

SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS

TRANSCRIPTIONS



**General Manager John Lynch and Head Coach Kyle Shanahan
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San Francisco 49ers
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We talk to head coach Kyle Shanahan several times a week. Haven't heard too much from you, especially the last part of the season. How did you feel about how the team concluded this season?

John Lynch: "I got a great deal of pride with the way we finished. That's so much to becoming a successful organization, is finishing everything you do. I'm really proud of the way Kyle and his staff kept the team positive and upbeat, but at the same time never lowered our expectations of what we expected out of them. Yes, our goal is to win games. But, when we had some really tough losses, I thought Kyle did a tremendous job of leading these guys and keeping the proper perspective. And so, when it all came together, I was really just proud. I think they came to work every day and I saw a team and I saw players getting better. That's what you want to see during the course of a year, particularly with young players, any player. I saw players getting better right down to the finish. That is very encouraging."

As a general manager, how do you weigh what you're seeing on the field as far as the wins taking place and what that does to your draft order?

JL: "We're trying to build a winning culture here. Anybody who had thoughts of, 'Man, you guys shouldn't be winning these games,' that's why you play. You play to win. That was always our philosophy. Having been through it myself as a player, I had a very similar year in Tampa, 6-10, in [former NFL head coach] Tony Dungy's first year. I think the record might have been actually 1-8, 1-9 at some point, we finished 6-10. I felt what that did for us moving forward. I think that's much more important. That's why we're happy and proud with the way we finished. I think Kyle and I have been doing a lot of talking throughout this process that we love the way we finished, but if our players think just because we finish this way it's just going to roll on over, that doesn't happen in this league. That's one thing I learned over and over, is that you've got to go create it. It's a new year, it's a new team, it's a new year. The way we work, the way we go about our business is going to affect how we play as a team into next year."

You guys did a good job of managing expectations when you came in. Does the way you finished the season and the acquisition of QB Jimmy Garoppolo accelerate what you think internally this team can accomplish in 2018 and 2019, etcetera?

Kyle Shanahan: "I mean, I don't think so. I mean, depends what you guys write is how the expectations go. Hopefully you guys don't go crazy on us. I get everyone is excited, especially when you finish the season with five in a row or six out of the last seven. We understand that. But, I also know that doesn't help at all. It's not going to help you play better. I know one thing is for sure: when we get to Phase 1 or when we get to OTAs that we won't be the exact same as we were right now. We will either be better or worse. The only way you get better is if you work. If we don't, I promise you we'll be worse. We've got to go right back to work, work just as hard as we did last year and try to be the best you can. When you think that way and you don't pay attention to anything else, usually good things happen. This is how we planned for it to go. We wish we would have won more games this year. We were definitely hoping to. But, I am proud of how we finished, just like what [general manager] John [Lynch] said. We'll have that exact same mindset going into next year."

Do you think you finished the season as maybe one of the better teams in the League?

JL: "You know, I remember when Kyle said to you guys, like against Jacksonville, it felt like we were the better team today. That's what I watched. Does that mean we're the better roster in terms of talent at each position? No, we're not there yet. We have a lot of work to do. But, on that given day, we looked like we were the better football team. That speaks to what I was talking about, the way we improve throughout the course of the year. Obviously Jimmy came in and was fabulous. He was great for us and he made people around him better. I think that's the mark of a player who has an opportunity to be special, is do you make people around you better. He did that. There was also a confluence of I think we had a bunch of young guys that were improving. Around that same time a couple things happened. We got healthy after enduring a lot of tough injuries. We got healthy. The experience level of some of these players and the confidence level started to also kick in. When I saw us finish that, yeah, I thought [T] Joe Staley said it well. I don't think there's many teams, had we taken care of business early, were able to sneak into the playoffs, I don't think many teams would have wanted to face us. We were playing good football."

You guys are going into the offseason with projected over 130 million in salary cap room. I think fans see that and think you have an unlimited amount of money to spend. Basically, what is the plan?

JL: "Well, we're putting that together now. That's always ongoing. But, as you guys know, Kyle and I came in here to do this thing together, with a great deal of collaboration. There's constant communication, but he's also getting the team ready. He's putting the offensive plan together each week. We'll be having a ton of conversations. We have a good idea of where we want to go and how we want to do it. I do know that we're both encouraged. We've got a lot of resources both in terms of cap money, but also in terms of draft capital, in terms of draft choices. We have a great opportunity. Again, that opportunity is only what you make of it. And so, one thing we learned, didn't learn, but you just know, last year we studied all these great players, most of those guys get taken care of, either franchise tagged or whatever. We'll

continue to study and continue to try to improve. We'll have a plan that's complete and thorough and well thought out."

