



Oakland Raiders Transcript

Defensive Coordinator Paul Guenther

Q: If we were to watch a little film of Mike Zimmer's defense and watched some of yours in Cincinnati, in what ways would they be similar and in what ways have you kind of evolved?

Coach Guenther: "I think structurally they're very, very similar. I would say 80, 90 percent of the defense, the calls, the fronts, the coverages, the terminology is all about the same. I spent a long time with Mike. Really, when he came over from Dallas and Atlanta to Cincinnati, he had the system that was probably 60 percent intact and then we kind of built up to where we are today. Certainly, I have my own little things that I added to the defense as I went along. He's added things. We're always talking in the offseason, just because we're close friends, about the things that he's doing, things that I'm doing. I would say it's very similar."

Q: What were the main factors that drew you to Oakland from Cincinnati? Why was a spot on Jon Gruden's staff so intriguing?

Coach Guenther: "Well, Matt [Schneidman], it was... I've known Jon for a long time. Just the ability to come with him and start something fresh from the ground up really excited me. I've been in Cincinnati for a long time. My kids were basically raised there. I know a lot of the players. But to have this opportunity with Jon coming to the Raiders and the brand of the Raiders really attracted me. Overall, just an opportunity to come coach with him, see him do it, see how he runs this organization, this team, would be a great thing for me to learn from."

Q: When you look at the talent on this defense, having someone like Khalil Mack up front, does that get your imagination going?

Coach Guenther: "Certainly, Scott [Bair]. When I watched the tape before I really had a chance to come out here, I watched pretty much every game from last year. Actually, I watched a couple from 2015. Having a talent like that and ability of a guy like that, certainly you want to make it the centerpiece of the defense. We have to continue to develop our younger players to bring those guys up to speed and add people as we go through the draft and free agency. He's a guy that you can really build a foundation through and around. He's an exciting guy to be able to coach for sure."

Q: Is there a difference being a defensive coordinator for a head coach who's more offensive minded than defensive minded?

Coach Guenther: "You know, I've really only been on the job for a week, so I probably can answer that question better once we start getting on the grass and getting on the sidelines. But Jon, he's obviously an offensive-minded coach. He's in there putting in the system right now as we speak. I'm hiring assistants, a bunch of, a group of guys I'm really excited about having them come join me here. I think time will tell, really, the difference. I can't really tell you that for sure right now because we really haven't started working with the players and out on the field so much."

Q: Were you one of those guys that Jon Gruden had on red alert if he was going to return to coaching?

Coach Guenther: "I'm sitting here today, so I would imagine so, yes. *(laughing)* I do want to say Cincinnati made a strong push to keep me there, but the opportunity to come out here with Jon and start this thing from the ground up was way too intriguing and I just looked at it as an opportunity I couldn't refuse."

Q: In the time you've been reviewing the team's defense, what are some areas of improvement that stand out to you?

Coach Guenther: "Again, one of the things that I've told the coaches that I've hired is that we're going to move forward. Obviously, we're going to use last year's tape as an indicator of some things we need to improve on, but what they did last year is just kind of a little bit of a thermometer of where we need to go because the system that we have, I believe in, I've been in it for 10, 12 years now. I've seen every snake in the system, the problems and we have to do the best job we can as coaches to build the system so the players are talking the same language, the coaches are talking the same language, we're all on the same page and guys can play fast and understand what all the responsibilities are. I don't really try to make it overly complicated the way I teach it. I teach all 11 guys what all



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11 are doing, not just saying, 'I don't just need to know in my little area here what I'm doing. I need to know the guy beside me, the guy behind me and the guy in front of me, whatever it may be what he's doing,' because it all fits in a line. It's 11 guys playing guys playing a game together, not 11 guys in the same uniform running around the field every Sunday, if that makes any sense."

Q: When you look at the team from last year, do you have the personnel on the unit to run a good scheme or do you need better players?

Coach Guenther: "I believe there's a lot of good players here, a lot of good, young players. You've got to get them out and develop them and get them to understand your system. But I think there's a lot of good pieces here for a foundation for sure. Obviously, every year, whether you're the number one defense in the league or the number 32 defense in the league, you're always looking to add pieces and fill out your lineup card. That's what we're going to be working through this spring and through the draft and through free agency as well as developing the young players that we have here. This day and age in the NFL when you draft guys and you think they're worthy, you have to get them out on the field. You can't sit on these guys for a couple of years because before you know it, their rookie contracts are over and they're out the door. I certainly think there's some good, young prospects here that I'm eager to work with."

Q: Do you fit the defense around the talent you have or do you make the players fit to your scheme?

Coach Guenther: "You know, that's been my background, 4-3, but I'll give you an example. In Cincinnati, we drafted two guys last year – Jordan Willis and Carl Lawson. We were a 4-3 team, we always have been, but when I got those guys out on the grass, I started realizing these guys can do some different things for us. If I had gone back to Cincinnati, I may have tweaked some things just based upon the abilities of the players that we had. So, I'm going to do what's best with the talent that we have. If a guy has to play 60 snaps for us, he plays 60. If he plays 10, he's a good blitz, then that's going to be... We're going to put the players in the best position we can to succeed whether it's a 4-3, a 3-4, it doesn't matter. We'll be flexible that way with what we got."

