

TRANSCRIPTIONS



**Defensive Coordinator Robert Saleh
Press Conference – November 14, 2019
San Francisco 49ers**

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Did you see that CB K’Waun Williams was added to the Pro Bowl ballot?

“I did, yeah.”

That must make you happy.

“For him. For him, absolutely. He’s earned it, he’s worked his tail off and he’s been healthy. I think people are starting to recognize how valuable he is in the slot.”

Do you think people might not notice him as much because nickel is sort of, I don’t know, sort of weird? It’s not a traditional cornerback position.

“You know, I don’t understand the whole system. I think it’s archaic in terms of the nickel plays a majority of the snaps, but you still have a SAM backer and a fullback. I don’t know how the whole thing works, but I do think slot corner should get a little bit more recognition than they do. I’m pumped for him that he’s getting that.”

How good of a game did LB Fred Warner play on Monday night? Was that his best game with the 49ers?

“I think so. Personally, just the checks, his communication, a lot of things that people don’t see with what he did, I thought he was just on it. He played violent. There were a couple times he had one-on-one opportunities with [Seattle Seahawks RB Chris] Carson in the hole. We talked about last year not giving up leaky yards and he was able to create some knock-back. He had a very good game and now it goes back to consistency being the truest measure of performance. He’s got to go stack it up and do it again.”

He was saying at that podium after the game that the loss isn’t going to define the team and just kind of more of the leadership role that you want to see out of a linebacker. Has he infused himself right into that knowing that LB Kwon Alexander’s unavailable and kind of filling that void?

“I don’t think he’s changed. I know Kwon has such an electric personality, but Fred’s always been the, he’s the MIKE linebacker, he’s in front of the huddle, he’s always had that steady presence and he’s been fantastic since the day he walked in as a rookie. Continue to grow, continue to get better and continue developing his personal mindset to be honest with you.”

What does it do for the defense for you guys to show that and show that he can be successful doing it? What does that, as far as the offense goes, making him accountable or knowing that that is a possibility that he could come on blitzes? What does that do?

“The most important thing for us is, by them having to account for him, especially using a lineman, is now you’ve got your four D-Linemen in one-on-one situations, our four horses. If they’re in one-on-one situations, you’re pretty confident that one of them is going to win. They’ve got to bring in extra people to protect and now it’s are we blitzing or are we rushing four? Are we defending with seven in the backend while you’re sending out three? It’s just a cat and mouse game. When you have to account for him, you’re freeing up your four horses in the one-on-one situations. For him to win some of those one-on-ones, to beat the back, and some of the things that played out with the pressures that were run, same thing with K’Waun, we’ve always stood up here and talked about how they’ve got, in order for those four, even though they’re pretty darn good, the whole group of D-Linemen, in order for them to be maximized we have to get offenses to account for the safeties, the nickels, the backers. When they do, it just frees up. Now you’re just creating one-on-ones for those guys and when you can do that, that group is pretty talented. It’s just a cat and mouse game of making sure that teams play us honest.”

It’s not the flashiest position, but what kind of season is DL D.J. Jones having and if you’re not going to have him on Sunday, do you have to change things up schematically to defend the run?

“D.J.’s been playing very well. He’s explosive. He reminds me of [Los Angeles Chargers DT] Brandon Mebane back when Mebane was younger. He’s just got great balance, great explosion, great foot quickness and a lot of power. He’s kind of built low to the ground so he’s tough to deal with. It doesn’t change anything. There’s [DL] Sheldon Day, [DL] Jullian Taylor, [DL] Solomon’s [Thomas] been filling in there. We’ve got a lot of guys who can play those spots. [DL] Arik’s [Armstead] been in there, [DL DeForest Buckner] Buck’s been in there, so the scheme won’t change much, but D.J.’s still working through it and he still has a chance, but we’ll see how it works out as we get closer.”

How do you feel like the defense played Monday night? Obviously, not the outcome you wanted, but a couple takeaways and seemed to contain Seattle Seahawks QB Russell Wilson more than a lot of teams had.

“You know what, it was a good day. I wish we would have been better in those sudden change opportunities. We had two of them inside the 20-yard line where we’ve got to hold them to field goals and we gave up touchdowns. The last drive of the game, make it a tie, don’t give them the field goal. But the resolve, the fight, the grit, all the things that we believe in philosophically it showed up play-in and play-out and they kept rising to the challenge. Going blow for blow, and at the end of regulation, I think they had 225 yards of offense and one explosive play and that’s one of the most explosive offenses in football. I was more pumped for the guys and the resolve they showed and the fight and that all gas, no break mentality that they represent every day and for them to do that and have success, I was pumped up for them. Like I told them on Tuesday, it was a good day, but it’s not good enough unless you win. So, we’ve got to go up, we’ve got to do it again, we’ve got to win a football game.”

On Russell Wilson's final scramble, what was the breakdown on that play? Was it a gap integrity thing?

"No, we brought a five-man pressure and they blocked us up with seven and it created a lane for Russell to run through that C-gap. The coverage we were playing on the backend caught us a little bit deeper than we wanted and it gave him an exit lane."

You weren't expecting the tight end to stay in?

"I wasn't expecting tight end to stay in. It was a good call by them."

What did you see from LB Dre Greenlaw from his first start at WILL?

"The game's not too big for him. He did a nice job. He was calm. It's good to have Fred in there because Fred's a calming presence for him. He was on his job, he was very reliable, he was dependent, wasn't afraid. We have other packages in the event, like if he was panicking, but we felt very comfortable with him throughout the game to keep him in there for the entire game and I thought he did a really nice job. The game wasn't too big. I don't think he had any busts, a couple of technique things he could clean up, but he was on this job. I was pumped up for him."

