

RYAN WILKINS | UCLA FOOTBALL Ø<βÈ

I'm Ryan Wilkins I'm a long snapper I played at Elon University and now I play at UCL A So my first year um playing football I was about 10 years old Um I remember our first ever practice Um we had a guy his name was Scott mckillop and he played all the way up through our little league um played the local high school I went to had a great career at Pitt University and um played in the NFL for um a couple of months and he came and talked to us and you know just said um you know basic stuff you know keep working Um This is hard this is where you'll become a good player And these skills that you learn as a 1011 12 year old will carry you not only through football but through the rest of your life just keep working at it Just do your thing have confidence in yourself Um And you know trust the process and you you can develop into what kind of player you wanna be I would say probably my second year of playing football is when I really started to figure out a little bit Uh my dad was a high school football coach for a long time so I got a lot of inside knowledge and extra practice So that was um that was a huge advantage for me I wasn't the best player Um I was able to develop you know just try to get a little bit better each year Work on um some specific things and go from there So in high school um my thing was I was very undersized um wasn't very fast wasn't very strong Um you know it's a lot easier to change your strength and your speed than it is to change your height So that's um what I worked on a lot is um trying to be explosive um trying to be smart um you know to match to make up for the lack of speed that I had So um really just a lot of I mean I had a lot of success as a linebacker because I was able to anticipate um you know what was gonna come at me Um what can hurt me Um and then my dad being a high school football coach too we were able to go and break down some film throughout the week So I had a pretty good idea of what was gonna be coming at me So in high school um you know my parents are both teachers and they told me you know the more things you can do the more doors will be open for you So I had that you know uh repeated to me a lot and um I found out that you know that was true Um you know I was I was I was solid academically wasn't the best wasn't the worst but um you know um would challenge myself um partly because my parents wanted me to So I was in a lot of honors classes and stuff like that Um to you know you know just just be the best that you can be um at the opportunities you're given So that was that was helpful for me to have people in my corner to help me go do that

Um Yeah so the challenges that I faced where I realized around probably my sophomore year of high school that I wasn't a good enough linebacker or tight end to play at a division one level So part of a lot of athletes goals are to play at the highest level they can play at Um so I had to figure out something that I needed to do and for me that was uh learn how to long snap I was I was our long snapper on our high school team and just kind of did it because you know we didn't really have one and I was the best at it I wasn't very good at it But you know that was something that I thought you know I have I have a chance to go do this and you know play at an extremely high level Um a lot of teams um that reach out to me in high school liked my linebacker and tight end film Um and you know when I talked to them I said you know like I'm I'm not good enough to play linebacker and tight end at this level Um but this is my film as a position player You know I'm I'm I'm physical and tough you know I I'm a football player who just um happened to learn how to long snap um to try to play at a high level So that was um that was one thing that a lot of coaches liked about me They're like ok he's you know he's he's all in about this and this is what he does to try to get on the field So they like that So my recruiting process was uh very unique and um actually pretty scary Uh I wasn't recruited until late January of my senior year of high school Um a couple places had reached out and talked to but nothing serious I was just on their boards Um and a lot of people who didn't know what I was trying to do were kind of telling me to go pick a school Um so one school that reached out to me was uh Elon University in North Carolina about two weeks before signing day You know I wasn't their top guy on their board was I wasn't I wasn't a pure and clean long snappers This other guy was they had some concerns about my form and that's why they decided to go with the second guy However that day I was I had I had known that was one of the reasons why I wasn't getting recruited was because of my form So I went out and I did a video and about two inches of snow Um And I sent that to their coach Anyway I said hey coach like thanks for the interest Um You know I can assure you there's no issues with my form and I saw the video Um You know the next day I got a call from him and he was asking me he was like how cold was it outside you know how much snow was on the ground So he was excited about that Um And then they they ended up having me go on a visit instead of that other guy So I think they just me being aware of what kind of player I was and being aware of what my flaws were on film and then addressing them before they were addressed was one thing that cut me apart from everybody else that they were recruiting So um when signing day

