

Ahkello Witherspoon

Ahkello Witherspoon's Football Career

Sports



COLLEGE FOOTBALL
PLANS FOR PAC-12 TEAMS
TO PLAY THIS FALL
REMAIN IN A HOLDING
PATTERN 2B

49ERS

Sherman headed to IR with calf injury, source confirms

BY CHRIS BIDERMAN
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SANTA CLARA

The 49ers were dealt a significant blow by an injury to one of their most important players Wednesday.

Cornerback Richard Sherman is expected to be placed on injured reserve with a calf injury, a league source confirmed to The Sacramento Bee. NFL Network was first to report the news Wednesday morning.

The news comes as a surprise given Sherman was not men-

tioned by coach Kyle Shanahan when he listed injuries following Week 1's loss to the Arizona Cardinals on Sunday or Monday. Sherman himself didn't mention an injury when he spoke to reporters after the game. It's unclear when the injury occurred.

New league rules for 2020

allow players to go on injured reserve and miss a minimum of three weeks and an unlimited number of players can go on IR and return throughout the season. Sherman would be first eligible to return Oct. 11 against the Miami Dolphins. Sherman will miss road games against the

New York Jets, New York Giants and a home contest against the Philadelphia Eagles. The 49ers will practice at The Greenbrier in West Virginia between their games against the New York teams to save travel time.

Sherman, a second-team All-Pro and voted to his fifth Pro Bowl in 2019, will be replaced by Ahkello Witherspoon, a 2017 third-round draft pick who lost his starting job to Emmanuel Moseley last season. Sherman is the second cornerback on the active roster to sustain an injury. Reserve Jason Verrett missed Sunday's game with a hamstring injury and it's unclear when he'll

SEE SHERMAN, 2B

Ahkello Witherspoon

Ahkello Elec Witherspoon (born March 21, 1995) is an American football cornerback for the San Francisco 49ers of the National Football League (NFL). He played college football at Colorado.

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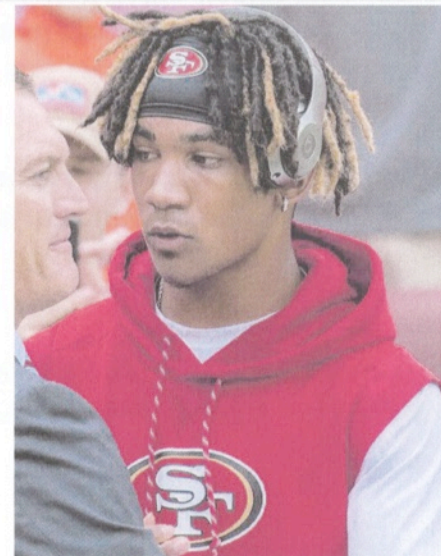
High school career

Witherspoon attended Christian Brothers High School in Sacramento, California. He played only one season of football in high school.^[1]

College career

Witherspoon played at Sacramento City College for one year before transferring to the University of Colorado Boulder.^{[2][3]} He played at Colorado from 2014 to 2016.^{[4][5]} During his career, he had 71 tackles and three interceptions.

Ahkello Witherspoon



Witherspoon in 2017

No. 23 – San Francisco 49ers

Position: Cornerback

Personal information

Born: March 21, 1995
Sacramento,
California

Height: 6 ft 3 in (1.91 m)

Weight: 195 lb (88 kg)

Career information

High school: Christian Brothers
(Sacramento,
California)

College: Colorado

NFL Draft: 2017 / Round: 3 /
Pick: 66

Professional career

Coming out of Colorado, Witherspoon was projected to be a second or third round pick by the majority of NFL draft experts and scouts. He received an invitation to the NFL Combine and performed nearly every combine drill, but opted to skip the bench press. On March 8, 2017, he chose to participate at Colorado's pro day long with, Adobe Awuzie, Tedric Thompson, Sefo Liufau, and ten other prospects. All 32 NFL teams had team representatives and scouts present.^[6] He had five private workouts and visits with the Indianapolis Colts, New Orleans Saints, Philadelphia Eagles, San Francisco 49ers, and Seattle Seahawks.^[7] He was ranked the 14th best cornerback prospect in the draft by NFLDraftScout.com.^[8]

Pre-draft measurables

Height	Weight	Arm length	Hand size	40-yard dash	10-yard split	20-yard split	20-yard shuttle	Three-cone drill	Vertical jump	Broad jump
6 ft 2¾ in (1.90 m)	198 lb (90 kg)	33 in (0.84 m)	97⁄8 in (0.25 m)	4.45 s	1.53 s	2.57 s	4.13 s	6.93 s	40½ in (1.03 m)	10 ft 7 in (3.23 m)

