

49ers Clips – March 3, 2017

Local Media

Is 49ers DB Jimmie Ward a Cornerback or a Safety?

By Joe Fann, 49ers.com

<http://www.49ers.com/news/article-2/Is-49ers-DB-Jimmie-Ward-a-Cornerback-or-a-Safety/853f2864-2968-43dd-89dd-5e867638af4e>

49ers GM Lynch sees timely talks as way to head off free agency

By Eric Branch, San Francisco Chronicle

<http://www.sfchronicle.com/49ers/article/49ers-GM-Lynch-sees-timely-talks-as-way-to-head-10973905.php>

49ers GM John Lynch raves about draft's QB class

By Eric Branch, San Francisco Chronicle

<http://www.sfchronicle.com/49ers/article/49ers-GM-Lynch-raves-about-draft-s-QB-class-10973299.php>

Report: 49ers among teams interested in QB Tyrod Taylor

By Daniel Mano, San Jose Mercury News

<http://www.mercurynews.com/2017/03/03/report-49ers-among-teams-interested-in-qb-tyrod-taylor/>

New scheme could lead to new look for 49ers cornerbacks

By Nick Wagoner, ESPN.com

http://www.espn.com/blog/san-francisco-49ers/post/_id/23689/new-scheme-could-lead-to-new-look-for-49ers-cornerbacks

Bold offseason moves for every NFC team

By Carl Yoder, ESPN.com

http://www.espn.com/nfl/insider/story/_id/18807916/bold-offseason-moves-every-nfc-team-2017-nfl-free-agency

National Media

Same Seahawks' band still capable of making plenty of noise

By Matt Calkins, The Seattle Times

<http://www.seattletimes.com/sports/seahawks/same-seahawks-band-still-capable-of-making-plenty-of-noise/>

Rams figure to be active in free agency

By Gary Klein, Los Angeles Times

<http://www.latimes.com/sports/rams/la-sp-rams-mcvay-snead-20170302-story.html>

Time running out? Reasons abound for Cardinals to draft quarterback

By Kent Somers, The Arizona Republic

<http://www.azcentral.com/story/sports/nfl/cardinals/2017/03/02/time-running-out-reasons-abound-cardinals-draft-quarterback/98646884/>

Keenan Allen 'on track' to return from torn ACL

By Conor Orr, NFL.com

<http://www.nfl.com/news/story/0ap3000000789015/article/keenan-allen-on-track-to-return-from-torn-acl>

Brandon Marshall posts farewell amid pending release from Jets

By Rich Cimini, ESPN.com

http://www.espn.com/nfl/story/_/id/18810257/new-york-jets-release-wide-receiver-brandon-marshall

Alfred Morris could be out as Cowboys look for McFadden to return

By Clarence Hill, Fort Worth Star-Telegram

<http://www.star-telegram.com/sports/nfl/dallas-cowboys/cowboys-corner-blog/article136057258.html>

Local Clips – Full Version

Is 49ers DB Jimmie Ward a Cornerback or a Safety?

By Joe Fann, 49ers.com

Jimmie Ward's position versatility has evolved into an annual debate about where the San Francisco 49ers defensive back best fits into the team's secondary. That question arose once again this week at the NFL Combine.

So is Ward a cornerback or a safety?

Ward, a safety in college at Northern Illinois, began his career at the position after the 49ers selected him in the first round of the 2014 NFL Draft. But Ward didn't begin to see significant playing time until he moved to nickel cornerback. In 2016, Ward was moved to a starting outside corner, while still spending plenty of time covering the slot depending on the matchup.

Ward has posted 126 total tackles, two sacks, two interceptions and one pick-six during his three seasons in San Francisco.

Kyle Shanahan and John Lynch – as well as defensive coordinator Robert Saleh – have already begun to discuss where their talented defensive back will play next season.

"I'm not sure yet," Shanahan said on Wednesday. "That's definitely something we've discussed, because I know he's capable of doing both. When you have a guy who's capable at both, it gives you some freedom (in free agency and the draft.)"