How impressive was his interception?

"It was pretty impressive. Especially the way it came out and the coverage we were playing from a zone-pressure standpoint. It's not just him. Between Fred, [CB Richard Sherman] Sherm and defense in general and the way that came out and the way they kind of zoned it off and we were still in position where if he did throw the check-down that was going to be a two-yard loss. I thought they did a great job executing and for him to not panic with the ball in the air and that smooth pick. Only thing for him is to show off his speed and take it home, but I thought he did a great job."

Are you optimistic CB Ahkello Witherspoon will be back and if so what kind of impact will he have? It's been awhile I know.

"No, it's been awhile. We're working through the performance staff. We'll see what happens as the week gets closer. Obviously, Spoon was playing at a Pro-Bowl level and knock on wood, [CB Emmanuel] Moseley's been doing a great job too, but again that comes back to the performance staff and how he's working and we'll see when he gets full clearance."

Were there things you learned about Arizona Cardinals Head Coach Kliff Kingsbury's offense going against it that you didn't necessarily know previously just by watching it on film?

"There's always things. One of the things that I think, I'll hold back on some of that stuff, but there are definitely things you can learn from without telling them what we think we learned, anyway. Anytime you see somebody over and over again, especially we had that short week and now we get a little bit longer. I'm not saying that it's going to be perfect the second time around, but you just pick up on things that they like and all that stuff. You pick up and you just see things you could do a lot better and so hopefully our performance will be a little bit better this week."

When you game plan against a team in such close proximity, how much do you look at what they had success with and then try to figure out what they could do off of the stuff they had success with?

“There’s always that. What holes were you showing them when you played? What holes have you been showing in previous opponents? How have you played things? It’s not just exclusive to the Thursday night game. It’s what did we do against Seattle? What did we do before we played them? What did they do that hurt us that they could come back to it? There’s a whole ball of things that go into this and especially with the extra week, the full week that they have, I’m sure there’s going to be a few more wrinkles and we’ve just got to be ready to play good sound football and figure out what they’re doing and make sure that we’re on our job.”

You’ve harped a lot on getting your guys to maintain the same approach and cancel out all the factors that they can’t control. But, when you’re in a game where you’re playing really well, you didn’t allow a touchdown, for instance, on a drive that didn’t begin with a turnover by the offense. So, do you have to remind the guys during the game to not get frustrated in situations like that or are they pretty in tune with that mentality?

“That’s where [head coach] Kyle [Shanahan] is unbelievable. The mindset of this team is it is a team-oriented game and he talks about it all the time. We might have to win 3-0, we might have to win 51-49, it doesn’t matter how you win a football game, it’s that you win. The main focus is that if you are focused, and it goes back to the defense and what coach always talks about, if you’re focused on what the offense is doing then you can’t put out maximum output because you’re focusing your energy on something you have absolutely zero control over. So, our guys have done an excellent job maintaining their own level of focus within themselves on things that they’ve got control over so they can roll. I mean, shoot, offense has displayed it this year, defense has displayed it, special teams, you know the group in general, they’re so focused on being their own personal best that you’re going to get their greatest punch regardless of the situation or how hard it’s getting. I think it shows in the way we’ve won games. Whether it was Pittsburgh, where it was takeaways and we had to step up. Whether it was Arizona where defensively we didn’t have our best game, and in a mud-fest in Washington. There’s been a million different ways and to be honest with you it could have happened again on Monday night in a slug-fest. This team is built the right way. Kyle does a great job with messaging and I think the players are a reflection on his leadership and how they operate from a day-to-day basis.”

You guys brought back in DL Damontre Moore, obviously in the wake of DL Ronald Blair III ACL injury. What does Damontre kind of bring to the table considering just how deep this defensive line is? How does he kind of fit your scheme?

“Damontre, you can never have enough pass rushers. Damontre did a fantastic job and he was a victim of numbers. I think if he was on any other roster in football, he would have made their team. It was a numbers deal and if it’s a 53-man roster, he was 54. Unfortunately, he doesn’t have practice squad eligibility. He should have been on someone’s roster. Selfishly, their loss in my mind. Damontre will come in, he’ll help us

out. You lose a lot with Ronnie because of his mental makeup and all the things that he brings, but Damontre displayed a great amount of tenacity. The man has been through the ringer. He was a third-round draft pick, I believe. He's been cut and he's felt that and he's been out of the league, so he's got a different why. So, his drive is going to push him to success. I don't think he's going to fail, personally. We're pumped to have him."

With this addition, too, you guys, San Francisco's one of the few teams in the NFL to have multiple players from the AAF. What does it kind of show that maybe you guys are looking elsewhere outside of the traditional avenues of like collegiate football to find guys that can actually play for this team?

"Personally, I think it shows [general manager] John [Lynch] and [vice president of player personnel] Adam [Peters] and [vice president of player personnel] Martin Mayhew and those guys and the diligence they have to look through every single avenue that they can and leaving no stone left unturned. They're so detailed up there to bring as many players forward as possible. I just think it's more of a credit to them and their focus and trying to find every single advantage they can to make this team better."

The Seahawks seemed to have some success leaving DL Nick Bosa unblocked and running misdirection and rollouts his direction. Is that something he can improve on with just experience and seeing that kind of stuff?

"It would be experience. It's odd. When a D-Lineman is unblocked, your tendency is to freeze and he just, with time and experience he'll definitely get better at all that stuff."