

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

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LeVar Woods

Press Conference



Q. Obviously one of the big stories so far has been the performance of Tory Taylor. From his coach's standpoint, what have you seen and maybe are you a little surprised by Howie effect I have he's been and made this seamless transition to football?

LEVAR WOODS: Yeah, he's certainly been a great addition to the team, great addition to the specialist room. Definitely not surprised by him. He's an incredibly talented kid, incredibly conscientious young man. Shouldn't call him a kid because he's not a kid. However, I think everyone has been excited by him and certainly looking forward to seeing how he progresses moving forward. But he's been effective for us in helping change and flip field position and helping pin the opponents inside the 20-yard line, inside the 10 at times, and it's been fun to watch him, watch his maturation. I think the sky's the limit for him, and definitely glad he's here.

Q. I wanted to ask you about one of your special teams demons I guess it is in Terry Roberts. One guy he kind of reminds me of a little bit in that position is Sean Prater from way back when. What's the impact he makes there and do you see just almost the desire to compete at that position that makes him so effective in some ways?

LEVAR WOODS: Yeah, I think Terry has been a pleasant surprise. Shouldn't say surprise, either, because he has worked very hard to put himself in the position where he's at. There's plenty of things he's done exceptionally well on the field and there's a lot that he needs to improve upon, as well, before he becomes a complete player on special teams or defense. But certainly happy with the trajectory that he's taken right now and the way he's been working, and he's been fun to watch.

Just a little bit about Terry, I think everyone has seen he's incredibly fast. He does have a desire to compete, and I think on game days you certainly see that, and I know he's certainly a welcome friend for Tory. Been punting the ball because Tory has been excited to have him down there, and also I think for Caleb in kicking off and seeing some of

the coverage things he's been able to do in kickoff coverage, it's been fun watching Terry not only mature as a player but also as a person. I think another guy the sky's the limit for him if he really sticks to it and keeps working hard.

Q. Charlie Jones, did you see this kind of coming, or has it even surprised you what he's been able to do?

LEVAR WOODS: I'm not sure anyone really saw this happening for Charlie. Charlie is again another guy off to a great start. A younger player as we look at it, sort of unheralded a little bit, for us kind of unknown, as well. I think one thing you can say about Charlie is since the day he got here a year ago, just kind of watching him and seeing how he works and goes about his business, the guy puts in a ton of work every day and it's been fun seeing all that work and all that time and effort he's put in starting to pay off.

I think, again, a guy that's got a very bright future and a guy that has really helped this football team, not only on the football field but also just kind of his mindset and the way he approaches every day and the way he works. The guy is here all the time, all day. I'll walk by, go down to someone's office or something and look out on the football field through the in door and the guy is out there catching balls off the JUGS machine at like 3:00 in the afternoon, well after practice. He and Nico Ragaini have developed a great relationship in that regard, and I think it's paying off for him. That is something, like I said, started a year ago for the guy. I think he has a clear vision of what he wants to be and what he wants to do while he's here at Iowa, and the guy has put in the time and it's fun seeing it pay off for him.

Another guy who I think the future is very bright for if he keeps working the way that he's working and the contributions he's making to this football team and just an early start I think are going to be fairly significant already and I think are going to be even more significant moving forward.

Q. I apologize if you've gone over this already, but could you detail the recruitment of Tory and your trip to Australia, how much time that took and what it was like for you?

LEVAR WOODS: Yeah, it was certainly an interesting experience unlike any other recruiting trip I've ever been on. I've been kind of all over different corners of this country looking at players at different positions and whatnot, but certainly have not crossed the borders or crossed the ocean into Australia. That was definitely a unique experience and just one, I've never been to Australia, although I do have a daughter named Sydney who was named Sydney because my wife and I were planning to go take a trip to Australia back when we found out my wife was pregnant with our daughter back in 2004 or 2003 she was pregnant with her.

But having a chance to go over there and see Tory and see how he lives and see how he operates and see the way that he has trained was exceptional for me. It's definitely eye opening. It's a different type of punter over there, a different type of training than we have seen here in America, and I think we're all starting to see that with Tory and kind of what his abilities and what he's able to do.

Tory is still fairly new to punting, which is exciting as a coach because you see there's so much potential in the guy, not only on the football field but also as a person, as a young man. The sky's the limit for that guy. I know I've been repeating that, but I think it's the truth for all these guys we're talking about. I think there's a lot out there for him.

