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2021 CHARLOTTE 49ERS

##	NAME	POSITION	CLASS	##	NAME	POSITION	CLASS
0	Trexler Ivey	QB	R-Fr.	17	Ford Werness	WR	R-Jr.
0	Markees Watts	DE	Sr	18	Preston Brown	QB	R-So.
1	Jon Alexander	DB	Gr.	18	Lance McMillian	DB	R-Jr.
1	Victor Tucker	WR	R-Sr.	18	Colin Weber	TE	Fr.
2	Dom Shoffner	QB	R-Sr.	19	Comanche Francisco	DB	R-Fr.
2	Justin Whisenhunt	LB	Gr.	19	Keith Pearson Jr.	WR	Gr.
3	Trey Creamer	DB	R-Sr.	20	Dominic Green	WR	Fr.
3	Chris Reynolds	QB	R-Sr.	20	Doug Newsome	CB	Fr.
4	Cameron Dollar	WR	Gr.	21	Shyhiem Scotland	LB	Fr.
4	Geo Howard	CB	Sr.	21	Elijah Turner	RB	R-Fr.
5	Calvin Camp	RB	R-Sr.	22	Chris Houston	WR	R-Fr.
5	Tyler Murray	LB	R-Sr.	22	Marcus Robitaille	DB	R-So.
6	Tre' Goode	WR	Jr.	23	Andre Francois	WR	R-Fr.
6	Solomon Rogers	DB	Jr.	23	Matt Martinez	DB	R-Jr.
7	James Foster	QB	R-So.	24	Chavion Smith	RB	Fr.
7	Kofi Wardlow	DE	DE	24	Lacy Williams	DB	R-So.
8	Cam Burden	LB	Fr.	25	Prince Bemah	LB	R-So.
8	Xavier Williams	QB	Fr.	25	ChaVon McEachern	RB	R-Fr.
9	Joshua Baliey	DT	R-Sr.	26	Shamar Baker	DB	So.
9	Elijah Spencer	WR	Fr.	26	Terrick Smalls Jr.	RB	R-Jr.
10	Dylan Ratliff	QB	R-Jr.	27	McKinley Nelson	RB	Jr.
10	Davondre Robinson	DB	Gr..	27	Bryson Whitehead	DB	R-Jr.
11	Jonathan Cruz	K	Sr.	28	Nolan Groulx	WR	R-So.
11	Taylor Thompson	TE	R-Fr.	28	JJ. Jones	DB	Jr.
12	Donta Armstrong	TE	R-Fr.	29	Ricky Kofoed	TE	R-So.
12	Shedrick Ursery	DB	R-Fr.	29	Jonnie Pitman	DB	R-Jr.
13	Briston Bennett	DB	R-Fr.	30	Derek Boykins	LB	R-So.
13	Shadrick Byrd	RB	Jr.	30	Keegan Williams	RB	R-Fr.
14	Grant DuBose	WR	So.	31	Trey Bly	DB	R-So.
14	Steven Parker	S	Fr.	32	John Anderson	DB	Fr.
15	Justin Jeffery	WR	R-Jr.	32	Henry Rutledge	RB	Fr.
15	Jarvis Martin	DB	So.	33	Jaylon Sharpe	LB	Jr.
16	Valerian Agbaw	DB	R-Fr.	33	Hahsaun Wilson	RB	Fr.
16	Kendric Blake Jr.	WR	R-So.	34	Boyd Farmer	DB	Fr.
17	Luke Martin	LB	R-Sr.	34	Freddie Felton III	WR	Fr.