All values from NFL Combine^{[9][8]}

The San Francisco 49ers selected Witherspoon in the third round (66th overall) of the 2017 NFL Draft.^[10] He was the 11th cornerback selected in the 2017 NFL Draft.^[11]

2017 season: Rookie year

On May 12, 2017, the San Francisco 49ers signed Witherspoon to a four-year, \$3.88 million contract with a signing bonus of \$973,572.^[12]

Witherspoon competed with Dontae Johnson, Rashard Robinson, Keith Reaser, and K'Waun Williams throughout training camp for the starting cornerback position.^[13] Head coach Kyle Shanahan named him the fifth cornerback on the depth chart behind Dontae Johnson, Rashard Robinson, K'Waun Williams, and Asa Jackson.

Witherspoon was a healthy scratch for the first four games of the year. On October 8, 2017, he made his NFL debut and recorded one tackle during a 26–20 overtime road loss to the Indianapolis Colts.^[14] On October 29, 2017, Witherspoon earned his first NFL start and recorded three solo tackles, one pass deflection, and picked off a pass attempt by Carson Wentz for his first NFL interception as the 49ers lost to the Philadelphia Eagles by a score of 33–20.^[15] Witherspoon earned the start in place of Rashard Robinson who was benched after repetitive penalties and then traded to the New York Jets, two days later. Head coach Kyle Shanahan stated that Witherspoon would be the starting cornerback, opposite Dontae Johnson, moving forward and his development was one of the key factors in trading Rashard Robinson. Pro Football Focus graded Witherspoon the best player on the San Francisco 49ers during the matchup against the Eagles and credited him with allowing three receptions on eight targets.^[16] During a Week 16 matchup against the Jacksonville Jaguars, Witherspoon recorded his second interception of the year by picking off Blake Bortles as the 49ers won by a score of 40–17.^[17]

San Francisco 49ers (2017–present)

Roster status: Active

Career highlights and awards

- Second-team All-Pac-12 (2016)

Career NFL statistics as of 2021

Total tackles: 117

Forced fumbles: 1

Fumble recoveries: 1

Pass deflections: 24

Interceptions: 4

Defensive touchdowns: 1

Player stats at **NFL.com** (<http://www.nfl.com/players/Ahkello-Witherspoon/stats/>)



Witherspoon in 2017

and two interceptions.^[18]

2018 season

Witherspoon entered the 2018 season as a starting cornerback alongside Richard Sherman. He played in 14 games with 12 starts, recording 37 tackles and four passes defended. On December 18, 2018, Witherspoon was placed on injury reserve due to a knee injury he suffered in Week 15 against the Seattle Seahawks.^[19]

2019 season

In the season-opener against the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, Witherspoon intercepted Jameis Winston and returned it 100 yards for a touchdown in the 31-17 road victory.^[20] He missed Weeks 5-10 with a foot injury but returned in Week 11 against the Arizona Cardinals.

Witherspoon finished the regular season with 28 tackles, a career-high nine pass deflections, and an interception returned for a touchdown. In the playoffs, he was demoted to a backup role to Emmanuel Moseley after a poor performance in the Divisional Round against the Minnesota Vikings. The 49ers went on to reach Super Bowl LIV, but lost 31-20 to the Kansas City Chiefs. Witherspoon finished the Super Bowl with one tackle.

2020 season

In Week 16 against the Arizona Cardinals, Witherspoon recorded his first interception of the season off a pass thrown by Kyler Murray during the 20-17 win.^[21]

FL statistics

Regular season

Year	Team	Games			Tackles			Interceptions					Fumbles		
		GP	GS	Comb	Total	Ast	Sck	PD	Int	Yds	Avg	Lng	TD	FF	FR
2017	<u>SF</u>	12	9	32	28	4	0.0	7	2	42	21.0	23	0	1	0
2018	<u>SF</u>	14	12	37	30	7	0.0	4	0	0	0.0	0	0	0	1
2019	<u>SF</u>	10	8	28	24	4	0.0	9	1	25	25.0	25T	1	0	0
2020	<u>SF</u>	11	4	20	17	3	0.0	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Career		47	33	117	99	18	0.0	24	4	67	16.8	25T	1	1	1

Year	Team	Games		Tackles				Interceptions					Fumbles		
		GP	GS	Comb	Total	Ast	Sck	PD	Int	Yds	Avg	Lng	TD	FF	FR
2019	SF	3	1	4	2	2	0.0	0	0	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	Career	3	1	4	2	2	0.0	0	0	0	0.0	0	0	0	0

Personal life

Witherspoon is the grandson of bluesman Jimmy Witherspoon.^{[22][3]}

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External links

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 Media related to Ahkello Witherspoon at Wikimedia Commons

