

TRANSCRIPTIONS



**Defensive Coordinator Robert Saleh
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San Francisco 49ers**

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You had LB Malcolm Smith and LB Reuben Foster going up against the threes today? Was that just for them to get different looks?

“Just getting reps. You may end up with different rotations here and there. It’s just to give them different looks.”

How is DB Tyvis Powell coming along as a left cornerback?

“He’s doing a nice job. Much improved from a year ago. He’s in tremendous shape. He’s competing his butt off to make this 53-man roster.”

How is his game? He has that size that you guys look for in a cornerback. What else does he offer?

“He’s got great strength. He’s got the length, obviously the size. He’s got good football IQ. He’s tough, and he’s got enough speed. He’s got plenty of speed to be able to stay on top and defend go balls and all that stuff. I like where he’s at. And again, he’s in a battle every day.”

Can you talk a little about CB D.J. Reed Jr. and how he did today in CB K’Waun Williams’ absence?

“D.J., talked about him a couple days ago. He’s coming along well. He fights his tail off. He’s got a great mindset, a great mentality. He’s fighting. We’re asking him a lot for a rookie to learn free safety and nickel. He’s doing a good job with it. He’s one of the guys, and there’s a lot of guys that I could speak of, that we could all speak of for this, but he’s taking this opportunity and he’s absolutely running with it. Excited about where he is. Actually, excited to see him play. That’s where everything is going to kind of come to fruition, hopefully.”

Did he have to be in a certain point free safety-wise before you would give him nickel as well or is that kind of 50-50?

“For sure. He was getting some nickel reps in OTAs, but it was more of a 50-50. He’s been asked to do a lot and he’s a smart kid. Again, he’s been running with it.”

Yesterday, TE George Kittle was saying that there was a play in OTAs that head coach Kyle Shanahan spent 45 minutes breaking it down. I remember you saying the other day, too, that Kyle is very detailed and demands a lot on you guys as

coaches. Can you give us some insight into how he does that, how he puts that on your plate?

“You know, the best way I could explain it with Kyle is that a lot of the times coaches, we’re trained to get through clips. Just show them as much as you can, show them as much as possible so they are getting visual reps. Kyle’s philosophy is to take one play and there’s so many different coaching points. All 22 guys on the football field at once can get coaching points. Whether you’re the backside corner, keeping leverage to the defense, the quarterback carrying out your play fake, O-Linemen, D-Linemen in their footwork. He starts from the right side of the screen and goes all the way to the left. Left to right, wherever the play is. He does a great job really taking one play and showing how much coaching is involved in one single play. I don’t want to say necessarily taking his time, but he’s mastered the art of being able to go fast and see every single detail form all the way across the board.”

Is that then the expectation of you guys as coaches?

“It’s the expectation to have that same detail and that’s--.”

How much of an adjustment is that for you?

“Well, for most coaches it’s not. If you’re detailed in your approach and you love the game of football, you love every bit of tape that you can see. To slow it down and to make sure you dissect every part, we always do that. It’s how you approach it with the player and what you’re trying to get the player to do. The reality is you’re trying to get the player to perform at their fastest level come game day. So, taking some bits and pieces from his style has been a benefit for everybody.”

A little more on D.J. Reed. Is it common for a guy to have a skill set that allows him to play nickel and free safety at a high level? What is it about him that makes him so transferable at those positions?

“I don’t want to say it’s uncommon. But, what’s great about D.J., again it goes back to his mindset. He’s relentless on the football field. There’s no plays off. He’s always thinking. He’s always learning. He doesn’t make the same mistake twice. He’s got a lot of stuff to learn. There’s a lot of nuances that he can learn just from getting experience. But again, that goes back to our system and how do you get guys who are as fast and as violent and as athletic as D.J. Reed is to play at the same level as a guy who has been in the league for six, seven years. He’s doing the same things over and over and over again and there’s only so many ways that he can be attacked. So, he’s learning a lot of different things throughout this camp and OTAs.”

Was K’Waun’s injury a high ankle sprain or not?

“From my understanding, it’s low.”

How is CB Richard Sherman’s injury coming along?