Getting a chance to see how Tory lives and how he was raised and brought up; there was really no mystery to the early success he's had, and there's going to be continued success for him, as well, if he stays on the right track. Great family. Mom and dad have done a great job with him. He's one of four brothers. I think over the years as you guys get a chance to know him and talk to him, he's a very reserved guy, really quiet, doesn't like to talk about himself. But I think the more you dig and the further you get with him, you'll realize what an interesting young man he is.

Q. How long a trip was that for you from the moment you left home until you got back, and what was it that made you want to go there all those years ago?

LEVAR WOODS: Yeah, it was too long. Too long to be honest with you, but it was well worth the trip. I think one way was 26 hours to get over there. If you're counting actual hours. The longest flight was from San Francisco to Melbourne, and that was 15-16 hours in a middle seat in coach. It's a long way to be sitting still in one spot.

But well worth it once we got there, and then the same trip on the way back we flew from Melbourne to Sydney and Sydney to Dallas on the way back. I had come back,

actually timed it up, I had planned on recruiting in Texas for a day but our flight got delayed, but I had flown in there to be there for Hayden Fry's memorial in Dallas and meet Coach Ferentz and a lot of the guys on the staff that were there and former teammates. So that sort of worked out that way.

But the other thing like getting over there, the guys he works with, the guys he trains with, there's a couple of guys in a group called Pro Kick Australia, guys that have a lot of ability and a lot of intel and understanding what they're doing with the football. It's a different style over there, and they've been teaching these guys for a long time, and Tory is one of the guys that's been in that program and had success. There's Michael Sleep-Dalton that we had the year previous. He was sort of the lead-in to that for us, and Michael came here and did well, so we felt confident going over there to see Tory.

Q. I have two questions about fakes. The one against Michigan State, would that have worked if they hadn't called time out?

LEVAR WOODS: They all work. They all work or I wouldn't call them (laughter).

Q. I had a philosophical question for you. Do you go into each game with one fake idea, five fake ideas? How is the procedure to actually getting it on the field?

LEVAR WOODS: Yeah, it's a good question. Typically for us we would go into the game with a couple or a handful of fakes that we like, that we've seen, that we've practiced, and how do they match up with the opponent that we're getting ready to face, and then also there are some opponents we face or some games where we feel like we can take advantage of and so we try to do that and try to be aggressive.

It also ties in with the play calling on offense and defense and sort of the situation that we're in.

Obviously Coach Ferentz is the one that makes those final calls, and I'm just the guy that tries to put it together and give him some ideas and thoughts, but ultimately it comes down to what's best for the team and can we help our football team either extend a drive or score points or whatever it is we're asked to do at that moment.

That's what we're trying to do, and that's all we're thinking about when we have fakes.

Again, one of the things with fakes, you're never quite sure is it really going to work, are they really going to respond the way that you think. But I think one of those things, you



have to have confidence in what you're doing and what you've seen and there's a lot of study that goes into it before we actually call it on the football field, but it's something that we've been thinking about for a long time and working on.

I like to coach it. I don't like you making me talk about it and giving up some secrets.

Q. Going back to Tory Taylor, it really is kind of a marvel watching what he's done. As you mentioned he's so new to punting, 23-year-old freshman, had never been inside of an American football stadium until the season opener against Purdue. How did you go about giving him advice going into that game and what were those conversations like? How do you give a player who's never stepped inside an American football stadium advice?

LEVAR WOODS: Yeah, so it was a little bit eye-opening on traveling to Purdue, right. So we get there in West Lafayette and we're driving on the bus there and we finally get to have a position meeting and actually having a meal with our specialists like we typically do on a Friday night, and I asked Tory, what did you think or what do you think about being here, and he says, "Coach, is this what it's like everywhere in America?" I said, "What do you mean." He goes, "Well, I've only ever been to Iowa City or to West Lafayette." It's the second city he's been in besides the airports he's flown through to get here. So that was very eye-opening for me. I hadn't even thought about that, so he hadn't really been outside of Iowa City.

So everything is brand new to him, and I think to your point about playing in his first game, it was definitely something he hadn't done before, but some of the conversations he and I had were more about just trying to calm some of his nerves, and I'd ask him what is he most anxious about, how can I help, what are the things that can calm him down, and ultimately the advice to him was he doesn't need to be anything other than himself, and don't try to do too much, don't try to be someone you're not, don't try to pinpoint this or do that, just be you, and that's what he's been doing so far and he's been excellent at it so far.

