ROBERT SALEH
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR

21ST NFL SEASON × 5TH WITH 49ERS

Robert Saleh (SAH-luh) enters his 21st NFL season and returns to the 49ers for his fifth season as the team's defensive coordinator.

Before returning to the 49ers, Saleh spent three-plus seasons (2021-24) as head coach of the New York Jets. While at the helm in New York, Saleh guided four different players in their first four years in the NFL to Associated Press First-Team All-Pro honors (WR Braxton Berrios, CB Sauce Gardner & DL Quinnen Williams) and Pro Bowl appearances (Gardner, LB Jermaine Johnson II & Williams). The Jets defense excelled with Saleh, ranking in the top 10 in the NFL in multiple categories over the 2022 and 2023 seasons. During that span (2022-23), Saleh's Jets ranked first in passing yards allowed per game (178.9) and opponent yards per play (4.7), second in total defense (301.7) and sixth in opponent yards per rush (4.1). The unit also tallied 93 sacks and 29 interceptions during that time, tied for the eighth and 10th-most, respectively, in the NFL. Over the first five games of the 2024 season, Saleh's Jets ranked first in passing yards allowed per game (136.6), tied-for-first in opponent yards per play (4.3), second in total defense (255.8) and tied-for-sixth in third-down defense (31.7%).

The 2023 Jets featured two AP First-Team All-Pros in Gardner and LB Quincy Williams as well as three Pro Bowl selections in Gardner, Johnson II and Quincy Williams. The Jets offense gained 4,566 total yards in 2023, with 64.1% of those yards coming from rookie and second-year players, the second-most in the NFL. The Jets also won four games after trailing in the fourth quarter that season, which was tied for the second-most in the NFL. Saleh saw second-year RB Breece Hall register career highs in rushing yards (994), receiving yards (591), yards from scrimmage (1,585) and total touchdowns (nine). Defensively, the Jets finished tied-for-first in opponent yards per play (4.6), second in passing yards allowed per game (168.3), third in total opponent yards (4,969) and total defense (292.3) and tied-for-eighth in takeaways (27). The Jets held opponents to seven points-or-less in 10 of their 17 games, which was tied for the most such games in the NFL that season. In addition to Gardner and Quincy Williams earning All-Pro honors, Johnson II registered career highs in tackles (55), sacks (7.5), interceptions (one), passes defensed (seven), forced fumbles (one) and fumble recoveries (one).

In 2022, Saleh led a roster that featured two AP First-Team All-Pro selections (Gardner & Quinnen Williams), a Second-Team All-Pro selection (LB C.J. Mosley) and four Pro Bowl selections (CB Justin Hardee, Gardner, Mosley & Quinnen Williams). He also was responsible for the development of the NFL's Offensive and Defensive Rookies of the Year in WR Garrett Wilson and Gardner, making the Jets the third team in NFL history to have both rookie players win the honor. Wilson led all rookie wide receivers in receptions (83) & receiving yards (1,103), while Gardner led the NFL in passes defensed (20). The Jets improved their win total by three games in 2022, which marked the sixth-largest win improvement in the NFL that season. Saleh improved the Jets to boasting a top defense that ranked tied-for-first in opponent yards per play (4.8), third in opponent passing yards per game (189.4), fourth in total points allowed (316) and total defense (311.1) and fifth in total opponent yards (5,288).

In his first year as head coach of the Jets, the 2021 team was led by rookie QB Zach Wilson (2,519 passing yards), rookie RB Michael Carter (639 rushing yards) and rookie WR Elijah Moore (538 receiving yards), which made the Jets just the second team since the merger to be led by rookies in passing yards, rushing yards and receiving yards.

Before taking the helm in New York, Saleh spent four seasons (2017-20) as the defensive coordinator for the 49ers. During that span, the 49ers defense ranked third in passing yards allowed per game (211.4), fourth in total defense (323.6) and opponent yards per play (5.1) and sixth in opponent yards per rush (4.1).

Despite injuries to key players throughout the year, the 2020 49ers defense held top five marks in passing yards allowed per game (207.9 - fourth), third-down defense (35.5% - fourth), total defense (314.4 - fifth), opponent yards per play (5.0 – tied for fifth) and total opponent yards allowed (5,030 - fifth). The unit also ranked tied-for-sixth in opponent yards per rush (4.0) and seventh in opponent rushing yards per game (106.4). The defense was led by LB Fred Warner, who earned AP First-Team All-Pro honors and a Pro Bowl selection after registering a team-high 125 tackles to go along with 1.0 sack, two interceptions, six passes defensed, one forced fumble and two fumble recoveries.

