

April 1, 2015



An Interview With:

COACH JIM REID COACH LeVAR WOODS

COACH REID: Just an opening statement. It's great to see everybody here. Honestly, we're very excited about this spring and upcoming season. We've got a great, fun, dedicated, outstanding, I think, group of linebackers. Athletic, smart, high character, competitive, and that's what you need at that linebacker spot to play real good defense. All the guys worked hard in the off-season program.

We've had three practices already, and we've had some really great play. But one characteristic they all have is great hustle to the ball. It's just really been fun. And really, it's the same as it's been like the last two years, so they are carrying on a tradition of good, physical play at the second level linebacker spot.

Q. Why the change to move Bo Bower inside?

COACH REID: What we are trying to do now is have all the positions be fluid, so we can go from inside to outside. There's a lot of shifting that goes on. It's good with our offense that we're able to move Bo inside. Certainly we've got him working a little bit outside.

Like I said, all the positions are fluid. You'll see Josey Jewell, I don't know how much time you're allowed to practice today, but in scrimmages, you'll see him play outside, get outside the core, as well, to give him some real good work. So we are just trying to slide the backers to wherever the strength of the foundation might be.

Q. What have you seen from Ben Nieman in that starting role?

COACH REID: Ben Niemann really fits the definition of Iowa football and being a linebacker. He is fast. He is athletic. He's tough and he can really, really think on his feet. He did a great job last year. Made an unbelievable move to block a punt and then picked it up and ran again.

He just has instincts to the ball and he's got a great opportunity to get up there and show a little bit of what he can do right from the get-go, because now we've moved all the way inside so that these first five, six practices that will be constant, and it's working out I think really well.

He's had three really great practices, flying around. Making mistakes, which is going to happen, but making them full speed ahead and then working on instinct, and that's where coaches come in to try to take that energy and maybe a long step here and get him going in the right direction. He's a high-speed athlete at linebacker.

Q. What convinces you that the linebacking position will take a big step up this season?

COACH REID: Well, let me just say, I'm not sure that it's going to be up, as much as it's going to be consistent.

What we're after is this you don't ever want to compare. That first year I was fortunate to be here -- I'll give you an example. The two inside linebackers had 30.5 TFLs. And that wasn't because Coach Parker was calling a lot of blitzes or pressures. It was because of really good reads and fast and movement, and experience.

Last year we had a total of I think it was 18 sets, minus 12, of minus yards played for our defense against an opponent's offense. And now I think what we've got, although we lose a guy like Quinton Alston who ran defense, really beautifully, made all the calls, did a great job, we have a nice consistency of real heady players who are very

aggressive up the field and are athletic enough to bring us back hopefully, any ways, to that number that we had in 2013.

We played hard last year. I want you to know that. Quinton Alston came from who is this guy to second team all-Big Ten. That's not done easily without some recognition of his play by the opponent coaches. I think the press had him as an honorable mention.

But the coaches, the coaches had him as second team. I think we are going to be playing hard. We're going to be physical and we've got to make more plays. And I think we've got the guys to be able to do it.

Q. Because of the nature of the position, last year seemed like Bo and Josey were in before their time, the physical maturity -- have they moved appreciably in the right direction as far as physicality?

COACH REID: There's no doubt. Josey was actually defensive player of the game in a loss in our Bowl game. But he had 14 tackles. And really, if you're his coach and you're told, I thought it was 18. He really, really played against a physical, run-oriented offense.

And Bo is just a tough guy. He looks like a tough guy. He is a tough guy. He plays like a tough guy and he has a 3.5 GPA. That's what we're talking about.

It's not all physical talent that allows to you make a TFL, to make a sack, to make a great play. It's having anticipation. It's reading the line of scrimmage. It's seeing the splits. It's knowing what the formation is. It's knowing what the down and distance is.

And you might say, hey, down and distance? Everybody knows down and distance. Well, you get involved in a big game and you're tired and every play is a battle, sometimes you don't know if it's second and ten, or second and three. You kind of lose that perspective.

So I think that personally, not just me, but I think we all believe that we're heading in the right direction with this crowd and it's a fun crowd to coach because they are into it big time. I know Coach Parker feels good about it, and if Coach Parker feels good about anything, you know we are going in the right direction.