FOOTBALL ROSTER

##	NAME	POSITION	CLASS	##	NAME	POSITION	CLASS
35	Antone Williams	DB	Gr.	64	Victor Loftin	OL	Fr.
36	DJ Brown	LB	Fr.	66	Navardo Miller	OL	R-So.
37	Jack Reynolds	WR	Fr.	68	J.D. Therrell	OL	Fr.
37	Bailey Rice	P	Fr.	69	Dejan Rasuo	OL	R-Jr.
38	Anthony Jackson	DB	R-Fr.	70	D'Mitri Emmanuel	OL	R-Sr.
39	Teddy Creecy III	WR	R-So.	71	Arabee Muslim	OL	R-Fr.
39	Colby Garfield	DL	R-Fr.	72	Cameron Clark	OL	R-Fr.
40	Bryce Parker	LS	Fr.	74	Knox Boyd	OL	Fr.
40	Rayshaad Roddy	DL	R-Jr.	75	TJ Moore	OL	R-Sr.
41	Doug McLaughlin	LS	Jr.	76	Jordan Brown	OL	Fr.
42	Alex Schattin	P	Fr.	77	Jaxon Hughes	OL	R-So.
43	Max Blitstein	K	R-So.	78	Hunter Kelly	OL	Gr.
43	Isaiah Turnage	LB	Fr.	79	Chibueze Nwanna	OL	R-Sr.
44	Mikel Horton	DL	Gr.	80	Jairus Mack	WR	Fr.
44	Zack Nicholson	P/K	R-Jr.	81	Jake Clemons	TE	R-Fr.
45	Cameron Lyons	LS	Gr.	82	Jaylan Williams	TE	R-So.
46	Aidan Laros	K	Fr.	83	Chris Wiggins	WR	R-Jr.
47	Ethan Torres	P/K	Gr.	84	Khilen Holliman	WR	Fr.
48	Barutti Mazangu	DL	R-Fr.	85	Ryan Carriere	TE	R-Sr.
50	Darion Smith	DL	R-Fr.	86	Bryce Kennon	TE	R-Fr.
51	Peter Agabe	LB	R-Sr.	87	Chylon Thomas	WR	R-Jr.
51	B.J. Ragland	OL	Fr.	88	Riley Engelhard	TE	Fr.
52	Jonny King	OL	R-Fr.	89	Quinton Patten	WR	R-So.
53	Panda Askew	OL	R-Fr.	90	Dez Morgan	DL	R-Fr.
53	Michael Kelly	DL	R-So.	91	Corey Mobley	DE	R-Sr.
54	Gage Welborn	OL	R-Jr.	92	Miles Posey	DE	Fr.
55	Isaiah Potts	DT	Fr.	93	Emmanuel White	TE	R-Sr.
56	Jordan Moore	DL	R-Fr.	94	Isaiah Belk	DL	R-Jr.
57	Ashton Gist	OL	Sr.	95	Miguel Jackson	DE	Fr.
57	Siah Sa'o	DL	Gr.	96	Isaac Hampton	DL	R-Sr.
58	Jon Jacobs	OL	Gr.	97	Jalar Holley	DL	R-Fr.
59	B.J. Turner	LB	R-Jr.	98	Tyson Clawson	DE	Fr.
60	Bryan Wallace	DL	R-Jr.	99	Taylor Chandler	DE	R-Jr.
61	Marshall Futrell	OL	Fr.	TBA	Ryan Tyson	QB	Fr.
63	Trevor Timmons	OL	Fr.				

FROM WALK-ON TO WATCH-LISTS

Quarterback Chris Reynolds enters his final season with the 49ers on multiple award watch-lists

by Sam Perry
Staff Writer

Fifth-year Quarterback Chris Reynolds has had a unique path to becoming the primary starter for the 49ers but has remained humble in his success. Reynolds will go from being a walk-on to multiple watch-lists as he looks to give it his all in his final year with the team.

Five years ago, Reynolds started his career with the 49ers as a walk-on having no offers from high school. He took a chance trying out for Charlotte, and it has paid off in a big way.

“Charlotte was my only option. I was a walk-on. They were the only opportunity, they were the only ones to give me a shot and the only ones that believed in me. From the moment I stepped onto campus, it has been home,” said Reynolds. “Starting from the first coaching staff and first guys I played with. I met some of my best friends and had so many relationships. It’s not home not only because of playing football here, but it’s home because of the relationships I’ve built, and it’s been special, and I’m so thankful.”

