



## ***Oakland Raiders Transcript***

### **Defensive Coordinator Ken Norton Jr.**

#### **Q: How was the first day in pads?**

**Coach Norton, Jr.:** "I'll tell you, the first day in pads is always really the most exciting. Everybody gets the pads back on. They get out of the shorts. A lot of times personalities change once you put the pads on. You start running into each other full speed. There's a little bit of difference."

#### **Q: What personality changes?**

**Coach Norton, Jr.:** "You see toughness. Toughness is a talent for us. The speed, the recognition, the game speeds up. All of a sudden you get hit in the mouth a few times. Can you remember the play? Things like that really are important in development."

#### **Q: What did you see out of Marquel Lee and Eddie Vanderdoes running with the first team today?**

**Coach Norton, Jr.:** "Well they're continuing their growth. We really like what we see so far. I think today in pads was really important for us to see how physical they can be. How they can react from getting hit the few times. With the pads and the extra weight on their backs, can they play tired, can they think tired? So many different things about their growth, and a lot of information that we give from the film that we watch."

#### **Q: Is Vanderdoes caught up with what he missed in the offseason program?**

**Coach Norton, Jr.:** "Oh yeah. Oh yeah. He's been a student of the game. I think he understands how to get lined up. He understands the blocking schemes. He understands how to get on edges. Things that we drafted him for, we're very happy with what we have. He's jumped right in no problem."

#### **Q: What's James Cowser like?**

**Coach Norton, Jr.:** "He's amazing. He's that guy that's always in your face. He's always in the right place. He's always available. He's extremely bright. He knows how to react under all situations. I can't find his weakness yet. He's all over the place."

#### **Q: Is it because of his intelligence that he made it to the NFL?**

**Coach Norton, Jr.:** "Well he has a combination. He has the size, the smarts available. You can never overlook him. He's always there."

#### **Q: If you had to name a starting linebacker today, who would it be?**

**Coach Norton, Jr.:** "Well I don't have to. That's great thing about it. It's open competition. The guys are really working hard. Really pleased with what we see, but we don't have to make a decision. We're not going to make the decision, they're going to make the decision on how they play and our evaluation of them."

#### **Q: How much does it hurt to not have Gareon Conley on the field right now?**

**Coach Norton, Jr.:** "Well I think any football player, what they do is play ball. The only place they have to get better is on the field. I don't think anyone is going to get better by not playing. I'm the coach. When they show up, I'm ready to coach them. That's all I have to say about that."

#### **Q: What have you noticed about how Marquel Lee has been able to process information?**

**Coach Norton, Jr.:** "He's a natural. He's played that middle linebacker for his whole football career. We like him. Big shoulders, long, really loves contact. You can't give him enough work. He's always asking for more. He's very coachable. Really like his development at this point. All we've asked him to do is what he has been doing is shorts



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and t-shirts. Now today, the first day in pads, we've asked him to show us a little bit more on the physical side and he's done that. We're very happy with the development and where he's at this point."

### **Q: Have you seen the defense have a chip on their shoulder after last year?**

**Coach Norton, Jr.:** "Well I think anybody, whether it's the secondary or it's d-line and linebackers wants to be the reason why they have more explosives. We all have our stats and we all watch the things that need to be worked on. Done a few things very well. Done a few things not well. I think that as you go into the evaluations and you look at yourself and how do you prove it, certainly our secondary, certainly there's things in our d-line. I think across the board we're always trying to improve the things that we weren't as well on and the things that we're getting better at. To answer your question, of course they have a little chip on their shoulder."

### **Q: How is Mario Edwards Jr. handling not being out on the field?**

**Coach Norton, Jr.:** "Well, it's only been a couple of days. It's still really early in the process. At the same time, we have the ability to develop our depth. The guys, the younger guys that really want to show up, the guys that we're going to have to depend on to bring rotation. I think with Mario, you know what you're getting. Again you want to continue to develop him, but he's a really good athlete. Plays really hard. I think once he decides or once his body gets in a position that he can play, he'll be ready to go, but right now it's still early."

