



CLEVELAND BROWNS TRANSCRIPT

Defensive Coordinator Steve Wilks *2-7-19*

Opening statement:

“Good afternoon. I would like to start out by saying how happy and very fortunate I am to be here with this organization. When you look at leadership, starting with the ownership here, I am very excited about the Haslam family and the direction in which this organization is going. When you look at personnel and the direction with the things that (General Manager John) Dorsey is doing and his crew, it was a no-brainer. Very excited to be a part of (Head Coach) Freddie Kitchens’ staff. I think he has done an outstanding job in putting together a great group of men from the standpoint of great teachers, guys that understand and know the game and can relate to these players and get the best out of them. I can’t ask for a better situation. When you are looking at the opportunities that I had out there, I wanted to be here and I am glad that things worked out.”

On why he decided to get back into coaching right after being relieved as a head coach rather than taking a year off:

“That is just what I love to do and having the passion and love to be around the game, and to be honest, when things like that happen you want to get right back to work. I was very excited to do that and most importantly, do it here.”

On being the head coach of the Cardinals for only one season:

“That is not my call. I would definitely say this, I have nothing but great things to say about the Arizona Cardinals and their organization, (Cardinals President) Michael Bidwell and the entire family there. This is a production-based league. We did not win enough games. Would I have liked to have more time? Of course, but again, I put that behind me. They have moved on, I have moved on and I am so excited to be here as a Cleveland Brown.”

On if being relieved by the Cardinals after only one season puts a chip on his shoulder:

“I have had a chip on my shoulder my whole life. It started at Division II Johnson C. Smith University, where I am lining the field and washing clothes. I have always had a chip on my shoulder. That is the reason I am sitting before you guys today. That does not give me any more motivation. I am about trying to be the best that I can be at my craft. I want to try to make this defense the best in the National Football League.”

On evaluating the Browns roster on defense, including DL Myles Garrett and DB Denzel Ward:

“I am excited about the guys that we have on the roster and looking forward to trying to add some more pieces to that. When you look at some of the core guys, you mentioned Myles, a very talented individual. I am excited about working with him and trying to really get him to that next level. Denzel Ward, a Pro Bowl player, a rookie, a young guy who still has a lot of things to learn and grow into as far as understanding the game and really trying to perfect his craft at this level. I am excited about those guys, along with some of the other guys we have in place.”

On what the Browns need to do to take the next step:

“I really do not want to try to pinpoint one area. It is all about trying to evolve and improve in every situation. I can really tell you this, you can never have enough pass rushers and you can never have enough guys that can cover based off what this league is about. I know this is a pass-happy league and it is about scoring so you need guys that can get to the quarterback and most importantly, you need guys that can cover.”

On the next level for Garrett:



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“When you look at a player of his caliber being the first overall draft pick and his talent, it is really about trying to get to that All-Pro status and that consistency week in and week out. I think that he has the traits and the ability to be a dominant player at this level, but we are looking for that consistency week in and week out.”

On if his background in coaching the secondary can benefit Ward’s development:

“I think really the guys that we have in place – (pass game coordinator/secondary coach) Joe Whitt and then we kept (defensive backs coach) DeWayne Walker – those guys are great teachers. My background at that position, I think, will be a plus for him, as well, with some of the things that I have learned and implemented over the years in just trying to get guys in the best position to be successful.”

On describing his defensive style:

“We are a 4-3 base. We are very multiple in what we are doing. I think you have to be in this day in age with all of the different things you are seeing. It can change week to week. I am aggressive by nature, but it is all about trying to put your guys into the best position to be successful. It could change. Quarterback is getting the ball out quick, therefore now you have to be more creative in your coverages and things that you are doing on the back end because you are not going to get there. It is all about trying to create negative plays on first and second down so you can get exotic in some of your third down pressures and things you want to do.”

On if his defensive style will result in a significant change for Browns players who played in the previous 4-3 base:

“I do not think so. I do not think it is going to be a big change at all. It is a 4-3 base. I think it is going to be more terminology and really trying to get those guys to understand how we do things and how we call it.”

On how defensive schemes are impacted by high-powered passing offenses like the Los Angeles Rams and Kansas City Chiefs:

“Each week, you have to adjust to the personnel and the scheme that you are getting. I think we are very flexible in the things that we do. I think it is about trying to find the right mix and the right personnel to put guys into position. When you look a guy like (DB Jabrill) Peppers, I think he is a guy that is going to be able to fit well within our system. I think you have to have guys that have linebacker traits but also DB skills because the game is so fast and they try to spread you out. You need those guys that are athletic in space, and I think he is going to bring that element.”

