

get so close to that today?

“Yeah. And that wasn't just because we were playing the 49ers. That was just in general. Games always come down to one possession and those mistakes that happen in the first quarter could affect the last play of the game or any bad play. You just never know what play may determine the game, so we just have to finish and that was our motto going into the game.”

You've been a part of some successful defenses here in Atlanta. What makes this group different in your mind?

“This group, we're just buying in. Every defense, you always -- every year we want to play team ball, complementary ball. But I think just the guys that we have in the building, the coaches in the building [are] just harping on complementary ball from offense, defense, and special teams. Everybody having their role to make an impact is the most important thing.”

SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS

HEAD COACH KYLE SHANAHAN

Opening statement:

“Alright, all I've got from the game is Christian [McCaffrey] with a thigh. He returned.”

Was he full speed after he returned?

“I don't know. I'll ask him, but I'll wait until I see the tape. Seemed alright.”

You guys had the comeback going there in the fourth quarter. What happened on the interception, specifically, where [49ers QB] Brock [Purdy] got picked off?

“They had a blitz, and then a guy dropped out. I think Brock [Purdy] was throwing to Jordan Watkins. Had him there and the guy popped out, and he didn't see him.”

What about the first interception with [49ers QB] Brock [Purdy]? What was he trying to do?

“It looked like he was trying to hit [Christian] Kirk down by the sidelines. That would have been a good catch if he could have got it. And then the guy went under it and made a great catch on the pick.”

There were some kind of uncharacteristic mistakes with some penalties and things like that. Just anything you can put your finger on why that was the case today?

“No, but that was one of the most frustrating things. Anytime you have four turnovers like that, and you get zero, it's real tough to win. I thought we had some. I don't know about the amount of penalties, but the timing of some penalties. Keeping them on the field and giving them some big plays, especially when we have them behind the chains and stuff with those illegal contacts or holdings, whatever they called. But too sloppy to win.”

There was one that seemed like a substitution issue. Did you see a substitution issue there?

"That's what I thought. I thought they subbed at the last second, and I feel like they gave us enough time to do it."

With [WR] Jordan [Watkins] and [RB] Kaelon [Black] fumbling, what was the level of frustration, just considering that those were on back-to-back plays?

"It was very frustrating. It was tough."

You guys put [49ers CB Ephesians] Prysock in at the end of the game. Is that to give the rookie more snaps, or is that something you could assess moving forward, who the third outside cornerback is?

"No, that wasn't something planned. We were just frustrated with some of the penalties and stuff and wanted to give him a shot."

Was [49ers CB Upton] Stout only available in emergencies?

"Yes."

You guys were up 14-3 at one point. Did you feel it was a good turning point?

"No, it was a big turning point. 14-3, we were going in on the red zone, and we fumbled to give them the ball back. I thought our defense had stopped them. I think they got to 4th-and-4 and then they drew us offsides, and we gave them a free first down, which made them kick a field goal. I think it made it 14-6. Was that right, or did they score a touchdown?"

They drew a field goal.

"They drew a field goal, and then that allowed them to lap us because they got the ball in the half and went down and scored. So, gained 10 points without us touching the ball. I thought that was on us because I thought we had them stopped, and I thought we should have scored before we turned it over."

There are obviously a bunch of different factors here, with the short week, early start, bye coming up. Do you think those played into the sloppiness at all?

"It's hard to say that. Usually, that stuff plays into guys not going as hard and things like that. I was really proud of a lot of guys. I thought our wideouts stepped up. I thought Jordan Watkins made some big plays. I thought we ran the ball really well. You know, we had one punt in the game. But when it comes down to those turnovers, I don't think that was from the things you just said. I think they were just [that] we've got to protect the ball better. They do a good job of going for it, but they got it out. We lost two of them with [George] Kittle and with 'KB' [Kaelon Black]. Then I thought they made two really good picks, to tell you the truth. [No.] 53 [Kendal Daniels] made a hell of a play, dropping out of there after a blitz that we didn't see. Brock [Purdy]'s got to throw that one away. It seemed like he did, but [Jessie] Bates just made a hell of a pick on it."