Q. If defending the flank is an issue, how are these guys better suited to help improve that?

COACH REID: It all starts with setting an edge and when you can set the edge on the outside, now you lead leverage players coming hard inside out through that edge set that will help.

But can I just say this? The run game, whether it's really in between the tackles, or whether it's on the edge, the flank, as you mentioned correctly, that is an 11-man responsibility. Just like in the pass game, it's not just the defensive backs that are responsible for defending the pass. It's the linebackers and their underneath coverage. What everybody for gets until there is one, a sack, is the defensive front pressure.

So once again, it's an 11-man responsibility to defend the pass, to defend the run on the flanks, to defend the run inside. It's an 11-man responsibility. We all have to get to the football. And that's pursuit, it's proper angles or tackle. It's an understanding of where you belong.

This is where, I don't think I've ever mentioned it here because people laugh at me, when I tell you this. There are plays that I'll run back and forth, and honestly, what I see, is art. And I know that sounds crazy, but what I see, it slows down. I honestly see great skill, talent, and I see artwork. And I told that to my players all the time. I said, this is to me not a great play. This is a great piece of art.

I've told a hundred times -- in fact, there's not going to be any room for me in my casket. Because I tell them all the time when I see. I'm going to cut this play out and they are going to bury me with this play. I'm proud of you for making this play. I've said that so many times, I'm going to have to have a casket maybe the size of this room.

But I've got so much appreciation for proper technique, great skill and great effort that what I see is art. And laugh at me if you will, but that's what I see when I see guys make a play on the flank, make an interception, recover a fumble, make a great tackle. To me, that's just a marvelous, marvelous event and that's what I see.

Q. Does that come with experience?

COACH REID: From a player's standpoint, plays are made by intelligent football players that play hard. And it can be a freshman; it can be a senior, but for me, when I was a player, and 44 years later, coaching, I have an appreciation for the skill it takes to make a play.

And that's the truth. There are plays that

I've cut out when it was 16-millimeter that I still have in my house, because I just would not want to -- they have to stay for history's sake. But that's just how I feel, which is not important here.

Q. What was the mission in the visiting different programs in the offseason?

COACH REID: We haven't changed. For 16 years, we have been successful here. But it's always good to get out and hobnob a little bit with your fellow coaches. And just to discuss areas of concern and how you take care of it.

But the system here that Coach Norm Parker put in 16, 17 years ago now as we get into next season, is one that is so flexible and adjusts very well to all formations; that it's almost kind of like you want to go there to make sure that you know what you're doing is, I'm not going to say right, but is right for you. There's a lot of people that have a lot of answers. Most of them have the best players.

We have excellent players and an excellent scheme that adjusts to different formations. If you want to I'll sit down and put together a tape about technique, maybe we can talk a little bit about how we defend formations and we can talk and field a little bit more questions.

Q. You talked about flexibility among the linebacking positions. Is there going to be any schematic changes or just merely improve your technique?

COACH REID: I think we mentioned defend the flank; we had to defend, is the big play, which most of them did happen on the flank in terms of the run game.

But I think what you're going to see is basically the same scheme. And all we're going to do is change the numbers on the jerseys. And I think you'll see the same aggressiveness and the same hustle and effort that you've seen the last two years. I really do. And what we're excited about is this. We have a great group of young guys, we really do. And we have a really nice group of seniors.

You haven't heard much about Cole Fisher. He's a special teams player and he's extremely valuable in our program and he gives great effort every single day and he's playing very well these first three practices and gave us some great work last year.

Travis Perry, came in, did a great job and then broke his ankle, I think it was Minnesota, but

gave us very important reps, excellent, excellent player.

So we have a really neat combination of some experienced players that know what's going on, some young, eager players that have played already, and then some guys like Aaron Mendis, he's going to be an exciting player. We are just starting to scratch the surfaces of freshmen who we'll be talking about in this room a year from now.

Q. Can you talk about Aaron Mendis and Jameer and what you've seen from them?

COACH REID: Yeah, I'd love to do that. Aaron Mendis is a fast-twitch, quick player, who has got electric feet. He's got a giant heart. He's got tremendous focus and he's a tough guy. I mean, he is a tough guy as the fullbacks on the lead play, he is a tough guy.

