

April 2, 2014



An interview with:

LEVAR WOODS

LEVAR WOODS: I'm still brand-new at this so I'm obviously nervous or always nervous doing this. But just starting off, thank you, guys all for coming here and being here today. Sorry I'm running late. We're in a staff meeting that is still ongoing so I jumped out to come down here. But just starting off, again, appreciate everyone coming here.

Spring ball we're going into our fourth practice today. Excited about today. It's our second day in pads. Get a chance to see some new faces and see where everyone is shaking out and where they're all going, how they're developing. The second day of pads is always better than the first day of pads, and hopefully that rings true today.

Q. Coach, in your position, you get to replace some guys on defense and you get to see some of these guys in special teams. What can you learn from a special team as they progress for the starting job?

LEVAR WOODS: First off, I think special teams sounds funny, but it's almost harder to play than it is linebacker, because you're doing all of this out in open space and you're transitioning from an offensive player to defensive player or vice versa. So you're able to see a young man's athleticism, and his instinct when you watch him on special teams, particularly the phase that we've been in on punt. And right now you get to play both your block and then cover.

But there are a lot of guys out there, lot of young faces, new faces out there all trying to compete and see where they stack up and how they finish.

Q. What kind of challenge is it for you? You recruit in Texas a lot, what kind of challenge is that?

LEVAR WOODS: I recruit Texas and Atlanta. It's definitely a challenge because distance, for one. Both of those areas are very, very, very heavily recruited for the SEC, the Big 12, the ACC. Every coach, every conference goes down there. It's definitely difficult to recruit there, but it's a great place to recruit as well because there are a lot of prospects and great programs, just like there are great programs here in Iowa. It's just different trying to get kids to come up here and visit because of travel constraints.

Q. The fact that you played in the NFL, does that help you sometimes when you're trying to get to know these kids?

LEVAR WOODS: I think a little bit, particularly with coaches that I've either played with or played against on teams in the NFL. There is always a common connection with guys that have played in the NFL it's a fraternity a little bit. They'll put you on to a kid to look at and recruit. It's still recruiting. When you go into Atlanta and you go and recruit against the SEC and the ACC in schools that are in there entrenched in there deep, it's tough to recruit there. But, again, it's still fun. Recruiting is fun.

Q. What is the challenge and replacement of graduating three starters?

LEVAR WOODS: I don't like to use the word replace, because the three young men leaving here are three outstanding young men, first and foremost, and outstanding players. The things that they've done for us the last three years and culminating in their senior year, I think it's hard to replicate that. But the three guys that left here, they all have bright futures in pro football and bright futures when they decide to get out of football and in life. Those guys are very, very

special.

It's definitely a difficult challenge. We have a lot of young guys that are here now working. Some guys with some experience in game and at the linebacker position and in different packages and things like that. But we also have a lot of young faces that no one knows about yet, and we as coaches don't know about yet that we're trying to find out and see are they really who we think they are? Can they put themselves in a position to play and compete and help us win?

Q. How do those guys impress you this spring? What are you looking forward to make those unknown names stand out?

LEVAR WOODS: Let it loose and go out and play. That's the thing. 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. Oh, man, I blew it. 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. That is what we were looking forward to last Saturday and looking forward to today.

Q. Are you surprised last year that you were teaching so much with technique? That is sort of the new spots for Iowa's defense last year and it worked. Were you surprised you found yourself teaching that technique?

LEVAR WOODS: Not so much. That's part of the business or part of the job and job description as a linebacker to be a blitzer. It's one of those things that you have to do along with coverage and run support, things like that. It's just part of what we have to do. But it's fun turning those guys loose a little bit and letting them blitz.

Q. I know it probably won't be the standard moving forward, but will the standard be this defense being able to go to that, being able to change what it does on the fly?

LEVAR WOODS: I think that's college football to be honest with you. The way offenses are changing, the defenses must adapt and change like that. I think you'll see more similar style, and that's Coach Parker's thing. That's what he likes to do. So we're trying to uphold that and exceed that if we can.

Q. Do you ever have to remind yourself that Reggie Spearman is still 17 years old?

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LEVAR WOODS: It's crazy. I recruited Reggie. When he told me that, I was like, Reggie -- I just thought I missed it or whatever. In camp last year I found out it's going to be his birthday. I'm like, oh, man, great. You're going to turn 18. He said, I'm going to turn 17. I was like, what? You're going to turn 17? I said, Reggie, stop messing around. Then talked to his dad, text his dad, his dad said, yeah, he's only going to be 17. So that's my fault I missed that in recruiting. But it is ironic.

He's a great young man, and he's done an excellent job. I know Coach Reid will talk about him when he comes up, that he's done an excellent job thus far. I know what I was like at 16, 17, nowhere near where he is.