National recognition

Coming off a solid 2020 season where he threw for 1,305 yards and eight touchdowns in six games played, Reynolds has gathered attention nationally, as he has been added to both the Maxwell Award watch list and the Johnny Unitas award watch list.

Both awards recognize outstanding football players. The Maxwell Award is presented by the best all-around collegiate football player in the nation. At the same time, The Johnny Unitas award is given to an upperclassmen quarterback who expresses excellent leadership qualities. Reynolds fits both categories as he will look to take his game to the next level this season.

“Chris has been off the charts. He has responded to every bit of adversity he’s

ever faced since I’ve been here. He is our guy,” said Head Coach Will Healy

Quarterback job competition

The 49ers come into this season with a very competitive depth chart for the quarterback position. James Foster, who transferred in from Texas A&M, and Dom Shoffner, who had an impressive stint as the backup quarterback in 2020, are competing for Reynolds’ job.

They pose a tough challenge for Reynolds, but he’s fought hard for his job so far against long odds going from being a walk-on to being named to national award watch lists.

“My preparation right now is for us to be a successful football team and to win football games. It’s not a matter of looking to your left and right and competing, it’s a matter of competing with yourself,” said Reynolds at the 49ers 2021 Media Day. “How can I get better every single day? Because if you aren’t getting better, you are getting worse. That’s how I operate as a person. Going into my fifth year, my time is ticking. My main focus is to win football games.”

For the time being, Reynolds looks like he has the starting job going into the season, having gained the coach’s respect over the years and having a very impressive off-season.

“There is nobody I’ve coached that I respect more than Chris Reynolds, ever,” said Healy.

Expectations

Reynolds hopes to return to his 2019 form, where he played 13 games throwing for 2,564 yards while also rushing for 791 yards.

“I expect to be the leader for the young guys, to lead us through adversity. When times get tough, I need to ask myself: how am I going to react?

Photo courtesy of
Charlotte Athletics

How am I going to push through? How efficient can I be? I want to be extremely efficient. My main goal is obviously to win a championship. My expectation is to put myself in the best position to do so,” said Reynolds.

With this being Reynold’s fifth and final year with the Niners, he wants to ensure he goes out with no regrets and leaves no stone unturned.

“I don’t want to look back and tell myself I didn’t do enough or I didn’t put a certain amount of time in. I want to make sure I check every box so at the end of the season I can say I gave it my all, I gave it everything I had, hopefully, that leads us in the right direction,” said Reynolds.



— NEVER ENDING IMPROVEMENT —

Healy and company are still improving 49er culture



by Bradley Cole
Sports Editor

Photo courtesy of Charlotte athletics

The moment Charlotte football coach Will Healy stepped foot on campus in 2019, the program's culture changed forever.

Maybe it was his bright smile, openness with the media and fans, or of course, the immediate change in performance from his football team.

Since day one, Healy has worked hard to keep improving the culture with the 49ers in many different ways. He has noted that he believes that's what gets programs from being good to great.

Now entering Year 3, Healy has improved the 49er culture both on and off the field.

Recruiting

Assembling a great team starts off the field, and that's where Healy has put his time and effort. There have been new editions to the football stadium,

including a brand-new turf field that sports the new Charlotte logo that debuted last year.

"You have to win recruits when they step on the field. And it's just a beautiful stadium," said Healy at Charlotte's Media Day. "When we get it to where we expect to get it, it will be second to none."

Along with new additions outside of the stadium, there have also been changes to the inside facility.

"When it comes to indoors, it's just about piecing some things together, adding some graphics. When you do that, I think you can win recruits based on your facility," said Healy. "It's just about fine-tuning it a little bit. For us, you win in the city, and you win on a vision and the university."

Healy noted that the program needs to keep up with bigger schools in the state.

"You have to win your state first," said

Healy. "For us, that's the Carolinas. That's what they (recruits) look at."