Would you imagine to be more aggressive financially than you were last year?

JL: "Look, our volume was pretty intense last year in terms of the number. Really, I remember last year, our plan as we arrived was to try to fill what we perceived as holes in our roster so that we could go draft the best players available, not feel beholden to we've got to come out this with this, this and this. Kyle and I both believe in being aggressive, but also you don't do things just because you have all this money. We have an ownership group that we're very thankful for. When we don't spend to the cap, they don't put that in their pocket and say, 'Thanks guys.' They roll it over to the next year. We'll be patient, but also aggressive. If we see fit, the opportunity to go get someone who can really improve us, we'll certainly take that opportunity."

What are your hopes and plans to get something done with Jimmy over the next couple of months?

JL: "We want Jimmy to be a Niner for a long, long time. That process is going to take place here. We're eager to get that done, to have the opportunity. But, I think one thing that we really believe is that those things should take place between us and his representatives and not occur and transpire in the public. That's the way we're going to treat that. You have our assurances, and the fans do, that we'd like nothing more than to make him a Niner for a long, long time."

You and Kyle have said repeatedly that you would like Jimmy to be here for a long, long time. Jimmy hasn't said the same thing yet. He keeps saying, "We'll see, we'll get there when we get there." Does that give you pause at all that he won't at least publicly, verbally say that he wants to be here for a long time?

JL: "Not at all. I think, you know, we've had conversations with him and we know where he stands and we're comfortable with that."

He looks like one of the better quarterbacks in the League based on five games. Are you ready to pay him like one of the best quarterbacks in the league?

JL: "We're going to work hard to try to keep him as a 49er for a long, long time. We're really happy with the way he played. We think he's got some abilities that are unique and we want him here."

Did you make the decision for sure that you were not going to talk to him during the season? Was that the decision you made or was that a joint decision?

JL: "We made that collectively. That's where his side was. That's where we were. We made that collectively and now we'll proceed."

You talked about how you learned about the players when you were 0-9 you learn a lot about them. What do you think you learned about John? John, what did you learn about Kyle through that 0-9, 1-10 stretch?

KS: "I learned that John was who I always thought he was. I knew John before I got here and stuff, but like I'll say a lot, you don't know people until you go through things

with them, especially when you go through adversity. Starting 0-9 here was tough. Especially being a first-year head coach, going through that, coming into a building every day, knowing how hard everyone is working and coming up just short each week. I think one of the things that helped me get through that time was how John handled it every day, how [CEO] Jed [York] handled it every day. They never seemed to lose confidence. I think I can stay pretty confident if I know people around me are confident in me. It was pretty cool to have them around where they didn't waiver, they acted like the same people I've always seen and made me respect them all a lot more."

JL: "I think I've said this publicly. I knew the offensive acumen and the mind that I thought was unique and special in Kyle. What I had never seen in him is him in front of a team, and how he could capture a team and lead a team, which is a big part of being a head coach. I couldn't be more impressed. We faced adversity on numerous occasions. The steady hand with which he handled it, and as I said earlier, it's a gift to be able to adhere to the expectations we set, but also keep a team encouraged and keep a team up and also let them know that even sometimes in a losing effort that we appreciated the way they went about their business. Also, I think what we learned is what we thought. We complement each other well. The communication that we had during the course of the year is crucial and integral. We've got to stick to that moving forward in the future and plan on doing that."

Following up on that, to both of you guys, having gone through last year where you had kind of that sprint and hit the ground running with free agents and stuff, having that year together, how much easier does it make it going into this offseason especially for your guys knowing what Kyle is looking for and the communication too?

JL: "I think a lot easier. I think one thing I've cautioned my staff is, just because we have all that, I mean, last year at this time I think I was broadcasting Kyle's game in the Divisional Round, after a Bye week or whatever. I think because we have all this extra time, we can't get lulled into, 'Hey, we've got this.' We've got to pedal to the metal and continue to work vigorously, which we will. But, I do believe the processes are so much further along. Just like you said, us knowing at each position what they covet, and that even grew throughout the course of the year. So, we're much further along, but our work ethic can't change. Last year it was survival. We had to go and we had to go and we had to go. We've got to keep that mindset, but definitely we're much further along and in a much better place."

You mentioned focusing on being able to select the best players possible in that draft last year. Now that they're done with their rookie year, how would you collectively evaluate that 2017 draft class?

