



Oakland Raiders Transcript

Raiders Offensive Coordinator Todd Downing

Q: What's the focus this week? Where do you go to address the problems?

Coach Downing: "Yeah, I thought we improved in some areas last week, but if we don't protect the football and sustain drives, then we're not going to be able to reach the goals that we want as an offense. We just need to continue to polish up those fine details and make sure that we're staying committed to the foundation of what we wanted to create here and that's protecting the football and making plays when we have the opportunity to make them."

Q: Is that the identity of the offense?

Coach Downing: "Yeah, that's certainly part of it. We lay it out, an identity for ourselves in our meeting throughout OTAs and training camp and all of that. Those things are definitely included. We also want to be an explosive unit. We want guys to go out and we say light up. When you get the ball in your hands, light up. As you said, we're looking for answers right now, but we know those answers exist in our room and in our scheme. Once we hit our stride, we're excited to see what it looks like."

Q: Do you see a lot of things that you need to change with your offense or do you feel like you're not that far away?

Coach Downing: "When you look at the tape, you can see that we're so close on so many things. I know that sounds cliché and I know that sounds like someone sitting up here and trying to give you the rose-colored glasses, but it's the truth. We know that we're just this close to making a couple more plays each game and being able to come out on top and feeling like we put together a good product. You're right, stats aren't everything, but they are often an indicator in areas that you might be struggling a little bit. We know that there are some areas that we've identified that we want to get better at quickly."

Q: Is just converting a few more third downs and getting that play count up, as crucial as it seems?

Coach Downing: "Absolutely. You look at our play count numbers and it's hard. I think we talked about it a couple weeks ago, it's hard to empty the call sheet and work on all the things that you practice if you don't get the reps in the game to do so. We've unfortunately had a low play count over the last four weeks when we've been struggling. The first couple of weeks we had a higher play count and did well. So, we just need to get back to being able to sustain drives and keep the ball moving."

Q: You guys have some dynamic playmakers. Are you seeing that defenses are really trying to cap those explosive plays?

Coach Downing: "Yeah, this is a league full of good coaches. Nobody got here by accident. Defensive coordinators look at our roster and they know the talent and playmaking ability that those guys have. Certainly, they're going to play us in a manner that is productive for their units or try to be productive for their units. Nobody is giving us anything. We need to be able to execute better and attack the coverages that we're seeing and the defensive structures that we're seeing. We've had some plans in place. I certainly have to do a better job at scheming some things better. Guys need to go out and execute better. Everyone has a piece of this pie and we're all hard-working individuals that are ready to come together as a team."

Q: Does Derek Carr need to hold onto the ball longer?

Coach Downing: "It's really scheme oriented. Sometimes you're in a situation where you're looking for a completion maybe to get you back into a manageable third down or something like that. Or you're trying to get one to your play makers, a catch and run opportunity. So, without sitting down with you and looking at play-by-play specifics, it'd be hard for me to fairly answer that question in terms of whether he should be holding the ball longer or not. He's doing a nice job of going through his progression. We just need to execute better all around and maybe a little better ball placement on some throws and we'll like the result."



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Q: If I'm not mistaking, you have a background in media relations.

Coach Downing: "Yeah, I was a PR intern."

Q: So you know the kind of stuff they say about offensive coordinators when the offense isn't playing well. Does that stuff get to you? Do you pay attention?

Coach Downing: "Honestly, I try to live my life in a manner of high character not matter what I'm doing. Whether I'm coaching or whether I'm shopping at the grocery store, taking my son to his little league basketball game or something. I kind of approach each day that if I put my best into each day and I do things in a manner of high character and I stay true to who I want to be, then I can sleep at night. I don't really read anything. I've never really worried too much about other people's opinions. I'd be doing a disservice to everybody in this building if I put too much stock into what others are saying."

Q: So if you're at the grocery store, are people saying, why didn't you run Marshawn Lynch more? Does that happen?

Coach Downing: "Oh yeah, I have friends that have him on their fantasy team that are mad at me for that. That's part of the business. That's something that... I never want to say that you welcome criticism, but I welcome the responsibility that this job has afforded me. I understand that I'm going to have to deal with negative comments and consequences when things aren't going well. I'm looking forward to standing up here in a more positive fashion some time soon."