The throw to Watkins' [WR Jordan Watkins] would-be touchdown was overturned there. Did you get any explanation after? Was it just the bobble after?

"I think it was the bobble. I mean, I don't really listen much once they overturn it. I've got to get ready for the next call. I never got to see it on anything."

Will you work out some kickers this week, or are you still confident in [49ers K] Eddy [Pineiro]?

"I don't know. I haven't talked to anybody about that. We'll probably discuss on the plane."

What did you think of [49ers WR Jordan] Watkins' performance in general?

"I thought he stepped up and made some big plays. He's been playing well here these last three weeks. He made a number of plays today."

How about [49ers RB] Kaelon Black getting his first career touchdown, and his performance today?

"I thought he did some good things. I thought he ran the ball well. He needs to protect the ball on that one fumble. But as a whole, I thought he ran the ball real well. We just couldn't stay with it there a little bit at the end, with the way the score got."

What was your frustration with the special teams overall right now?

"It's not over the top. It's just about equal to the rest of our team right now. I thought they gave a big kickoff to open up the game. We got to kick that where it's supposed to be. I think Jordan [Watkins] missed a tackle on it, which opened it up. I think they did a good job not allowing him to score and get him out of bounds there. It's not too frustrating, but we need to play better."

QB BROCK PURDY

You guys were up 14-3. Did you feel like there was a turning point or something looking back?

"Obviously, I felt like we had momentum early in the game, then turnovers happened, starting with the first fumble. But regardless of that, yeah, I think just coming out of the half, we needed to go and sort of bring some sense of urgency to our team. I thought we did. Then obviously, it was my decision of not throwing the ball away completely, allowing them to get the interception. That was, I thought, a huge turning point with momentum and stuff in the game. So, they did a good job with bleeding out the clock before half, kicking the field goal, going down and scoring right out of half. They did a good job on that, but at the same time, I thought we still had plenty of opportunities to pick up our momentum as an offense and sort of help out our team."

What did you see on the play you mentioned and trying to throw it out of bounds? What kind of happened there?

"Yeah, I thought maybe Christian Kirk on the scramble was going to be there. But then, towards the end of the throw, as I was going to throw, I was like, no, it's not. I went to just throw it away by the sideline and then [Jessie] Bates, all of a sudden, came across and made a play. I was like, 'You've got to be kidding

me.' In that moment, I've got to completely throw the ball away if I'm not going to make an attempt to a receiver. I've got to learn from that in a tough way."

Then on the second interception, what happened there?

"The linebacker was mugged up on the line of scrimmage and then thought we had an alley outside to, I think, it was Jordan Hawkins. I was going to throw. Like, it was there and I thought it was going to be a drive-by kind of play. All of a sudden, I threw the ball and he came from the backside, tipped it up to himself; I didn't see him or anything. So credit to him. He made a good play. But I don't know, in that moment, I'd like to say, 'Yeah, I need to see him.' But at the same time, it's pretty tough to drop back and see a backer mugged up on the line, dropping from the opposite side and stuff. It was a good play calling them and a good execution, I guess, by the linebacker."

You don't have [49ers WR] Deebo Samuel, [49ers WR] Demarcus Robinson, [49ers WR Mike] Evans. How big of a challenge is it? Obviously, these guys you have are professionals but you don't work with them as much. Just how big is it a challenge, with the chemistry, to have an offense functioning the same way?

"I mean, yeah, they're new guys and stuff, so you've got to learn how they run routes and how they play and stuff for sure. That's a real thing. But I think just with our preparation and how [49ers Head Coach] Kyle [Shanahan] goes about the week with getting us ready as an offense and stuff, I think it's pretty, not easy, but he makes it pretty smooth for these guys to come in and learn what they need to do and be on time and all that kind of thing. I thought they did a great job today for what was handed to us. We need to limit the turnovers, yes, and we sort of shot ourselves in the foot with that. But the fact that we were out there, you know, having those new guys and stuff out there running routes for us and creating separation and making plays and stuff. I thought I saw a lot of really cool things from Jordan Watkins [and] Jacob Cowing. Obviously, I'm trying to get the rock to Brandin Cooks and Christian Kirk, too, and see what they can do. You know, that will all come. But I thought they did a good job. It's our first game all together as a unit with the receivers that we had. We've just got to keep working and stuff. But I thought it was a positive performance on their end. We've just got to keep chipping away."

