



Oakland Raiders Transcript

Offensive Coordinator Todd Downing

Q: What was it about EJ Manuel when you brought him in this offseason that made him the guy? Why did you want him?

Coach Downing: "I've known EJ for a long time. I coached him in the Senior Bowl. I met him back in, I guess that was February of his draft year. It's pretty obvious to see his physical traits that made him a first-round draft choice. He's a big, strong guy. He can whip the ball all over the yard. I love his zest for the game. I knew that that was still in him when I supported us bringing him in here. He's a guy that's always hungry to learn and get better. He's done exactly that since he got here."

Q: What's the biggest difference with him now since when you had him three years ago?

Coach Downing: "I think he fell back in love with the game. During training camp, maybe late in OTAs, I was talking to you guys and said something along those lines that you could see him passionate about the game again. He just really enjoys coming to work and putting in a hard day's work. That's what it takes to be a good quarterback in the league. It's fun to see him doing that and enjoying himself again."

Q: What are the issues you've seen with the run game these last two weeks?

Coach Downing: "You know, I think it's varied. I think it's been some situational stuff. I think it's been a little bit of misfortune, a little bit of misdirection, and I can certainly call it better. So of that pie that is the run game, there's plenty of pie to dole around to each group."

Q: You guys have struggled to get into rhythm offensively with the third downs, how much of it is having more opportunities and being on the field longer?

Coach Downing: "Yeah, it certainly helps you get to some more of your plays. When you're not converting on third downs, you're leaving a lot of your stuff on the call sheet. It's funny because third downs can be a little bit of an ebb and flow based on teams you play. We were very good in the first couple of games by percentage. I think after two games, we were fourth or fifth, somewhere in that ballpark. Obviously, we've struggled mightily the last couple of weeks. We're excited to put this plan into action this week and hopefully do a better job on third downs so we can get to some more of those game plan adjustments and things that we tweak on the sideline."

Q: How much help can that bring to EJ to have that balance on offense?

Coach Downing: "Yeah, I think it's huge. We always want balance. That's something that I strive to have for our play calling is good balance. Unfortunately, we've gotten a little bit out of balance in some scenarios, but we're looking forward to this week as an opportunity to get back on track."

Q: How much of challenge is it to find that balance with a backup quarterback?

Coach Downing: "You know, it can be as much a challenge as you let it be. If you stick to your bread and butter stuff and you go with concepts that your quarterback is familiar with, I think it's a little bit easier. That's one of the things I feel fortunate about with EJ is I have a history with him. I know what he likes and what he doesn't like. Hopefully I do a good job of making him feel a little bit more comfortable."

Q: Whether it's personnel-wise or physiology, do you feel like you're better equipped to handle Derek Carr going down than you were last year?

Coach Downing: "I don't know that you're ever necessarily better equipped. Losing your starting quarterback and an MVP caliber player, it's not necessarily a thing that you plan for. You just prepare that backup quarterback as though he is the starter each and every week. Then if something happens, then you move on with life without him. I think EJ has put in a lot of hard work and I think that's what makes us well suited for having to play a little bit of time without Derek."



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Q: You guys haven't used a lot of playaction. Is that part of your offense or situational?

Coach Downing: "There's been playactions on our call sheets over the last few weeks. Again, when you get into different game situations, what good is a playaction going to do you in two-minute mode. It kind of goes with the flow of the game a little bit. We have called some play actions, they just haven't resulted in the types of results that we want. That tends, as a play caller, to shy you away from those a little bit as well. We certainly have plenty in our system, and we certainly work on them. When the time is right, hopefully we get them called or I get them called and the guys go execute."

Q: What can you do to get Amari Cooper on track?

Coach Downing: "You know, Amari has been working really hard as well. We all believe in Amari to the up most. I think that he's going to get going, just base on his hard work paying off, number one. Number two, when you play a game like this and a game plan like this, you're able to kind of get, like I said earlier, to some of your bread and butter stuff that he might be comfortable with, that the quarterback is comfortable with. A lot of times, that leads to a little bit more success on just generic type routes."

Q: Do you sense any sort of frustration with him?

Coach Downing: "No. No, he's such a great kid. Just like nobody got frustrated when he went through a little bit of adversity, he doesn't get frustrated when offensively we've been through a little bit of adversity. We're all in this together. The great thing about the offense that we put together player wise and coaching staff-wise is that we have a great sense of belief and accountability to one and other. We're all are just pulling for each other to get this back on track."

Q: What is the main cause of Marshawn Lynch slowing down these last two games?

Coach Downing: "Again, you're not able to get to all your run game plans when you get into the game situations that we have. When you get into the down and distances that we have. Marshawn is doing well with the things that we're asking him to do, we just haven't hit it with the same sense of efficiency that we did the first couple of weeks. We look forward to seeing what Marshawn can do this week and watch our offensive line be physical."

Q: Specifically, what can you do to get him going?

Coach Downing: "I think any back gets into a rhythm a little bit. If you can get him more carries, you can get them sustaining throughout the game, you tend to get a little bit better feel for the run game, how the fits are going to be, how the linebackers are playing it. When you pair all those things together, I think it gives the back a little bit better chance to be more efficient as the game goes on."

Q: Do you expect to have Michael Crabtree back?

Coach Downing: "You know, you'll have to check with the head coach and the medical staff on that one. I know he's working really hard to get back on the field. He's one of those guys that he thrives on Sundays and I know he misses being out there with his teammates."

Q: How much does that limit you not having him?

Coach Downing: "It may have taken some things off the plate from his route tree standpoint, but it wasn't the factor in us not playing well offensively."

Defensive Coordinator Ken Norton, Jr.

Q: What's the biggest improvement you've seen Mario Edwards Jr. make this season?

Coach Norton, Jr.: "Just being available. Being here. We've always known that Mario is big, strong, athletic player. It's just a matter of being able to play every day. Being able to be around the guys, Khalil [Mack] and Bruce [Irvin], all the big guys up front. His game is only going to get better and better. To be young, to be fast, to be that athletic



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and love ball that much. He's really learning how to study now and how to apply the information that he learns on the film and apply it to actual games and practice. There's no limits, there's no cap to how good he can be."

Q: How versatile is he?

Coach Norton, Jr.: "Right, he can play a lot of ball. You don't want to be too versatile with him at first because you want him to get good at something, really master what you're doing. He's explosive. He's athletic. He plays hard. He really has a lot of desire and he loves ball. He's young. It's good to be young. Think about when you were that young and had that much talent, what you would do with it. He's able to really apply it and put it on the field."

Q: What did you see out of your secondary last week?

Coach Norton, Jr.: "The biggest thing with our secondary is just staying on top. Not giving up that deep ball. I think a lot of teams just throw it up and just see what happens. There's a few instances where we don't come out on the right side of it. It's a matter of the ball is in the air, let's make the play. Either go up and catch it at the highest point or knock it down, but don't let them catch it and don't get a penalty. I think that early on, TJ [Carrie] and Sean [Smith], they did a great job of putting that fire out. Once you put that fire out, it forces the offense to work now. Now they have to work for every yard, every third down, every second down, every first down. It's not going to be an easy, deep throw. Now they have to work down the field methodically. That's where our strength is."