

TRANSCRIPTIONS



**Defensive Coordinator Robert Saleh
Press Conference – August 22, 2018
San Francisco 49ers**

[Listen to Audio](#) | [Media Center](#)

Are you guys going to sign DL Chris Jones?

“We did. He’ll be here for practice.”

What did DL Cedric Thornton, he’s retired, is that what’s going on?

“Yeah. Happened yesterday. I thought he did a great job. He’s a great man, a great human being and he worked his tail off, did a lot of good things. Sometimes veterans get to that point where they know they don’t want to do it anymore. But to his credit, he was thinking about a lot of people while he was going through that process. So, a lot of respect for that man and how he handled it.”

So, Jones will go back to the defensive tackle spot he was playing last year?

“So, he can play big end, three and a little bit of nose too. Excited for Chris to get out there and put some tape on, because he’s a good football player. He’ll be able to show that in the next couple of weeks.”

You talked a lot about the structure of the pass rush and how that’s important this year. What did you think of the structure of it in the first two games?

“First two games, I think it’s moving in the right direction. I really do. There was some communication things in the first game that we could’ve been better at. Even during the week of practice against Houston, same thing. Guys are on the same page, they’re working together and they’re understanding each other’s roles. Now, it’s time we start winning. It’s moving in the right direction, really like where it is, and like I said, now that they’re starting to understand each other a little bit more. Now, it’s time, from themselves, to start expecting a little bit of production.”

How did DL Jeremiah Attaochu do in his first game?

“He did some good things, especially there in the second half. He was slippery. He was active. He played hard. So, again, it’s another opportunity for him to come back this week. He’ll get more opportunities and continue to stack up good days.”

Have you received any clarification from the league on whether that should have been a penalty on Jeremiah?

“The feedback we got, you know what, it’s sitting on my desk. I’ve got to read it. I always struggle with those things because they always come back one way or the other. It does no good at the point. It does no good after the fact, I guess is what I’m getting at.”

But in the preseason, they might be trying to tell you.

“We don’t teach using our helmets. From everything with us when we talk about being violent and all that, everything is within the rules. Using your hands, being violent with your feet, being violent with your pad level. Violence just isn’t throwing your helmet in there. I know there’s an image, but you can play violent within the rules of the game. We know what we teach. We’ve got great conviction on what we teach, and one thing that we don’t teach is using our helmet. Some of the things that showed up in the game should not have been called, but I get the refs and all that, they’re probably going through the same things that everyone else is going through trying to figure out exactly what this rule is and how it has to be called. As players and coaches, we all have to adjust and find a way to get it so we can maintain our physicality within the rules. Everything we teach is with that in mind.”

You said earlier that just based on where you come from in Seattle, you didn’t think the helmet rule would really be an issue. Does the fact that what you’ve seen so far make you reconsider, ‘Geez, maybe this is an issue?’

“No. You struggle. What do you tell a guy? We’re trying to find the balance of what exactly do we tell a defensive player when he’s in a great football position, he’s standing his ground and he’s about to get trucked over. When you go to make a tackle, your head follows. But, we teach head leverage side, shoulder leverage tackling, so our helmet is not designed to make contact. But when you have a 225-pound man running full speed at you and you are bracing for contact, you’re at more of a vulnerability by putting your chest to the runner than you are if you get into a good football position with your head in proper position. It’ll be interesting. We’ve got to keep figuring it out.”

CB Richard Sherman spoke out on it the other day. Where is he at right now? Is he ready to get into Week 1? Do you feel like he’s on pace for that?

“I do. He got a good dosage of work yesterday. He’ll get more work today. As he works towards this game we’ll see if he can get some game action, which is still to be discussed. With all that said, he looks good. He’s moving in the right direction. His mind is in the right spot. Excited about the direction he’s going.”

Is this game probably the last time we’ll see LB Reuben Foster until Week 3?

“No. I wouldn’t say that.”

So, he might play in the exhibition finale?

“Could be. I haven’t talked about it.”

How has he looked through the first two exhibitions?

“Like Reuben. He looks good. He looks good.”

You've made it clear that DL DeForest Buckner's best position is three technique. He clearly is the best interior rusher on the team. But, is it also possible that he's also the best edge rusher, too?

"He's our best player. So, the challenge for us as coaches is to find a way to get him one-on-ones as many ways as possible. So, wherever that puts him. If it puts him at nose, it puts him at three, puts him at end, it doesn't matter. We've got to find a way to get him in a one on one situation because he's hard to block."

As far as edge rushers, DL Cassius Marsh and Jeremiah are the guys obviously who have potential but haven't done it in tons in the NFL. From what you saw in training camp, were you encouraged? Is there still work?

"There's a lot of work to do. The main thing we talk about is when you get a one on one, you've got to win. You've got to win. That's what football is. You've got scheme, you've got all the rules, fundamentals. You've got everything. But, what it still comes down to is winning your one on one battles and taking it personal that you got singled up. And so, when you get those opportunities and you get one-on-ones, in our room it doesn't matter who it is, the expectation is that we win. So, for them, like I mentioned earlier today, the structure of it looks good, the rules look good, the communication is coming along, and now when you've found yourself in a one on one, expect to be in a one on one and the expectation is that you win. Turning all of this into production is the next step."