JL: "I've got a great deal of belief in that class. That's just not because I'm tied to them, because we chose them. It's because I saw what they did on the field. I saw the way they conducted themselves. Right from the very top in [DL] Solomon Thomas and [LB] Reuben Foster, to [CB] Ahkello Witherspoon. [RB] Joe Williams was on IR and hopefully he can pick us up. But, then you go to those fifth-rounders with [TE George] Kittle and [WR Trent] Taylor. What I loved is that the vision we had for those guys

started to play out on the field. So, I think that's where the collaboration comes in. When Kyle can articulate, 'Here is what I'm looking for at this position,' and we see that come to life, that's a good thing. When you have 15, 16 rookies playing and contributing in a big way, that's encouraging. You talk about the guys at the end. [DB Adrian] Colbert, the free agents like [RB Matt] Breida. I could go on and on, but these guys came and really picked our team up in a big way and were accepted by their teammates because of the way they go about their work."

Does that add an extra layer of enjoyment in that Jacksonville game where you have so many young guys making big plays from Colbert to Breida and Kittle and Trent scoring touchdowns?

KS: "It did because you can see them get better each day. And we know. We see it on the practice field a lot. I think you guys saw it throughout the second half of the year. It's always nice when it was that obvious, to where the fans could see it, you guys could see it because they deserved it, because the guys had improved throughout the year. Talking about that class, what was special to me about that class is you can study people on tape and you've got a pretty good idea of what you want to see in that, but you never know. That's why the draft is such a crapshoot. You never know until you really know the person. We can act like you get to know people through these draft interviews and these visits, but that is extremely hard. You don't really know people until you go through something with them. That's why you don't know what you officially have until you have them here. What was unique about that class is I think we've got a very special group of guys. They're guys we put a lot of pressure on. At some times they weren't fully ready for it but because of the type of people they were, I think they all fought through a lot of things this year. When it was all said and done at the end of the year I think they were better players, better pros, really showed something about their character, which I think goes hand-in-hand with them becoming better as their careers go."

Things could change, but do you imagine any staff changes going into next season?

KS: "I don't imagine any changes. It's still early. I haven't talked to everybody. I know we've got a few guys, especially right now, some colleges are interested in and stuff. We'll see how that plays out. But, I'm hoping there's no changes."

You didn't know defensive coordinator Robert Saleh real well, and you've talked about this, but how did that fit? When did you really know that you guys could go into a future long-term?

KS: "I worked with him earlier in my career. He was a quality control. I always really respected how he worked. I thought he was always a very smart guy. I've kept in touch with him over the years and played against him a number of times. So, I felt really good about it when I really sat and interviewed him right after the Super Bowl, talking to him over the phone, doing things like that. Through it all I knew he had the, for lack of a better word, the type of brain I was looking for, just to be able to handle it all and the way he worked with people. I also knew he had a scheme that I really liked that I thought he could add to and change a little bit. Going through the year with him, he was

everything I hoped for. He put in a very good scheme, adjusted it throughout the year to try to fit the players. Still made adjustments, but also didn't just give up on everything when it didn't work. He had a foundation of what he believed in and he stuck to a number of things. I think that's one thing that allowed us to get better throughout the year. I think that's one of the biggest challenges. Why is it so hard to lose that many games or to go 0-9, I said it with John, when you're struggling like that, everybody thinks you have to change everything you're doing. 'What are you going to change here? You've got to change this.' It's hard not to fall into that pressure because you're 0-9. It's hard to say, 'No, it's working.' But, when you do have people that are convicted, the right type of people who believe in each other and believe in something they stand for, Saleh is just like that. We were able to stick with what we believed in. I think it paid off in the long run."

When you guys were 0-5 and you decided to part with LB NaVorro Bowman, was this a big testing point for this organization at that point, which direction you wanted to go?

KS: "I think it was. When you have a guy who had the type of career that Bo had had here, the type of guy he was, it would have been much easier to maybe ignore it. You never know how people are going to react. That press conference was real tough for us because it's not something that we're wanting to do. We just felt it was the best thing to do. I've learned over my career that sometimes things you think are the best thing perception-wise and stuff, sometimes it comes back and bites you a little bit because not everyone understands. That was something we had to do, that we believed would help us in the long run. We thought it was better for Bo, too. To sit there and stay strong with it, I thought it went over well. I thought it tested our organization pretty good. Didn't know how everyone would react to it. I think everyone felt the same. It was something that no one was happy about, but I think everyone understood and it made me believe and feel a lot more comfortable where I was. I felt everyone in here had each other's back and understood tough decisions you've got to make. Hopefully they end up being the right ones."