Q. Can you talk about coaching with Coach Reid. There are a few decades between you?

LEVAR WOODS: Just one, just one.

Q. But it seems like it's an interesting way you guys go about coaching.

LEVAR WOODS: Well, Coach Reid is a rotten human being. He's terrible to work with (laughing). No, Coach Reid is awesome. He's unbelievable to be honest with you. He's great for me as a young coach. A guy with a lot of experience in what he does and different defenses, different styles, different conferences in college football, and he's also coached in pro football. So it's been great for me just to see how does he do things. I have my own thoughts, and he has his own thoughts. Just being able to learn from him and have someone, a mentor, that I can go to. With Norm's passing and Norm's defenses, this is Norm's defense or started off to be, one style, right? And then being able to talk with Jim and see different styles that he has done or different ways to play things has been awesome for me. It's been a huge help, huge help.

Q. As a player and coach, how have you seen the linebacker position evolved because of spread offenses and such? How much more difficult is it maybe now when you play?

LEVAR WOODS: It's different. Just talking about this defense at Iowa, this program. As a player I played at 242 pounds, 245, somewhere in that range at the LEO position.

Christian Kirksey last year who now I say that he sort of has broken the mold for LEO's, he maxed out at 232, 234, something like that. So it's 10 pounds difference, and he had to run. Those guys had to run. I couldn't run like that. So it's just a little bit different.

The game is more spread out. The game is more wide open, if you will, more passing, and you have to be able to run and react quicker than in the past where gone are the days really of big 250-, 260-pound linebackers. So that's definitely changed.

Q. Travis Perry has been sort of the back-up outside linebacker for a couple of years. So he probably has pretty good familiarity. What is maybe the one skill or some of the skills you want to build in him as he emerges in this start?

LEVAR WOODS: First and foremost, Travis joined us as a walk-on player. He's put himself in position to compete for playing time from the moment he stepped on campus. He did that by being smart and just his athleticism. 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. He has a very uncanny knack in zone coverage. To be in the right place at the right time. He reads routes really, really well.

The other thing that 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. He played in the secondary as a safety in high school. So those are just a couple things he's got to work on.

Q. You mentioned how you feel Christian kind of set the mold as far as playing the LEO position is concerned. How do you see that applying as he moves on to the next level and possibly playing that position there?

LEVAR WOODS: Sure. People don't really use the LEO linebacker in the NFL. But Christian will be a Will linebacker or what we'd consider a Will at Iowa, which is not that much different, it's all how you look at it. Is it red or is it dark red, if that makes sense. But Christian has exceptional, exceptional ability, uncanny ability. Some things that you can't teach. When I try to teach, I screwed them up, but he has an incredible ability.

I think he has a very, very bright future at the next level, and it's something that Christian, to

me, is a type of player, a generational-type player, if you will, where they only come along every 10 years or every so often. A very great young man, and he'll be missed around here for a long time.

Q. Run defense is a point of pride for this defense last year and throughout the regular season. But then you face an LSU team that does what they're going to do. They're going to take it. What happened in that game and how do you move forward? Was that a learning point where LSU was able to do on the ground?

LEVAR WOODS: Sure, it's definitely something we're moving for. That seems like years ago now. But it's something that we have to work on. We just need to be better defensively and stopping the run. Nothing that you haven't heard or talked about already, but we've learned from that. We're moving forward. Taking some things that maybe we could have done schematically a little bit different and then just getting down to the fundamentals of playing blocks, getting off blocks and actually making the tackles. It was a very good team we played in LSU. I want to say there are like 11 of those guys off that team that were in the NFL combine, a lot of them younger players.

So we knew going into it that it was going to be a tough game and they're a good team that we faced. They showed it and they proved it, and now those guys are moving on to the next level, a lot of them. LSU will always have a lot of talent and good players.

Q. What do you personally do to improve in the off-season? Do you go back and check out film? Do you check out what you taught or do you go anywhere? Do you go to coaches that you trust and want to learn from?

LEVAR WOODS: Sure. I have a great resource here in house with Coach Reid, who we've already talked about. When Norm was still with us, we'd talk with Norm. The other thing we do as a staff is we go back and watch every single snap almost to the point ad nauseam how many times we -- don't tell Coach Parker I said that -- but watch and see what can we do schematically. Does this scheme work? Are we asking our players to do too much or too little? Can we get more out of them? So we watch every play, every

situation, every formation differently and look at it that way. Then is this scheme good? Can we improve upon it?

But then also through coaches convention and things like that in the coaching community I'll reach out to them and see how are you guys playing this particular play? How are you playing this position? We had a couple coaches that came in and visited us. Coaches, I guess, do that and just try to learn from each other.