In 2019, Saleh was named Coordinator of the Year by Sporting News after leading the 49ers defense to rank second in the NFL in total yards allowed per game (281.8), the fewest total yards allowed per game by the team since 1997 (250.8). San Francisco ranked first in the NFL in passing yards allowed per game (169.2), the fewest passing yards allowed per game in the NFL since 2009 (NYJ - 153.7). It marked the first time San Francisco led the NFL in passing yards allowed per game since 1987 (165.6). The 49ers ranked tied-for-second in the NFL in third-down percentage allowed (33.3) and tied-for-fifth in the NFL in sacks (48.0), the most by the team in a single season since 1998 (51.0). San Francisco also ranked seventh in both opponent completion percentage (61.3) and opponent quarterback rating (83.0).

Rookie DL Nick Bosa, who played in all 16 games (14 starts) and registered 47 tackles, 9.0 sacks, one interception, one forced fumble, two fumble recoveries and two passes defensed, was named Defensive Rookie of the Year by the Associated Press and the PFWA, and Rookie of the Year by Sporting News, PFWA and Pepsi. He was also named to the PFWA All-Rookie Team and was named a starter in the Pro Bowl. With DLs Arik Armstead (10.0), Bosa (9.0), DeForest Buckner (7.5) and Dee Ford (6.5), the 49ers were the only team in the NFL to have four-or-more players with 6.5-or-more sacks in 2019. LB Fred Warner started all 16 games and led the team with 118 tackles, while also adding 3.0 sacks, one interception (returned for a touchdown), three forced fumbles, one fumble recovery and nine passes defensed. Rookie LB Dre Greenlaw played in all 16 games (10 starts) and tallied 87 tackles, 1.0 sack, one interception and two passes defensed as he was named to the PFWA All-Rookie team. The secondary was led by CB Richard Sherman, who registered 57 tackles, three interceptions (one returned for a touchdown) and 11 passes defensed and was named AP Second-Team All-Pro.

In 2018, the 49ers defense registered 37.0 sacks, the most by the team in a single-season at the time since 2013 (38.0 sacks). The defense ranked in the top half of the league in rushing yards per play allowed (4.09 – seventh), opponent completion percentage (63.5 – 10th), yards per play allowed (5.42 – 11th), net passing yards per game allowed (233.3 – 11th), yards per game allowed (346.6 – 13th), rushing yards per game allowed (113.4 – 14th) and passing yards per play (6.45 – 14th). San Francisco was one of six teams (Baltimore Ravens, Buffalo Bills, Detroit Lions, Indianapolis Colts & New England Patriots) to allow fewer net yards per game, rushing yards per game and passing yards per game than in 2017.

The 49ers defense was anchored by Buckner who led the team with a career-high 12.0 sacks, ranked second with 67 tackles and was named to the Pro Bowl for the first time in his career. His 12.0 sacks were the most by a 49ers defender since LB Aldon Smith registered 19.5 sacks in 2012. Warner started all 16 games as a rookie and led the team with 123 tackles, ranking 12th in the NFL and third among all rookies. Warner became the first rookie in the NFL since 2000 to begin his career with four consecutive games with 10-or-more tackles, according to Gamebook Statistics.

In 2017, Saleh led a 49ers defensive unit that allowed 5.28 yards per play, which was a 0.62 yards per play improvement from 2016 and the third-largest improvement in the NFL from 2016-17 (Cle. - 0.76 yards per play; NYJ - 0.72 yards per play). The defense also finished the season holding their opponents under 100 yards rushing seven times. From Weeks 12-16, the 49ers streak of holding each of their five opponents under 100 yards rushing was tied for the longest streak in the NFL over that span (Arizona). It also marked the first time the 49ers held five straight opponents to under 100 yards rushing since Weeks 11-15 of the 2012 season. The 49ers defense was among the league leaders at getting into the opponent's backfield on running plays, finishing ranked tied for fifth in the NFL by forcing 53 rushes for negative yardage.

