

SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS

# TRANSCRIPTIONS



**Defensive Coordinator Robert Saleh  
Press Conference – December 7, 2017  
San Francisco 49ers  
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**Were you disappointed at all that you didn't have to call defenses on Sunday?**

"It was awesome to be able to sit back and watch the offense go to work. You don't get many opportunities at that. I don't care what team you play for. You just don't get opportunities to be able to be a spectator as much. So, it was pretty cool."

**Did you notice in the fourth quarter that your team has more energy? Just the way it's playing on your side, the defense.**

"It is contagious. When the offense is moving the ball you could hear our guys on the sideline. It was the urgency at which they felt they needed to get the ball back for the offense because they were doing so well. It's a team game. It's no difference that the defense is getting three-and-outs. The offense is going to feel like they need to get going. If the offense is staying on the field the defense is going to feel like they need to get them the ball. Then special teams doing what they've been doing all year, and they've been playing great ball. The whole thing, it's always about team ball. Last week was a pretty cool example of it."

**When you go up against Houston Texans DeAndre Hopkins, do you expect both your corners to see him at times on Sunday?**

"For sure. They put DeAndre everywhere. He's a heck of a receiver, too. I anticipate [CB] K'Waun [Williams] getting some of DeAndre Hopkins too. It's going to be a cool challenge."

**Are you eager to see how CB Ahkello Witherspoon, I mean it seems like Witherspoon gets a little bit better each week and that this would be a nice test to see exactly where he is? Are you sort of eager to see how that matchup goes?**

"I am. I'm excited really for the whole group. I don't ever want to shut down questions or anything, but just for Witherspoon and the challenge he has ahead of him, [DB Adrian] Colbert and the challenge that he has, [CB] Dontae Johnson, the defensive line to see if we can get after the quarterback, the linebackers running and hitting. It's all 11. We've been doing a really good job. We've been steadily improving as the year has gone. Especially since that Dallas game. For us to continue that growth to get better so at the end of the year we're peaking, it's kind of the whole way this system is built is that come crunch time we're playing at a faster speed than everybody else. Once we get going as an organization it's really going to start showing."

**On the DL Cassius Marsh sack where DL DeForest Buckner helped set it up, how well did Buckner execute that and is that something that you can do or--?**

“He did a great job. I’m sure they’re going, it kind of showed up a little bit too much on tape. He’s got to figure out how to get a little more sly with it. It’s not something we’ve been doing this year. It popped up and teams are just leaning so much on Buck that it was just something that the guys came up with in the D-Line room and it worked. So, not something you want to make a living out of, but at least it brings a little bit awareness to them that they can’t just let our D-Line run free.”

**When you all signed LB Elvis Dumervil, questions he’s had his injuries the last couple of years, and his age, I think general manager John Lynch even said it was a bit of a risk. Has he done enough to prove to you that he still has enough in the tank?**

“He still has enough in the tank. He’s missed two sacks where he had them in the hands, and he had one called back because of a penalty. He’s been inching towards double-digit sacks, so he’s been producing. With leads you’ll get even more opportunity for him to get out there so he can produce even more. He’s been a pleasant, I shouldn’t say a pleasant surprise, the guy’s been all-time in terms of QB-rush production. From that standpoint when you’re dealing with people like him I don’t know if you’re ever really surprised. But, it is awesome to have him here.”

**He has an option year on his contract. It would seem like edge rushers are a need here. Do you envision him as part of the future?**

“I envision all of them. Of course the evaluation process always goes and I’m sure that is something that John and [head coach] coach Kyle [Shanahan] are constantly talking about with [vice president of player personnel] Adam [Peters] and [senior personnel executive] Martin Mayhew.”

**You talk a lot about the simplicity of your defense. What are the virtues of simplicity?**

“Speed. You get to the point where if you have continuity in the backend, even in the front, where guys are continually working together, they start understanding where they need to be and they can start focusing less on their responsibility and what we’re asking them to do and more about the offense and what they’re doing to them. When you get to a point where you can play with great anticipation, you can play much faster than the people around you. Like I said, since the Dallas game, the injury bug has kind of, I don’t want to jinx it, has kind of stopped. We’ve been able to have that continuity throughout. So, the improvement that we’ve been seeing has been pretty cool defensively. We’ve just got to continue to stay the course with regards to communication and understanding our responsibilities so that way we can focus more on what the offense is actually trying to do.”

**Do the restrictions placed by the CBA on practice time and meeting time favor simplicity or necessitate simplicity?**

"I can't answer that because there are some complex defenses and they are doing really well. There's easy defenses that aren't doing very well. It's all about consistency in the message I guess you could say, having conviction in what you believe in. There's some really complex systems that people have a lot of belief in and they've got of conviction in and they have a great amount of success. We have a system that we have great conviction in and our coaches are doing an unbelievable job relaying that message and because of it we feel like it's been progressing the way we want it to so far this year."

**Is there a scenario working at the way the season is winding down for Adrian that he could go into the offseason and force you guys to make a tough decision in terms of can he vie for the starting spot long-term starting in the spring?**

"To answer your question, yes. For sure. If he's playing lights out ball you can't ignore it. It'd be a disservice to the players, it'd be a disservice to the organization, it'd be a disservice to everyone if we did. We've taken great pride, Kyle has done an unbelievable job delivering the message of 'The people who do it right, the people who work deliberately and show that they want to get better and show that they want to do things necessary to play great on Sunday are going to be the ones who play.' That message has been supported from the top down. Because of that support and because of that ability to have that conviction over what he wants from our players, we've been able to keep that open mind and allow everyone a chance to go compete for whatever job that they're trying to get."

