

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

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Special Teams Coordinator Levar Woods

Press Conference



LEVAR WOODS: I appreciate everyone being here today. Obviously, it's a beautiful day outside. Got a good bike ride in today, so I know it's beautiful out there. You could be doing a lot of stuff going on, and there's a lot going on in the world right now, but I appreciate you being here and your interest in Iowa and Iowa special teams.

To start off, we've had some really good moments, and on special teams some electric moments. You guys probably witnessed some of those in person. We've had some really amazing things done, and then some plays that are, like, Man, what the heck is going on? So, some inconsistency. Those are things that we're striving to try and improve here throughout the bye week and keep pushing forward.

I feel good about some things, and some things we have to keep address and keep pushing forward and keep improving on.

First and foremost, I love this team. I've been around enough football at different levels and college and pro and seen some really good players and some maybe not so good players, some teams that started off really hot and then kind of fizzled out.

I think right now what we have in this football team is amazing human beings and some guys that are really connected. They're working really hard that believe in each other and have great work ethic, great toughness, great effort, energy every single day.

So we're seeing some of that out here and getting a chance to be a part of that is pretty fun. Coming to work every day is a lot of fun with this group.

I kind of mentioned this the other day on Monday, after the game, and pointed out a couple of things when you watch the tape. When you watch Iowa football -- and this is important to me as a special teams coordinator that when you watch Iowa, what do you see? You turn on the tape,

and you watch.

You can judge a football team based on their kickoff coverage unit and their field goal blocking. That's an old adage in coaching, because typically you'll see, hey, is it going to be a touchback? What do people do? Do they back off? Do they slow down? It's going to be a touchback. I don't think you see that when you watch us.

You see our guys flying through the goal line all working to the returner. They are fighting each other to go get the ball to bring it back to the ref. Those seem like little things that ticky-tack things, but those are things I think when you really watch and you really know football, you watch those things, and you see those, and you see a team that's hungry, a team that's trying to get down there.

When you watch a field goal block unit, okay, it's another thing in coaching. If you look at it, you can kind of see as a team, how are they really playing throughout a game because it's a response unit, right, a field goal blocking. Either got scored on and you are playing for a point and a PAT or, hey, we have to get a stop and keep points off the board in a field goal.

I think you've seen that from our units. If you watch, how these guys operate, how they take the field and have gotten our hands on the ball, field goal block a couple of others are really close. I think you're seeing guys fight and scrap and clawing for every single point, every single inch out there.

I think that's what we have on this football team overall, and it's fun to watch and fun to coach and being a part of.

I'll open it up for questions.

Q. I'm curious, Drew has missed a field goal in three straight games. After the UMass game, he said that he was focusing on driving his kickoffs, and that's maybe what led to the field goal miss against them. I haven't talked to him since the last two games, but what do you think is going into the field goal operation not being perfect?

LEVAR WOODS: First off, it's a unit, so it's not just one person. Drew is the kicker, so everyone looks at him. It's sort of like the quarterback. Everyone looks at the

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quarterback. Did he make the pass? Did he not make the pass? But there's ten other guys out there. There's ten other things, ten other layers that go into that in regards to any play in football, particularly in field goal.

Yeah, not the kicks he wanted to make and didn't go through the uprights. I've seen Drew make plenty of kicks that have gone through the uprights. That's another thing we saw. We saw a career long field goal from Drew in Week 1.

We see it every day here in practice, right? We see him every day. Look at this kick. It's unbelievable. Also, over the course of his career he's gone on and has made big kicks for this football team. Just didn't get it done in the most recent game, but that to me is a one-off. That's not Drew Stevens. That's not the guy I know, a guy that I've watched work and grow over the last four years.

To me I attribute it to didn't get it done, didn't go in the way he wanted to, and continue to work on it and continue to improve.