happened I had three division one offers I had a scholarship offer to Elon University I had a walk on offer at Western Illinois and I had a walk on offer to uh UN C Chapel Hill Uh I decided to go to Elon University because my dad you know gave me some really good advice and as a high school coach he would give all of his players This advice is you know go to the school that wants you don't go to the school that you want to you want to go somewhere to a place that you're gonna be treated well and then it's very easy for you to reciprocate that you don't want to go to a school where you're just another guy on the team and they don't really care about you because it's hard for you to care about them as much And you know if something bad happens to you or you might not actually get a fair shot at playing So I got to UCL A from Elon Um season ended at Elon University had a great time there great experience there Um You know great coaching staff great teammates everything I wanted Um You know I was able to achieve Um I had a great college experience there I decided to enter my name in the transfer portal um for my last year or two of eligibility Um A couple schools reached out right away One thing that got me to UCL A was the relationship I built with our head coach at Elon and uh the UCLAS head football coach Chip Kelly Um One thing about when you're building a team is a lot of coaches don't want to waste time on character issues and car and what kind of character you are So it's very easy for them to give the green light and bring in a guy on their team when other people will vouch for him Um I had a uh several other Power Five offers and um they had already talked to my coaches before they had called me um before they offered me So this happens everywhere and you know it happens in life too you know how what kind of person are you with everybody involved um that can open a lot of doors for you So I had a shoulder injury in high school Um I was a football and basketball player Um the shoulder injury kind of um closed one of those close the basketball door for me Um and I just had to go focus on football It got me in the long snapping too you know I had a lot of rehab A lot of downtime I couldn't the physical lift weights couldn't really run well Um after the surgery So that's one you know a lot of downtime long snapping not a lot of stress on your body Um so that was one thing that I did a lot and you know over the course of the rehab process you know started to realize like hey I'm I'm pretty good at this I have a shot to play at a high level with this skill So the first camp I ever went to um I was a junior in high school going into my senior year Um which is very very late Um if you're a specialist to go to one of these camps um it was it was in Morgantown West Virginia Um there were maybe five or

six other snappers there there was a long snapper there who would end up going to Notre Dame I didn't know this at the time I saw him snap one ball and I said she's like this guy is legit There's no way I'm gonna be able to compete with any with any of these guys That guy is that guy is unreal And then I found out about five minutes to the to the start of the camp that oh yeah this guy is the best snapper in in college in high school college football So that put my mind at ease you know Ok All right I got a shot to go do this Um so being able to see the very best player snap the ball like that and you know how he carried himself and um you know snapping it's it's a mental it's a mental game So looking back um I would have gotten it gotten into long snapping a lot earlier I would have went and gone to a camp to see the guys who were the best at what they do and you know how they do it That was one thing that you know long stabbing is a unique skill Not a lot of people know how to do it It's not like you're playing linebacker a tight end where you know your high school coach can you know get you just as good as any other linebacker from his high school coach It's it's very specific it's very unique So being able to find somebody or find players that are good at it and then you can compare yourself to them is one thing that I would have done differently My advice to anybody that wants a division one scholarship is don't have your goal be division one scholarship have your goal be the best player that you can be if you set small mundane daily goals for yourself that are achievable That is how you get to the level that you wanna play at Um division one unfortunately is not in the cards for everybody whether it's genetics or you just weren't recruited So having that is your goal shouldn't define you as what kind of player you should be Um a goal that I had for myself was I just wanted to play at a level where I looked out of place you know running out of the tunnel Like why is that kid there Like he doesn't he doesn't look like everybody else So that was my goal that I had in high school um and it ended up working out pretty well for me Um yeah but the the division one or bust is not the way to go about this It's just be the best player you can be And if and if your ceiling is a division two or division three you know you can you know you can be happy you can go to sleep at night No and you you gave you were all in and you did everything you could