The addition of 49er alums joining the NFL will help the recruiting case for the 49ers, as they will have highlights playing and pictures of former players such as former 49er and current Pittsburgh Steeler Alex Highsmith.

Bigger Stadium, Club Lit

As the program expands its horizons, the hope is for the stadium to get bigger in the future. "You're looking at doubling the size of the stadium and suits and all those types of things that make an unbelievable game-day improvement," said Healy. "I think what you have to do now is make a demand for 16 (thousand capacity) before you make a demand for 30, and that's on us."

The aspirations are high for Healy and the team in the long-term future.

Club Lit is the most notable change to the culture at Charlotte, which is where the 49ers as a team celebrate in the locker room with lights and music. With the return of somewhat normalcy, Club Lit will likely return after a mix of cancellations and losses stopped the regular celebration.

This season, Healy and the 49ers will hope to add big games against teams to their resume, such as Duke, Illinois and, new Conference USA foe, Louisiana Tech.

Charlotte's 2021 schedule

Check out a breakdown of this year's games

by Joey Ellsworth
Staff Writer

Photo courtesy of Charlotte athletics

After a successful 2019 season, Charlotte looked to follow it up in 2020, but disappointing results ensued. Not only did Charlotte not win enough to again be bowl eligible, but they only managed to grab two wins due to multiple Covid-19 cancellations. With all that in the rearview mirror, the 49ers hope their season goes smoother and with less delay.

The 49ers will have big names returning, such as redshirt senior quarterback Chris Reynolds. Just a week ago, Reynolds was named the 2021 Johnny Unitas Golden Arm Award Watch List presented by A. O. Smith. This award recognizes the top senior or upperclassman quarterback set to graduate with their class. Reynolds is entering his 3rd year as the 49ers QB.

The 49ers will also be losing notable names like Tyriq Harris, who was named to the 2020-21 Academic All-America® Division I football second team two weeks ago.

Head coach Will Healy will enter his third year and has to help his team find a way to win with Covid impacting his squad. The Covid-19 pandemic may not be as extreme as it was during last year's season, but it's still a factor, and something Healy and the rest of the squad will have to be wary of and find a way not to let it impact the results of the team.

Charlotte will play 12 games this season. Six will be at home, and the other six will be away games. Below is a breakdown of each game for the 49ers.

Sep. 3 vs. Duke (7 p.m.)

The 49ers kick their season off with a home game against Duke. Charlotte had

only played against Duke once before when they lost to the Blue Devils 53-19 less than a year ago. Charlotte will search for a different result for their Green Out home game, and it will be the first time the Niners host an ACC or Power Five team at home.

Sep. 11 vs. Gardner-Webb (6 p.m.)

Charlotte will remain home to face Gardner-Webb, who they have beaten in their previous home games. The last time these two faced off, Charlotte wiped the floor with them, 49-28 in 2019.

Sep. 18 @ Georgia State, (7 p.m.)

For the 49ers' first away game of the season, they will travel to Atlanta, Georgia, to face off against Georgia State. They haven't played Georgia State since 2017. Charlotte took a 0-28 loss in the two team's last meeting. It won't be an easy game for the 49ers as Georgia went 6-4 last season and won the LendingTree Bowl 39-21 over WKU.

Sep. 24 vs. Middle Tennessee (6:30 p.m.)

Charlotte returns home to face Middle Tennessee, who beat Charlotte in their first four meetings, but the Niners were able to turn it around and finally beat them in late 2019, 34-20. Charlotte will look for a repeat performance this season.

Oct. 2 @ Illinois, TBD

The Niners travel to Urbana-Champaign, Illinois, to face an unfamiliar foe. This will be the first time the 49ers will face Illinois, a team that went a poor 2-6 last season. Illinois is already 1-0

this season, beating Nebraska 30-22. The team also has a new head coach in Bret Bielema, a veteran college football coaching space.

Oct. 8 @ FIU (7 p.m.)

After their match with Illinois, Charlotte will travel down to Miami to face off against FIU. Charlotte hasn't had much luck playing FIU, losing all five of their matchups. Their last matchup came in late 2019 when FIU took down the 49ers at home 48-23.

