



Oakland Raiders Transcript

Defensive Coordinator Ken Norton, Jr.

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

Coach Norton, Jr.: "Those guys are good. Really good football players. Glad they're on our team. Long, fast, they love ball. They love practicing. They chase well. They're always trying to improve and they've done a great job of understanding our system, understanding what we're trying to teach them. They're very good learners."

Q: What do you see from them in specific packages?

Coach Norton, Jr.: "A lot of speed. Youth, length all the things you like to get on matchups. You really need matchups. These guys do a great job disrupting and they should cover really well."

Q: What did you see from Conley in terms of slot? How does he fit there?

Coach Norton, Jr.: "That's what practice is for. He's out here competing for a position. There are a lot of guys who are very good out here competing for a position and Conley is one of the guys out there really competing."

Q: What about his skills that translate to that position?

Coach Norton, Jr.: "Very good. I think you want all of your corners to be able to play inside. You don't want to pigeonhole them to one position. He's a guy that has the ability to play outside and be very effective on the inside."

Q: You've always talked about not wanting to give up the deep pass. What did you see as the problem with that last year?

Coach Norton, Jr.: "We need to get better obviously. We need to stay on top. Communicate better. Understand that last year is last year. This is a whole new year. We've learned from our weaknesses and our mistakes. The guys are learning, playing really hard and are ready to start all over."

Q: What does it do for the group that is back together to continue to get reps?

Coach Norton, Jr.: "If you play ball, you chalk up every year to experience. You learn every year, you grow every year and you get better every year. I think you learn from all the things that happened to you in this game. This game is tough. Really good athletes at the same time, it's constant improving and learning. Things happen good, and we learn from them. Things happen bad, we learn from. You know your weaknesses and you know what your philosophy is. We need to stay on top better than we did last year. We did a lot of good things and a lot of things we need to improve on. That's one of them."

Q: Where do you think Reggie Nelson improved the most over the course of the season?

Coach Norton, Jr.: "Nelson is a ball hawk. He's always around the ball. He's a veteran. He knows how to play this game, he's been playing for a long time. Our team is so young, it's important for a guy like that to continue to set an example for a lot of the younger players. He has a lot of respect in the room, a lot of respect on the field and he's been playing for a long time for a reason. He's a guy whose experience is very important to us."

Q: You mentioned the communication last year. How do you get better at that this year?

Coach Norton, Jr.: "We keep talking about last year. This is a whole new year. We've been at camp for a lot of days and we've been doing a whole lot in our OTAs, in our ability to come out here and play well. I think we have a lot of good additions to the team. There's a lot of work to do. Again, last year was last year. We did a lot of really good things and a lot of things we certainly need to improve on. We're moving forward."

Q: This year's linebacker corps is pretty light on experience. What do you make of that group?

Coach Norton, Jr.: "We're coaching them up. These guys are playing hard. We're coaching them up. They understand the scheme. Cory [James] and Tyrell [Adams] are playing really hard. Bruce [Irvin] is outstanding. I think that so far, so good. They're playing hard. We're very impressed with what we see so far. It's still early in the



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process. It's a big process that is involved here and we have to continue to fall in love with the process. There's a lot of practice out there, a lot of learning still."

Q: With the addition of John Pagano to the staff, how does that change what you do?

Coach Norton, Jr.: "Nothing changes for me. Obviously Pagano is a guy that has a lot of experience. We all have a lot of experience. Certainly you have to use the people around you and it's important that we all fall into and understand what he's been able to accomplish. Obviously right now his role is to help us on the back end with our communication and sure up what's going on to make sure we stay on top, and that we're all talking about the same things every week, about them throwing the ball deep on us. That seems like all we want to talk about so let's make sure with his addition and his experience, let's put that fire out."

Q: What has Sean Smith shown you this offseason?

Coach Norton, Jr.: "Improvement. Competition, very competitive. Wants to really understand and get back to how he can play. I think that Sean Smith is an outstanding player. He's improving out here. Last year is last year. We all have made our mistakes. We're very impressed with where he is now."

Q: The strides that he's made, what areas has he shown that improvement?

Coach Norton, Jr.: "Just showing up every day. In learning, in communicating, in competing. Understanding what the philosophy is, and practicing really hard."

Q: Does Marshawn Lynch look like the same Marshawn Lynch from Seattle?

Coach Norton, Jr.: "No question. Marshawn is a competitor. I think his experience and his success speaks for itself. He's a fine addition to the Oakland Raiders."