Saleh's defense continued to improve throughout the season. Over the final eight weeks of the year, San Francisco ranked second in the NFL in rushing yards allowed (640), tied for fourth in yards per carry allowed (3.62), fifth in rushing yards allowed per game (91.4), seventh in net yards allowed per game (314.4) and tied for eighth in rushing touchdowns allowed (four).

Saleh joined San Francisco after three years (2014-16) as the linebackers coach of the Jacksonville Jaguars. In 2016, Saleh's linebackers helped the Jacksonville defense rank fifth in passing yards allowed (215.3) and sixth in opponent rushing average (3.82). Team captain LB Paul Posluszny started all 16 games at MLB and led the team in tackles for the second-consecutive season. According to Jaguars team statistics, LB Telvin Smith registered 118 tackles while starting all 16 games at outside linebacker for the first time in his career. Smith's 350 career tackles were the most by a Jaguars player in his first three NFL seasons.

In 2015, the Jaguars defense allowed 3.68 yards per rushing attempt, the fifth-lowest rushing average allowed in the NFL. Posluszny led the Jaguars and ranked fifth in the league with 133 tackles, according to Gamebook Statistics, while tying with Smith for the team lead with 13 tackles for loss. According to Jaguars team statistics, Smith registered a career-high 128 tackles in 2015.

Under Saleh's guidance, Smith stepped in the starting lineup and ranked third among all rookies with 99 tackles, according to Gamebook Statistics, in 2014. Smith led the team with two fumble recoveries while ranking second with nine tackles for loss. After a season-ending injury to Posluszny midway through the year, LB J.T. Thomas stepped in and set a career high in tackles along with two interceptions, two tackles for loss and five passes defensed.

Prior to Jacksonville, Saleh spent three seasons (2011-13) as a defensive quality control coach for the Seattle Seahawks. During his three seasons with the Seahawks, he was responsible for assisting the defensive staff with day-to-day duties with a focus on the linebackers. Working under linebackers coach Ken Norton Jr., Saleh aided in the development of LB K.J. Wright, LB Bobby Wagner and Super Bowl XLVIII MVP LB Malcolm Smith.

Before joining the Seahawks, Saleh spent six seasons with the Houston Texans, serving as a coaching intern (2005), defensive assistant (2006-08) and assistant linebackers coach (2009-10). In Houston, Saleh oversaw the growth of the Texans linebackers, including AP Defensive Rookie of the Year performances by DeMeco Ryans (2006) and Brian Cushing (2009). In 2009, the Pro Bowl duo of Ryans and Cushing were the only teammates to both rank among the league's top 10 tacklers, according to Gamebook Statistics.

Saleh joined the Texans after three seasons working in the collegiate ranks. He began his career as an offensive assistant/tight ends (2002) and defensive assistant/defensive line (2003) at Michigan State University before spending one season (2004) as a defensive assistant/defensive line coach at Central Michigan University and a brief stint (2005) at the University of Georgia as a defensive assistant/linebackers coach.

A native of Dearborn, MI, Saleh attended Northern Michigan University where he started at tight end for four years. Saleh and his wife, Sanaa, have eight children: six sons, Adam, Zane, Michael, Sam, Jacob and Robert Jr., and two daughters, Mila and Ella.

SALEH'S BACKGROUND

YEARS	COACHING BACKGROUND	HEAD COACH
2025-current	Defensive Coordinator, San Francisco 49ers	Kyle Shanahan
2021-24	Head Coach, New York Jets	---
2017-20	Defensive Coordinator, San Francisco 49ers	Kyle Shanahan
2014-16	Linebackers, Jacksonville Jaguars	Doug Marrone/Gus Bradley
2011-13	Defensive Quality Control, Seattle Seahawks	Pete Carroll
2009-10	Linebackers, Houston Texans	Gary Kubiak
2006-08	Defensive Assistant, Houston Texans	Gary Kubiak
2005	Coaching Intern, Houston Texans	Dom Capers
2005	Defensive Assistant/Linebackers, University of Georgia	Mark Richt
2004	Defensive Assistant/Defensive Line, Central Michigan University	Brian Kelly
2003	Defensive Assistant/Defensive Line, Michigan State University	John Smith
2002	Offensive Assistant/Tight Ends, Michigan State University	Morris Watts/Bobby Williams
1997-2001	*Tight End, Northern Michigan University	Eric Holm

* Player