“It’s coming along good. Sherm has great conviction that he’ll be back sooner than later. I’ve always stood by it. When Sherm says something, it’s going to happen. He feels pretty good about being back within the next week, week and a half or whatever it is. It’s

not anything major. Sherm, I don't know how many reps he needs at this point in his career, but Sherm knows how to be prepared for the season."

DL Sheldon Day has been showing signs of being an every down player, consistently pushing the pocket, making strides on first, second and third down situations. My question to you is, what have you seen from his game so far in camp from last year as opposed to this year?

"So, we were lucky. I was with Jacksonville when we drafted him. So, we know what to expect. The great thing about Sheldon is he brings it every single day. He plays with tremendous leverage, technique, hand placement, all that. There's nothing flashy about his game. But, he has deceiving power and slipperiness that he can win on blocks. There's stuff that he'll even tell you he's got to improve on. But regardless, we like where he is. He was showing the same stuff. It's kind of a testament to Jacksonville's D-Line that they had enough players to be able to let a guy like him go. Sheldon is a good football player. He's never been really overlooked. He was just in an unfortunate part of a numbers game with Jacksonville and we were lucky to get him."

Is he a true defensive tackle or does he have some position versatility as well?

"We have him playing three and nose, just kind of switching in and out of there. Nose in nickel situations and all that. He does have some flexibility in there for the rotation. Really, all of them have got to have some type of flexibility, because when you get up to game day and there's only seven or eight guys dressing, they have to be able to play two spots."

How is Reuben moving around? It looked like he was a little bit slow out there today.

"He's fighting some soreness, some little nicks and bruises. The fact that he's out there, he's toughing out whatever it is he's got going. If he looked slow, I'm going to let him know that it was called out. So, you might see a much faster Reuben tomorrow."

Does the fact that he is going to be suspended for the first two games, does that have any impact on what you do with him in these preseason games, play him a little more?

"No, as of now we're proceeding as if he's part of our Week 1 roster and as we get closer, we'll address it."

What about DB Jimmie Ward? Does he have a chance to play in Thursday's game?

"We're meeting as a staff on that tonight, so you may be able to get an answer tomorrow."

DL DeForest Buckner is one of the best players in the league, but he only had three sacks last year. Yesterday in one-on-ones he took a couple of reps at D-End. How are you planning to unleash him this year to get the most out of him?

"You know, he's a special talent. I'll back up the three sacks with the fact that he was in the quarterback's face probably the second-most of all defensive tackles. So, he gets

consistent pressure in the backfield. The challenge for us is how to get Buck one-on-ones as many times as possible. Testing him out there at that end spot to see what he looks like. I mean, he's unbelievable. He is a special talent. It's on us to make sure that we put him in position, however we need to. Now his best is when he is inside rushing the passer, but as a changeup it could happen for sure."

You brought up versatility of some other defensive linemen. You guys have been playing around with DL Solomon Thomas and moving him around a little bit. He found some success today at the three-tech. Can you talk about what you've seen from him so far, specifically at that location?

"Solly's getting better. He is. When you watch his one-on-ones in pass rush, it's much improved. He's winning consistently. In team drills, what you guys might be seeing is the same, we're doing the same things with him. He's on the edge in run downs, he's inside in pass downs. So, what you see when he is three technique, it might be second-and-15 and we feel like we need to get after the quarterback a little bit you might see a smaller group out there to get faster. So, the plan with Solomon hasn't really changed. What you are seeing is his improvement and he's got to continue to improve. He's got so much more to learn as a second-year player and he is. Just like the rest of the D-Line, they're all taking little, incremental steps in the right direction and they have got to continue to get better."

I think at one point you had six defensive backs on the field. Are you trying to get creative in what you can do with Jimmie Ward?

"I guess you could say that. You've got traditional dime packages. So, he's one of the better football players. The challenge for Jimmie is to get on the football field and when he is on the football field, he is one of the better players. We're always going to prepare as if they're there until they're not. So for Jimmie, getting on the football field, that all goes part of the whole best 11 thought process."

Where has Solomon Thomas' made his biggest strides since last season?

"Pass rush. He's got a plan. Last year he would get gobbled up, he'd run through the middle of people and then the play would be over. Right now, he's learning edges. For me just watching him, it's the second move when he's lost on the first move is where he's actually improved. It's where all of them have made a great jump. A year ago, it was first move and that was it and it turned into bull rush, running down the middle of people. Right now, they're continuing to work those edges. Even when they lose on that first move, they're still working the edge and trying to work a second move and that's where they're coming free. So, it's coming along good. We're excited to see what it looks like in a game situation where they don't have the familiarity of our offense."

