things could always happen, but do you lay back now, do you kind of take a pause on free agents?

JL: "There's still a couple of things in the works. Kind of the first wave is gone and there's still guys out there and so we're in contact with a few players. But, this is what we set out, like priorities, let's get these guys taken care of. And like I said, it was tough. We had to compete in a big way for these guys. [President of 49ers enterprise and executive vice president of football operations] Paraag [Marathe] did a tremendous job getting it through the finish line. I do feel like in many ways, that these two are up here today, but really for us this whole offseason, it's about Jimmy, it's about [WR] Marquise [Goodwin], it's about Richard Sherman, it's about [DL] Cassius [Marsh] and [OL] Garry Gilliam and [LB] Brock Coyle. And so, we feel like we've improved our team greatly and that excites us."

When did the 49ers jump onto your radar? Were you too busy with the Vikings heading into the playoffs to notice what was going on here in December?

JM: "I really found out everything yesterday. Last year during the season my mind was focused on what was going on right now and that was with Minnesota trying to win a championship. So, when I got the news I was overwhelmed and more than happy about the news. And like I said before, it's the perfect fit for me and I feel like what coach Shanahan does with the backs in space and all that stuff I feel like it's a good fit and I'm just ready to work. I'm glad to be here and ready to be a part of something special that they're building here."

How would you describe your pass-protection and how capable you are?

JM: "I think it's good. I think it's more than good. It's one of my strong points of my game. It's something that I've worked hard at over the years since I came into the league."

Do you agree?

KS: "Yes. You can tell a lot about a guy by how they play when the ball is not in their hands, especially when they're a guy who gets the ball a lot. [Running backs coach] Bobby Turner [Jr.] will talk about it all the time, usually the first thing he tells me is how running backs play without the ball in their hand, which I'd go the other way around. But, this guy is violent, doesn't turn anything down, is one of the more physical backs that I've seen and you can tell why he's just a very good football player because he's got the mentality and the skill set. And when you have that, you can block."

Jerick, you had 32 bench press reps at the Combine. Do you lift with the offensive linemen? And Weston, are you impressed with a guy like that?

JM: "I have lifted with the offensive linemen before. I'm just a guy who loves the weight room. Being committed in the weight room definitely shows on the field. And I think when you're on a team, other guys see the work that you're putting in in the weight

room and they respect that and at the same time it makes them go harder in the weight room. So, I just try to let my work do the talking and just be a part of something special. That's all I'm ready for, just to be a part of something special."

You talk all the time about football character when evaluating these guys. For these guys that you don't know, last year you brought in a bunch of guys who you've worked with. Do you call around before once you target guys or how do you go about determining that's a guy you haven't worked with?

KS: "You try your hardest to find that out because I think that's extremely important, especially when it comes to free agency. If you bring in the wrong type of guys in free agency, I think it's one of the most underrated things in how much that can hurt your team. You want to bring in the best players possible, but they have to be the right type of person. It usually starts with the tape. Very rarely, when you watch how guys play, how do they play when they're down? How do they play from play one to the last play? What type of effort do they give? Is it always as hard as they can go? When you have guys who work their tail off on every play, whether they're on the back side or the front side, they play physical. They never turn anything down. That usually looks like you're dealing with the right type of guy. But, you've got to do your homework and hopefully, you have some people who have been around them that you can trust and you try to talk to those people and get an idea. You go back to their college, you look up all these old reports. We have guys who played with them, we've talked to all those guys. You go to coaches that you've coached with, personnel people, you hit up everything. I always feel that's the biggest risk in free agency. We can see what you're getting on tape, but you don't know what you're getting until you go through some adversity with a guy. That's always the gamble. It's always easier when you know a guy, too. We've looked into how they play on tape, I feel extremely confident that we got the right type of people."

You were in Cleveland when Jerick was coming out?

KS: "Yes."

Did you lobby the organization to draft him?