Q. Regarding the Rutgers field goal kick specifically, I know you mentioned it's not just one player. How much of that is snap? I know you've got a first-time snapper that isn't Luke Elkin for the first time in a while. How much of that factors into maybe not that specifically, but other misses, issues that maybe you've had otherwise on special teams?

LEVAR WOODS: I think it's more operation. Again, there's 11 guys on the field. One guy gets to kick it. Hopefully only one guy kicks it on one single play. Otherwise, it would be really weird, but I've seen things happen (smiling).

Again, it's operation, right? When you talk about operation, it's not just one, two, or even three guys. It's 11 guys. Need a cleaner snap, need a cleaner hold, need a better kick. That's the bottom line.

Also, I think also still as a group still gelling together and working together. Whether you are talking about whoever is snapping the ball over whatever, it's three guys that haven't been together nearly as long as Luke to Ty to Drew. There's some of that still working through as well.

I have all the confidence in the world in the guys we put on the football field. I have all the confidence in the world in Drew Stevens. I actually had a conversation with him today. I've seen him grow and mature as a human being exponentially.

To me we are human beings regardless of what we all

think when we send someone out there. People have money on games and things like that. You think it's just some machine, and it's just supposed to happen because some guy set the line at some point, but man, they're human beings. We're all human beings.

Man, it's unbelievable the growth Drew has made, and the amount of confidence I have in this guy and the stuff I've seen him do on the football field, it's unbelievable. We've all seen it. We've all watched. The guy has made three game-winning kicks for the Iowa Hawkeyes. He didn't get one the other day. It sucks. It frickin' stinks.

If you are a competitor like Drew is, he has to sit here not only for one week, but he has to sit here two weeks thinking about it for the next opportunity. So that stuff eats at you as a competitor.

To me I think it's more just more didn't get the job done. That happens from time to time. There are percentages. If you look at numbers, you're not going to make 100% every time, which is unfortunate, and as a competitor, that stinks, right? It sucks. But, again, you have to live with it, and you have deal with it, and you have to keep moving forward and trust your process.

Q. Something that Kaden Wetjen told me a couple of months ago is that when you were recruiting him from over at Iowa Western, that you told him that he reminded him of Tim Dwight? What did you see in him that made you make that comparison, because that's a name holds a special place in Hawkeye and Iowa high school sports lore?

LEVAR WOODS: I think initially the stature and how he runs. Tim is not the tallest guys. Tim is blazing fast. Kaden, again, not the tallest guy, but super fast. Kaden has really good balance, really good lower body strength.

It's very unique to have a guy that can do kick returns and punt returns and still -- he has a speed of a wide receiver and probably the build of a running back. I think it's a very unique build that he has physically.

Now there's the fearlessness part, okay, because Tim was fearless. When you watch him, you go look. I had to pull up these YouTube clips, because believe it or not, they didn't have the video digitized from back then.

So we're looking at YouTube clips late at night during training camp one year and watching Tim out here this end zone. Man, it was Arizona. I think I was a true freshman. Yeah, I was a true freshman. Tim came down as a gunner and just tattooed this guy as a punt gunner.



I was, like, Watch this, this could be you. Going through all the things going through all of his returns. Kaden Wetjen is pretty dang good. I think Tim would tell you the same thing.

He's a competitor just like I mentioned Drew is a competitor, a guy that wants to make plays, a guy that is trying to do right for his team. Again, it goes back to the makeup of this football team.

He's a really talented young man, but I'll go back to he's really talented. He'll be the first to tell you, he didn't get touched against Rutgers. Didn't get touched until he had to touch his off returner at the 5 yard line.

So there's a lot of other guys working for him and trying to help him, and they believe in him too. That's the other thing about this team, man. These guys really believe in one another, and they want to work for one another. Sure, he scores the touchdown. There's ten other guys running all over the place getting excited and getting hyped for Kaden because of the success that he had, so...