How do you approach this time, end of the season before free agency? You have some free agents or pending free agents. S Eric Reid, RB Carlos Hyde, C Daniel Kilgore just to name three. Do you anticipate because they don't have the risk of playing games your leverage isn't as much had you re-signed them early? Would you expect those guys to hit the open market? Are you going to work toward bringing some of those guys back?

JL: "I think the one thing that we've tried to do is, yes, you're playing a season, but we've had conversations with all of those guys throughout the course of the year. I think in each situation, given the right parameters on both sides, we'd like to work something out. We'll see as we move in whether that happens. There's going to be competition for some of those players. Kyle and I have been having those discussions all morning. We're going to continue to have those. We'll continue to stay in communication with those players."

With those players, if you approach them, do you almost have to give them the ultimatum of once free agency starts all bets are off? A lot of guys would want to hit the market and kind of see what their market value is.

JL: "No, not necessarily. Some of them, that may be the attack is let them go to the market and see where it's at. We'll see how that develops. I think each situation is going to be treated uniquely, but we'll remain in communication with all those guys."

It was a year ago about, 11 months ago when you two were up here introducing yourselves. Can you flash back to that? Do you feel similarly, do you feel totally different from then? What's the mindset from that?

JL: "Well, it's been a whirlwind, it really has been. It's been a really rewarding year because certain things that I felt convicted about, my conviction in wanting to join forces with a guy like Kyle, I feel really good about that. I feel really good about my feelings on an organization like this, what we could get going. I feel it's by no means even close to a finished product. We still have so much work to do. But, I think more than anything, I'm just glad I did it. I did it because I wanted to be back in it. I wanted to be back invested in something. It had to be the right opportunity. I really feel convicted it's the right opportunity. I feel like we're a better organization, mindful though that the work never stops in this league. We've got so much work to do. But, I'm really proud of the mindset that this team developed. I thought we became physically and mentally tougher. We grew. That's what we wanted out of this first year. I love the way we finished, but Kyle will be telling these guys right away that it's only what we do going forward that's going to dictate how good we are going to be in the next year and into the future."

You guys had two former first-round picks in Eric and DB Jimmie Ward change positions. Obviously they didn't end the season healthy, but how do you think their position switches went and do you anticipate that they would stick at those positions going into next year, or is there still going to be an evaluation to be made whether or not they switch again?

KS: "No, I think they went really well. I think both of them played at a high level. Eric had definitely been back there more, both spots. But, I know Jimmie, it was new for him in terms of the NFL, but that's where I saw most of him in college so I didn't think it was that far out there. They both played very well. They've shown they can play at a high level at that position in this league. It's always nice when guys can do other things because you put together the best possible roster and then you try to get the 11 best guys out there. When guys can do more than one thing, then it gives you some freedom on how to make that decision. But, you're always going to try to get the best 11 guys out there. They're all trying to compete to start at certain spots and if they don't and they can do something else, then we'll find a way to get them out there."

With Jimmie, I think he's suffered four fractures since 2014. Obviously that could happen at any position he plays, but is there any thought to trying him at cornerback again maybe to prevent some of those high-speed collisions?

KS: "You can try to prevent things in football, but I think that's just part of the game. You still have to make tackles at corner. You still have to make tackles at nickelback. You have to do it all over the place. Injuries have happened there also. We're going to try to

get Jimmie back here to be the best player he can be, then you let that handle itself. But, I love that he can play all the positions, but I want to make sure that we find the best spot for Jimmie, for him, and for our team.”

Staying on Jimmie, from a contractual standpoint, that’s a pretty high one-year number because he was fifth-year as a corner and not a safety. Are you comfortable with that number or are you going to look to do something with that to either extend him and lower that or just pay cut?

JL: “We like Jimmie Ward. We like the versatility that he brings to this team. We like the mindset that he brings. He’s a tough football player. I’ve seen players before have a run of injuries early in their career and somehow they figure something out and they get through it. Hopefully that can be the case for him. We’ll figure all that out, but we’re excited to have Jimmie back and plan on him being a big-time contributor to this team.”

I know you guys don’t like using the name where you have needs. But, would it be fair to say number one receiver, interior line, young pass rusher or cornerback be of those positions?

