

Michigan strength coach takes a low-key tack to conditioning

Angelique S. Chengelis / The Detroit News

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"Aaron Wellman has been with Brady Hoke at Ball State, San Diego State and, now, Michigan as director of strength and conditioning. - John T. Greilick/The Detroit News

Ann Arbor-- Aaron Wellman was dressed like all the Michigan coaches, in a white polo shirt and khakis, but he tucked himself deep in the corner of the Commons at Schembechler Hall during Sunday's media day, apparently trying to remain unnoticed.

Wellman is a stand-in-the-shadows guy when he's away from Michigan's weight room, where he has spent the last seven months shaping the Wolverines, having some add weight, some lose weight while building on the program's new catchwords -- accountability and physicality.

When Brady Hoke became Michigan's head coach in mid-January, he brought Wellman, the strength and conditioning coach who had been with him at Ball State and then San Diego State.

"Coach Hoke trusts me and trusts what we do," Wellman said. "He and I see eye-to-eye on a lot of things."

He has shied away from media attention since arriving in Ann Arbor, until Sunday when the staff and players were made available to reporters.

"This is Michigan, this isn't about one person," Wellman said. "This isn't about me. I came here to help this program win Big Ten championships. My part is getting in early, working my tail off, staying late. If I spend a half-hour doing interviews every month, that's a half hour I'm taking away from this program."

How different is Wellman's approach from previous strength coach Mike Barwis, who arrived at Michigan with then-head coach Rich Rodriguez?

"I can't speak even for a second on what they did before," Wellman said. "I know what we've done for eight years with coach Hoke. Every team is different. Every team needs a little something different. When you get to a program, the first thing is make sure we're accountable, let's emphasize discipline, let's emphasize toughness, let's emphasize great effort.

"Forget about anything else. Until you have that foundation in place, it doesn't matter to me what you're doing. The kids were great. The seniors have been great. They've all done a great job."

Wellman's philosophy, in a nutshell, is this -- maximize strength, develop maximal power and speed and minimize orthopedic stress to the body, he said.

To accomplish those goals, the Wolverines work a substantial amount, about 95 percent of the time, on free weights with little use of machines. There has not been a drastic change to the weight room, which underwent a \$1 million makeover

when Rodriguez became head coach.

"(It) has everything we need to be successful," Wellman said. "We've added some personal changes, we've changed out some racks, and we'll continue to upgrade things we need to get ready for our program. But we wouldn't have had to do anything to the weight room."

There has been plenty of adjusting of players' weights, however.

Offensive lineman Taylor Lewan and defensive players Craig Roh and Ryan Van Bergen, for instance, have added weight, thanks, in part, to 6,000-calorie diets.

Lewan is up more than 10 pounds from the spring to 308, Roh was listed at 251 in the spring and is now 269 pounds, and Van Bergen went from 283 to 288. Defensive lineman Will Campbell, listed in the spring at 333, is down to 315 during preseason camp.

During winter conditioning and spring practice, Wellman began evaluating the players on how they moved and how they played. He compared fat mass to lean mass, and then he analyzed the body types Michigan needs to run a pro-style offense and a 4-3 defense. He also got input from the coaching staff.

"Every year in college football you hear all these weight-gain and weight-loss success stories, and (reporters) talk to the strength coach," Wellman said. "Yes, we educate them, but they do it. When they decide to make a commitment to themselves -- and really it's to the team because they've got 104 other guys counting on them, all these former players -- that's a pretty easy commitment to me when you've got all those people counting on you, so once they make that commitment it's pretty easy."

Lewan said Wellman wants the players to know that everything they do, good or bad, affects the team and their teammates.

"He believes in being committed to a lot of things," Lewan said. "He's a guy who makes you, when you do something wrong, you don't feel bad for yourself, you feel bad for your team."

Offensive guard Ricky Barnum said Wellman clearly cares about the players, and he understands where their bodies need to be to be effective.

"He knows the human body more than anybody I know," Barnum said.

There's a nutritionist with the team at every meal, and Wellman said he and his staff have worked to educate the players on eating healthy and how this affects the team.

"We're all over them," Wellman said. "Still, me being on them, me sitting down talking to them, me getting upset with them or praising them, at the end of the day, those kids made a commitment. That's the only reason it got done. It has nothing to do with me."

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