Q: How is that balance with the sense of urgency but also having patience to not force things?

Coach Downing: "That's a great question. I think some people can fall into the trap of pressing when you're in a situation like this, when you've gone a sustained while with struggles. You look for plays that aren't there or you force balls into coverage or something of that nature. Or, as a play caller you want to create a shot or be perfect with your scheme so you can get something going. You do have to stay patient. I tell the offense this every week, but it's never been more true than where we're at now as an offense. We have a belief in what we've done this far, and the system we've put in place, and the playmakers we have in that room, and the coaches that are up in the room with me, and you will never see me waiver in my belief of any single one of those guys, including myself. If I did, and I started acting different or started calling games differently, then that would mean I didn't really believe in the first place."

Q: Has Derek Carr struggled in the last three games or has the offense as a whole, struggled?

Coach Downing: "I'm going to say the offense as a whole. I don't think there's a single guy that can look back over the last few weeks and say, 'You know what, I'm really pleased with how I've played over the last three weeks,' or, 'Called the last three weeks' or, 'Coached my position the last three weeks.' We all own this together. There's no one guy that is going to save it or break it or anything in between. We need to do this as a team and everybody needs to make the plays they're afforded the opportunity to make and I need to call the right plays when afforded the opportunity to call them."

Q: Even last year when the offense was doing a lot of good things, the Chiefs were a struggle. What do you see from them?

Coach Downing: "They're an extremely well-coached team. They don't beat themselves, which is something we need to stop doing offensively is beat ourselves. They have a lot of talent, obviously. You put those two combinations together, being paired with the offense that's clicking on the other side of the ball they're going to be just as much of a challenge this year as they were last year. We're looking forward to that challenge. We're looking forward to a home crowd on the Thursday night and hopefully we can get that atmosphere rocking."



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Q: Amari Cooper had some catches negated by penalties. How relevant were those in terms of disrupting the rhythm?

Coach Downing: "Yeah, anytime you're losing 50 yards of production to a guy you've been trying to get more incorporated into the game plan, that can be frustrating. We need to be able to overcome anything that comes at us adversity-wise as an offense and certainly had our opportunities to do that and just for whatever reason weren't able to. Amari did a nice job and both of those players were vintage Amari plays. We look forward to doing more of that with him. He did a nice job on the vertical throw on the right sideline, the one that was called back on the illegal formation. Then you saw him go up and get a contested catch that you guys have been telling me he's missing. We're excited where he's trending. His attitude is great and he's relationship with Derek is great so we're looking forward to not having them called back next time."

Q: How do you get the playaction more involved?

Coach Downing: "Couple things. One, we talked about it earlier. It's hard to get to some playactions on your call sheet when either the game situation takes you a certain way or you simply don't have enough plays to get to those. We'll certainly incorporate them more. We've run a decent amount of playaction shots. I don't know exactly who charts them or decides whether they were play-actions or not, but often times we might have a playaction called and a protection assignment takes the back off of his fake or something of that nature. They're still a part of what we do. They need to be set up to be efficient. We need to be able to sustain drives and run the ball well and then hurt them with playactions."

Raiders Defensive Coordinator Ken Norton, Jr.

Q: Alex Smith has had some of his best games against the Raiders. What makes him so tough to face?

Coach Norton, Jr.: "Well he's good. That helps. He's very talented, mobile, smart. Has a really good talent and good players around him. There's a lot of explosive players. The really good quarterbacks get up for the big games."

Q: How are you going to go about slowing him down?

Coach Norton, Jr.: "We're going to work. We're going to practice. We're going to work on our fundamentals and do the things that we have to do to get right. We'll have a good challenge out there for us."

Q: How bad is Gareon Conley's injury? Are you considering putting him on IR?

Norton, Jr.: "Well you have to talk to the training staff about that. My job is to coach."

Q: TJ Carrie has been steady for you guys. What have you seen from him?