Q. Are there things you can do to improve as a recruiter?

LEVAR WOODS: It's been interesting now. Bobby Kennedy is on our staff who has been a recruiting coordinator. Chris White has been a recruiting coordinator. Coach Reid has been doing this a long time and recruited some great players so been able to learn from guys on the staff.

The other thing, one of the best things that's going to help us recruit, always winning always helps, right, but then that big brick building you guys see and have to move around out there, that's going to help us in recruiting, I think, going forward. Not just myself, but this whole staff I think it's going to help us.

Q. I'm not sure how much you had to do with kick coverage, because I know special teams are kind of an umbrella. But I know you guys finished one-on-one in the country, and I know it's something you guys wanted to improve on. What needs to happen with that unit to make it something you could trust late in games and maybe you can do different things?

LEVAR WOODS: Sure. Schematically we're a little different last year than we have been over the last 10 to 12 years under coach Ferentz, and that's going to take time. I think we have the right things in place and the right pieces in place. We have a lot of young guys coming up here in the next couple months that have the opportunity to put themselves on that team and put themselves in a position to play. I'm anxious, I'm eager to see these guys do it. We break down these drills and put them in competitive situations and it's been fun to watch and see how they compete.

I think moving forward, that that will help us. Also just getting and understanding the kickoff play itself a little bit better. You know, I think that's something we try to do meeting-wise last year, and I think that helped some of the guys, at least that's what they've said, so.

Q. In improving recruiting. I've seen a lot of different tweets from guys, the mock up "Sports Illustrated", the puzzles, what kind of impact have you seen that have in terms of getting kids on the phone or getting them on campus?

LEVAR WOODS: I think it's been good. We have a guy in house, Max Allen, who spends hours and hours and hours putting those things together. He's been a tremendous resource for us. I think it's been good for kids. I've heard a lot of kids say while we may not send the most mail, but we send the best mail, and that is kind of what we want to do. We want to get their attention. Particularly, I recruit Texas and Atlanta, and trying to get those kids' attention and get them up here. As you guys all know in recruiting, once a kid gets here on campus, particularly if it's a nice, sunny day, Iowa City is hard to beat. It really is. You put all the things in with this program and what this program has built and done not just one or two or three years, but has done consistently for the last 15 years, that when you get a kid here, that's a huge point.

The other thing I talk about is that big brick building, that's going to help us a lot, I think, in recruiting. Obviously, like you talked about the mailers, the design things that we send out.

Q. What about when you go into Atlanta, what is your approach? The Iowa brand probably not as strong as it is in Texas and it takes time to build. How have you gone about that?

LEVAR WOODS: The greatest thing about Iowa and one of the best things about Iowa is there are Hawkeyes everywhere. I went on vacation to Costa Rica trying to leave Iowa, first two people I see wearing Iowa shirt and Iowa shorts. So everywhere you go there are Hawkeyes everywhere. There are Hawkeyes in Atlanta to help. Help us playing Georgia Tech and beating Georgia Tech in ACC country, SEC country definitely helps, because people always talk about that. I saw you guys play. I watched you guys play in that game, so that helps. Just trying to make a name for ourselves. Put our brand out there, having the opportunity to play an SEC team in LSU and in Tampa, that helps. Now it's just getting out there and getting our face out there and getting a chance. Eventually, we'll have to pull a

kid out of there, which we will do here soon, but that will hopefully open up a pipeline. It's a straight shot from Atlanta to Iowa City, straight shot to Moline. So it's no different than -- it's actually advantageous compared to some other places.

Q. Are there any guys in the linebacking group right now after the first two practices that caught your eye in terms of the development that you were hoping they'd make from the last season until now?

LEVAR WOODS: This is going to sound corny, but I think all of them have caught our eye because they've all -- some of them have been unknown. Where guys, particularly young freshmen and sophomores. If they got here, we really don't know. But in my room, Bo Bower has done a great job. A guy from West Branch who joined us as a walk-on. He really hasn't done anything that we didn't expect him to do because that's why I recruited him so hard to come here. But he's a guy that's been impressive. Cole Fisher has been impressive, and getting an opportunity to go out there.

Travis we already know a lot about. He's been out there and been impressive in those situations. I'll let Coach Reid talk about the inside guys. But there are guys in that room that are impressing us as well.

Q. How do you spend your time with the linebackers?

LEVAR WOODS: It depends on what we're installing that day. But we'll go through individual drills. As you know, this program is built on fundamentals and will always be about fundamentals. We spend a crazy amount of time developing fundamentals, tackling, shedding blocks and putting ourselves in the right position in pass coverage and getting down to the finer techniques of things, man-to-man coverage, stuff like that. So sort of break it down that way. Break it down that way each practice, each day go out with agenda and what we want to improve on that day. If we don't see it improve, we need to redevelop a new drill or introduce a new drill to get to the point where we want to be, and that's where we are right now.

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