When you mentioned the turnovers, you saw some costly penalties and things like that. What was kind of the disappointment level in a game that seemed like it was fair if you just played clean?

"100%. I think that's sort of how we feel. It's like, man, we had the momentum. We were moving the ball well. We felt like we were running the ball really well and stuff like that offensively. Then all of a sudden, it's like a couple of plays can make you feel like, dang, we're not doing our job and stuff. And obviously that's the most important thing: protecting the football. It's the number one thing really in our organization. As an offense, it's all about the ball, protecting it. So when we have those kind of costly mistakes, it does make you feel like, 'All right, we're not doing anything. We're not putting up points like we need to.' But at the end of the day, we were moving the ball. We've got to protect the ball through and through, and that starts with me at quarterback. I think it bleeds to everybody else, too. So obviously, we're going to watch the film. Atlanta played their butts off. They had a really good scheme. I think they all played together really well. Complimentary football at the end of the day. They got turnovers. Offense went and scored, and then defense goes back out there and gets some tough stops. That's how you win in the NFL, so that's a credit to them."

It was good that [49ers RB] Christian [McCaffrey] was able to make it back, but can you shed some light on what it's like to not have him for such a significant stretch after you guys had started so well?

"I think obviously what he brings to the table on our offense: being able to run the ball with him, being able to throw the ball out of the backfield with him, line him up, throw him the ball. Those are all things that we obviously love to do. And when he's not there, then we've got other guys that are open. Obviously when he's not out there, it's new guys, young guys, that have to come along and stuff. I think they're doing a great job with that. Kaelon [Black] and Jordan James run the ball really hard and stuff. Obviously, what Christian [McCaffrey] can do out of the backfield as a receiver - receiving, running back - like that's the component, too, that obviously we want out there. I'm not saying those other guys can't; it's just Christian's a Hall of Famer with that. So yeah, it obviously changes up our game plan. But we also have to be able to adapt and use our other guys in ways that they're able to go and make plays."

I'm sure you have to assess everything that's fresh off this loss, but being at 6-1 at the bye, how do you feel about the way things have gone up to this point? How can the bye help you going forward?

"I think it'll be good to watch the film and just see where we're at, how we're playing, offensively, defensively as a team. And obviously having some time to be able to heal up, get our guys back - some of our starter guys across the whole team. Obviously, we are 6-1. This one stings. But we really do have to have perspective on how we're playing, what it's going to take moving forward for the second half of the season. Every game, every little thing matters. We've got to take care of our bodies and get back ready."

TE GEORGE KITTLE

You guys were up 14-3. Did you see that turning point at all, in terms of the end of the first half, second half? What was the thought at halftime as far as where you guys were at?

"I thought at halftime, I think we were just disappointing ourselves for having turnovers in the red zone. And then the turning point was probably the turnovers. We had four. I mean, I think everyone's going to say about the same thing. [With] four turnovers, it's hard to win football games. Still had a chance at the end. It's just not good football."

You guys had some turnovers and some penalties that were just really inopportune at times. What's kind of the frustration when you have a game that is kind of there on the table, and you shoot yourself in the foot?

"I mean, you kind of answered it. We have all the confidence in the world to come out here and play a good football game. We were up 14-3. We have turnovers in the red zone. They take advantage of that. They have so many explosive players on that offense that can take over a game, and their defense made plays when they needed to. So we kind of just stuck our foot in our mouth multiple times that game."

Every team in the league has injuries. It almost seems like the 49ers have had more of their share. Can you put some perspective on what teams have to deal with in dealing with just attrition over the course of a long grind of the season?