### **Q: Do you expect Denico Autry to get back to where he was before his injuries?**

**Coach Norton, Jr.:** "Yeah, that's the plan. Again, like you said he was playing with one arm the whole season. He's got that club off now. It's a lot easier to play with two hands than it is one, because it's a lot of men you have to line up against. Denico is really tough. He's kind of the guy that shows how tough we really on this defense. He's hard working, showing up every day. He's only going to continue to get better."

### **Q: What do you want to see most from Conley?**

**Coach Norton, Jr.:** "Well first you want to get him on the field. Then just see him run. I think in mini-camp we were all very happy. Everyone who saw him move and catch and coach and learn. Very happy with his length and speed and his ability to jump in and play on the outside or play in the inside. The way he really digested all the work. We really like what we see. Now football is sometimes you're available and sometimes you're not, and we have to really [focus on] the classroom side of it. There's more than just being on the field, there's a lot of classroom work that he has to work on and learn that he's really able to catch up on."

### **Q: How does it make you feel as a coach that you have a lot of guys who don't have experience at inside linebacker?**

**Coach Norton, Jr.:** "That's what we do. We love coaching and I've been around a lot of really good football players and they all start somewhere. They're all rookies at some point. They all don't have any experience at some point and that's when you get a chance to put your hands on them. Coach them, teach them and really help them through the developmental process. The great ones all start somewhere, they just don't show up great. You have to put your hands on them and really teach them, take your time with them. What we have, we're very, very happy with."

### **Q: Karl told us awhile back that now that it's been a year since his injury, he was feeling stronger. What have you seen from him?**

**Norton Jr.:** "I think if you watch him, you see Karl making checks. He's disguising, he's blitzing, he's covering, he's hitting. I saw a couple times he used his shoulder today, put his body on people. He's explosive. Everything you saw early in his career and the reason why he's here, he's got all of that. I think he's really eager to get this thing



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going because I think anytime you come off injuries, your legs and your body don't really react how you expect them to. You have to really work with it, but he's on top of his game."

### **Q: What do you think of an underdog making it in the NFL?**

**Norton Jr.:** "We coach them all. We learn them all. We learn how they learn, and I think that's the great thing about this game. When you put the pads on, you never know what you're going to get. You get the guys that are harder, play tougher, enjoy the pads as opposed to not being in the pads. Comes down to being available every day and then all of a sudden we get into the game experience. There are so many ways to evaluate. So much information that they give you and if you're good, if you can play, we want you on our team. We like good football players."

### **Q: Players typically make the big jump in their development from year one to year two. What has James Cowser shown in that regard?**

**Norton Jr.:** "It's still early. It's like day three. There is still a lot of football and a lot of film to watch. Cowser is one of the guys, he's definitely in there. He competes. He's tough, he's smart, he shows up every day and he loves ball. He's constantly asking questions. You can never give him enough football, you can never give him enough diagrams and defenses. He wants to learn. He's really hungry."

### **Q: What warrants an up-down?**

**Norton Jr.:** "Sometimes it's any type of mistake. It could be anything, jumping off-sides, not getting to the line correctly, it can be anything. It's at your discretion. If you don't like it, you're going to get an up-down."

### **Q: What do you think about the fact that you, the head coach and the general manager all played linebacker in the NFL, yet there is still uncertainty at that position?**

**Norton Jr.:** "My job is to coach them. My job at this point is to bring them to me and I'll coach them. I've coached Clay Matthews as a walk-on at USC. Bobby Wagner was a second-round pick. KJ Wright was a fourth-round pick. It doesn't matter the uncertainty. It doesn't matter the age or what round they've been picked. Just give me someone who loves ball, who's hungry, who has the right stuff. I will coach the heck out of them."

### **Q: So you don't really see guys as underdogs, do you?**

**Norton Jr.:** "No, I just love coaching them. Just bring them, we'll coach them."