Q: It's not a desired circumstance where your third-round pick is not able to be here since he can't get the reps, but how have you and your staff worked with Eddie Vanderdoes to make sure that once camp comes, he'll be as ready as he can be?

Coach Norton, Jr.: "I think we all understand the situation. They knew that going into it. School is school. I came out of the same school and played 13 years at a high level so I think he'll be fine."

Q: Did you miss your spring?

Coach Norton, Jr.: "Sure did. Same quarter system."

Q: How did you overcome that?

Coach Norton, Jr.: "You love ball. You find ways. UCLA is the Ivy League of the West. So, he's really smart. I'm sure he has the playbook right now and he probably is right up with everybody."

Q: Where do you find more sacks on defense?

Coach Norton, Jr.: "Work. The secondary and rush work together. Obviously we need to improve on those things. We will play hard and get the sacks that we need. We also got a lot of turnovers that no one is talking about. We also stopped people in the last two minutes when the game is on the line, no one's talking about that. We also won 12 games, no one's talk about that. The same guy keeps talking about last year. This year hasn't started and there have been no sacks and no games but somehow we keep talking about that."

Q: What will it mean to have Mario Edwards Jr. healthy for the entire year?

Coach Norton, Jr.: "Mario is a really good football player. Anytime you can put a bunch of really good football players together, you're going to have success."

Q: Shilique Calhoun has bulked up it seems like...

Coach Norton, Jr.: "He has bulked up, he's got some big arms and shoulders."



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Q: In what ways do you want to see him make strides? How can bulk help him do it?

Coach Norton, Jr.: "He'll improve in all areas. He'll be playing behind Khalil, playing behind Bruce, getting a lot of plays in special teams. There are so many ways that he can impact this team. Again with the pass rush, again with stopping the run, playing in the pass defense, covering kicks, covering punts. So many ways to impact this team in a positive way."

Q: What do you think Mario's interior presence could affect this season? What does that do for the edge guys?

Coach Norton, Jr.: "Everything. You have to account for them. You have to feel them. Mario is fast, he's twitchy, he plays hard and you have to deal with them when he's around. You have to know where he is. That's certainly we expect him to be and have a breakout year."

Assistant Head Coach – Defense John Pagano

Q: What's this process been like?

Coach Pagano: "Like you said, it's learning everybody. It's learning the process of, you know, all the guys around us. The coaching staff being able to be a part of something. The opportunity that [Head] Coach [Jack] Del Rio gave me to join this staff and be able to help in all facets, from the back end to being able to help the linebackers communication between the secondary. It's been going good. It's a great staff to work with. We've bonded in a short time. We've met about a lot of football."

Q: They've talked about communication before you came.

Coach Pagano: "You know, the big thing is, communication is key to all success. I try to always relate those things even as a family. Communicating to one another as a husband and wife, as you're talking to your kids. For us to be able to communicate, our communication starts as coaches to coaches and then to work from player to coach. Then they take that communication out on the field from player to player. The big thing is what we're saying out there on the field in a gameday situation and being able to communicate like that. I think the biggest thing is making sure that everybody is saying the same thing. That starts with us as coaches, and that process of going through that. Then you just keep working on those things. Every day we strive for two goals, I know they talk about it in the back end, let's have great communication, how we're speaking to one another and two, let's not let the ball go over our heads."

Q: Are you more focused in the secondary?

Coach Pagano: "Yeah, I would say I'm more in the back end right now and really trying to, with [cornerbacks] coach [Rod] Woodson and [safeties] coach 'Vies' [Brent Vieselmeyer] to be able to make sure our communication is at a high level. I'm another set of eyes that gives them a different way to look at things. To be able to hear and to be able to help guys understand. Mine and Kenny's [Ken Norton, Jr.] communication has been outstanding from a point that we try to talk everyday about certain situations. Just to be able to give another set of eyes and be able to handle those things. I think it helps, but mostly right now, it's been going to the secondary meetings. Being able to talk to them. I went to the linebacker meetings earlier in rookie mini-camp. Just keep listening, keep hearing what we're saying and make sure we're communicating at a high level."

Q: Are concerned at all about stepping on Norton's toes?

Coach Pagano: "No. No, there's no stepping on anyone's toes. I have a job to do and Coach Del Rio told me what I needed to do and the first thing was to improve our overall communication as a defense. It starts in the backend. Once we get those things, because as long as we're saying the same things and we're doing the correct things, you get 11 guys doing that you get 11 guys out there hunting on the field. That's what it's all about."



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Q: Is that easier when you have a veteran like Reggie Nelson back there?