"It's the NFL. Injuries happen. It's just how much depth you have, how many vets do you have that can

stay healthy, that can continue to keep the elevation, the standard of play up. That's all that really matters. When you have a really good coaching staff like the ones we have that give us an opportunity every single week to go out there and make plays, they try to put guys in good positions to succeed; that's what gives you a chance to win. Every team is dealing with crazy injuries. The Ravens haven't had Lamar [Jackson] for weeks, and they're still doing okay. They came to Atlanta and won in overtime. So, there's no excuses. It's the NFL. Every week, it just keeps chugging along, chugging along. It doesn't care who's out there, who's not out there. You're just expected to go out there and win."

You went over to [49ers WR] Jordan Watkins on that [49ers RB] Kaelon Black play to congratulate him. "It was an awesome block downfield. So much fun."

What have you seen in a change in him from Week 1 to now?

"Confidence. I think the more reps you get, the more confident you can become. And Jordan [Watkins]' a guy who didn't play a lot last year, and I don't think he didn't play a lot early on this season. I think he might have been a healthy scratch early in the season. Injuries suck, but the one benefit of injuries is you get to see other guys get a chance to take advantage of their opportunity. Jordan's out there [and] he's done a great job with all his blocking stuff. That's been his emphasis: all these blocking plays. Whether it's pin blocks, all this stuff, he's done a really good job in practice. I think he's done a good job in the games. And then he's out there making really cool catches. I wish that touchdown would've counted for him because that was awesome, but he made a couple really big plays down the field for us when we needed him to. I'm just really happy for Jordan. It's like he's taking steps forward and becoming a good player for us. I think he's only going to get better."

When you go through different injuries to receivers, how much does that limit the offense from a game plan perspective?

"Look, I'm always going to stand up for the guys we have on the field. Did I go in that game with four active receivers, which I don't know if we've ever done that in the [49ers Head Coach] Kyle Shanahan era. We usually have five. I'm going to stand up for those guys. I had belief that we were going to go out there and win the game. I didn't think they were going to hinder us at all. Like I said on Thursday, I thought they had a good week of practice. I was excited about it. But yes, is the game plan different when there's not a Mike Evans Hall of Famer? When Ricky Pearsall's not out there, who's an elite man-to-man win guy? 'Rookie' [De'Zaun] Stribling? Deebo Samuel? Is the game plan different? Sure, it's incredibly different. There's no Deebo on the sideline over there. There's no wide receiver taking running back snaps. Mike Evans is one of the most unique wide receivers I've ever played with. So yes, is the game plan different? Sure. But what I was saying earlier is [49ers Head Coach] Kyle [Shanahan] and [49ers Offensive Coordinator Klay] Kubiak do a really good job of building the offense around what we have available. Then they try to put those guys in positions to succeed, which is what you saw with Jordan Watkins today. Brandin Cooks made some good catches for us. So, we can still win with it; it's just going to look different."

How would you assess where the team is at 6-1 going into the bye and how can the bye be beneficial?

"I would have much rather won. Losing is never great. But when you do lose, especially in this

organization, it makes everybody really just look at yourself in the mirror. All I think it's going to do is even spark a bigger fire underneath us. All we want to do is win. We want to continue to win. We want to put good tape out there. I think it's definitely going to sour our entire bye week. I think that's good because I think when we get back next week, I think our guys are going to be incredibly focused and have a great intent going into – we play the Raiders at home. That'll be really fun. But yeah, I think it's going to sour everybody's week, Kyle [Shanahan]'s week. He's probably just angry at the world. But like everybody else? Yeah, I'm not going to be incredibly happy the entire time. But I think that's good. Would I have rather won? Absolutely. Way more fun. But hey, like I said, it could be worse. We didn't have a bunch of guys get injured today. I think we made it out pretty healthy. So anyway, we've got guys coming back. So I'm excited about that.”

You’ve had undefeated starts in past seasons. Did you guys entertain the thought of how long you could go undefeated? Does that creep into your guys' mind?

“Not really. No. I mean, not mine. I'm just like, get through another week, play at a high level, stay healthy, win a football game. I think that's the mindset of everybody we've got. It wasn't pretty today. Like I said, four turnovers. But hey, there's going to be good stuff on the tape. There's going to be tough stuff that we can learn from. We have young guys step up and make plays. Like I said, it could be way worse. We could not be 6-1. I'm always the positive guy that's trying to find a good spin on it. Losing sucks. It is what it is. And you can put that on the entire roster of guys who didn't make good plays today, whether, me, quarterback. It hurts when Christian [McCaffrey] doesn't play most of the first half after having 80 yards on one drive. That hurts. Fumbles, turnovers, penalties, whatever it is. But this is a team. I think we have a great core. We have good young guys that are coming up, and we still have way better football out of us.”

