

4/2/2014: Iowa spring football notebook



Iowa co-linebackers coach LeVar Woods discusses spring football during his press conference held Wednesday, April 2, 2014, at the Hayden Fry Football Complex in Iowa City. Woods is entering his third season on the Hawkeyes' coaching staff.

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – When the Iowa Hawkeyes put the final pieces together in revamping their coaching staff, a different dynamic was re-introduced with the hiring of Jim Reid.

After working the 2012 season as Iowa's lone linebackers coach, LeVar Woods found himself splitting duties with Reid in 2013 when it came to coaching this group. This dynamic – at least last year anyway – paid off for the Hawkeyes. Both coaches were able to mesh, were able to coach specific players more one-on-one than before and the linebacking corps was one that led the Iowa defense en route to the Hawkeyes posting an 8-5 record after going 4-8 the year before.

When asked about working alongside as both coaches held press conferences on Wednesday, Woods described him as being “a huge, huge help” for him in terms of being someone to bounce ideas off of and seek input from when needed.

“He’s unbelievable, to be honest with you,” Woods said in reference to Reid, who is older in age but not as experienced inside the Iowa program. “It has been great for me just to see how he does things. I have my own thoughts and he has his own thoughts.”

But the success this group had wasn’t just a matter of the coaches being on the same page. It also featured a trio of seniors, all of whom had experienced. Right now, this group is a question mark. But not as big a question mark as one might believe.



Iowa co-linebackers coach Jim Reid discusses spring football during his press conference held Wednesday, April 2, 2014, at the Hayden Fry Football Complex in Iowa City. Reid is entering his second season on the Hawkeyes’ coaching staff.

The groups Woods and Reid are working with are the same as last season. Woods is in charge of coaching the LEOs (strong side linebackers), while Reid handles coaching the MIKES

(middle) and WILLS (weak side). The main point both coaches are stressing to their players right now is to play with aggression and not be afraid of making mistakes.

"We're making a lot of mistakes, but we're making mistakes playing very fast and before you can win, you have to play fast and then you have to be detailed in your assignments and your reads," Reid said.

Last season, Woods had the luxury of working one-on-one with Christian Kirksey, a player Woods said Wednesday was "a generational type" player for Iowa and someone who "broke the mold" for how the LEO position should now be played. With Kirksey out of the picture, Woods now has the task this year of coaching up junior Travis Perry, who (barring injury) will start at LEO come August.

Perry, who joined the Hawkeyes as a walk-on, has limited game experience. Most of his playing time the past two years has come on special teams. His intelligence and athleticism are two attributes of his that Woods considers to be strengths.

"Moving forward, the things that he needs to work on that we're working on with him are just his reaction to certain blocks and how he takes those blocks on," Woods said. "He has an uncanny knack in zone coverage to be in the right place at the right time. He reads routes really, really well.

"The other thing we're with him trying to work on improving is his pass-rush skills. Those are things that he hasn't had to do in the past."

Meanwhile, Reid has the challenge of coaching up a senior in Quinton Alston who has spent the last three years waiting in the wings at MIKE behind James Morris, as well as sophomore Reggie Spearman, who still hasn't turned 18 yet. If there's good news for Iowa, it's that both Alston and Spearman saw the field plenty late last season when the Hawkeyes began incorporating what they called their "Raider" package on third

down.

The “Raider” was essentially a 3-4 look designed to confuse the opposing offense. Alston not only lined up as one of the inside linebackers, but Reid made mention of how he handled the play-calling out of that formation for the defense. As for Spearman, he lined up at defensive end in this package opposite Nate Meier and was used primarily as an extra pass rusher in this package.

What stood out most to Reid about how both Alston and Spearman played whenever they did see the field was the confidence both began to exude through their performance.

“We told Reggie to get down the field. Don’t worry about it. James [Morris] will follow you and will clean up any read that you might have missed. That is what he did. He had some speed and he did it,” Reid said. “Quinton made a lot of calls and then was where he was supposed to be. It was performance.”

Performance is something both coaches hope to see in the fall. For now though, their message to all of their linebackers is to ball out.

“When you’re a young player sometimes, ... personally I used to get all bound up and think about this and that, this step, that step, this responsibility,” Woods said. “Instead, what we’re looking for is just let loose and go. See who can run. See who can play. See who will hit. Who can put themselves in the right place and then coach them off of that.”

TRANSCRIPTS (courtesy of UI Sports Info.):

[LeVar Woods \(4/2/2014\)](#)

[Jim Reid \(4/2/2014\)](#)