Happy with the progress he's made. Again, there's plenty more out there for him as there are a bunch of guys on the team. We're just trying to get better every week and he's certainly one of those guys that I think is improving with every opportunity he gets.

Q. I wanted to ask you about Tory Taylor. Did you always feel like he was your guy, that he was definitely going to be coming to Iowa? Or was there real competition for him coming from Australia?

LEVAR WOODS: I felt good about Tory from the first time I spoke with him on the phone and FaceTimed with him. I certainly watched his workouts from afar virtually, which everyone is doing in recruiting. They're all doing Zoom meetings and FaceTime workouts and all that kind of stuff. So we were ahead of the game with that in recruiting Tory.

But think back, this was almost, shoot, a year ago now or maybe a little bit before. I think it was October was when we first kind of got connected with Tory and first got a chance to really see him and he was still developing at the time and still figuring some things out and then finally made the decision that that was our guy and made a chance to go over there and see him and confirm it.

I've always felt good about Tory since the first conversation, again, back in I want to say October. I don't remember exactly. But definitely felt good about him and still feel good about him now.

Q. Keith Duncan expressed a little disappointment in his last couple field goal tries. When you've got a guy who's been as consistent as he's been over time, what's the key to avoid having him make that into more than it needs to be?

LEVAR WOODS: Yeah, he is a veteran guy, an older and experienced guy. We've all seen him for a long time and seen his successes. I think Keith is one of the ultimate competitors, both he and Caleb Shudak together I think are incredible competitors, and I think that's one of the things that helps set them apart and set Keith apart, as well.

I think that's where the frustration may come in for him, when the results aren't desired, and I think for him it's more just about going back to the basics and going back to, hey, what works, what doesn't, taking inventory, seeing what did you think about this, are there technical issues or is it more just, hey, I happen to read the wind incorrectly on this place or hey, I didn't quite hit the ball the way I wanted to. I think Keith is in a good place. I feel good about where he's at, and I think we've all seen Keith and seen him in some of his finest moments, and again, he's a senior but he definitely has more room to grow, which is exciting.

Anyway, Keith is on his way, and certainly he's disappointed whenever he misses kicks because he cares and because he's a competitor. But happy with him, happy with Caleb. I think I'd also throw in Austin Spiewak and Ryan Gersonde. I think those are four older guys that the leadership from those guys for not only our position room but also within special teams has all been exceptional. They're all operating at a high level and excited about where they're at and where they're taking this group.

Q. Recruiting never stops, except for dead periods which are now it seems like - in person anyway - for over a year. How is that impacting you because I know you're still having to do the Zoom stuff, but is it difficult or more frustrating than ever because you don't get a chance to evaluate some of these people face to face?

LEVAR WOODS: Yeah, it's frustrating. I think coaches, players, young recruits, high school coaches, parents. It's very frustrating because, as you know Iowa and you know our program, we're methodical in what we do. It's not just, hey, he looks good on tape or he checks these boxes and we offer guys. It's more we need to see him. We need to be around him, we need to talk to the high school coach, talk to his high school basketball coach, talk to his eighth grade girlfriend, talk to the janitor, talk to everybody to get a feel for who the person really is because that's important for us here, and that's what we're unable to do right now. Some of it is recruiting by blind faith, which is not the most fun thing to do right now, but it's part of the nature of the beast, sort of like we talked about the initial FaceTime recruiting with Tory Taylor back in October a year ago. I had no idea that that was going to be how recruiting was going to be moving forward here in 2020 and 2021, but it is what it is and we've got to manage it and deal with it and keep pushing forward.

The one thing, too, to close up with that, when you talk about this football team, you talk about the guys that we get a chance to work with on a daily basis, this team is full of great young men. We talked about a few of them that you guys have asked about but there's a bunch of others out there, too, that come every day and they work really hard and they put in the time, and it's fun seeing some of the young guys kind of mature and come to the point where they're going to be exceptional football players on offense or defense and then contributing to this team the best way that they see fit.

Some of those guys, just to highlight Ivory Kelly-Martin and Mekhi Sargent, two guys that are veteran running backs for us that have really put in the time and helped out on special teams and contributed to this football team, a guy like Henry Marchese, guys that have been here for a while and put in the time, he and Julius Brents, two guys that are really helping push this thing forward for us. And Turner Pallissard and Monte Pottebaum were just getting a taste of those two guys. Some young guys that people haven't even heard of until the last week or two with Kyler Fisher and Mike Timm, some guys that I think are the future of this program, particularly in special teams and guys that we get a chance to work with every day, so it's a lot of fun.