Q. Teams have gotten really smart against you guys in just fair catching kickoffs because your kick coverage is so good. How do you adjust to that now that you have a bye week? Can you adjust? I know it would require a bouncing kick, right, for them not to fair catch it? How can you adjust to that?

LEVAR WOODS: I think situation dictates some of that, and I think you are right. People watch and they see. Again, this is something that's coached too, right? How do you cover every play? Are you covering through the goal line? Does a coach look you and are like, Yeah, we can get a return against these guys, or does he look at you like, Yeah, I don't want to return against them?

That's part of being a competitor. You want to put that out there on tape. When someone watches you, man, they don't want to return against you.

It's up to them, do they decide to fair catch or not? We're able to force a situation at Iowa State where we tried to force them to return, and the ball ended up on the ground. They were trying to fair catch it, and we get on the 4 yard line. So there's that element of it as well, but you know, it's their choice. We just have to be ready if they try to bring it out.

Q. The guys on special teams, who has kind of jumped out this year, coverage guys, that maybe you were thinking about and then they have gotten out there and performed well?

LEVAR WOODS: So coverage, I'll kind of hit overall just the core players. Obviously you know about Lutmer. You know Entringer. Right, they're the gunners. They're flying down the field.

Okay, there are some other guys. I think Preston Ries has shown up, especially early in the game. He had two tackles, two big tackles, inside the 20. Blocked a punt in his first game. Teams have definitely found him (smiling). They definitely have game plans for him right now.

Derek Weisskopf has shown up as a young guy. Nolan DeLong has shown up more so on punt return and kick return. Done a really good job. Same thing with Landyn Van Kekerix. Chubs is what we call him. Man, he's quietly a really good football player, and he's really helped.

You go back and watch Kaden's touchdown against Rutgers, which I encourage you guys to do. He knocked a guy down three times. Like, boom, knocked him down. No, excuse me. Knocked one guy and another guy. That's two knock-downs. The guy gets back up. Boom, knocks him down again.

Everyone is, like, Wow, how is he so untouched? This guy kicked the crap out of that guy. Chubs kicked the crap out of two guys. That's how you score touchdowns like that.

So go back and watch that and look at it. Those are the kind of guys that to me are unheralded, maybe they don't get the recognition. To your point about everyone wants to go make a tackle and kickoff, but you can't always do that based off what the opponent does, but those are some guys that are really showing up right now.

Q. Year two for Rhys punting, just if you could evaluate him five games into his sophomore year.

LEVAR WOODS: Rhys, a really talented young man. Still young player. Talk about being a human being and things you see at practice versus games, but really talented.

This kid, really like how he works every day. Very diligent, very focused, accountable. You can coach him. There's no pushback. There's no, Well, coach, I don't think this. You don't see that at all from Rhys.

A couple of things we're still working on, ironing out. We're still trying to build some of that consistency between snapper to punter, but what he's done so far, been happy with. He hasn't had as many opportunities, which is good for us, right, because it's less times -- I think he is averaging two punts a game, maybe three. You know better than I do.

I thought he played his best game last week as far as 47-yard punt, fair caught. One inside the 5. Another one had a chance inside the 10. Bounced back. I think he is really starting to come along. Still a thing, looking for consistency, right, with what we're doing.

Q. The blocked punt last week, what's your diagnosis of that was and what happened there?

LEVAR WOODS: Again, going back to consistency in operation. So snap location, getting the punter pulled off his line, not great. So that definitely doesn't help.

Again, those are some of the things, consistency, that we're looking for and we need to improve upon. Again, I don't attribute it really to anything really other than that. I wasn't overly upset, because it's, like, man, we just have to be better. It's just hard for me to not be upset about those things, but I'm trying hard. Trying to keep that blood pressure down a little bit.

In regards to that, again, just we need to be better than that. I expect us to be better, but I don't see anything, like, oh, it's Rhys's fault or this's fault, the snap's fault. I don't see that.

We're a unit. We have to just be better, be cleaner.

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