Head coach Kyle Shanahan was talking yesterday about the value in his offense of having a fullback and the different things that he can do. From a defensive perspective, how much more difficult is it when you face a team that has a fullback, especially one that's maybe versatile and can do a bunch of different things?

"For me, when you have a fullback who's versatile, it's an issue, like [FB Kyle Juszczyk] Juice. When they can split out and create 11-personnel looks and he becomes an extra receiver. But, the hard part, because of the way the league has transformed and the way college and high school is teaching these defensive players, they've forgotten what a two-back run fit looks like. So, they struggle fitting the run properly. So, you get a lot of these guys, especially linebackers that have zero clue of how to fit runs and are just out there floating from the read zone and so their fundamentals when they get here are unacceptable. But, as far as to answer your question about the fullback, I do think it is an issue to have a fullback, especially like Juice, where they can bounce in and out. But, for all of the reasons I mentioned, the art of defending a two-back run game is becoming harder to teach."

Do you find that beneficial then for your guys when you do get to see it in practice?

"Heck yeah, absolutely. Forever, base teaching begins with two-back pro and then you go from there and you spread the formation out and you teach them from there. So, we love it. I was talking with Kyle this morning, it's hard to go against our offense because of all of the different things they can do. They can attack you a million different ways. But yeah, to have a guy like Juice is a big problem."

You mentioned needing to see eventually production from the edge rushers. At what point do you and other coaches consider bringing in someone who has a history of production like DL Elvis Dumervil?

“You know, that’s a fair question, one that I will leave for [general manager] John [Lynch] and Kyle and everybody. We do, we’ve got great conviction in the men that are in here and we are going to coach our tails off for the guys that are here. If it’s decided to bring someone else in, we’ll coach the heck out of them. I try not to live in a world of uncontrollables and so right now we’ve got control of the guys that we have to teach them the best we can and whatever happens after that, happens.”

It seemed like DL D.J. Jones and DL Sheldon Day stood out last game. Do you view the interior as a strength on the D-Line and do you view the depth there as potentially moving DeForest out wide more?

“Definitely strong inside. When you have a guy like Buck who, in our opinion, is one of the better inside guys in this entire league, I think to make a living outside is not what you want to do but to sprinkle him out there every once in a while just to try to find matchups will be good for him. Overall, the interior of our D-Line is a strength. We feel really good about the interior of our D-Line. The edge guys, they’re coming along. Marsh showed up last year, did some good things. Attaochu is looking for an opportunity. You still have guys fighting through, you’ve still got [LB] Eli [Harold], you’ve still got [LB] Pita [Taumoepeanu], you still have [LB] Dekoda Watson. They’re still going through it too. So, there’s a lot of work to be done in the next two weeks. I’m really excited to see how it plays out.”

What’s your overall assessment of the secondary so far through two games of the preseason? I know S Jaquiski Tartt had a little bit of a moment there during Houston’s first drive, kind of blew coverage. And then obviously we know what happened to DB Jimmie Ward against Dallas. So, what’s your overall assessment of the secondary thus far?

“Their mindset, it’s a young group and their mindset is awesome. I think it’s a very versatile group. I know the game, we all wish we had that first drive back. There were some things that leaked into our defense that none of us liked. But, overall practice, going against Houston in those two practices, there was a lot of great things that happened in there. [CB] Ahkello [Witherspoon] getting to compete against [Houston Texans WR DeAndre] Hopkins and really doing a great job holding his own both in one-on-one situations and out in field. The safeties, they attacked us with a lot of really good three-deep beaters and the overall structure of our defense and the safeties being able to communicate and relay indicators all the way across the board. So, I love the way they’re communicating. I love where they are from a physical standpoint in terms of their footwork, hand usage, being able to win one-on-ones. And now it’s just a matter of them being able to work together as a group because some guys have been in, some guys have been out, but together as a group so they can really amp up their communication skills.”

Has DB D.J. Reed Jr. done enough so that he would be the guy that comes in at free safety if something were to happen to S Adrian Colbert?

“D.J.’s moving. His arrow is up. We love him and the thing about it is we love his mindset. That young man just is, talk about all gas, he’s awesome. He’s doing a good job, he really is. For him to solidify that spot, there’s still two weeks left. There’s nothing set in stone yet.”

In Kyle’s offense he doesn’t run a lot of things that a lot of offenses do, like back shoulder fades and jump balls, things like that. How do you go about practicing for those things while you don’t really see it that much against his offense?

“That’s why Houston was so important. They back shouldered a lot and so for us to get all of that work, that’s why going against teams in preseason, I think it’s great work so long as everyone understands the overall agenda and what people are trying to get done so you can practice and get all of that work in. Because, it’s different. Being able to just get different formations, different run game, different route concepts, seeing a different quarterback and his mannerisms. So, overall being able to work, all of that stuff is priceless and basically those two days and working against Houston and of course the games that we get, that’s about the extent of our work.”