Lynch provided a little more clarity on Thursday.

"That's been a topic of great conversation," the GM began. "We think he's a good scheme fit for what we're doing at the safety position. But you don't know that until you put him there. It's projecting. We think his traits (and) his skills translate very well to that position. It's such an instinct position that we're excited to have him give it a go."

Ward's versatility, while a huge asset to a defense, also presents a potential pitfall. In regards to moving a player around to different positions, it begs the question of how much is too much?

"The more a guy does, sometimes the worse he gets," Shanahan said candidly. "It all depends on the person, and it all depends on the scheme. Anytime you have a guy like that, as a coach, it gives you more options. Whatever option you choose, you need to do the best by him and the best by the team, also."

So whether San Francisco's brain trust decides that Ward is best served as a safety or a cornerback, it's fair to assume that's where Ward will stay for a bulk of the offseason program.

"I don't want to bounce him around too much, because then you don't really see anything," Shanahan said. "It takes guys time to get used to a position."

The conversations will continue to be fluid while the team adds various pieces via free agency and the draft. Once the roster is set (for the most part, anyways), Lynch and Co. will make a determination as to where to deploy Ward's chess piece.

49ers GM Lynch sees timely talks as way to head off free agency

By Eric Branch, San Francisco Chronicle

INDIANAPOLIS — Last week, the 49ers added three players, signing nose guard Earl Mitchell, cornerback K'Waun Williams and wide receiver DeAndre Carter to contracts.

This week? Don't be surprised if they sign some of their own players.

General manager John Lynch said the 49ers could sign some of their scheduled free agents before the start of free agency next Thursday. Among their notable free agents are kicker Phil Dawson and wide receiver Jeremy Kerley.

"Some of those are in the process of going on right now," Lynch said. "Hopefully, we see some things in the next couple of days."

Lynch said contract extensions with players on the roster aren't imminent. The most logical candidates are running back Carlos Hyde and defensive back Jimmie Ward, who will be entering the final year of their contracts.

Lynch suggested the current state of the roster means a wave of extensions isn't forthcoming.

"We haven't gotten there yet," Lynch said of extension talks. "Frankly, I wish we had more of those because that's something we believe in: drafting and developing your own players and signing them.

"That's something that will be very much a part of what we do moving forward. That's part of our job — to get the guys that warrant that."

Safety dance: Lynch was direct when asked about Ward's position in 2017.

His response: The 49ers will try the cornerback at free safety in their new 4-3 defense this offseason to see if it's a good fit.

Ward, a safety at Northern Illinois, has played both nickel cornerback and on the outside throughout his three-year NFL career.

"Just being completely honest, we think he's a good scheme fit for what we're doing at the free-safety position," said Lynch, a former NFL safety. "But we don't know that until you put him there. It's projecting. We think his traits, his skills, translate very well to that, but it's such an instinct position."

On Wednesday, head coach Kyle Shanahan only offered the 49ers were considered moving Ward to safety.

The 49ers are seeking a free safety with excellent range to patrol the back end of their defense. The template has been provided by Seattle's Earl Thomas.

"We're excited to give (Ward) an offseason to say, 'Let's give this a go,'" Lynch said. "That doesn't preclude him from playing nickel in some situations, or moving around. I think he brings some great versatility."

If Lynch sticks at free safety, Eric Reid or Jaquiski Tartt will presumably man the other safety spot. It's not clear if Antoine Bethea would fit into the team's plans in such a scenario. Bethea, who will turn 33 in July, is scheduled to count \$7 million against the salary cap.

49ers GM John Lynch raves about draft's QB class
By Eric Branch, San Francisco Chronicle

INDIANAPOLIS — The 49ers have the No. 2 pick in the 2017 draft, but they won't use it on their biggest area of need because this year's quarterback class is weak and ...

Wait. What? Hold on.