Oct. 21 vs. Florida Atlantic (7:30 p.m.)

Charlotte returns home to face FAU, a team they played back in October of last year. Unfortunately, that game did not go Charlotte's way, losing the close contest 21-17 in the debut game for FAU's new head coach. Charlotte also lost to the Owls at home in 2019.

Oct. 30 @ WKU (4 p.m.)

The 49ers hit the road for Bowling Green, Kentucky, to face WKU for the fifth straight year. Whenever the two meet, the game has been a blowout. The closest game was in 2019 when Charlotte lost 30-14. Unfortunately for the Niners, they have only beat WKU once before.

Nov. 6 vs. Rice, (3:30 p.m.)

Rice and the 49ers have just faced off twice before, the last game coming in 2016. That 2016 battle was close as the Niners took a one-point 22-21 loss after allowing Rice to score 22 unanswered points. With this game coming towards the end of the season, it could be a must-win for the 49ers.

Nov. 13 @ Louisiana Tech (3:30 p.m.)

Louisiana Tech and Charlotte have never faced off against each other, but there's a first time for everything. Louisiana Tech went an even 5-5 last season, finishing it out in the R+L Carriers New Orleans Bowl against Georgia Southern, where Louisiana got blown out 38-3. Given the 49ers are facing a new brand team and have trouble on the road, this game will be tough.

Nov. 20 vs. Marshall (3:30 p.m.)

Charlotte's last home game comes against Marshall. When these two last faced, which was back in late 2019, Charlotte grabbed a 24-13 victory over Marshall to extend their winning streak that season to four and give them a bowl-eligible sixth win. After not being able to play in 2020 due to Covid-19, there's a high chance another classic can take place.

Nov. 27 @ Old Dominion (2 p.m.)

Charlotte will close off the season with an away game season finale against Old Dominion. While Old Dominion won their first three games against the 49ers, Charlotte has turned it around and won the last two. Charlotte will look to even the record and close out their season strong on the road.

Predicting the future

Five bold predictions for the fall football season

by Cameron Williams
Staff Writer

Photo courtesy of Charlotte athletics

With the start of yet another football season just right around the corner, the expectations are high for the 49ers. Here are five bold predictions for Charlotte football in the 2021 season.

5. Tyler Murray will make 1st team all-conference

After racking up 49 tackles in the team's shortened season last year, Murray, now a redshirt senior, will look to be the anchor for the 49er defense. Murray had two games last year with double-digit tackles and was 66th in the FBS in tackles per game with 8.2 on average.

With the loss of Tyriq Harris to graduation, a lot of responsibility will be on Murray to be the leader on defense. If the team gets to play a whole year, there is a good chance Murray will find himself on the all-conference first-team list.

4. Charlotte will beat Duke this year

Anyone who follows 49ers football knows how the game between Charlotte and Duke went last year. It was not the outcome that head coach Will Healy or anyone had in mind on the Charlotte sideline. The 49ers will be out for blood this year, and the team knows what it will take to beat the Blue Devils.

Charlotte will get to play this year's game at Jerry Richardson Stadium in front of their fans. With fans not attending games last year, there were no "home-field advantages." Now, the 49ers will be relying on the fans to be loud and ready to cheer them on.

Lastly, with Chase Brice transferring from Duke to Appalachian State, the Blue Devils will have a different quarterback under center this season. If Healy and the 49ers can limit Duke's offense compared to last year's game, Charlotte has a great chance to knock off Duke.

3. Charlotte will finish above .500

The 49ers play several teams at home this year that



they have had success against in the past. The team also has the luxury, as mentioned above, to play Duke at home. They will also face Marshall at home, who has had a national ranking for multiple weeks at a time in recent years. Charlotte beat Marshall in a home game in 2019 that clinched a bowl game for the 49ers.

The 49ers have the talent to win many conference games and even a handful of their non-conference bouts this season. Realistically, the team has a decent shot to go 7-5, or maybe 8-4.