KS: “We’ll try to get better at all of those spots. I’ll take any of that. I was thinking about when you guys were thinking about all of our cap space and things like that, will we be aggressive, will we not. I think we’ll always be aggressive. I think we were aggressive last year. Don’t take that the wrong way in what you guys think that means. I think being aggressive is you’ve got to look at what your options are and what you believe is the right way to go. Whatever you decide on that, being aggressive is going out and getting those guys. I think that’s exactly what we did last year, maybe not a lot of high guys that seemed like it, but we went and got all the guys that we wanted to, that we targeted from the beginning. I didn’t feel like we lost on anybody. We’ll go into this year the same way. You don’t know what’s going to be available in free agency. You don’t know what’s going to be there in the draft. I think the worst thing you can ever do is say, ‘Hey, we have this much money and we need whatever this is,’ one of those guys you said, and you don’t see that guy, and then you go get the best available because you need that guy and he isn’t that guy. That’s how mistakes happen. You might not always get every ideal situation. But, you just keep improving your team. If you don’t have your ideal situation at whatever position that is, then you get better at another position and you lean on that side and work around that other ways schematically. I think we’ll do that year in and year out, how much money we have available and what are the things that are available in free agency, trades, drafts. Whatever that is, whether it’s spending all of that, as you guys want to say, or only spending half of it, I do believe it’s all aggressive if you make the right decision and whatever you do, you go for it. What’s neat about having that space is it allows you to make the right decisions.”

October 29th, where was quarterback on that list?

KS: “That was the day before? It was pretty high.”

Have you guys heard from the New England Patriots and head coach Bill Belichick since the trade?

JL: “We don’t talk about that. We’re onto the offseason.”

You knew that there were challenges that you were going to face with building a roster. In hindsight, how important was the decision to add vice president of player personnel Adam Peters and senior personnel executive Martin Mayhew to your personnel team to help you bridge those?

JL: "I think any time you're in this situation, obviously my own circumstances and background were a little unique. But, anybody who jumps in this role, you better have a great team around you. I tried to assemble the best team I could. I'm extremely pleased with both of them and their contributions. Both Adam and Martin have been invaluable to me, as have [director of pro personnel] Ran Carthon and all the scouts that work with us. They've done a really, really good job, working hard, working smart. I'm really happy and glad to have all those guys as part of our team."

How is Pierre Garçon's health and how much do you look forward to seeing him and Jimmy pairing up and seeing what they can do next season?

KS: "A lot. It was a huge challenge when we lost Pierre halfway through the year, especially with him being the veteran of that group, one of the only guys who had ever started before. So, that was a big loss when we lost Pierre and put a lot of pressure on other guys. It didn't happen right away, but throughout that time Pierre was gone, [WR] Marquise [Goodwin] took it to another level, [WR Kendrick] Bourne ended up helping us out, Trent Taylor started playing at a higher level. Kittle came back, finished strong. [TE Garrett] Celek, to me, played at a higher level. A lot of guys really stepped up to that challenge. Pierre is healing up. He's going to be good to go and I'm pumped to get him back for OTAs."

Is there anyone outside of OL Trent Brown that you're expecting to miss early in the offseason program when you guys come back?

JL: "[LB] Brock Coyle is actually having surgery today. A labrum deal in his shoulder. We didn't get a call yet that it's finished, but he was in there this morning. I think there's a minor deal Armstead is having, like a bone spur taken out on a toe. That's pretty much it, of the guys that haven't already had procedures done."

That's five, six months for Coyle.

JL: "To be full bore."

Any news on DL DeForest Buckner's chest?

JL: "He's doing better. He had a sternum, chest contusion. He's doing better."

I have a question about two guys that have injury histories. Marquise has been in the protocol, I think, six times. He's had four known concussions since 2014. Rueben, it just seemed like his stingers became a weekly thing. What level of concern is there, if any, about either of their long-term futures, if that can shorten their career in some way?

JL: "We're not worried about the career effects of those things. I think Marquise has been sensitive about that before, that however many have been reported are actually the case. We've looked into that. He took a tough hit the other day. He was more upset

about not getting 1,000 yards than anything else. He's doing good. I'm happy to report that, that he is in the protocol heading into the offseason, but he is doing well. Rueben is something I've been through that myself. When you get going with those stingers, you really just need an offseason. You need to be able to quiet down. He played valiantly trying to get through it. But, this offseason will be good for him. I think as he grows as a professional, like every young player, in terms of how to take care of his body on a week in, week out basis. He plays a very physical brand of football, so he's going to have to be better than a lot of people in terms of the way he takes care of his body. We think we have some ways in which we can help him and we're going to look into all those. What we do know with Rueben is when healthy he's a special football player and he's a special personality that kind of lifts everybody. We're going to work real vigorously with him to try to figure out the best way to keep him healthy as much as possible. The great thing is he's willing and eager to take on that challenge himself. I think this offseason will be a great one of growth for him in that respect. Then there's some luck that comes in and some things that are out of your control. But, what we want him to do is everything in his control to get himself to be able to stay on that field. I think Kyle had a deal no more staying on the field with him. It didn't work in that last week unfortunately. Real proud of his year."