

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

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LeVar Woods



THE MODERATOR: I will introduce first, Coach LeVar Woods.

LeVAR WOODS: Thank you guys for being here today. I appreciate it. I know this is your job. This is not typically my job description, but I appreciate every time I get a chance to come out and interface with you guys and get a chance to see you face-to-face, follow everyone on Twitter and social media and get a chance to see what you write and how you write and we appreciate that.

Starting off a little bit about the tight end position, obviously this is a different year, we lost two seniors last year in Jake Duzey and Henry Krieger Coble, two outstanding young men that epitomize what it means to be a Hawkeye and a Hawkeye tight end. They're going to be sorely missed over the next couple of years.

Transitioning into this year, George Kittle who had some playing experience last year, going to be a senior next year, had some good experience last season; and then also there is a host of younger guys that don't have as much experience behind them. Overall, the group is very, very young, and a group that -- but it is a group that is hungry and ready and willing and able to come to practice every single day and work hard.

I cannot say enough good things about the young men that I get to coach. They're phenomenal people, phenomenal young men, each one of them carries a 3.0 or higher GPA, with the exception of one guy and I'm working every single day on him to make sure he stays up with the group and a bunch of guys that are coming out every day trying to work hard and get better.

Q. How has Jameer transferred over from linebacker and how has he made that transition?

LeVAR WOODS: He made the transition. It came about in camp last year, right at the beginning of fall camp. It was new to him initially and I think he sort of picked up speed throughout last year and into the off-season and into spring. He is transitioning well. He still has a long way to go, as everybody does. But he's making the transition well. I think this is more of his natural position. He does some things very, very naturally and there are some things that take more time as far as catching the ball and being more precise in

his route running, but run blocking the guy is natural.

Q. Tight end position was pretty loaded on the offensive team last year because of Henry and Jake. What do you perceive this year, and what you do have coming back?

LeVAR WOODS: You hit the nail on the head. The tight end position at the University of Iowa is pivotal. It's been that way for years and years going back to the early 80s, this position at this university is a historic position with the tight ends and we look forward to transitioning to this year. Last year we had two guys that were seniors and then George kind of emerged his junior season, so we had three guys that were readily available. Right now we're trying to find out who those other guys are.

George, he has the experience and he's the guy that's been on the field the most. He's played some -- Jameer started one game out of necessity last year, however, we're just trying to find who the other guys are. Not to say that -- not to say that George is definitely cemented in his position, but he has the most experience. So that should lend itself to being the most stable player, I guess, if you will, and now we're just trying to find out who the other guys are.

Q. You have 4-5 guys coming in --

LeVAR WOODS: Do you know something I don't know?

Q. I'm not sure.

LeVAR WOODS: You must know something I don't, but go ahead.

Q. Do you see anybody, any true freshmen helping out?

LeVAR WOODS: Yeah, I know of two guys that we recruited definitely as a tight end.

Q. Maybe I'm confused with defensive line.

LeVAR WOODS: But two guys that we recruited for sure as a tight end and I'm not sure if I can say their names or not. I just want to make sure, I don't want to screw anything up, but Noah Fant who was a top player in Nebraska coming out of Omaha South and then T.J. Hockenson, you guys from Iowa should know T.J. He broke the all-time receiving record here in Iowa as a tight end.

We're excited about those two and there's a couple of other guys am coming in that we're not sure if they're going to be tight ends or not. We would like to have them, but other positions dictate whether or not they can play tight end or whether they need to play defense, those guys are gonna steal them from me.

Q. Are you fighting it go out?

LeVAR WOODS: A little bit. I think it kind of depends on how things shake out in spring. Obviously I want them all to play tight end. I love coaching good players and good athletes but if they stay on defense, they stay on defense. We recruited a couple of guys as athletes, not knowing which position they would be. But they have length and speed and attributes that end itself to the tight end position and if so be it Coach Ferentz gives me those guys we will coach 'em and make 'em good players.

