

TRANSCRIPTIONS



**Defensive Coordinator Robert Saleh
Press Conference – December 5, 2019
San Francisco 49ers**

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Any update you can provide on DL Arik Armstead? Is that a serious--?

“No, just a vet day. He had a big workload in that Baltimore game, the things we were asking him to do, just give him a day off.”

So, there’s no concern he misses Sunday?

“No.”

He has obviously had a great season for you. What does he mean to the pass rush and the overall defensive front?

“You know, he’s probably one of the most violent defensive linemen in football. The knock-back he creates, especially when he’s matched up on the tight end. In that Baltimore game, we were able to put him in basically an equivalent of a six technique over an offensive tackle. He’s very versatile, he’s got great pocket push in the pocket, so he means a lot. He’s kind of the glue that puts all this together and it’s, between all of them, they’ve all got a unique skillset that kind of helps them all work together.”

The Saints are 10-2, they’re doing a lot of things right, but it seems like their offense hasn’t fully clicked like they had in previous seasons. I don’t know if you agree with that assessment, but if so, are you weary like “Oh no, I hope it’s not this week?”

“I still see the same stuff on offense. I still believe that they’re still an explosive offense. Obviously, they went and [New Orleans Saints QB] Drew Brees missed a pocket of games there and they’re transitioning back into it, but they’re still putting up, they’re still getting a lot of yards, they’re still putting up points. I know they had the one bad game against Atlanta, but other than that, they’ve been putting up yards and points and they’re still going to be a very difficult challenge to keep at bay.”

What is it about New Orleans Saints WR Michael Thomas that makes him so tough to stop or slow down?

“He’s big, his foot speed and quickness is pretty elite. But, he’s so strong at the point of attack and can catch the football. He’s an all-around receiver, excellent route runner. I’ve got a lot of respect for him, he’s got great hands, he does well after the catch, too, so he’s a problem. They obviously try to give him the ball and we’ve got to do our best, all 11 got to try and stop him.”

I don't think you played them last year, but have you seen him kind of become more of a focal point? I know New Orleans Saints RB Alvin Kamara also has been banged up a little bit, but it seems like he's kind of become the center piece now.

"He's obviously a focal point. Anytime you have a superstar like that, and same thing with Kamara, they do a good job of getting those guys the football and making sure that they're always active within the offense, and so it's our responsibility, we've got to find out where they are at all times and do our best to maintain them."

What's it say about their chemistry, the fact that Brees completes such a high percentage of his passes, his targets, to Thomas?

"He's very, well Brees is very efficient. Obviously, he can recognize coverage in a heartbeat and he gets the ball out faster than anyone in football, I believe. He's up there. He's always been efficient as far as completion percentage with Thomas. I'm not sure exactly what his individual completion percentage is with him, but I do know that those guys have a great connection and they work very well together."

It's 83-percent.

"Is it 83? Jeez. That's really high, but it just feels like with Drew he's got a high completion percentage with everybody. He's one of the best."

They've added the New Orleans Saints QB Taysom Hill element to their offense. What does that challenge pose? It seems like it's a real switch up from when Brees is there.

"Yeah, I mean they put him at tight end, they put him at receiver, running back, quarterback and he's not just a decoy. They're going to get him involved, they get him the ball even as a receiver. He blocks his tail off. I've got a lot of respect for him and the way he plays and the effort and the standard that he plays with. We do have to be aware of where he is when he's on and off the field and of course obviously not panicking, but making sure we do have a plan for him."

Do you have to account for x-amount of plays during the week with him in the mind in practice to prepare?

"Yeah, you do. We've got all those walk-throughs. Throughout the week with walk-through and practice and all that I think we cover for every team that we play, we pretty much cover everything, almost everything, as much we can anyways. Obviously, he is a big focal point of their offense and something that we do have to cover, but at the same time not something that I feel like we have to panic over either."

Does he have his own look-team guy playing him this week?

"No, not this week."

LB Fred Warner, obviously NFC Defensive Player of the Month. It was interesting last week Baltimore Ravens head coach John Harbaugh said some teams didn't think he was going to be a drafted guy. Obviously, you guys thought that and made that happen, but coming out of college was he uniquely suited for your scheme or can you just discuss why maybe some others didn't view him in the same light?

“One of the things that we take pride in with our scheme, and I can speak for the offense too, when you’ve got so much conviction over what you’re running as an organization in terms of what that scheme is, you can easily identify what guys fit and what guys don’t. When it came to Fred, the conversations we had at the combine and I know I’ve told you all before that I thought he was the smartest combine interview I’ve ever had. Then you combine what you see on tape and you could just see where he could fit and how the angles and the different positions that he was put in as a college player, how they transition to the NFL and how they transition to what we ask them to do. There was no doubt in our mind, which is why we took him in the third round, that he would end up being a really good football player for us. Pleased with where he is and he will even admit it, he can get even better. He’s only a second-year in the league and he still has a lot more, he’s going to grow into his own and he’s going to become more of a man. He’s going to be even more vocal and by man I mean strength. I’m excited for where he’s going in his career.”

How much did LB Kwon Alexander affect his growth this year?

“Kwon is still here, you know? So, Kwon is a fantastic leader. He’s been everything that we could possibly hope for. I hate that he’s not with us on the football field, but he’s here on this trip when he didn’t have to be. He’s at every meeting when he doesn’t have to be. Just having that veteran presence, that energy on the sideline, and he’s there with Fred talking through stuff. It’s priceless for Kwon.”

How much does what he does pre-snap put him in position to make the most splash plays that he wasn’t making last year?

“With Fred?”

Yes.

“Well, as a MIKE linebacker, the balance for us as coaches and MIKE linebackers, because he’s so smart you want to give him more. But like any player, the more you give, the slower they go. We always try to balance off to try to eliminate as much as we can from him so he can just go line up and play because one of his greatest strengths is he can identify formations, tendencies and down-distance situations. He can pick up indicators quicker than most people can, so to take away some of that stuff from him is really more the challenge of giving him more.”

So, what do you think has led to the increase in splash plays?

“We’ve taken a lot off his plate so he can just go line up and play. Putting more of the onus on making sure that guys lineup and go play. We were playing some of those read-option teams, the Arizona teams, we’re asking him to make a lot of checks and see if he can get us in the perfect defense. While he’s busy trying to do that, he’s not able to focus on his job. Even though he was getting everyone lined up and everything was perfect, it’s just not fair for him. So, to take a little bit off his plate so he can go ahead and go play, I think that’s really been the difference.”

Is that putting more on the plate of the other linebackers, the rookies?

“No, because again, it comes back to us to make sure that the defense understands. Just try to make it as easy as possible so they can go play, and that all comes back to us, too, as coaches. We put the onus on everybody to make sure that we can go do that.”

You’re obviously very close to 49ers radio broadcaster Tim Ryan. What was your reaction yesterday when you found out his comment and the suspension that was given?

“You know, with Tim, I’ve always as a human being try to judge people on how I interact with them. I love the man. He’s a very genuine human being and I know he knows he made a mistake, and he’s just trying to move this on as quickly as possible.”