General manager John Lynch spent much of Thursday at the NFL combine dumping cold water on what has become nearly gospel. Weak? Lynch suggested he was wowed by this year's QB class.

He said Notre Dame's DeShone Kizer "blew the doors off" his interview with the 49ers on Wednesday night, Clemson's Deshaun Watson has a "confidence" and "aura" that's "pretty special" and the more he saw of North Carolina's Mitch Trubisky, the more he liked him. As for Texas Tech's Patrick Mahomes, Lynch offered that "the film's pretty special."

"I think it's a very talented draft class at that position, one we're very excited about," Lynch said. "And, look, I don't think you need to be too transparent to realize that's a position we're looking at. We don't have any (QBs). That's a position that's a big focal point of our preparation right now and this week's a big part of that."

It's possible Lynch is being sincere, but even rookie GMs are fully capable of creating predraft smokescreens.

Lynch has also said the 49ers are open to trading the No. 2 pick, but he won't maximize the value of the selection if it appears he's too eager to move back in the draft. So perhaps his generous appraisal of the 2017 QBs is meant to signal the 49ers won't trade the No. 2 without receiving a nice haul in return.

Yes, lying season in the NFL can get confusing, but there's no doubt Lynch was truthful when he said this: The 49ers need quarterbacks.

Barring the unforeseen, they will have zero on their roster when free agency opens Thursday.

The unique situation explains why both Lynch and head coach Kyle Shanahan have refused to dismiss the possibility of Colin Kaepernick re-signing with the 49ers after he officially opts out of the final year of his contract before free agency.

"There are things that Kyle likes about his game," Lynch said. "I think it would be foolish to say we're done with this."

Despite their 2-14 record last season, the 49ers' head-coach and GM openings were viewed as attractive by many largely because the new hires would have a clean slate to rebuild as they saw fit.

And nowhere is that more evident than at the most important position in the NFL.

"A lot of people look at it like 'Oh my gosh, you don't have any quarterbacks,'" Lynch said. "But that also is somewhat liberating in that you can create this thing in that position that is so critical in the way that you want it. Now, we're restricted by who's available, but I think we've got a lot of great options at our disposal. We've got the No. 2 pick in the draft."

Before the 49ers use their first draft pick, however, their most pressing needs will come into sharper focus after they wade through free agency. Last year, they took their conservative approach to free agency to the extreme under GM Trent Baalke. They signed only guard Zane Beadles and third-string quarterback Thad Lewis.

On Thursday, Lynch smiled when he was told 49ers fans have been conditioned to a nap during the first day of free agency. His advice next Thursday?

“Stay awake,” he said. “We need players. We’ve got to get ourselves in a situation ... so that we don’t go into this draft saying we have to have this. Everyone says the best way is to go in and (draft) the best players, but sometimes you can’t do that. You need certain positions. And we don’t want to be in that position everywhere.”

Report: 49ers among teams interested in QB Tyrod Taylor

By Daniel Mano, San Jose Mercury News

Add Tyrod Taylor to the list of quarterbacks connected with the 49ers.

The Bills’ signal caller has drawn interest from three teams — including San Francisco — if Buffalo decides to release Taylor, according to Vic Carucci of The Buffalo News.

The Browns and Jets are also reportedly intrigued by Taylor, who is due \$30.75 million next season. That figure suggests the Bills may release the QB by the March 11 deadline — and, as Carucci notes, a trade is “unlikely because the terms of Taylor’s contract would still be in place.”

Taylor threw for 6,058 yards and 37 touchdowns over the past two seasons while tossing just 12 total interceptions.

49ers GM John Lynch expressed intent Thursday in thoroughly exploring free agency and trade options for the 49ers’ quarterback position.

New scheme could lead to new look for 49ers cornerbacks

By Nick Wagoner, ESPN.com

SANTA CLARA, Calif. -- Free agency begins March 9, and teams can begin negotiations with those poised to hit the market beginning March 7. We'll count down to that period with a position-by-position look at what the San Francisco 49ers have in place, who is set to hit the market, what the 49ers might need and who might fit the bill.