On how his relationship with Head Coach Freddie Kitchens will evolve and playing complementary football:

“No. 1, our vision is Freddie’s vision. It is all about being on the same page. I think there is a constant communication that we have already started that we will continue to have throughout each session. I think it is important that we are all on that same page. We have to work well together from a standpoint of making sure that we are complementing each other in the things that we need to see in the offseason so that we are preparing ourselves for the season. Freddie has already mentioned a lot about having these one-on-one meetings with the coordinators and making sure that we implement and have the things in place that we need. I am excited about that.”

On potentially bringing in former Panthers DE Julius Peppers to assist the Browns staff during camp or the offseason to help develop Garrett and the DL:

“That is always a possibility. You always try to look, whether it is former players or coaches with different traits and skills that you would like to try to bring in so that is definitely a thought. I am sure that he is going to have a lot of time on his hands now with retiring. I was very fortunate to have the opportunity to be able to coach him that one year. A great football player.”



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On if he had a relationship with Dorsey or Kitchens prior to the interview process:

“Not really. Not a personal relationship, but this league is so small when you look at our inner circle and the people we know. I didn’t know either one of them personally, but I knew Dorsey and a lot of the things he’s done in this league – well respected. Of course, Freddie and I just missed one another in Arizona so we have some mutual friends there.”

On if Garret on film looks as talented and athletic as anyone he’s been around:

“Yes, he does. Very athletic. Very fluid. Quick off the ball. Great skillset. I was very excited when I started watching tape and just his ability to be able to anchor and play the run. A lot of time when you have guys with that skillset, it is just a mindset of really trying to get after the quarterback. I know what I just said earlier about this being a pass-happy league, but there is nothing more demoralizing to a defense than having a team run the ball down your throat. That is the one thing we have to pride ourselves in is stopping the run first. I think he does a great job of doing that. We just have to continue to add to his repertoire for pass rush.”

On opportunities for interviews with other teams:

“I had some opportunities, but this was the first place I wanted to come. I scheduled this first because this is where I wanted to be.”

On if he will emphasize takeaways as much as the Browns did last year and the significance of causing turnovers:

“It is very important, and that has been a part of my background and my makeup ever since I came into the league with the Chicago Bears. You go back and look at the history of what we did there and same thing in San Diego, the year we went to the Super Bowl in Carolina. We pride ourselves not only on taking the ball away but scoring on defense. We just want to be able to build on what those guys did last year. We are talking about complementary football, and that is part of it – not just giving the ball back to the offense but trying to score, as well.

On how his experience as a head coach can help him as a defensive coordinator:

“I would say the No. 1 thing I learned – not the No. 1 thing but how it is going to help be this year is being a great assistant coach, understanding the value of what it means to have a great staff and guys with one vision, implementing and teaching the same thing. My thing as I mentioned before, it is all about the things Freddie implements and puts in place. I’m going to make sure I do my job to make sure the defense is the best it can be.”

On if he can be an asset to Freddie, given Kitchens is a first-time head coach:

“I think I can. That is the communication coming in daily on the things we are doing, whether it is scheduling or whether it is the pitfalls that come up as a head coach. I talked to him about some of the things already that you are going to get pulled away with things that really don’t have anything to do with football. Our makeup as coaches, we want to be in there scheming, talking ball, getting with the coaches and being around the players, but there are so many other things that may come up. Being around him, I can definitely help him out with those things.”

On taking over a team that primarily ran a 4-3 compared to transitioning from a different base defense:

“I think the transition is easier. I felt like we had the pieces in place there (in Arizona), but it is a big change. When you really look at the game as I talked about earlier, even teams that are 3-4, 70-percent of what they are doing is a 4-3 base because teams aren’t really in 21 personnel anymore. This game is to the point to where they are spreading you out so you are going to be in a four-down look, which is a 4-3.”



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On if he believes the Rooney Rule is working, referencing he was head coach for one year and one minority head coach was hired for 2019, and how it could potentially be improved:

“I do think it is working. Every owner has their own expectations and the things they want. I think it is about production. It is about winning. Does it take time? Yes. You look at any Fortune 500 company in the United States, they will tell you that when someone comes in and takes it over, it is going to take some time. You just wish you had that time. I think the Rooney Rule is working. I think it is effective. The coaches have to understand that this is a production-based business. That’s what it’s all about.”

