

Cowboys

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if that was the first instinct for everyone involved after his paralyzing back injury.

New receivers coach Trooper Taylor had Woods wear a green jersey restricting him from contact throughout spring practice, cut down on his repetitions and spared him from routes that would take him across the middle of the field and into harm's way.

Five practices into camp this month, Woods came up to Taylor and told him: "Coach, you can't baby me. You've got to turn me loose."

"As a parent, you worry about that because I saw the pictures of what happened to him and what they did to his back and how they fixed it," Taylor said. "It would just be hard for me to pick that phone up and call Mom and say 'This is what happened' or call Dad and say, 'This is what happened.'"

Reluctantly, Taylor backed off. He started giving Woods slant patterns that could result in crushing blows from linebackers and safeties, and even warned the defense what was coming. After Woods made that first catch and popped up from the tackle, he looked right

at Taylor before going back into the huddle.

"My heart stopped beating a 1,000 miles an hour when he got back in there," Taylor said.

Woods has been an inspiration to the teammates who saw him crumpled on the weight room floor and then watched him go from the hospital to rehabbing in a pool to learning to run again.

"It's been real tough but I'm hanging in there," Woods said.

All that's left now is for Woods to make that first catch, score that first touchdown and complete the journey that he could have easily given up on.

"I don't know who's going to cry first: me or his mom or his dad or him. I really don't want him crying, not as a football player," Taylor said. "But it will be emotional because I know where he's come from."

For a guy who's faced one of the scariest, life-changing moments imaginable, Woods isn't dwelling on what could have been. He's sounds like any other football player.

"I expect to be a big playmaker like I expected before," he said. "I don't really feel like nothing's changed. I feel like I can make a real big difference."

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