



## **Oakland Raiders Transcript**

### **Offensive Coordinator Todd Downing**

**Q: Jared Cook has had a couple of big games the past few weeks. Is that a matter of hitting a rhythm or you guys emphasizing him more?**

**Coach Downing:** "I think there's certainly something to him finding that rhythm. We've tried to highlight him in the passing game matchup-wise throughout the course of the season. I think he's getting a little bit more comfortable building that chemistry with Derek [Carr] a little bit, understanding route stems and things of that nature. He's really doing a great job and he's been working hard all year so it's finally starting to pay off in the way we've anticipated. So, we're excited about that."

**Q: How much is his natural speed opened things up?**

**Coach Downing:** "Yeah, certainly a big part of his skill set is that long speed. He's such a long stride guy so he can cover a lot of ground without a lot of steps. He's got that length to be able to adjust to the ball, where that may be. He has a skill set that's good in the intermediate and the deep and certainly that's something that lends itself to being productive in the passing game."

**Q: Did you think you have narrowed your focus over the bye week on what you like and what you want to do going forward?**

**Coach Downing:** "Yeah, it was a great time for us to be able to evaluate all that we did. As I said last week, we wanted it to be a broad scope, self-reflective time. Be able to look at some things and we certainly have been able to identify things that we want to run more and things that we'll probably keep on the shelf until we have time in the offseason to polish them up a little bit. It was a very productive time for us and we're excited to kind of take a new focus coming out of the bye."

**Q: Were there any surprises in that process?**

**Coach Downing:** "There may have been some things that we anticipated being more successful than they have been. There's certainly some things that I wouldn't say surprises but maybe not quite to the level of production that we had anticipated. You're never going to be surprised if you're around this game long enough. Things that you expect to go a certain way inevitably will find a way to have their challenges. We certainly feel that we've gotten a good grasp on things we want to do a little bit more going forward."

**Q: How challenging is it to prepare for a team that doesn't line up the same way all the time and can change their scheme late in the week like the Patriots do?**

**Coach Downing:** "It's a delicate balance and there's certainly that fine line of over preparing for too much at too great of a volume. What we've tried to do with this scheme, with this system, is build rules in place for the different things that we could see defensively. Whatever we haven't been able to scout or whatever they might adjust or throw at us that we haven't seen, hopefully we've built a sound enough scheme and sound enough rules to be able to handle that. That just enables us to go play fast. That's the goal of this offense, especially this week. Just go down to Mexico City, play fast, play confident and let our rules take care of anything that's un-scouted."

**Q: How much of an impact on the run game does the offensive line's ability to hold and sustain blocks have?**

**Coach Downing:** "They are a big powerful group. There are some people movers up there. Just like we were talking about Jared and his role in the passing game, I think we're all getting a little bit more comfortable with the scheme and with the assignments that we have within the run game this year. Collectively as a group, we look forward to that being something that is enhanced as the second half of the season unfolds."

**Q: In your experience, how much does the altitude affect the offense?**

**Coach Downing:** "The ball travels further so we're going to Derek to... No I'm just kidding. *(laughing)* It's certainly an element that will come into play in Mexico City, but each week has its challenges and each week has its set of circumstances that you have to prepare for. [Head] Coach [Jack] Del Rio does an excellent job of putting us in a great



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situation from a preparation standpoint leading up to whatever those challenges may be. I don't anticipate it being something that you will see an affected change on our play because of the amount of preparation and commitment we've put into getting ready for this week."

**Q: New England is worst defensively in a couple of categories, but what have you seen from them in the last couple of weeks?**

**Coach Downing:** "With the thousands of stats that they have out there now a day and all the different stat platforms you could probably find a stat that says they're the greatest ever in something. Same with us. You could pick us apart with stats or you could support what we're doing with stats. So I don't pay too much attention to the stats other than the situational stuff. Like you said, they've kept scoring down. They've done a nice job of buckling down as drives have extended a little bit. They've kind of dug their heels in a little bit and stopped people from getting in the end zone. They are certainly playing sound defense. You don't see a lot of free runners in their secondary. Their communication seems to be on point. We're going to have to be on the details of our assignments if we're going to sustain drives, move the chains and score points."