**Is Colbert playing lights-out ball or is he--?**

"He's doing a really good job. He is. He's showing up on tape. He shows a really good feel back there. Obviously there's still four games left. He's going to have four really cool opportunities to go showcase some more. But, he's shown some really cool traits that we look for out of that free safety."

**I think the Bears longest two passing plays were either a screen or a dump off to running backs. Was that a product of what he was doing in the middle of the field or was it just kind of the way the game was going?**

"It's the way the game was going, for sure. I don't know if they really had an opportunity to challenge us downfield. We were playing really, really good coverage on the backend. They had the one 21-yard screen that was the result of some poor tackling on our part, something that we've been working on to get better at. But, other than that, I think that was their biggest one. They hit a slant that went for 12, but they had one explosive pass the entire day and it came on a screen. We feel really good about what we've been able to do back there. For him patrolling it, it does help that if they do try to test us on the sideline, he does have the ability to go redline to redline. Which is sideline to sideline."

**I think only one pass traveled 11 yards pass the line of scrimmage. Obviously that was by design on their part. Was that because of the coverage do you think when you watch the film, there was nothing open for them?**

“Maybe a little bit of both. We do feel like they’re really starting to understand our three-deep principles. Keep the ball underneath, kill some opportunities. With it, yeah you do get a higher completion percentage. But, when you take all their drop backs we look at it as four, five, or less is a win for the defense. Six or more for the offense on a pass play is a loss in our mind. So from an efficiency standpoint we feel like, I can’t give you the exact number, I have it written down somewhere, but I think they dropped back about 20 times and he either scrambled or it was a sack or it was a check down for three or four yards on a good majority of the plays. So, I think in our mind we lost about six of them. Overall, we felt like even though the completion rate was good we felt like we were doing really well on defense.”

**Is yards per attempt a stat that, I’m sure there’s different stats you look at, is that a big one?**

“Yes. A big one for us, yes. Trying to keep it five yards or less.”

**One more coach about the simplicity of your defense. Does the simplicity make the restrictions on practice time and meeting time less of an issue for you?**

“[Defensive backs] Coach [Jeff] Hafley, he does an unbelievable job with those guys on the backend. Especially with all the cycling and the different things he’s had to do back there with injuries. But, he talked about it this week and last week where one of the few times it was a aha moment where he was like, ‘Man, in these meetings I don’t have to talk about scheme or anything. I can just talk about what’s happening on the football field.’ So for him, he felt like he could really start teaching instead of having to re-teach something that was happening in OTAs. To answer your question, it does. We can get to the nuts and bolts and teach football, rather than scheme.”

**Has Pittsburgh Steelers LB Ryan Shazier been talked about among the players and do you emphasize tackling or anything like that in the wake of an injury like that?**

“It’s terrible what happened to him. Love that kid too, he’s a fantastic linebacker. If it’s been talked about with the guys I haven’t heard it. But, our style of tackling, it goes back to keeping your head out of the game, shoulder tackling, keep your head leverage side. It’s unfortunate his head got in there a little bit. It was very unlucky. I pray to God. I still haven’t heard anything, but I pray to God he’ll be alright and come back playing.”

**I’ve got a QB Jimmy Garoppolo question for you. There seems to be, for a 2-10 team, a lot of excitement because maybe the quarterback is in place and that’s obviously a big deal. Do you sense that or is the defense in its own little cocoon?**

“We’re in our own cocoon, we are. But you can’t help but notice. The first couple of weeks when he was working on seven-on-seven, he’s got a really cool demeanor to him. He’s got a really good arm. I don’t know what goes on on the offensive side of the ball. I don’t know anything else except for what I see. Guys are excited. Like we talked about earlier, there was an urgency on the sideline to get the offense the ball. I get the quarterback is a big deal, but the rest of the offense seemed like they were playing really good ball. The O-Line looked like they had their best day. The receivers were making some really good plays. The running backs were doing a really good job. It all

comes down to team ball, as you guys know. To answer your question, you always hope that you have answers I guess. But, he's cool."

**Your time in Jacksonville, when you look at what Houston is doing, is it different this year in terms of what you saw in previous years?**

"It got a little bit different when [Houston Texans QB Deshaun] Watson was in there. Just some different schemes and all that stuff. They're still doing some carryover stuff from last year. There is obviously some wrinkles here and there. But, for the most part it's very similar."

**You obviously had time in Houston. So did a lot of other coaches on the staff. What's this year been like just reuniting with everybody? How long ago was it, about 10 years ago or so?**

"You know, we still keep in contact. When Kyle was with [Atlanta Falcons head coach Dan Quinn] DQ that was the same group of guys. My best friend is [Los Angeles Rams offensive coordinator] Matt LaFleur. They've been together forever. There was always that connection, seeing each other. But to actually work again together, it's been really, really cool just because of the fact that from a continuity standpoint, it happens in all coaches buildings, no one is really worried about looking over their back. There's a lot of trust, not a lot of agenda in terms of what people are trying to get done. So, because of it, between special teams, offense, defense, we can work really, really well together to make sure that we're having a really efficient practice without worrying about the other guy trying to embarrass the other person. Because of that, you can get a lot of work done. So, that working relationship combined with the schemes that we all have, it's been really cool."