Do you credit pass rush specialist coach Chris Kiffin for that or Solomon?

"All of them. It's [defensive line coach Jeff] Zgonina, it's Kiff, it's the entire structure of what we're trying to get done. It goes back to what we talked about. It's the elimination of gray area, making everything black and white and showing them the exact picture that needs to be shown and exactly what it's supposed to look like. Collectively over this offseason, it's been a collective effort to make sure that our wording is correct, that

we're all on the same page in how we communicate with them and that everyone is coaching the exact same things, no different than the rest of the scheme. It's a credit to the players buying in. It's a credit to Kiff and Z and the ways they've been working together. So, it's been good so far."

As far as the helmet lowering rule, do you think it has the potential to significantly change how the game is played?

"You know, we'll see. Maybe it's ignorance, stubbornness, I don't know for me, but we feel like we've been teaching this style of tackling, I've been exposed to it for the last eight years. People in the rugby world have tackled without helmets for years and we've been teaching that style of tackling for, I'm going on, I believe, eight years now and our players are going on year two. So, we feel so good about all of the drills that we run, the techniques that we teach, the tape that we have to show them exactly what it looks like, that in a way we've been preparing for this moment. Now that it's here, I don't think it should change us. Now, the rest of the league needs to catch up, but we feel good about it. So, we'll see once it actually starts getting flagged and how it shows up. But, like I said, maybe I'm just being naïve but I feel good about where we are."

It's kind of a unique situation with Zgonina and Chris Kiffin kind of being dual defensive line coaches. It's unique. Can you talk about what it means?

"Z is still the lead voice. You always have a one and two, but the reality is that we're grown men and grown men need to work together to achieve one goal. That's players, that's coaches, that's everybody. The one thing that we talk about on defense whether you're a player or a coach is check your ego at the door and get ready to play team ball. So, for them to work together is an expectation, but it is hard. Sometimes people get territorial but Z and Kiff do a great job of working together, communicating. But again, we're grown men so if it was any other way, we'd have a problem."

Do their backgrounds and expertise complement each other in a way? Zgonina was a run stuffing player."

"You hope that they're both learning from each other. Z still knows how to coach pass rush, and he's a fantastic defensive line coach. He wouldn't be the defensive line coach if he wasn't. But, like I mentioned earlier, there were a lot of ideas floating around last year and the reality is that there has got to be one idea and that one idea needs to have great conviction. That's where all the studying went this offseason. So, I'm excited about the way those two are working and excited about the way the players have responded to both of them and I'm excited about where they're going. So, again, the games are going to show up so we'll see."

As a defensive guy, can you explain the difficulties in matching up with Kyle's offense in terms of the way he utilizes tight ends and the versatility that those guys have within that scheme.

"It's miserable. Every play is an issue, every player's got an option, every player has their set of skills that can expose you defensively. So, it's a problem. I'm glad he's on our team."

Is it a problem because, he's talked about it, there's sort of an answer for everything?

"He's got an answer for everything. We always joke around because he'll be like, 'Well what if we do this?' and I say, 'Well, then I'll do that.' [T] Joe Staley was talking about it, he laughs at our banter during walk-through because Kyle always has the pen last, he's the head coach. But, it's not one time, two times is an accident, three times becomes consistent. Their offense has consistently been one of the best offenses in football, wherever he's been. No matter what his personnel is, he's always found a way to get those guys in position to go make plays. Whether or not he had a running quarterback, a drop-back quarterback, an off-schedule quarterback back, he's had many different varieties of quarterback and many different varieties of top-10 offenses. So, him and his staff, [run game coordinator Mike] McDaniel, [wide receivers/passing game coordinator Mike] LaFleur, all of them, [quarterbacks coach Rich] Scangarello, they're phenomenal in terms of teaching the scheme and getting players all being on the same page. The way that they have dialogue and all of that, it's a really cool thing to see and it's something that if you, on the defensive side of the ball can take from it and can mimic, you can be successful on defense too. So, it's a cool little machine they've got going on over there and you guys see the results."