Coach Norton, Jr.: "TJ has been a pro's pro. He works really hard. He cares a lot about his craft. He's always trying to improve and talk and ask questions. He's here early. He stays late. He's a type of guy that gets a whole lot out of his talent. He does a really good job. He sets a good example for the younger players."

Q: How have you seen Sean Smith respond to sitting on Sunday?

Coach Norton, Jr.: "Well, it's all about the response. I think that competition is an essential thing to the program. If he wants to get back on the field, he's going to have to compete and show and work hard and make himself one of the top two or three corners to play."

Q: Why do you think NaVorro Bowman is a good fit for this defense?

Coach Norton, Jr.: "Well, again my job is to coach. NaVorro shows up and we coach the heck out of him. He's a perennial All-Pro. Been watching him from my days in the NFC West. The battles I've had with him, he's special. I think for our young players, our young linebackers that have watched him play as well, I think he's going to be a very good impression on him. At the same time, he's still a young man himself. He's 29 years old. He has a lot of football left ahead of him. We're excited to have him a part of our team. He's going to make a real strong impact for us."



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Q: How much do you feel like you can get Bowman up to speed before Thursday's game and what is the role that you envision him having this week?

Coach Norton, Jr.: "NaVorro's a smart man, now. He's really sharp, he loves ball. He's been around a lot of good ball, a lot of good ball players and I think he's going to step in. He's a pro and he understands that he's not going to get out on the field unless he's ready to play. So, he's really the type of guy that wants to play, wants to play at a high level and has been playing at a high level for a long time. So, he's doing a lot of work when people aren't watching."

Q: What do you think a guy like Bowman does for a rookie such as Marquel Lee in his development?

Coach Norton, Jr.: "Well, it's important for Marquel. It's all about the person himself. Anytime you have an All-Oro, a very successful, tough, productive player like NaVorro on your team, sitting right next to you in the meetings, it's up to you to watch, to learn, to listen. To really learn from a guy like that. I mean, some guys have a lot of wisdom in the room and don't use it. Some guys have a lot of wisdom in the room and they do use it. We hope that he's that guy that understands the position he's in now."

Q: When you were coming up as a player at UCLA, whose wisdom did you lean on?

Coach Norton, Jr.: "I was lucky. I looked at everybody. Everybody who was playing, I just watched all the top linebackers and just found a lot of things that I felt like I should do and can do and just put it in a bag and shook it all up and see what came out. I just wanted to be the strongest, the fastest, the most athletic, the smartest, making all the plays. All the things were very important to me. So, I just watched all and studied all the really good ones and then tried to emulate what I saw."

Q: What can Obi Melifonwu bring to the table if he's activated in a couple weeks?

Coach Norton, Jr.: "That's a good question. It's been a while since we've seen him. So, it's up to Obi to show us what he has and we're all waiting and watching and interested in seeing what he brings."

Q: What caused Sean Smith to fall down the depth chart over the last few weeks?

Coach Norton, Jr.: "It's hard to put your finger on one thing. Things just weren't going right and we felt like we needed to make a change and that's what we did."

Q: Are you seeing opportunities on tape where interceptions could have been made?

Coach Norton, Jr.: "Yeah, they're a lot of opportunities. We were so good at it in the past; leading the league in turnovers for the longest time. It's just a matter of teams are trying hard now not to give the ball up. It's so important and turnovers are such a big part of winning and losing that these offenses – like playing Kansas City – they've only given up one turnover. So it's not as easy as it seems. It's a lot of hard work. It's a lot of hustle. It's a lot of opportunities, it's a lot of chances you must take to try to get the ball. But it's going to come. You keep trying hard enough, you keep hustling hard enough, you keep hustling, the guy who hustles is going to get the loose ball. We're going to get it."

Q: Were you able to do your normal turnover circuit last Thursday?

Coach Norton, Jr.: "Well, we adjusted a little bit. Rather than the regular turnover circuit we had to make practice itself our turnover circuit. So we used practice as a chance to be a circuit during our practice time."



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Chiefs Head Coach Andy Reid Conference Call

Q: Have you ever been in a situation where you signed a guy and played him two days later?