Q. What was your first year like as the tight end coach?

LeVAR WOODS: It was a wild ride, wild ride. It was a lot of fun, first and foremost that's the first word that comes is fun. It was different being on the offensive side but it was a historic season being here at the University of Iowa and I cannot thank -- I keep talking about the two seniors. I cannot thank those guys enough. They made it a blast every single day to come to work. They were so much fun and the room itself, the tight end room what I saw throughout the year was they constantly gelled together and got closer and closer and became a tight-knit group that I think performed up to what they wanted to do and they were able to achieve the goals they wanted to achieve up until the end of the season.

Q. You are a former linebacker and linebacker coach. Do you try to coach the tight ends what the defense is thinking and try to check what they're doing?

LeVAR WOODS: I do and I do that almost every day. It's fun being on the other side. I joke with the linebackers every day I know what your weakness is and how to attack it so it's definitely fun.

Q. Where is Jon in his development?

LeVAR WOODS: Jon Wisnieski has taken a big step from last season till now. I think going into last year he kind of assumed that he was going to fall right in line because he's the next tight end at Iowa, and I think that sort of set him back a little bit last year. He's been tremendous the last -- since the season ended till now he's been awesome and he's doing very well, he's making his way and out there competing every day, and we will see what happens. But he's putting in good work. He's been great in the meeting rooms,

great in practice and we will see where he comes out.

Q. Is there any guy like Krieger Coble last year making unbelievable catches in practice that we don't know about and some of those guys behind Kittle that may be emerging?

LeVAR WOODS: I think I would be doing Hank a disservice if I said that somebody was catching the ball like him. But I will be honest, I have not seen a guy that can catch a ball like Henry at that level. I played with some good players in the National Football League, and I haven't seen them catch a ball like Henry. So I would be doing Hank a disservice in that regard.

However, I haven't had any problems in spring, one of the models we have when the ball is thrown to you, you catch it. I don't care where it goes and who is on you. This route, he dumped it, the point is, catch the football. And we haven't had any issues with that yet. When the ball is thrown they've caught it and that's what we're looking for. But as far as the acrobatic, one-handed, low balls, haven't seen that yet.

Q. Who would be one of your better blocking tight ends so far? Do you see that in practice?

LeVAR WOODS: Over all of them? I would say -- I think everyone would say offense and defense George has emerged as the top blocker in the group. He's a guy that's, again, low and explosive, he's an exceptional athlete. He's far from being where he needs to be in both the pass game and the run game. But he's making good strides, and I think when the guy comes off low and he fits his pads right and he does what he's supposed to do he can move anybody. But he's too inconsistent right now in practice and that's something we're working on every day.

Q. With his size and speed how good can Kittle be?

LeVAR WOODS: I think George -- it's great you ask that question, we have talked about that. I think he can be as good as he wants to be. He can be as good as anybody that's played here. He has the speed and the size combo, like you said. He also has an energy and enthusiasm about him that can help him be as good as he wants to be, and we're far from seeing I think the best that George has put on the field. But he's got a long way to go, long way to go.

Q. Where does he need to improve?

LeVAR WOODS: All aspects in run blocking. He's getting better. He's getting better without getting too technical, but run blocking and shoring up his routes, being a little bit more detailed in his routes. But the guy can run, he can jump, he can accelerate as quick as anybody that I've seen and, you know, I think you guys saw that last year on some of his touchdowns.

Some of them were explosive plays. A lot of them were play action where it looks like he's coming out running, going to run the corner over, and he hits the gas and runs by. So that's what he does really, really well. But we've got to clean up some detail in his route running and his run blocking.

Q. You have a quarterback like C.J. with great accuracy. Does that make them more focussed?

LeVAR WOODS: Exactly. You guys got a chance to see C.J., I don't want to talk about him too much. He's a phenomenal player, phenomenal leader. He's an awesome kid to be around. He can put the ball on you in a hurry. I always joke with the tight ends, don't be surprised if C.J. sticks you with a dart in the neck. That's how hard and fast he throws, but when C.J. is in the game we know that the ball can come to us and hit us in a hurry. So he will definitely take some throws that some other quarterbacks may not.