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9/21/20

Projecting the 49ers' final 53-man roster

CORNERBACK (5)

**Richard Sherman,
Emmanuel Moseley,
K'Waun Williams, Ah-
kello Witherspoon,
Jason Verrett**

The battle to play opposite Sherman is likely going to be won by Moseley, though Witherspoon's upside remains intriguing. Consistency has, and perhaps always will be, his top issue. But he's worth a roster spot nonetheless. Verrett appears healthy and has gotten a lot of work with the starters this offseason and could be a contributor if there's an injury. Jamar Taylor has gotten most of the reps in the slot, but it's hard to find a roster spot for him when Williams returns from his calf injury, which isn't expected to keep him out Week 1. Tim Harris, a draft pick who missed all of last season, seems ticketed for the practice squad.

*Didn't make the cut:
Taylor, Harris, Dontae
Johnson*

9/8/10

During the preseason
Ahkello Witherspoon,
CB: Plays like an All-Pro
at times, like early last
season, and then plays
himself off the field late in
the year. The 49ers are as
perplexed as you are.

INJURY REPORT AND OTHER NOTES

Running back Jerick McKinnon (ribs) and cornerback Ahkello Witherspoon (hamstring) were listed as full participants in Wednesday's practice.

McKinnon received treatment injury early in the week but appears in line to play his fourth straight game on Sunday. Witherspoon was absent against the Giants because he tweaked his hamstring during the week of practice which allowed Jason Verrett to get the start.

OCT 1 2020

INJURIES AND NOTES

Slot cornerback K'Waun Williams returned to practice as a limited participant after missing Wednesday's session with a hip issue, which should be a good sign for his prognosis on Sunday night.

On the other hand, cornerback Ahkello Witherspoon, who was a full participant in

OCT 2 2020

Wednesday's session, spent the early part of practice open to reporters doing rehab on the side field. He was listed as a limited participant with the same hamstring injury that caused him to miss last week's game.

If Witherspoon can't play, San Francisco might have to tap Dontae Johnson for expanded playing time after he filled in for Emmanuel Moseley last week. Moseley missed practice Thursday after suffering a concussion on Sunday.

OCT 2 2020

Witherspoon would likely start opposite Jason Verrett, if his hamstring allows, with Jamar Taylor playing in the slot to replace Williams.. The 49ers might be forced to tap Ken Webster, the former Dolphins practice squad member against his former team, if Witherspoon can't play.

San Francisco this week

OCT 11 2020

WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 2 2020

Taylor, who had been playing in place of K'Waun Williams, tore his ACL on Sunday and will miss the remainder of the season. He was placed on injured reserve. Cornerback Ken Webster was also placed on injured reserve following his hamstring strain, which could lead to Ahkello Witherspoon being made active for the first time in four games Monday against

On Sunday, San Francisco's coaching staff made the odd decision to start Brian Allen at cornerback despite Ahkello Witherspoon's balky hamstring being healthy enough to suit up. Allen was promoted from the practice squad Saturday and made his first career start. The Dolphins realized that and targeted Allen from the jump.

He allowed a 47-yard catch on Miami's first snap and was flagged for a horse-collar tackle moments before their first touchdown. He was also in coverage on a touchdown

10/19/26 →

allowed on a third-and-22, and he was flagged for a pass interference at the goal line.

Suffice to say, starting Allen was a disaster, mitigated only by the fact he was replaced by Witherspoon after four series, once the Dolphins had scored three touchdowns.

Allen was a particularly surprising choice given Ken Webster had been with the team since Sept. 13. Yet the team decided Allen was the better player to start. Shanahan after the game wasn't asked why backup safety Tarvarius Moore, who was drafted to play cornerback in 2018, wasn't a better option than a player fresh off the practice squad.

After all, the 49ers often talk about getting their best players on the field regardless of position, and San Francisco used a third-round pick on Moore thinking he would play cornerback before switching him to safety in 2019.

And why not start Witherspoon if he was healthy enough to suit up?

"Ahkello, he tried to go this week, but he was too tight to try to go this whole week," Shanahan said.

"Because of our low numbers, we still trust him for emergency. We were trying to hold out to see how long we could go through with that. And when Ahkello came up to us on the sideline and said he wanted to go, and wanted a shot, gave us a little more confidence with his hamstring, he went in, was able to pull it off and get out of the game without tearing it."

Until Witherspoon is healthy, four of the five

Allen was replaced by Ahkello Witherspoon, who was suited up for emergency use only because he had been dealing with a tight hamstring since the Week 2 victory against the New York Jets.