Coach Pagano: "It's been outstanding. I have nothing but just gravitated to a guy like that. To be able to talk football with him. Pick his brain of how he sees things, how he understands the game of football. I think the biggest thing that we always talk about back there, usually, is disguising. I think disguising is something that you have to take to a level in your defense that you could really do a lot of different things out of that. He's somebody that understands the game. It's just good to be around a guy like that. Excellent pro. He's a pro. Comes to work every day with questions. Writes everything down, listens. That's what it's all about. He's a great example for our younger players to be able to watch a guy like that and be able to see how it's supposed to be done."

Q: What stood out to you when you saw this defense last year?

Coach Pagano: "The biggest positives is you see a defensive player of the year, Khalil Mack, and I find myself always watching him in certain things. His rush game and you see a great, athletic outside linebacker in Bruce Irvin. The things that he does and the takeaways that they generated here defensively. The game stops at the end of the game. I think those were always big in their two-minute drives. The number one thing that we have to be able to do is you have to eliminate those explosive plays. It's a focus that you have hit in our OTAs right now and in the offseason. You can't let the ball get over your head. It's those things that we have to correct. As you're working through this process, defensive football, the first thing you have to eliminate is big plays. Like I've always said, it's a game of mistakes, but it's a team that minimizes those mistakes that you're going to benefit from. For us to have success, can't let the ball go over our head. It's something that we have to do a better job of. Last year, we learned from those things. You move on from it, but the only thing we can do from the past is be able to learn from those mistakes and move on."

Q: Where do you want to see Karl Joseph make strides?

Coach Pagano: "Well I think, you're always seeing a player like that, just from the first year to the second year, he's going to jump just because of his ability to grow as a professional. I've told guys, always, when they came in as a rookie, they don't understand the game quite as fast as other guys get it. There's always that learning curve. Right now, rookies' heads are spinning on certain things and how everything is coming at them. You take it one day at a time. I always tell them, the most important play is that next play. Regardless of what happen, we'll learn from it, but move on and let's get that next play. A guy like Karl, you know, he's going to be 50 percent. The mental part is going to be so much better, just from his jump from his first year to second year and how to learn those things and truly understanding it. He's done a great job of, just like Reggie, taking notes. He wants to know everything from every detail of why we're doing this. When they understand that, they can play faster."

Q: What have Gareon Conley and Obi Melifonwu shown you so far?

Coach Pagano: "Real good football players. Athletic. They're out there competing. The best thing that you can do to a group is bring in competition. Any type of more depth you have, the more competition you have, the better it always makes you. That, I think, has been a real positive. They're young. They're still rookies. They're still trying to find their way around and making sure they're getting lined up OK. Other than that, they're really detailed and you can see. The one thing that always stands out first and foremost is the athletic ability of both of them. They're great athletes."

Q: What does that do for a sub package standpoint to have those two?

Coach Pagano: "You can always do a multitude of things. From talking to Kenny about the different type of personnel groupings that you can find yourself in. I think you always have to find a way in this league to make sure you have to have a great understanding of getting the best 11 out there on the field at all times. Situational football is the key, and being situational masters, that's one thing that we always have to take our level to higher level as coaches so they understand the game even easier."



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RB Marshawn Lynch

Q: What does it mean to you to play for the Oakland Raiders?

Lynch: "Just to play in Oakland is like a dream come true or something like that."

Q: When did you know you were going to come back? When did you decide you wanted to play football again?

Lynch: "When I found out they were leaving."

Q: Why did that have an impact? To give back to Raiders while they're in Oakland?

Lynch: "It's always been something to being from Oakland that you want to play at home and have the opportunity. I mean, maybe them staying probably wouldn't have been so big for me to want to come and play, but knowing that they were leaving and a lot of the kids here probably won't have the opportunity to see most of their idols growing up being in their hometown no more, with me being from here and continuing to be here, it gives them an opportunity that they get to see somebody that actually did it from where they're from and for the team that they probably idolize."

Q: Even playing in Buffalo, playing in Seattle, you've always stayed true to your roots. What does playing in Oakland allow you to do? We've seen you have bike rides from Oakland Technical High School to Berkeley and you've been in the community a little bit more than you might be able to at this time of year. What does that allow you to do playing in Oakland and still being in the community during the season?

Lynch: "I don't think it's no different. I think it's just more the timing with me playing and having to go to work other places just didn't allow me to be able to do the type of things that I was able to do while I was retired. I'm at home, I'm doing when I'm at home, so it just gave me more time to do the same (expletive) that I would've been doing if it was something I could've been doing year-round."