LB FRED WARNER

Did you guys think that fourth-quarter comeback was going to get completed? I mean, you guys force the three-and-out and feel like the momentum was finally turning your way.

“Yeah, for sure. Even through all the adversity, a lot of it was self-inflicted. You've got to tip your cap to them. The way that they came out, the way that they played and executed was much better than the way that we did throughout that game. But I think that just goes to show you the talent that we have on our team, the will to still win. Even through all the adversity, to have a chance to go down and win it. It was just unfortunate that we couldn't pull it off. But I wouldn't say that we earned that one by any means.”

You mentioned the self-inflicted stuff. What's kind of the frustration level? Anything you can point your finger on why some of that stuff that's kind of uncharacteristic for you guys?

“It was super frustrating. It's something that, of course, we have to look at on the film. It's hard to tell exactly in the moment what's going on. But I'd say that we just didn't play complementary in all three phases. Defensively, I felt like it was super sloppy all day. Of course, I've got to look at myself, the way that I'm communicating to the rest of the group, and the way that we're executing. But at the end of the day, you can't beat yourself. They came out, they played better than us, and we've got to deal with that result.”

You guys are 6-1 going into the bye week. Is it a good time for a bye week? Is it to get some guys back from the injured list?

“Absolutely. You mentioned 6-1. Unfortunately, we're not going undefeated this year. That's how I look at it. I said all along, it's not just about winning. I said we have to continue to get better as a team. I feel like today we didn't get better; we took a step back. That doesn't mean that we can't use this vibe the right way, get healthy, get our mind right for what we have ahead of us and be better going forward. I'm excited about the challenge. I love that group in there. This is the most fun I've had playing football, playing with this group. We have so much talent. We have so many guys that play the right way. If we can clean things up, which I know we will, then we have a great chance every single week that we step out there.”

You've played on some good teams. What makes this unit so special that you would say that about them?

“I just love the blend of obviously the older veteran leadership, as well as the younger guys that have asked to play a lot of snaps, who are out there competing their tail off. The blend right now is great. Like I said, we obviously have to get healthy to have all of our weapons out there to help us compete to win these games. It's always next-man-up mentality. No matter who's out there, we have to be able to compete and execute our job at the highest level. So, we'll be better.”

Just because the offense was so short-handed, did you guys feel like that you had to play better than usual?

“Well, all the way through, I'm a believer on the road, you always have to pack your defense. You pack your defense and your special teams. I feel like we were ready for the challenge to come out and play our best game. And unfortunately, we just didn't do that. I feel like we had so many opportunities to take the ball away. I was super close on a couple of those punch-outs, and the ball just didn't happen to fall on the ground. It's no excuse. At the end of the day, it is what it is. They outplayed us. We've got to make sure we go back, we look at it hard, correct the mistakes and get ready for the next round.”

Obviously, the goal is never to lose. But going into the bye here, the guys are going to have to sit with this for basically two weeks. Do you feel like that could have a positive effect, just in terms of motivation going into the next game?

“Yeah, for sure. The feeling in there is mutual amongst everyone. We feel like we let that one get away, and they outplayed us today. We do have to sit with it for two weeks, regardless of the outcome. Like I spoke on, our goal is to continue to get better as a team. If our goal is that, then we're going to look at it hard. We're going to continue to work and make sure that's the case, regardless of the outcome. I'm excited to get right back to work.”

Were you on the bench or watching from the sideline when the second interception happened? From the linebacker's perspective, did you see the linebacker?

“No, I didn't get to see the actual play. I was standing for most of the second half, trying to just keep guys in it or keep everybody's spirits up. I'm not sure what happened on that play, but I trust Brock [Purdy] with all my heart, every single time. I know he's going to beat himself up over it, but I'll take him out of anybody.”