

A healthy Air Force football linebacker Lakota Wills has warning for opponents: Be afraid

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After soaking in the changes to Air Force's defense, Lakota Wills issued a warning to opponents.

"Everyone should be worried," the junior cautioned.

The extent of those defensive changes haven't been revealed, but Wills said his outside linebacker spot now has the freedom to attack from the outside or inside and add creativity.

"I can do whatever," he said. "I'll keep the offensive line guessing."

Of course, Wills would be excited in any scheme right now. He's just happy to be healthy and playing after a rugged year.

'He burns': Junior Demonte Meeks brings fire to the linebacker position for Air Force

He carried high expectations into 2018 after logging seven starts as a freshman in 2017. And after three games he was living up to that standard with 13 tackles, two sacks and a forced fumble.

Then a high-ankle sprain in the fourth game knocked him out for two weeks. He returned and suffered a broken finger, sidelining him for another game.

The 6-foot-3, 235-pound native of Richland, Wash., made just eight tackles and registered half a sack over the team's final nine games. This from a player who made eight or more tackles four times in a six-game stretch as a freshman.

Air Force football has never had a player before like Jordan Jackson

"Of course I was disappointed," Wills said. "I was super excited just to get out there and be with the team, make plays. But things happen for a reason. This year I'm feeling good, feeling healthy, feeling lucky."

He hopes experience can aid in the luck factor. The injury against Nevada came against an opponent who went for his knees after Wills beat him in one-on-one battles throughout the game — and let him know about it.

"Knowing when to say things on the field, when not to say things; when to cut holes," Wills said. "That comes with experience."

Of course, that's easier said than done, as indicated by his central role in at least one practice skirmish.

“I’m a hothead sometimes,” he said. “I’m working on it.”

'Nobody made greater physical gains' for Air Force football than cornerback Tre' Bugg, coach says

Coach Troy Calhoun said Wills’ limited production didn’t necessarily diminish his value during his injury-plagued sophomore season that saw the Falcons go 5-7 for the second consecutive year.

“His worth ethic, his toughness; just his mental toughness, was beyond special,” Calhoun said. “In the offseason his strength and his commitment, his power, and some of the skill things that you have to do at that position, too. I mean, he’s a different player today.”

Wills has a personal goal this year — to be named first-team all-Mountain West.

“That was my goal last year, but I didn’t get the opportunity,” he said.

Healthy and with a little more freedom this year, there should be no lack of opportunities.

Brent Briggeman