2. The 49ers will be bowling again in 2021

By now, everyone knows what a letdown 2020 was for not only the 49ers but for many teams around the nation. It goes without saying that after a 2019 campaign where

the 49ers made their first-ever bowl game, the season expectations were very high going into 2020. Unfortunately, some of these expectations were unrealistic going into an uncertain year like 2020, where nothing was guaranteed, and many games ended up rescheduled or canceled.

Many predict that the 49ers have the talent to make their second-ever bowl game with fewer virus-related interruptions this season. With veteran players like Chris Reynolds, Victor Tucker and Cameron Dollar, the 49ers have the pieces to have a winning football team and bring home a bowl game trophy.

1. Charlotte will finish second in the East Division of Conference USA

Saving the best prediction for last, this team can finish second in the east division. It will be a challenging task to contend with Marshall. With that, the 49ers will finish second in the east division.

Again, several factors are in play here, such as the team's health as the season progresses, how much Covid-19 interference the 49ers encounter, etc.

Charlotte plays Marshall on Senior day; this Senior day will allow the team to honor players who have helped build the program. Quarterback Chris Reynolds, wideout Victor Tucker and linebacker Tyler Murray will all be seniors. The game is at home, so the 49er faithful will be out to support their seniors in a pivotal matchup to decide who will play in the conference championship game.

These predictions are bold, but the 49ers will look to live up to the hype in what should be a "normal" year of football. The season is right around the corner, and Charlotte kicks things off against the Duke Blue Devils on Sep. 3 at 7 p.m. on CBS Sports Network.

New kids on the block

New transfers look to make impact for 49ers

by Kameron Roach
Intern

Photo by Chris Crews

Charlotte's football team gained a heap of experience with the seven transfers brought in this past February. With their first game just days away, the transfers are hungry to get on the field and will look to make their mark this season.

Head Coach Will Healy faced some hardship in recruiting because of fewer face-to-face interactions with recruits due to the pandemic. Nevertheless, Healy admits he had to be willing to take a chance on guys he had not been around. Healy says getting his players to buy in will be a "daily process." He plans to "invest in relationships" and making sure they trust the coaching staff.

The 49ers now have Jon Alexander, a 6-3 grad transfer from Kansas State, playing safety. In 2019, Alexander played in 12 regular-season games and picked up 25 tackles. He did not play in the 2020

season but hopes to produce at a high level this season.

Graduate transfer Davondre Robinson who played at East Carolina, is another safety transferring to the team. The SC native had a career to remember at East Carolina. Robinson has the potential to make this year's 49ers defense even better. Robinson stated he felt like Charlotte "was a good move for him." The safety brings his "football IQ and physicality" to the defense on the backend.

The Niners also landed 300-pound defensive tackle Joshua Bailey. Bailey is a redshirt senior who hails from Iowa State. He did not see much playing time at Iowa State. However, he has a chance to show his potential for the 49ers.

From Iowa, Charlotte signed redshirt sophomore running back Shadrick Byrd. Byrd only played on special teams in a

season opener at Purdue during his time at Iowa. He, too, has an opportunity to prove how valuable he can become to the 49er offense.

In addition, redshirt sophomore James Foster comes to Charlotte from Texas A&M. Foster will be competing for starting quarterback job after he opted out of the 2020 season. In 2019, he played in four games, completing three passes on nine attempts with five rushes for 15 yards. Niner Nation eagerly awaits the healthy competition inevitable between Foster and fifth-year starter Chris Reynolds this season.

Kofi Wardlow, a 6-3 defensive end coming from Notre Dame, will be a great addition to the Niner defense. Wardlow played in three games in four seasons at Notre Dame. However, Healy expects Wardlow to have an exceptional season

with the Niners. Wardlow says being a 49er has been "pretty amazing" so far. And according to Wardlow, entering the transfer portal was "nerve-wracking," but Healy has created a new and fresh culture of which he is excited to be a part.