KS: "Yeah, I didn't do a lot of lobbying there. I did my best to grade everyone and say where I'd want them. I just remember how tough he was. When you are hard to tackle, that means you're a very good running back. But, it's different to watch them from a quarterback position. Then you watch how he timed at Indy, with how fast he was, how strong he was, all that. You're like, 'Man, I think this guy's going to be great in the league.' It's just very hard to have an idea of where when you don't see him play that position. I don't remember where he ended up there for us. I know how bad we wanted him and I know how bad I wanted him."

Can you describe the value of the center position in your offense? A lot of people have drawn parallels to Atlanta Falcons C Alex Mack and his vital role in your success in Atlanta.

KS: "When you have a center at the level of what you're talking about with Alex or with Weston, it changes a lot of things, things that people don't totally realize. Sometimes

you have to get in certain personnel groupings to help someone have an angle to a MIKE linebacker so you can help your center out with the guard. Sometimes you go into one-back. Now a WIL's going to walk outside the box and your MIKE is a little, the angles aren't as good, but you've got a center who can reach someone on his own and doesn't need the help. So, it allows you to do a bunch of different stuff. It puts some more pressure on that player instead of always taking it off. It really helps the versatility in everything you can do. Not just at the center, but what your guards and tackles can do on other positions. It really helps solidify the whole O-Line. I feel that's usually where it starts. There's a lot of good players, but when you have a difference maker at that position, is what I've found and I've experienced through my career, it's been a lot easier to run an offense."

Have you had a chance to talk with Matt Breida before or after making your decision to come here?

JM: "I talked to him yesterday for a little bit. I'm more excited to see how far he's come since playing with him in college. Like I said before, just get to working with the rest of the running backs group, because that's who I'm going to ultimately be meeting with the most and doing individual drills. I'm ready to work with him, [FB] Kyle [Juszczuk], the whole squad. I'm ready and I know he's pumped. He texted me today and congratulated me and stuff like that. I'm ready."

I read that you were a hurdler in high school. How did that transition work from hurdle to shotput?

WR: "Yeah, I was a lot smaller earlier on in high school. I hit a pretty good growth spurt. I let myself go a little bit and got a little bigger and kind of changed my whole direction. It's fun to kind of reflect on that and think about that."

Do you feel that the athleticism doing that running and hurdling and doing track and field helped translate to the football game later on?

WR: "It's part of who I am as an athlete. I think it can be useful in different sports. I think it does help me in football and in a scheme like this where the center is asked to get out and run a little more. I'm excited to be able to do that here and be able to kind of showcase what I can do in this type of offense."

Weston has never been to a Pro Bowl. In your eyes, what qualities does he have that differentiate him from other centers who are solid but not special?

KS: "The same ones that I've said when it comes to reach and shade, things like that. How long you can sustain your blocks. It's not always about just getting in front of people. It's how well can you block them, also. I don't even know how Pro Bowl voting works, so I don't even know who has been to the Pro Bowl and who hasn't. That doesn't mean much to me. It's what we all see on tape. You see him do it and you see the level of it. You also don't just watch one center and make an opinion. That's something we do year-round. I've been doing it through my whole coaching career. You see a lot of players, you go through a lot of different stuff so you have a way of knowing how to stack guys up based off of what you see. I feel like I've been running a very similar offense for a long time so I think I have a very good idea of what guys can do and our

scheme and what they can't do. We rarely ask people to do stuff they can't do. We try to make the offense the best we can for what we have. The guys you get who are more versatile and can handle a little bit more, allows you to expand that."

You've played a number of different positions in college. In what ways did that help you in the long run in terms of seeing the field and your understanding of the game? How did that help you?

JM: "I think it just gave me more understanding of the game, understand the defense a little bit. We didn't run a traditional offense. It just helped me learn the game from a different aspect as far as maybe just running it from a running back aspect or a receiver aspect, just getting a better feel for the game. It was understanding how defenses are going to fill in gaps, things of that nature."

Who gave you the nickname 'Jet?'

JM: "I got it in college through one of my weight room coaches. He heard about it. I can't remember how he heard about it, maybe through a blog or something and I got the name and it's stuck with me ever since."