**Q: Is there anything you learned from the Mexico trip last year?**

**Coach Downing:** "Yeah it was a good experience for us. It's nice going down there a second year. Like you said, just walking in the stadium. The environment, the energy there, it won't be a new experience for us. At least those of us who went last year. It's nice to have that experience under our belt and be able to deal with the sight lines of the stadium and just how big the stadium is. The walk from the locker room. Things like that. It kind of gives you that 'not my first time' type feel when you're taking the field, so that's nice."

**Q: Is there anything you're going to do differently to prepare for this game this year?**

**Coach Downing:** "We've done a couple of things from a line of scrimmage procedure standpoint. Things like that just with our experiences from last year coming into play, but without getting too game plan specific or reveling anything, we feel fortunate that we have that experience from last year to rely on."

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

**Q: The guys talked a lot about putting an emphasis on tackling. Why so much this week?**

**Coach Norton, Jr.:** "Especially so this week because the Patriots do a really good job of underneath coverage. They have guys that catch and run really well. The backs, the tight ends, the matchups underneath, they catch and make people miss. They try to match up with your linebackers and safeties. They feel like their guys are pretty good. Tackling is something we've been really outstanding with all year but this last game against Miami we didn't do so well and it's kind of stands out, especially when it's something we've taken a lot of pride in. I really feel like our emphasis and what we do well matches up well with that they try to do."

**Q: Do they do a lot to fool you and trick you or are they just so good in their execution?**

**Coach Norton, Jr.:** "They're really good at executing. If you go back to New England Patriots five, six, eight years ago they're doing similar things. They do what they do really well. They're a fine-tuned machine. Everybody knows exactly what their role is. Guys know exactly what's expected of them. Obviously the quarterback is the heart and soul and the one that makes that train run. Really, really good players that really understand what their role is and play well against leverage, run after catch, tough and they make plays."

**Q: What do you see to them regarding how multiple they are in personnel?**

**Coach Norton, Jr.:** "Just like most teams with good tight ends that have the ability to run, catch, block, ability to do a lot of things spread out and act like wideouts and try to get matchups on your safeties and linebackers. It's very similar to what most teams do with tight ends who are longer and receiver-type. They seem to do it better than everybody else."



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### **Q: What stands out about Rob Gronkowski?**

**Coach Norton, Jr.:** "It's quite obvious. You watch the film and he's big. He's usually bigger than everybody else so that kind of helps. He combines that with good talent and he wants the ball. He's the type of guy when you give him the ball or the ball comes near him, he's going to catch it. He's going to make plays. You combine the ability with the size with the attitude and the playmaking ability, also the durability with him being able to play hurt and the things he's been able to play through, you have the makings of a good football player."

### **Q: What kind of element does Martellus Bennett present?**

**Coach Norton, Jr.:** "He comes in at the same time. He's a guy that can block, can catch, smart, has been around, knows the system. You'll see more two tight end sets now because he's back. It's important that we understand the different challenges that he brings now that he's back on the team."

### **Q: Obi Melifonwu's skill set might match up well in this scenario. Is he ready for that?**

**Coach Norton, Jr.:** "Like you said, that's kind of the idea we had when we brought Obi in. He's kind of a long, fast, and has the ability to matchup with the bigger, longer tight ends. He hasn't been able to be available for us, but we're expecting him to step up. This is the world champions, the guys who have been doing it really well for a long time. Obi is going to get introduced at a high level, but he's very confident. He's been pretty good at what he's been able to do for a long time. We're expecting him to play at a high level and accept the challenge."

### **Q: Does a guy like Tom Brady bring any sort of intimidation factor when he steps on the field?**

**Coach Norton, Jr.:** "We all kind of watch the film. When we're not in the Super Bowl, we're all watching him. The games that he comes back on. Any time you play well for a long period of time like he has, you gain a level of respect. I don't know if it's more about awe, but it's about respect. When the guy has been able to do it as long as he's been able to do it, it's a lot of respect. It makes us practice harder. It makes us work harder. It makes us emphasize leverage and tackling. It makes us emphasize being on the same page. You do this for all games, but at the same time when you play the top teams who have played at a high level for a long time, it's important to see how you match up to what they're doing. Brady is a highly respected, and at the same time we want to show that we play ball, too."