Q: Does your experience with the Division III level give you familiarity with a guy like Nicholas Morrow?

Coach Guenther: "Honestly, I always tell the players, one of the things before I became the coordinator in Cincinnati, I was a linebackers coach and I was always one to defer in the draft. If we had a better corner or rusher to take one of those two before the linebacker. We made a living in Cincinnati of getting guys as free agents, guys who were maybe former safeties, small-school guys. I mean, I can go down the list. We had Dan Skuta. I went to Grand Valley State to work him out. He was a nose guard at Grand Valley State and we made him a linebacker. He went on to play with the 49ers and the Jaguars. We had [Vincent] Vinny Rey, was a free agent from Duke that nobody wanted that played at a high level for us, still playing at a high level. We had Emmanuel Lamur who's now with Minnesota that we took as a safety out of Kansas State. Having the background from a small school that I have, I really look at those levels. I've been around some teams where I've been like, 'Man, this guy's good enough to play on Sundays regardless of where he comes from.' And one of the things that I always tell the coaches when we're up evaluating the talent – we drafted Nick Vigil out of Utah State – and I said if this guy had an Alabama helmet on, just envision that. Just look at the talent and see what you get out of it. I'm always up for guys like that. I don't care where he comes from, it all depends on what you do when you get here, that's what matters."

Q: You didn't blitz much last year. Is that more philosophy or based on the players you had at the time? How much blitzing might we expect to see with the Raiders?

Coach Guenther: "Well, it all depends on how many we can get home with four. I think the thing you really have to look at is the amount of pressure you're getting on a quarterback. If you don't have to blitz and you can get home with four guys, when you get into these games you're seeing on... Now, I'm going to tell you this, go watch these games this weekend. You tell me how much blitzing is going on when you get into these playoff games. Because when you play good quarterbacks and you leave a guy one-on-one and he picks up a blitz, there's a good chance you're going to get it. I think it's all going to matter. I love blitzing, I got every blitz in the book up on my board here. We got it all – double A's, overloads – any blitz you can imagine, we have it. That was what my role was with Mike



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Zimmer coming up with the third-down blitzes. I'm certainly all for it, but I think from a team perspective, and you've got to really see how the game is going on whether you blitz more or you blitz less, but if you can get home with four guys... Really, what I'd like to try to do is get Khalil Mack one-on-one. That's more of a blitz to me than anything, to get him on a tight end or a running back or a tackle that we feel we love the matchup on. To me, that's where the NFL has evolved in some ways because everyone says that the blitz numbers are down, but the pressures are up. That's really the number I'm looking for. If we're having a hard time getting home with four, then we're going to have to bring some blitzes."

Q: What are your impressions of Obi Melifonwu and Gareon Conley?

Coach Guenther: "I really like both of them when I evaluated. We're not too far from Ohio State, so we drove up there and had plenty of guys coming out but he was probably my favorite corner coming out last year. We didn't take one because we took one the year before but he was my favorite corner coming out. His ability, he's smooth in the pedal, he's a good press corner, which we love to have. I'm excited to work with him. Obi is a big guy that when you turn on the tape, you're like, 'Man, who is this son of a gun?' He's playing half field, he's down in the box playing the run. We just need to get these guys out on the grass and keep them healthy and teach them the system. I always tell these guys, you don't help us when you're in the training room for ten weeks out of the season. You're not helping the team. I am going to tell the trainers to turn the temperature down to about 60 degrees in the training room this year so we can keep them guys out of there."

Q: How would you characterize your relationship with Jay Gruden?

Coach Guenther: "Jay and I are really close, very close. We do a lot of stuff in the offseason. His wife and my wife are best friends. Jay and I have been best friends for a long time. He tried last year to get me to come over to Washington, but I had another year on my contract and the Bengals didn't allow me to do that. Good friend, good football coach, great offensive mind. I think he's going to get things turned around in Washington because he's a very good football coach."

Q: When did you become aware that you were Jon's guy? How far back does this go?

Coach Guenther: "When he got hired here. We had talked in the past, but nothing serious. I never knew that... Obviously he had a good situation at ESPN with Monday Night Football and I never knew if he was going to make the jump back into football. I believed it when I was on the plane to come down here for the press conference. When he got up to the podium and said he was coming back, that's when I believed it."

Q: Is NaVorro Bowman a guy you'd want to see on your defense?

Coach Guenther: "I think NaVorro is a prototype middle linebacker, really. The thing that impressed me most with NaVorro is that they got him here midseason and by the end of the year, it appeared to me that he was kind of the leader of the unit, making a lot of calls. You can see that on tape. It looks like he is a smart guy that understands the game. I love smart guys that love playing football. Hopefully we can get him back in the fold and keep him a Raider."