A couple of times -- one time last Saturday, it was like, oh, God, is everybody going to be all right here, and I mean, he really can hit with really good leverage, fast. This guy is very, very, very quick. He's playing linebacker for us and he could be a defensive back. I mean, that's a skill that I believe that Aaron has.

And Jameer, Jameer is just a great guy. Tough, can run very, very well. He's playing a tough position because he has to make a lot of calls and he's doing a very, very nice job in the amount of experience that he had last year. But he's going to be a very good player in this program. Gets up field, uses his hands really well. Two really good young prospects.

Q. Talk about the 16-millimeter film you have at home -- do you ever watch them still?

COACH REID: Let me just say this to you. If you ask my wife, she would tell you when we move, whenever we move, that we have one van for the furniture and then one van for all the film I still have. I've got all the highlight tapes from when I first started at the University of Massachusetts. And the answer is, the last time I watched some of those old tapes was about three years ago, and it was just really, really fun.

See what you don't understand, it's hard to understand, is that coaching, when it's done the way we all used to do it the way we first broke in, we did it because -- there wasn't a dime in it. There was no money. And you did it because you loved the game. You loved the game for what it brought you as an individual to that point. Did you

follow what I just said?

And what you wanted to do was you wanted to make sure that you could bring others with you and teach them integrity and honor and discipline and competitiveness, so that you could become a great son, a great father, a great husband, and a great leader of a family. That's how I've always viewed it. I viewed it in no other way.

And as the intensity -- so everybody says, and you've got some older guys like myself, about Twitter and Facebook. They laugh, they say, you're on Twitter? Best thing ever happened. Because you know why? I put a Facebook message on, I get 170, 190 replies right away from former players. I love that. And what makes me cry is when they say, "Thanks, Coach, for everything you did for me."

That's why you really coach the game, at least for some of us. And that's why I'm in it and that's why probably -- I have to watch what I say because it almost happened to me in Miami; that's why I coach it until I drop dead on the field. And if I did, I'd be dying in a sacred place, the football field.

So people can yell at me and then scream at me and they can throw stuff at me and they can call me all kinds of names. They have no idea because they are not touching my world. My world is my players and the staff.

The greatest thing I've ever done, really, in a long time was when I hooked up with LeVar Woods, best guy I've ever been around. He's a tremendous man. Is he up next? Good lead-in. Thank you very much.

COACH WOODS: Obviously just getting started here, you just heard from Coach Reid. Coach Reid has a wealth of knowledge as you guys have already been around him long enough to know that and understand that.

I'm very grateful and thankful for the time I got to spend with him working with him and learning all the things that he has.

And I will tell you right off the bat, I have zero 16-millimeter film. I do have some VHS tapes and seen some super VHS tapes but I have no player to play them with. They are all digitized for me and DVDs digitized. So welcome to the new era. Just want to thank you for the opportunity to be here and speak in front of you, and right now, I guess open it up for questions.

Q. Talk about the new era on the other side of the ball.

COACH WOODS: Yeah, it's definitely a new era for me. It's a position that I have not played since scout team in the Hayden Fry era. But it's a great position. I tell you what, I had no idea how much that position was involved in the offense until I started coaching it. It's very similar to linebacker. Linebacker, you have to know what the D-line is doing. You have to know what the linebackers are doing and you have to know what the secondary is doing. And then you coordinate and run the show defensively.

Switching to the offensive side, I would venture to say that aside from the quarterback, there isn't a position on the field that has to know more than the quarterbacks because you're involved in the run game, you're involved in the pass game, you're involved in the hops and the sights versus blitzes. You have to catch and you have to run. There's a lot that goes into it.

I've heard tight end coaches say that before and I've kind of snickered and laughed because as a linebacker, you just want to beat up tight ends because they hold and things like that, at least from the defensive side.

Now seeing it, now I understand what they are talking about, because there's a lot that goes into it and you have to be a sharp guy to play that position.

Q. What is the challenge like and what have you done to try to learn the position yourself as you're trying to teach it?

COACH WOODS: The challenge initially is just learning offense, right, and learning the position itself. It's actually funny, ironic story is after we left Jacksonville from the Bowl game, I made my off-season to do list on my phone. Not on my pen and paper or 16 millimeter, but on my phone on my Wunderlist app. I made a list of things I wanted to do and things I wanted to accomplish in the off-season.