### **Q: You played with Steve Young and Troy Aikman at the top of their games. What did having those guys do for those teams?**

**Coach Norton, Jr.:** "You just know you're always in it. There's a guy that is very confident and capable of throwing the big play. He's surrounded himself with players who believe in the ball getting to them. I played Brady a couple years ago in the Super Bowl with Seattle. We played very well against him. I've had some success against him so I have a good feel for what can be done and what cannot be done. It's just a matter of having the right emphasis and the ability to make the plays. Having a guy like that on the team who's capable at any point of throwing a deep ball, capable at any point of getting it to the right players at the right time. He understands who is around him. He understands how to get the ball to the guys. He's got a long resume of doing it well."

### **Q: Everyone says to beat Tom Brady, you have to make him uncomfortable.**

**Coach Norton, Jr.:** "He's seen it all. You have to make plays. You have to get him off the spot sometimes. You have to make him think sometimes. You have to make plays. You have to knock the ball away from the receivers. You have to tackle really well. You have to put together a really solid game because they're going to test everything that you're doing. They have a certain formula that works well for them. You have to understand that formula and find ways to try and make them get off rhythm."

### **Q: Why do you feel like there hasn't been as much pressure on the quarterback as you've wanted in some games?**

**Coach Norton, Jr.:** "Well it's a matter of the coverage and the rush working together. The rush has to get off, has to have a really good rush plan along with the coverage. You go back to the Miami game for us, if you just try to chart how fast the ball was coming out it was 1.5, 2.1, the ball is coming out really fast. A lot of times you can't get there



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in that a fast of the time. So, it's important that the coverage holds up to make the quarterback go to his second read which now goes to two seconds, three seconds and that's when the rush can get there. It's important that across the board the defensive lineman understand their role. The secondary understands their role and we work together to get a successful play."

### **Q: Do you have to pace yourself with being vocal on the sideline in the altitude of Mexico City?**

**Coach Norton, Jr.:** "You just play your game. you just play. Signs helps us out. There's oxygen masks and there's rest and there's water, but you have to play your game. You have to coach your game no matter what the surroundings."

### **Q: Do you see this game as one that could catapult you through the rest of the season?**

**Coach Norton, Jr.:** "Absolutely. At this point, it's about winning., I think we understand the winning formula. It's a matter of being consistent. So many times, we look so amazing for a half of football or three quarters of football. We have to do it consistently for four quarters. There's no question there are teams that have been 4-5 that have gone to the championship games. There are teams that are 4-5 that have played really well. We're just going to make sure that we're one of those teams. There's no question wins, once you start stacking wins, it's a snowball effect. We just have to win one game at a time and continue to build confidence."

### **Q: What did you see from Gareon Conley in his short time on the field?**

**Coach Norton, Jr.:** "It's hard to tell because Gareon was new to us. So, it's hard to tell exactly what healthy looks like to him. He came in, obviously we weren't really sure what was going on with him, but long, fast. I think the game that we got out of him against the Jets earlier in the season, he goes up and makes a play. We know what he's capable of. We scouted really well coming out of college and he's a type of guy, long and fast. Really cares about ball and play making. He's our kind of guy, it's just a matter of playing this game you have to be available. You have to be healthy. You have to be out there every week. That's the difference between the really good players that play a long time like [Tom] Brady and the guys who have the ability to not be as durable. What he has is the right stuff. It's a matter of being available for us. He's doing everything he can at this point to get healthy and get back."

### **Q: What did you take from Obi Melifonwu's first game?**

**Coach Norton, Jr.:** "Well, Obi is a fun character. He's long and I think if you put together your ultimate football player, I mean if you stand next to that guy, you look at him from afar, he looks perfect. He's long and fast and has a right attitude. He's really smart. He loves ball. He loves practice. He's in the meeting room and wants to see all the film. He does all that stuff. Now, he guy can you carry that over to the field? That's kind of where we are now. Continue growing, continue learning. You look great, now let's make that into playing great. I think that all you can do at this point is get more reps. More time on the field. More experience. Sometimes things are going to be the first time for him. I think he's the type of guy that learns so quick, he's going to have some first-time learning situations. He's not going to be an error repeater. He's so smart that he's going to learn fast. He's so fast that sometimes any mistakes he makes, his length and his speed make up for that. That's why you like them long and fast because sometimes things aren't perfect but your speed and your attitude and your length and your ability make up for any mistakes that you may make."

### **Q: Does he remind you of any player that you've coached before?**

**Coach Norton, Jr.:** "Well, he hasn't played enough. I need some more plays. I need some more time. I played for 13 years and I've been around this game for a long time, so he's got a few plays to make before he starts being compared to the good ones."