Position: Cornerback

Under contract: Tramaine Brock, Jimmie Ward, Dontae Johnson, K'Waun Williams, Keith Reaser, Will Redmond, Rashard Robinson, JaCorey Shepherd, Prince Charles Iworah.

Pending free agents: Chris Davis (restricted).

What's needed: The first order of business for the 49ers is determining whether Ward will remain at corner or if they would prefer to move him to free safety, where he can play the Earl Thomas-type role in new coordinator Robert Saleh's defense. Ward is the only player on the roster with the skill set to handle that job, but he has also steadily improved as a corner and was valuable when healthy in 2016 because he could play in the slot and outside. Niners general manager John Lynch has indicated Ward will get a look at free safety this offseason.

Overall, the Niners have a solid group in place here, but this is a position that could evolve, in large part because of the change in defensive scheme. Saleh's defense is rooted in the principles of Pete Carroll's Seattle Seahawks. That system values long-limbed, physical corners capable of playing press coverage and handling zones outside the hashes. The Niners seem to have some corners who fit that profile, such as Robinson and, to a lesser extent, Brock and Johnson. Redmond is more of an unknown after he missed his entire rookie season with a knee injury, though he projects as an option in the slot.

This is one of the few positions on the roster where the 49ers seem to have some depth, so diving into free agency or the draft for league average caliber players wouldn't do much good. But if the Niners do want to address cornerback, finding a No. 1 type of corner who fits their physical profile is possible in this year's class. As an added bonus, signing a top corner would allow the Niners to commit to moving Ward to free safety and potentially fill two spots with one move.

Houston's A.J. Bouye would be particularly intriguing as an emerging star who is only 25 and went to the Pro Bowl last season. It's a small sample size, but Bouye is 6-foot, 192 pounds and would be a perfect fit in the Niners' scheme. He won't come cheap, though, and the Niners might be more inclined to invest at positions of greater need. The same could be said of other top corners scheduled to hit the market such as New England's Logan Ryan and Buffalo's Stephon Gilmore. The Los Angeles Rams' Trumaine Johnson received the franchise tag for the second year in a row, making it unlikely the Niners would make a run at him.

Possible fits: Malcolm Butler (New England/restricted), A.J. Bouye (Houston), Logan Ryan (New England), Stephon Gilmore (Buffalo), Trumaine Johnson (Los Angeles Rams/franchise tag).

Bold offseason moves for every NFC team

By Carl Yoder, ESPN.com

San Francisco 49ers

Sign-and-trade Alshon Jeffery for additional picks

The 49ers currently have a massive amount of cap space and few key free agents that they absolutely need to retain. Given that the team is likely more than a year away from returning to the heights of the Jim Harbaugh era, it would make sense for the 49ers to sign a prized free agent with the understanding that they would then trade him to a cap-strapped team such as Philadelphia, effectively renting their cap space out for draft picks. ESPN's Bill Barnwell once raised this hypothetical situation on a podcast, and Chase Stuart expanded on it at his Football Perspective website, using the Jaguars as an example.

Jeffery would work here. San Francisco could sign Jeffery as a free agent and pay him a larger-than-normal signing bonus up front. They would then subsequently trade him to the Eagles for a valuable package of picks, with Philadelphia essentially using picks to open up salary-cap space they would not have otherwise. When the player is traded, his signing bonus accelerates onto the original team's cap, so the 49ers would be left with a dead-money charge for Jeffery as the cost of effectively buying the picks from the Eagles.

The 49ers could then take those picks and either use them in the draft themselves or as part of a trade package for the Patriots' Jimmy Garoppolo. San Francisco would likely view the No. 2 overall pick as too high of a cost for Garoppolo, but if they acquired more picks as part of this hypothetical trade with the Eagles, they could put together a package worth something similar to a late first-round pick without forgoing the opportunity to load up on other young players in the draft.