Dolphins quarterback Ryan Fitzpatrick finished with 350 yards on 22-of-28 completions (79 percent) with three touchdowns for a near-perfect 154.5 passer rating. It was easily Fitzpatrick's best game of the season.

Shanahan on Monday fielded a handful of questions about why Witherspoon didn't start

despite being healthy enough to be in uniform. Shanahan said Witherspoon was the emergency option that only would have been used if Ken Webster, initially Allen's backup, were to get hurt.

It turns out Webster was also dealing with a hamstring issue which led to Witherspoon telling the coaching staff he felt good enough to play before he was inserted in the second quarter. Witherspoon wound up playing 41 snaps (61 percent).

The Witherspoon situation sounded like a tricky one to navigate. Based on Witherspoon's treatment early in the week, the 49ers planned on Witherspoon starting, but his hamstring wasn't right during practice Wednesday and Thursday, leading to the coaching staff deciding on Allen late in the week.

"I talked him to Wednesday night and Saturday and made the decision that was it like it looked in practice, and like he said," Shanahan said. "So that made us go with the other two guys. But he was willing to dress in case of an emergency and that ended up coming up."

Shanahan indicated had the team not planned on having Witherspoon available, the 49ers would have had more time to get creative with the position, which might have included shifting Tarvarius Moore from safety back to cornerback, which is how he began his pro career after getting drafted in the third round in 2018. Moore has played safety exclusively in the last two seasons and Shanahan said there simply wasn't enough practice time available to get him acclimated in time for Sunday.

"If I knew that a week in advance, two weeks in advance, we'd get (Moore) ready to do that," Shanahan said. "He could always do that in case of an emergency if all those guys went out, (if) Ahkello wasn't dressing or anything like that. When you go into a Wednesday and you're planning on it going a different way, for you to stop and give him all those reps on a Wednesday when you don't think that's the way it's going and it doesn't go out that way, you're going to hurt the team in many other ways with the a chain reaction of it."

The 49ers have started five different combinations at cornerback in the first five games. And of their five cornerbacks that made the opening day roster, Jason Verrett is currently the only one healthy.

But there was a hint of good

SEE 49ERS, 5B

12/28-20

49ERS NOTEBOOK

Witherspoon shines; Gould struggles with contract deadline looming

BY CHRIS BIDERMAN
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Saturday's victory for the 49ers was about redemption for a few of their players.

On the offensive side, it was all about C.J. Beathard, making his first start at quarterback since his younger brother's murder in Dec. 2019.

Defensively, San Francisco can thank cornerback Ahkello Witherspoon for a standout performance that was crucial in the 20-12 win.

Witherspoon, who was a healthy scratch for three straight games in November, brought down a fourth quarter interception of Kyler Murray in the end zone that helped the 49ers put together one of their most complete performances of the season. It was the second straight game Witherspoon stood out

after playing well in last week's loss to the Dallas Cowboys. That was Witherspoon's first start since Week 2.

The former third-round pick, who grew up in Sacramento, faces free agency in the spring and appeared to be on his way out of San Francisco just weeks ago before his recent emergence. None of the 49ers notable cornerbacks are signed for next season. Whether or not Witherspoon is back with the team that drafted him remains to be seen, but his play Saturday will certainly help his case.

Witherspoon had seven tackles, a tackle for loss, a pass breakup and the pick. He was burned by Christian Kirk for a 38-yard gain on the game's first third down leading before Arizona got on the board with a field goal. That play up the right sideline offed Witherspoon an ad-



RICK SCUTERI AP

San Francisco cornerback Ahkello Witherspoon (23) during a game against the Arizona Cardinals on Saturday in Glendale, Ariz.

justment to make as the game wore on.

"I credit the pick to the first third down when the ball kind of floated up on me," he said. "It was hanging in the air, and I just took note that Kyler's going to loft that thing up there. So if I got another

go ball (opportunity) I knew the ball was going to be in the air and I was going to have time."

Witherspoon had played himself out of the starting lineup, in part, due to the emergence this season of Jason Verrett, along with the play of Emmanuel

Moseley, who nabbed Witherspoon's starting job last season and in the playoffs. Witherspoon was a healthy scratch for three games in November because the team determined Ken Webster, a free agent signed off the street earlier in the year, was better on special teams. Even while Richard Sherman was sidelined with a calf injury, Witherspoon wasn't good enough to dress.

49ers head coach Kyle Shanahan said Saturday that Witherspoon had conversations with defensive coordinator Robert Saleh and special teams coach Richard Hightower about what he could do to get back in the lineup.

"I was hard on him at the beginning of this year, I thought for good reasons, and Ahkello didn't really shy away from it," Shanahan said. "And that's what made us start