And again, I'm thinking I was a defensive coach. But one was to learn offensive protections, learn why plays are called when they are called; learn run blocking schemes just so I could help me as a defensive coach. I did not realize that, fast forward a month, that I was going to be learning that as an offensive coach.

It's been fast and furious for the last month, two months really, but just learning the

words that they speak with, the way that it's taught and understanding the run game and the pass game. The things that I think have been easier than I expected was understanding, once I know the play and once I understand where the tight ends are supposed to align and what the objective of the play is, it's easier to look at the defense and understand what they should do. And that I think just comes from defensive experience and knowledge on defense.

Q. Going back to your playing career, do you have a newfound appreciation for guys who coached you?

COACH WOODS: Absolutely. You know, there has not been -- I probably shouldn't say this, but I don't know if there's been a coach that I haven't stayed in touch with that has actually coached me as a position coach or head coach that I haven't told them thank you for what they have done. And I don't know how much I realized that until just like you said, until I started coaching the amount of time and effort that a guy puts into their players.

I always use the example with Phil Parker. When I used to come back -- we would have an off-season, I would come back and come into a game and walk in on a Friday. And everyone was nice and quiet around the office, and little I realized, these guys are scrambling trying to get ready for the game plan.

But I'd pop in, sit in Phil's office for an hour, shoot the breeze and talk about stocks and finances and football, life, all the stuff that you just chitchat with your coach about. Phil always wanted to know about stock tips I had as a pro player. Little did I realize, I ended up taking an hour of that guy's day and he misses his workout, prep for his meeting and all those things. We laugh and joke about it now because now I realize how valuable that one hour of time is as a coach.

Coinciding what Jim was talking about, those are the things that you love about coaching. When a player comes back and all he wants to do is tell you about his life and tell you about where he is with his football career and where he is with his family or his girlfriend, those are the things that make coaching fun.

Q. How are you learning the technique and is anybody on staff helping you adjust and learn?

COACH WOODS: To be honest with you, it's not that much different than playing linebacker.

You're still doing the same thing. Inside hands win, run on your knees. The person that can run on his knees and keep his hands inside wins in a blocking situation.

As far as pass routes, it's basically the opposite. Everything you teach someone on defense, you teach the opposite on offense. Coach Brian Ferentz has been a huge help. He had some tight ends up in New England, coached some really good tight ends up there, and obviously he's the run game coordinator. So it's been good to learn from him the different techniques that are taught here at the University of Iowa.

And also Greg Davis and just the offense in general, but how he sees the offense being played and how the routes are run and what we are trying to do with those routes and how we are trying to create different rubs or open up the passing game for certain receivers.

Those are the two guys mainly. Obviously Coach Kirk Ferentz has helped a lot and then Chris White and Bobby Kennedy have helped, as well. It's been good. They have been open and helped me.

I've also spent some time -- I don't know if this is documented or not. I spent some time down in Florida State with Tim Brewster who used to be the head coach at Minnesota. But now he's a tight ends coach down in Florida State. Tremendous coach, tremendous coach. If you look at his bio and the players he's coached at the tight end position, outstanding players. He coached the John Mackey Award winner this year in Nick O'Leary. So I got a chance to go down and learn from them. I'm anxious to put some of that into use right now.

Q. You coached special teams quite a bit last year --

COACH WOODS: The main special teams I was involved with last year was field goal block or our punt save. So that stuff will stay the same. I'll have a hand in special teams. We haven't ironed all that stuff out yet.

Q. When did Kirk come to you and say, want you to move over? Were you shocked? Surprised?

COACH WOODS: I would be lying if I said I wasn't shocked. But it was somewhere about a month ago or so. My dates are all screwed up

now. About a month, six weeks ago. And I was definitely shocked, definitely surprised.

But obviously excited at the opportunity. I get the opportunity to coach tight ends at one of the greatest schools for tight ends in the country. And you don't have to go very far, you walk into our media room and you see Jonathan Hayes, you see Dallas Clark, Brandon Myers, Tony Moeaki, C.J. Fiedorowicz, guys that have played this position at this university. There's a reason around the country it's known as Tight-End-U, and I get the opportunity to coach one of the best positions at the greatest university in the country in my opinion. It's a great opportunity.