Lastly, signed graduate transfer linebacker Justin Whisenhunt from Troy will be a big part of the defense. Whisenhunt played in two games, made four solo tackles, and broke up one pass.

Healy has his eyes on both the newcomers and transfers this season. He is excited about what is to come as players will buy into the program. Likewise, fans have high expectations as they expect a transformation with the new additions on the team.

FORGED BY FIRE



Charlotte's Markees Watts looks to lead defense in 2021

by Bryson Foster
Asst. Sports Editor

Photo courtesy of
Charlotte athletics

Charlotte defensive end Markees Watts will return to Charlotte for his senior season 2021, and Watts is determined to step into the leadership role as he looks to blossom as a player and a person.

"My senior year has to be my best year," said Watts. "I want to get better than I am currently."

The Lancaster, SC native will look to bounce back after an injury-ridden season just a year ago. Watts is itching to get back on the field and produce at a high level once again. Watts is ready to put the injury in the past with new techniques this season.

"I want to train like a professional, and when it comes to the game, I want to make sure that I am safe," said Watts. "I have to play right to keep going."

The role of leadership is one that Watts will look to fit into for the 49ers. Watts is on a mission to lead by example for the younger players and help them get better. He believes that actions on the field speak louder than words.

"I feel like I am the type of guy that leads by example and not as much vocally," said Watts. "I plan on leading by example every day possible."

Watts has the drive to learn the game

by preparing himself for every play. He was all over the field in 2019 as he would rack up 62 total tackles. Watts is also the third 49er to have double-digit sacks with 11.5. He has high expectations for himself to keep those numbers up.

"I ran to the ball and was all over the place in 2019, but I wanna add that knowledge to it as well," said Watts. "I want to be able to predict the plays before they happen."

Watts is not the only person with high expectations for himself as head coach Will Healy is also excited for his progression as a player. Healy feels that Watts will be highly successful on the field this season but even more successful off it. Healy reflected on Watts' progression as a player and how he will continue to grow this season.

"Markees went from being a guy that struggled with consistency to now being the heartbeat of the whole team," said Healy. "His work ethic, leadership, and determination have shaped him into the player he is now."

Assistant head coach and co-defensive coordinator Marcus West feels that Watts will fit into the defensive strategy by leading the team into battle. West thinks

that Watts has taken lessons learned from his predecessors and will apply them throughout the season. West is ready to see this new defense play together and see Markees Watts take a big jump in his game.

"Markees is walking in the footsteps of his predecessors, and if he continues to do that, he will be set up for success," said West. "We want to have consistency with Markees, and we feel like he will make a big jump this year."

The 49ers are looking to get back on track after a season that saw Covid-19 cause multiple cancellations for the team. Watts is confident that this group of players is ready to create more success for the program. The expectations are high, and Watts is excited for what is to come.

"I feel like we can only look up from here," said Watts. "I see us continuing to get better throughout the season."

Watts has many goals that he hopes to accomplish this season. He wants to get back to producing at the level he was in 2019 and helping the team in any way that he can. Watts is looking to tie his career-high of 9.5 sacks and bring passion on every snap this season.

"I have to beat nine and a half sacks

this season," said Watts. "If I can reach that goal, I feel like all the other areas of my game will take care of themselves."

Healy also has lofty goals for the senior this season, and he is ready to help him reach them. Watts continues to coach up younger players and genuinely wants to invest in the future of 49er football. Healy has confidence that this season will be the best yet for Watts.

"I expect Markees to have an all-American type season," said Healy. "Markees Watts has changed his entire life for his fellow teammates and the program in general."

Watts has been shaped throughout his life for this moment, and he will not let it slip by him. Markees Watts will step up and take life by the reins for his final season in Charlotte green. The time is now, and all the trials he has been through have shaped him into the person he is today. He has been ready to take on this role his whole life, and he looks forward to what is ahead.

"I have been tossed in the fire my whole life," said Watts. "It comes down to the player and person that I want to be, so I feel that I am in control of my future."

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