On improving the Browns run defense:

“No. 1, it is just about gap integrity. That is what our defense has been about for years. It is everybody having their gap. It is everybody doing their job. It starts with trust, great communication, technique and fundamentals. We are going to make sure that we emphasize that from Day 1. I think that is what you have to start with in this defense – understanding your responsibility and understanding and trusting that the man beside you is going to do his job. We have to stop the run No. 1.”

On if he would like to pair Garrett with another elite edge rusher to alleviate pressure on Garrett:

“As I mentioned earlier, I think you can never have enough rushers, whether you complement him from the inside with a strong 3 technique that can rush and get off the ball or where it is another guy from the outside because I think at that particular time, it affects their pass protection. They can’t really lean to one side, and it really takes some pressure off him as you just mentioned.”

On if Ward could benefit from adjusting his tackling technique as stated by former defensive coordinator Gregg Williams, particularly as it relates to Ward sustaining two concussions last season:

“I think it is a point of emphasis across the board because the league is all about safety. I think coaches are taking a lot of pride in that and trying to teach and coach it the right way. Not only with him but just across the board and the whole defense, we want to make sure that we’re teaching tackling the right way. I believe in being aggressive as we talking about earlier and setting the tone on the defensive side of the ball, but we have to make sure that he is doing it to where he can make sure he can maintain 16-plus games throughout the year so we have to teach him the right way.”

On Peppers and opportunities for his contributions to continually increase:

“When you add Peppers along with (DB Damarious) Randall, I really love that combination and the range we have in the back end making plays on the ball. With Peppers, I think he gives you that element of a guy who can play closer to the core, has the athleticism and the skillset to be able to play out in space and can cover a slot receiver, as well as a tight end. I’m very intrigued to work with him and see if we can really get him going in the system and the schemes that we have done before, whether it has been (Cardinals S) Budda Baker at Arizona or (Panthers LB) Shaq Thompson at Carolina. I think he has that same skillset.”

On the Browns’ missed tackles last year:

“I pride myself on the fundamentals and technique. We are not going to get away from that. From Day 1, even in the offseason when we are not working with pads, I still think it is a point of emphasis and it starts there. Then once the season gets here, we can’t get away from it. It is not just one guy. It is a team effort. We have to get guys running to the football. We have to get guys understanding the proper leverage, angles, how we get there, how we arrive with velocity and most importantly, impact.”

On if he not is an ‘analytics guy,’ given his reaction to a mention of tackling and analytics:

“I really am. It has grown on me over the years to the point that I think it is very beneficial. You can definitely get some things from it that can help you out with your gameplan, as well as calling the game on gameday. I laugh and chuckle a little bit, buy yeah, it is beneficial.”

On missed tackles being a matter of either you tackle or you don’t:



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“That is true. I somewhat laughed about that, not so much the analytics part. That doesn’t have anything to do with missing a tackle. You have to finish and make that.”

On the Browns LBs and if major changes are needed to the unit:

“I’m not going to emphasize major changes. We are still emphasizing right now the roster and trying to evaluate each and every individual here. Do we need to improve in every area? I think so, even up front, as we just mentioned with Myles and on the back end with Ward. I think Dorsey, Freddie and myself, we are all going to do a good job in making sure we get the right players in here.”

On why Cleveland was his first choice for a new team:

“When you look at the personnel, and not just personnel but young personnel, and then the head coach, as a former head coach, I think you have to look beyond just the defensive side of the ball. You can’t win in this league if you don’t have a quarterback and we have a quarterback. We have a quarterback. Not only do we have one, we have one that I consider to be from my studying and the things I learned from him coming out of college is he is an alpha male. He affects not only the offensive side of the ball but this team, and that was very attractive coming here. When you look at Myles, you look at Ward, you look at Peppers and young players that I think can have a major impact on the defensive side of the ball, it is very exciting. You look at the direction as I mentioned before with Dorsey and how he is building this team and the things he is doing and Freddie – young, energetic, new head coach – excited about the things he is trying to do. It is good. It was good. It was a good fit for me.”

On if he believes he will be able to help the Browns attract high-quality free agents this offseason:

“I will say this, we are going to try to get every player we can that is going to be able to help us win a world championship. If that is really tapping into some of my previous resources, friendships and things like that, I will definitely do it.”

On if advancing in the playoffs this year is realistic for the Browns:

“I think every year, if your mindset is not trying to get into the playoffs and win the championship, you shouldn’t be coaching or playing so yes, I do [think it is realistic].”

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