Q. You haven't really talked about the guys you're coaching yet. Would you like to talk about some of those guys?

COACH WOODS: I would. Without trying not to use too many adjectives about guys, it's very hard -- I sat here and listened to Coach Reid talk and used a lot of adjectives about guys and you can use the same about tight ends.

First and foremost, there's five guys in room right now, all five of those guys are exceptional young men and not just football players or students. Just the way they go about their business and who they are, exceptional young men and that's probably the first thing I'm most excited about. You get to deal with really good people.

You look, there are two seniors in the group, Henry Krieger Coble and Jake Duzey, they have the most experience. And then you transition to a year younger to George Kittle, who has phenomenal skills in the pass game. Very good athlete, has all the tools. Just need to refine some technique and shore some things up.

Then two younger guys in Jon Wisnieski from West Des Moines and Peter Pekar from Wisconsin. Again, two guys that don't have as much experience, but they are working hard. It's a great group.

Like I said, the two seniors have helped me out a ton, and I start off every meeting, like if I'm screwed up, you have to stand up and tell me, 'Coach that's not right.' They have done that, but mainly they have been a good sounding board and good resource to help installing some of these plays and what the tight end actually is responsible for.

Q. All three of them have played a lot and have a lot of skill -- is there a schematic

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way to change that or is it just within the offense?

COACH WOODS: I would say a little bit of both. We have to be better at the tight end position. I've told those guys that. I think we need to be more aggressive in the run game and blocking, because we have the physical tools to do that. I wouldn't say it if I didn't think they could do it.

One thing on the defensive side I always hated but respected from the tight end is a guy that's just physical and will knock your head off coming off the line of scrimmage. That's what I want the Iowa tight ends to be.

As far as different ways to make bigger plays, it comes from catching the ball when it's thrown to you, for one, and knowing that when the ball is coming, you have to catch it, be accountable for that. And also we'll find different ways within formations to get certain people the ball and without explaining too much, but that's the goal, that's what we're trying to do right now.

But I think, again, you said very good skill set, highly-skilled players, I agree with that 100 percent. They have the ability. Now it's just a matter of coaching them and them executing when it's their time on the field and see what we can do.

Q. Wisnieski came in, a lot of accolades. How far away is he from contributing?

COACH WOODS: I don't think he's far at all. He's just a younger guy that didn't have the experience. He obviously was injured, so you know that. He was injured for basically a year. He's coming along. He just has not had the experience and has not had the opportunity, but he's progressing well. I like Jon a lot. Very, very smart guy and knows what he's doing. You brought up the point, he came in with a lot of accolades in recruiting and we expect him to fill those.

Q. You had great success here as a player and you transition to the offensive side. Is it the first time everything has been so new to you on the football field?

COACH WOODS: It is. It's funny, because I say this sometimes to the guys on the staff: I feel like I'm at a different place with the way I'm coaching a new position on the other side of the ball. The only thing familiar are the people I

work with and the faces I see.

But change is good. Change makes you a better person. It makes you better at what you do, and so from that side of it, I'm excited about that. Just the opportunity to be fresh. I'm excited every day I come to work, and nervous, but that's good. It keeps you on your toes. Keeps you on edge.

The thing that from the defensive side, it's really the same -- a lot of the same stuff we've been doing since 19 years or 20 years old ago when Norm and Coach Ferentz and Coach Parker came in here.

Offensively, it's totally different to me. It's totally foreign to me. So in that sense, it's like a completely different school, program, operation, everything. So I'm always on edge, always kind of sprinting around this place not quite sure where I'm supposed to be at the right time. But that can be good and that will help me move forward and progress quicker.

Q. In the season opener, will it harken back to your first game at Iowa or NFL game, a brand new something in front of you?

COACH WOODS: It's hard to say because I haven't been in that situation as a coach. At least defensively I was familiar with everything. Maybe, maybe not. I can't tell you exactly how I'll be. But I know I'll be excited because it's at Kinnick, and it's my favorite place in the world.