Q. You have the unique perspective of former player but coaching here, what was last year like for you?

LeVAR WOODS: It was surreal to be honest with you. It's kind of one of those things you're in it and you don't even realize until you come out into the Big Ten Championship game. The season, because it was a new position for me, I was buried in work and then you come out of it and all of the sudden it was a great season.

But more importantly, I think that the actual season and how it came out was how the team came together. Right? I always start with the tight end group because I think that's where -- in my world that's where it is right now, and the closer they got together mentally, emotionally, without -- I guess using the word love and truly loving each other and caring about the guy next to them, that has a ripple affect on to the team and I think that's what our team had last year and that's what we're constantly working on every single day, not only in the tight end room but with the team. Going forward that we can keep that alive and keep that going.

Q. Have any of your walk-ons progressed to the point where we might see them on special teams?

LeVAR WOODS: Yes, we have two guys that are not on scholarships, and that's Peter Pekar and Nate Wieting, and if you came in the room you wouldn't know if they're on scholarship or not on scholarship because they both are tremendous upsides and bright futures. They both have a chance to really emerge this year.

Q. Talk about Josey Jewell coming on?

LeVAR WOODS: He has a tremendous attitude and you can see that from the second he walked in here.

He has a different aura about him. He carries himself a little bit differently than some other people and he has a feistiness to him that not many people have or not everybody has, and that's what kinda separates him. He plays angry. He plays fast. He plays violent and that's always what you're looking for.

Q. I know you guys were recruiting Georgia, do you see yourselves still trying there?

LeVAR WOODS: I think so. I think this year, the season that we had in the past and kind of getting on the national stage, talked to some high school coaches there and they say we're crazy to get out of there at this point because we started to make hay and come on the scene. Desmond King winning that award last year obviously helped and that award was presented in Atlanta, which is basically where we recruit in Georgia.

So I think it's too early to get out of there right now, however, those guys do have to get on a plane and fly two hours past ACC and past SEC to get here. But I think it's a spot where if we can get one or two out of there we can start a pipeline.

Q. You're now in St. Louis and Kansas City, is Iowa still well regarded?

LeVAR WOODS: Absolutely. I had Kansas City my first year and then transitioned out of there when Coach Kennedy came in we switched some things up. But just going back there, Iowa still has a great name, people are fans of Iowa, there's a lot of alum that live in the Kansas City area, St. Louis as you guys know we have had some really, really good players out of St. Louis and some of the best players in this program have come out of St. Louis. But those are the guys we're trying to find down there right now.

Q. How do you split special teams duties?

LeVAR WOODS: I coach the punt return unit. I had that last year and this year I will have punt return unit, and Coach Wallace has punt unit and Coach White has the kick-off and kick return unit.

Q. Will we see Desmond again?

LeVAR WOODS: I would like him to be at that spot absolutely. I think we have two guys -- really three guys that have the ability to return coming off last year's unit in Desmond King, Riley McCarron, and Matt VandeBerg. Those are three guys that have done it in a game and that will be our starting point.

Q. Josh Jackson was back there today. Does that mean anything?

LeVAR WOODS: I hope so. Josh is a phenomenal athlete. I asked him to make sure he is fielding punts during the spring. We don't work on punt return in the spring, but ask him to field punts, get comfortable out

there. He has phenomenal ability and start and stop ability and he can hit the seam as fast as anybody and it's a matter of him getting confident.

LeVAR WOODS: There are times when I say I've never done that. So I'm not exactly sure, is that the right way to do it. However, I think on the flip side, I think I see things totally different than the tight ends see it now where I can see the defense and tell them who is going to cover them, what the coverage is, how to beat that person.

Q. Coach Reid have a lot of influence on you?

LeVAR WOODS: Absolutely, Coach Reid was awesome. The time I got to spend with him was awesome. He and I always talk about the 2013-2014 season, how much fun we had together, and it was a unique experience, very unique experience.