

Special Teams Coordinator Thomas McGaughey Jr.
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San Francisco 49ers
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What's the scouting report on the Lions special teams?

“Well coached. [Detroit Lions special teams coordinator] Joe Marciano is obviously one of the best special teams coaches in the league, who's ever done it. They've got really good personnel. Their returners are really good. You look at [Detroit Lions RB] Ameer Abdullah and [Detroit Lions WR] Golden Tate, obviously those guys are play makers. They've got big time playmaking ability. Their specialists are really good. [Detroit Lions K Matt] Prater is having a heck-of-a season. Sam Martin is a big time punter, kickoff guy. I mean, [LS Don] Muhlbach has been in the league forever, a consistent snapper. They've got the makings of a really good special teams unit, a really good core group of guys, very good. Very good team. Very good unit.”

What happened on the field goal block Sunday?

“A guy on the other team got a little help. He helped himself a little bit. Probably a combination of him with a little leverage and [K] Phil [Dawson] probably needed to get the ball up maybe just a little higher. But, that's basically what happened. He was right at the line of scrimmage, there's no penetration. He kind of uses his off hand to push off. He got up pretty high.”

Have you heard back from the league on that?

“Not yet. I'm sure we'll hear back the next couple of days.”

I think including the extra point in Chicago, I might be wrong, but that's three that have been blocked. Is there a common theme or are they all different?

“The first one was just a protection deal. We had some new pieces in there against Minnesota. And then the extra point was more a getting the ball up type of deal. It was a bad situation that day, you all remember that with [Chicago Bears K] Robbie Gould and it was just the field was rough. And then, obviously the other day, the leverage deal. I think that kind of was a big deal. I think it had a lot to do with it.”

P Bradley Pinion had been much more consistent recently. Obviously, the 18-yarder wasn't what he wanted. Was that, was he trying to just have a directional kick and obviously it didn't turn out?

“Right. That's what it was, exactly what it was. Just a bad drop, it didn't work out. That's part of it when you're a directional kicking team you'll have some of those. Hopefully not very often, but at times those kicks will come up, especially with a young punter.”

Did you say anything to him after that?

“Yeah, don't do it again. It's an easy fix and obviously you look at the next punt and it was a really good punt. You don't really realize it, but when you get out there on the field like on the sidelines you really can't feel it, but on certain spots on the field you can feel the wind more so than others and that will affect your drop. He just has to understand when he feels that wind at any point in time he just has to hold it in his hand longer and kick it right out of his hand.”

Last season as a rookie, and I know WR Bruce Ellington didn't do much of it in college, but he showed a lot of promise and he looked comfortable in pretty much all aspects for a guy who hadn't done it much. Did you expect him to make a bigger leap this year in just his productivity?

“I would hope that he would make a bigger jump. He’s doing a good job. We just need to see certain things a little bit better. It’d be no different than if he was standing right here we’d say the same thing, you’ve just got to have a little bit more anticipation and got to be a little bit more aggressive hitting the hole full speed. He’s going to get better. He’s getting better. He’s a good kid. He works at it and he wants to do well and that right there is definitely a trait that we like.”

When you say that, there was a play where it looked like he had some room to run but he caught it and pretty much just went kind of flat footed looking around. Is that the kind of thing you’re talking about?

“Yeah, just go. Get vertical and let it happen as you run. Just kind of be aggressive as a runner and everything else will take care of itself. The cuts, you’ll see everything. The wall will form and all those different things. He just has to get comfortable with doing that and it’s just going to come with reps.”

You’ve mentioned being a directional kicking team. Can you just kind of elaborate on that philosophy? How does it benefit you guys specifically? Do you look at who you have and the skillsets of your punter and say this is how we’re going to be most effective? Just kind of explain to people that might not know.

“Well in this league, when you look at the field, it’s 53 and a third from sideline to sideline. And if you can confine [St. Louis Rams WR] Tavon Austin, if you can confine [WR] Tyler Lockett, [Arizona Cardinals RB] Patrick Peterson, all those types of great athletes to one spot in a field, as opposed to giving them the whole field to work with, like just punting it right down the middle of the field, you would obviously like to put them in a corner or put them in an area where you can corral them. It’s really hard when you have those great athletes out in the open space and you give them 26-yards one way and 27-yards the other way to work. It’s a whole lot harder to cover them as opposed to giving them 20-yards or 15-yards into a boundary or into a spot. You design your coverage around that. That’s just basically the philosophy behind it.”

I know Bradley was a good directional punter in school, but is it asking him a lot more to try to be precise in his placement as a rookie than you would if you just said kick if 50-yards every time?

“Yeah it is. It’s a hard job. That’s why he was drafted. He has a job to do. He has to learn that skillset. He’s no different than a quarterback having to learn how to pick up all these different exotic blitzes. They are not going to change just because you’re coming to a situation. The defense is not going to change just because you’re a rookie. Just like the returners aren’t going to change just because you’re a rookie. You’re going to have to adapt your skillset or ramp up your skillset or develop more skill as a pro to be able to move the ball around. You can’t just come out and just kick the ball as far as you can down the field. Not with these guys, not with these returners, they are too good and they’ll kill you field position-wise. So, you’ve got to be able to put them in a spot.”

Is it more specific than just between the numbers and the sideline or do you try to get it even more?

“General area for numbers on the sideline. Obviously, if we can pin them to the boundary that’s what we want to do in a perfect world. But, if we can keep them between the numbers and the sideline that’s basically what you want to do.”

I want to apologize. I’m going to put you on the spot here. Who is the best directional punter in NFL history in your mind?

“Me? [Former New York Giants P] Jeff Feagles. Jeff Feagles, I coached him for four years or three years with the Giants and he’s the best I’ve ever seen. He was really, really good at what

he did and it was almost like a jugs machine. He was just right, left, right left. More so right because he was really good going to his right, but it took a long time for him to get that way. It just didn't happen overnight. He put a lot of work into it."

Is it useful, I don't even know if this would make sense, but do you say, "Hey Bradley watch the Jeff Feagles film?"

"Yeah, it's easy to say that, but when you look at the two guys they are built totally different. One guy is 6-5, 230. The other guy is probably 6-2 about 215. Different skillset, but the purpose of it as far as the fundamentals and what you're trying to get done and how to get it done, yeah it's very useful watching guys like Jeff Feagles."

Last directional punting question. It seems easy. It's like, well he's an NFL punter so you're just going to punt it in that general direction. You don't have to give the full explanation, but what is, is that something kind of innate or what is the skill there?

"It's really just trusting your line, because you're kind of slightly turning your line a little bit and just trusting it. It's a lot that goes into it, but you've got guys that are right eye dominate, left eye dominate in things that they see primarily going one way and things that they see, primarily going another way. So, you just have to understand, you've got to learn you as a person. What do you feel comfortable doing as far as how you see things? Are you a right eye dominate guy? Are you a left eye dominate guy? Do you feel comfortable with your line to the left as opposed to your line going right? A lot of guys that are right footed obviously feel better going to the right because a lot of them are right eye dominate. So, going to the left, it's not as easy for them. Same thing as a kicker. On the right hash sometimes a lot of kickers struggle on the right hash, because most of them are right eye dominate. So, when you have those different things that come into play other than the steps and a guy might be pigeon toed, bowlegged, all those different things that kind of play into it. It's an intricate process. There's a lot of moving parts that you've got to consider going in."