Coach Reid: "As long as [Raiders Head Coach] Jack [Del Rio] and I have been doing this, we've probably had one of everything. I have done that, yes."

Q: What can it do for a defense to put a guy like NaVorro Bowman here on such short notice?

Coach Reid: "I know it worked for a guy like [Perry] Riley. He played pretty good for you guys. I don't think it's too different than that situation. You get players that have experience, and he's been around a little bit."

Q: You guys have been consistently successful against the Raiders. What's been the key behind that?

Coach Reid: "Not talking about it, just getting busy and making sure that you're taking care of business on your end here. Trying to get ready for a quick turnaround here. Normally comes back to just making sure you're doing your thing, and whatever happens, happens."

Q: The numbers speak for themselves as far as Alex having been one of the top quarterbacks. In your eyes, what has he done to take his game to another level?

Coach Reid: "Probably started when he married a Raiders cheerleader and it's been uphill from there for him. He's one of the guys you just pull for because he does everything the right way. He's continued to do that. He's got a lot of trust around him."

Q: Has he elevated his game the way people seem to think, or has he played at the same level in your eyes and gotten guys around him that improve the stats?

Coach Reid: "He'd probably say both, I guess. The kids he has right now, he's kind of raised those kids. They've got a good connection there. A lot of trust in each other."

Q: Are you surprised to see the Raiders at 2-4?

Coach Reid: "I really haven't looked at it. I know they've got a good coach and good players, so that's what we look at. We don't really go on records and all that stuff."

Q: What problems does Derek Carr present?

Coach Reid: "Lucky enough to coach him in the Pro Bowl and I was very impressed with him. He is a smart kid and a very good player. You have to be on you're A-game when you play against him for sure. It's important, again... We're kind of into this thing now so you're asking me philosophical questions that we're so much into it, it's like a scramble now to get everything done so sorry on my answers. I haven't thought about some of these things. We don't get into that. We just get ready to play against a good player and a good team."

Q: Is Alex Smith taking more chances downfield this year?

Coach Reid: "That's similar to what that fella asked there. If you did numbers, that might be. I don't want to sit here and tell you that it's not. I really haven't looked at it much. He's got guys that he's liked throwing to down there and had some opportunities. I don't know exactly how that compares with the years past, I don't know that. You can check me out on that I don't have the stat for you on that."

Q: Is there a key for being ready on Thursday nights? Is there one thing that overrides everything else?

Coach Reid: "I don't think so. It's a unique challenge, I think, for both teams. It's short. It's a short week. You really get one good day to get stuff done. We're talking here on that day. It's a lot different than what you might have in a normal week. I guess the challenge is putting everything together and making sure everyone is speaking the same language once it comes to Thursday and if they function as a team."



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Q: Do you have to shorten correcting mistakes after your loss because you don't have time?

Coach Reid: "Well, you have to go through and correct them because you're playing a team that has that same tape and will look at it. You have to make sure that you have answers for whatever problems arose or you're going to get the same problems again and not have an answer. You have to make sure that you look at it and do that part. That'd be the answer there I guess on that."

Q: How have you seen Tyreek Hill improve on as a receiver?

Coach Reid: "He did a little bit of each in college, wide receiver and running back. That whole thing there. He came here last year, he kind of did a little bit of each for us. This year we decided to put him strictly at wide receiver. I think every week he's gotten a little bit better and more comfortable with it. He's learning on the go. The different coverages that you see in the National Football League and then the different players in those defenses and how they play and so on, he's just kind of going through that first round of this and doing a nice job with it. He works very hard at it. He's a smart kid, an innately really smart kid. Picks things up easily. He spends time at it too."

Q: I've heard the same descriptions about Kareem Hunt. How have you seen him improve since he started?

Coach Reid: "Yeah, he's another on that is a great representative of Toledo there. He's a sharp kid and works very hard. He's humble. You appreciate those kind of guys. He wants to be good. He has a coach that you guys are familiar with in [Chiefs running backs coach] Eric Bieniemy. Eric played in the league. He's very fortunate to have him as his coach and learn from him."