Q: You're joining a team that's on the rise. You have Khalil Mack, Derek Carr, the receivers. How exciting is that for you to join a team that seems ready to take that next step?

Lynch: "Yeah, I got the whole town, you feel me though, riding with me, so that's good what they've got going on, all that good (expletive) you just said, but I've got a whole new Oakland behind me though. The way we feel just about where we're from and why we represent where we're from so hard is because we know what the struggle is and how we get down, so every home game that I get to come to this (expletive), I'm probably going to be riding with the whole town, so when you're going into something like that, knowing that you've got a whole... It ain't like I'm saying, 'I'm coming to y'all's city and I'm riding with y'all.' This is actually like born and raised and bred and pissing in them hallways and running down them alley ways. I really did that right here and now I get an opportunity to play here, so all of that you said is great, that's good, but there's more for like Oakland though."

Q: There is a really strong connection between you and this town, but what was that experience like when you signed and seeing the reaction of the community?

Lynch: "To be honest, it was heartfelt, but then at the end of the day, I still walk outside, so beside the billboards and all of that, I really just get out with the people. The billboards are for the commercial people, but when you get outside and you walk in the cracks, you get to find out what's real."

S Reggie Nelson

Q: What do you think of the young group of safeties?

Nelson: "I'm enjoying it, man. Great talent around and competing. Bringing the young guys along and doing what's asked. I think they're doing a great job of what the coach is asking them to do. It's just been a great add-on to this team to help us win games this year."



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Q: What has John Pagano meant to the staff?

Nelson: "It means a lot. It's just more knowledge in the room. It's not like we don't [have] that here, but they just added on a little more knowledge and he was defensive coordinator for like [years]. With him seeing it and coming in our room as a DB, helping us out with our communication, I think it's been great for us. It's been helping us out. I think we've been right on track and we still got a lot of work to do, but it's coming along good."

Q: What have you seen between Gareon Conley and Obi Melifonwu?

Nelson: "I mean, like I said, they've been doing things that coach asked them to do and you know, it's just been a lot of communication. Once we get all that down, communicating with them, it's the first time we're playing with them so... Like I said they've been doing a great job of what coach asks them to do and just coming out not making too many MEs (mental errors). It's just been great working with them."

Q: What do you see as the biggest areas for growth on the defense this year?

Nelson: "I mean, there's a lot of work to do. I can't really answer that. We still have training camp and another week of OTAs and all of that. It's a lot of things that we can still get better at and we'll see Week 1. Ask me that Week 1." *(laughter)*

Q: What have you seen from Sean Smith this spring?

Nelson: "I mean, he's working hard. Sean is Sean. He's a veteran to this group. D.A. [David Amerson] is working. Everybody's working, getting better. Not only doing the little things, but the things that coach wants us to fix from last year. Just continuing to grow as a group. I mean, that was the first time we all played with one another. So, we're a lot more comfortable this year, well I am this year, with D.A. and Sean, knowing how they're going to play routes and this and that. It's going to be an exciting year this year, and I'm excited to see how it works out."

Q: Is the familiarity with one another while playing center field something that happens over time?

Nelson: "It's just me personally just knowing how that player plays. D.A. and Sean are going to play something different. They might play a different route. D.A. might play a route one way and Sean might play a different way. So it's just knowing how they're going to react to that route and on that defensive call or what not. So, it's just us as a group; 'Zo' [Karl Joseph], Obi, Conley, whoever's out there, just us communicating as a group and coach has been doing a good job of mixing everybody in there and seeing what everybody can do."

Q: Why do you think Karl Joseph is ready to take the next step this year?

Nelson: "His work ethic. He's always had the work ethic. He played one year. That first year is always hard. It's going to be harder on the quarterbacks now, they know how he play, so he's going to change up a lot of things and show them [something] different from last year. Just got to continue to grow and I think all of us have growth to do around here. We just can't wait to get after it."

Q: Do you give yourself homework assignments during this point in your career?

Nelson: "Man, I got homework every night. It's a young man's game. *(laughter)* They keep drafting safeties, so you have to compete, man. *(laughter)* I study every night no matter what it is. There's always something that I can get better at and that's what I keep trying to tell the young guys, 'Don't think you made it because you're here. There's always something that you can get better at and work at.'"

Q: What do you think the internal competition can do for the group this year?

Nelson: "It's going to do a lot for the group. Everybody's stepping up their game and it is what it is. You're out here to compete and keep a job. Like I said, the league keeps getting younger and younger each year and you should be concerned. You have to compete if you want to play. Nothing is going to be handed to you."