Q. Do you foresee any changes the way tight end are deployed? Will it be similar to last year, two tight ends in line --

COACH WOODS: They are the same guys. We just lost one. So I don't know how much faster we are. But that's kind of what I was talking about, different formations; deploying, use that word, deploying guys in different spots. I'll have to try to feature them to get them the ball. I definitely foresee that. And it's just a matter of when their number is called and we throw them the ball, execute and then catching the ball and making the play.

Q. Do you think you're scratching the surface for George Kittle? He averaged 25 yards a catch a few years ago. Is he sort of a different breed? I don't think you guys expect huge things out of him blocking, but you do expect things from him in the game --

COACH WOODS: I do expect huge things out of him blocking and I do expect him to make

plays when his number is called. George has tremendous athletic ability, and it's just a matter of him focusing, harnessing that in and becoming the player that he wants to be and he know he can be.

I'm excited for the guy, because again, you're not expecting much out of him blocking -- I disagree, because I think the guy can block. I think it's just a matter of getting him those reps and getting him that experience.

He's not the biggest guy. He's converted from wide receiver. He's not the biggest guy but he gives good effort and he tries and he's working every day. I expect good things out of George and I think down the road, as he progresses and as this role for tight ends progresses in this offense, that he'll be in a position to make some big plays.

Q. Which guy tormented you most when you were on the other side of the ball?

COACH WOODS: I won't give that satisfaction. I won't do it. (Laughter).

Q. Jake Duzey a couple years ago -- plays at Ohio State opened everybody's eyes a few years ago, what is it about his skill set -- 400 yards last year and what you think he can do to be better this year?

COACH WOODS: Sure, starting off, this is going to sound cliché, but he's big, he's fast and he's strong, and so that's everything you're looking for in a tight end. That's his skill set.

The things that I think will help him is just be more consistent. And Jake will be the first to tell you that there's four, five or six drops that he had last year, that watching all the film, I expect the guy to make the play. Maybe that's being unrealistic but to me if a ball hits your hands, you should catch the ball, especially if you're an offensive skill player.

I think that will help him, just focusing in and then we'll have to get into some of the techniques more as I get more comfortable teaching him some of that stuff. But Jake's already well on his way, and all the guys are well on their way and now it's just a matter of reining him in and tightening things down and being more consistent with what we are doing.

Q. Being a tight end on scout team, was it ever a possibility for you or was it always going to be defensive?

COACH WOODS: My first year I was on

scout team, Ross Verba destroyed me every day on defense.

Then the next year, I wasn't playing on special teams, wasn't a factor on defense, so they put me on scout team tight end. And to be honest with you, that's where I became a better defensive player because I learned what the offensive player is doing to the defensive guy to block him or how he's working his releases, things like that.

But that was going to be a position, what I was told was going to that spring after my second year; so my redshirt freshman year, that if it didn't work out on defense, they were going to look at me going to tight end. It worked out, so the rest is history.

Q. How do you guard against insecurity coaching in a new position and the players know more about the position than you did. How do you get them to understand that you're running the position, but still be confident in your abilities and the way to teach it?

COACH WOODS: Sure, I'm going to say, I don't think I lack confidence in what I'm doing, and the guys have been great, because I don't think they see that either -- I hope they don't see that.

But for me, it's just a matter of understanding, what are we trying to do. What's the play, for one; what's my role in the play. And then I think just from playing on the other side of the ball and knowing how to attack defensively, attacking the offensive position, I think that helps me. All right, now I know what the defensive guy is going to do and now I can help you in that play.

I think you ask the guys, there have been a couple situations where I've explained it to them from a defensive perspective. Like, you think that's good, you think that's helping you; it's not helping you at all. Let's try this instead.

But I think the more I get comfortable in just the offense and verbiage and understanding when the tight end is hot, who we are blocking, ID'ing formations, all that kind of stuff. I think once I'm more comfortable with that, I'll feel much more comfortable in actually coaching technique. Technique is technique, fundamentals are fundamentals, and coaching football is coaching football. I don't think it's that far off.

We'll try to go into it with a defensive mentality. I want these guys to be aggressive. I challenge Nate Meier every day. Nate Meier and Drew, I apologize to them the beginning of every

practice because the tight ends are going to come after them. Same thing with Ben Niemann, we're going to try to come after you and put you on your back. That's what the defense thinks when they go up against the offense. I'm taking that same mentality to the offensive side.

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