You missed some time with a concussion last year. When did you feel back to right and at any point did you have any long-term concerns?

WR: "No. This was the first concussion I've ever had, honestly. I was feeling good near the end of the season last year. I'm excited to be here and move forward. This is kind of a new start so I'm excited to get going."

Unrelated, but DB Jimmie Ward's salary just became fully guaranteed on that option. How comfortable are you with that number given his injury history? Are you guys maybe looking at creating more flexibility with him and his contract going forward?

JL: "We think Jimmie Ward is a really good football player. We think his versatility is what allows us to be comfortable with that. Jimmie's a guy who can play safety, we saw that. He can play outside corner. He can also play the nickel. I think because of that, he becomes very valuable. When you add to that, he's made of the right stuff. He's a guy who competes. Sometimes having been around this game for a long time, you hope a guy like that who has struggled to stay healthy, sometimes early in my career, I couldn't stay healthy. Then I went about seven, eight years where I never missed a game. We're hopeful that can come. Sometimes you learn how to take care of your body. Part of it is he plays so darn hard. But, we love that about him and we're pleased to have him as a part of our group."

We haven't had a chance to talk to you since you signed Sherman. What is it about him that made you believe in him and his ability to come back from the injury that he has and also what do you expect him to bring to the team?

JL: "He's a special player. He's one of those guys you don't really like if he's on the other side. I think you love him if he's on your side. I've watched him way back to Stanford when he transitioned from a wide receiver over to defensive back, then watched him develop throughout his pro career. One of the unique competitors, I think

one of the better competitors I've ever seen in the way he brings the best out of his teammates. He brings a lot to the table from that perspective. He's also been highly, highly productive in terms of taking the ball away, in terms of being kind of a prototype for what you're looking for in this system. I think we weighed all of that. For the injury, part of it is you do a lot of research and you take that into account, but then you kind of believe in a guy. I tend to think that the best athletes tend to heal at a little different level than everybody else. There's some risk involved with it, but we worked a deal that allowed us some protection and allowed him the upside that if he returns to the Richard Sherman everyone knows, he's going to be very happy. I think it worked out great. We're thrilled to have him and I think he'll be here Tuesday. We'll be doing this with you all then."

Are you counting on him to make a full recovery and start and play 16 games?

JL: "Absolutely."

KS: "No one can tell the future. No one is God here, but you believe in people. I've played against him a ton. I think everyone knows how good of a player he is. I know that form just going against him. You come off injuries like that, no one knows for sure. But, getting to know the guy, being able to go out to dinner with him and spend about four hours with him and his fiancée, what I can tell you for sure is I believe in people who believe in themselves. That is very true with that guy. There is no doubt. I don't see him as cocky. I see him as he believes in himself. You don't realize that until you spend some time with him. I know how he can come off before that, but I spent some time with him. He's a very intelligent guy who believes in himself. It's so obvious to me why he's been as good as he has because he has a different mindset that is real. He's as competitive of a guy that I've been around. If you're going to bet on someone to come back from something like that, I'm going to bet on a guy like that. I think he's shown you by his actions that there's not a doubt in his mind that he's going to do that and we're going to do everything we can to support him to get there."

Are you going to give yourself some type of 'Plan B' in case he can't make it all the way back or are you all-in with Richard starting all season?

KS: "We'll have more corners on our roster than two. There's two guys who start on the outside. If he can't do it and someone else has to come in, there will be another guy. I promise you we will have other players, backup players and that's just part of the league. If people get hurt, if they don't get healthy, then you've got to go to whoever else is on your roster."

Backups you feel comfortable in your starting lineup, playing?

KS: "Yeah, obviously. You put together a team of 53 people. I wish there could be 11 Richard Sherman's at corner or 11 [CB] Ahkello's [Witherspoon], but you can't. You go into that, you try to get draft picks, you try to add people to your depth chart and you get 90 people here. We'll have the best 53 that make our team. I believe in Sherman, I'm confident he'll come back. But if not, we'll have another guy step up. We'll play as a team to get it done, just like we did last year."

