

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

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Kelton Copeland



KELTON COPELAND: I want to start off by saying the start of spring ball has been awesome. Getting into the fourth week this morning was practice number ten starting off, and things have been going very well.

The biggest focus that I've had coming into spring ball and even now practice number ten, is we want to develop and grow that room at this point. There are a lot of questions with the whole position group as a whole. Right now there is not a lot of experience in that room, and anybody can look at the roster and tell that just by looking at it.

So coming in, that was my first mindset and my biggest focus is developing that room with the youth, seeing who can do what, establishing a depth chart, and then moving on from there. The best way to do that is starting with fundamental play, fundamental drills, stance and start. Things that guys probably learned back in first and second grade, but we still go back to that even now in practice ten. That's the first thing we did as a position group is we were with stance and start, just focus on the fundamentals of how to be a receiver.

How to be an efficient player on and off the field and moving on from there, that's where our biggest focus has been to this point.

Q. What kind of growth and progress have you seen from Nick Easley since he came to campus and in practice?

KELTON COPELAND: Nick has done a tremendous job. He's one that's surprised me in a lot more ways than one. Coming into this thing, everybody has a clean slate whether they've been here four or five years or just starting off just like me. So everybody's brand new and everybody's had a clean slate.

He's a guy that really opened my eyes. Just from meeting with him in the meeting room. He's a guy that's very attentive. Gives you great body language, whether it's in a meeting setting or whether it's on the field or even in a social setting. He does a great job of being very attentive. He gives you his eyes. He's a very yes-sir, no-sir-type person. He asks great questions in the meeting room.

He surprised me before we got on the field. He caught

my eye. When we got on the field, that translated over. His attention to detail translated over into his play. If you were out in practice, wherever the last time you were out at practice, you would have seen that result in production. And that's what it's all about. No matter what you've done in the past, like I said, we've all got a clean slate here and it's about producing, including myself. We have to produce.

Nick is one of those guys that's producing as a steady rate, and he's getting better by the day. So he's definitely done some things in my eyes that's going to put him in the conversation.

Q. Does the scholarship number effect the performance of the wide receiver group?

KELTON COPELAND: Well, it's all about who we have in the room. My biggest focus is exactly that. Who we have in the room that we're working with. I always say it doesn't matter if you're on scholarship or you're a walk-on, fourth- or fifth-year guy or true freshman walking in. The guys that I trust and earn my trust and earn the trust of the rest of the coaching staff and their fellow teammates, those are the guys that are going to play. And my biggest focus is coaching those guys that are in that room.

So I can't be concerned about scholarship numbers, who is in the room, who is not in the room, who may be playing, who may not be playing because of injury or any other thing. My biggest focuses are getting those guys better, developing that room, and growing that room as a whole, and that's what we're doing.

Q. What are you physically evaluating with your group of receivers you have right now? What do you need to see on the field?

KELTON COPELAND: Production. At the end of the day, it's all about producing. The easiest thing from a fan standpoint is to say production. Okay, we want to see touchdowns. That's the easiest thing at the receiver position. Everybody wants to see how much touchdowns, how much catches, how many yards after catch, that type of thing? It's about the play-to-play execution that I'm talking about production. If I'm asking to go dig out a safety and you get that done, that's a productive play, so you're being productive. Also, catching the hitch. If you can run a good route, be efficient in and out of your stance and get into that

route, catch the ball and do something after the catch, that's being productive.

It's not all about the end result of a touchdown or a big play or big spring block. It's date-to-day, getting better at being productive, being efficient of what we're asking you to do within the system, within the scheme of play. That's what I call being productive. That's the biggest thing that we're attempting to do moving forward is be productive and be efficient within the scheme that we're asking you to be.

Q. What is the program plan for Jerminic Smith?

KELTON COPELAND: That's a question probably better directed towards Coach Ferentz. My biggest focus at this point is coaching the guys on the field and in that room with me as a group. If you're not in that room right now, for whatever the reason may be, I'm not focused on that. My focus is on developing that room with the guys that are in that room right now.

Q. Do you take any hands on in academics, as assistants?

KELTON COPELAND: As assistants, yes, we assist. As assistants, we assist our academic staff, and obviously their primary job is to do the hand's on work and make sure they're going to class, all those types of things. Our jobs as assistants is to assist them with that. Obviously, we have more hands on, more time with the student-athletes themselves.

So our job, in a sense, is to assist them, making sure our guys are being accountable and making sure what they need to be doing academically.

Q. Do you think he'll be back?

KELTON COPELAND: I hope so. It's up to him. The ball's in his court, so we'll see.

Q. Taking on that leadership role being the leader of the group, considering it's a small and pretty young group.

KELTON COPELAND: Yeah, that's something as a coach that I really try to feed off of that. I'm always encouraging guys to step up as leaders. The thing that I've learned over the years, you cannot force somebody to be a leader. Leaders don't just all of a sudden -- I can't coach you to be a leader. You either have that innate ability to be a leader or you don't.

There are different types of leaders, but at the end of the day, a true leader is a person that influences other people, whether it's a good leader or a bad leader, a true leader is a person that has influence over other people. So my job is to find those leaders, good or bad, and hopefully we have more good than bad, and find those guys and help them and develop them to

become the type of leaders that we want.

There hasn't been a clear-cut leader right now outside of Matt. Matt and I actually had a conversation yesterday one on one that he does a great job leading. He was the first guy when I first got here, my first day on the job, he came to my office. I didn't have his cell phone number, and he didn't have mine. Honestly, I couldn't pick him out of a lineup if I was paid to. But he was the first one to come to my office to introduce himself to me and tell me about each guy in the room, his thoughts, what he's done up to this point, and what he thinks needs to be done as a group or what I need to do as a coach and what he's willing to do, which is everything. He's been great.

Now the hard part for Matt and what we conversated on yesterday, and the hard part for him, as everybody knows, it's hard to lead from the back. Meaning he's not on the field right now. So you kind of feel like a hypocrite, hey, guys, you have to push, push, push, and I'm off standing to the side telling my peers they've got to push. So that's hard for him. He's done a tremendous job.

As far as the guys on the field right now, it's kind of hard because we're all learning. So once somebody figures out that they're comfortable with their role, then it's easier to lead. It's kind of like trying to teach something when I'm not sure what I'm teaching, if that makes sense. So as we grow as a group, some of those leaders will start to emerge. But there are some leadership skills in that group, for sure.

Q. Does it hurt his ability to learn the offense, because he can't go on the field of play until he has his classroom stuff?

KELTON COPELAND: A lot of our offense hasn't changed, honestly. Especially the terminology hasn't changed a whole lot; how we label things and how we formulate things has changed. But for the most part the meat and potatoes of the offense, for lack of a better term, has not really changed a whole lot.

So Matt really doesn't have a lot to learn. Now, Matt shows up to every meeting, like I said, he's very accountable. I have no issues whatsoever with Matt. He's shown up to every meeting, been accountable, shown up before practice, after practice, before meetings after meetings. Even though he's not active, he is still active mentally. He's still getting his mental reps. He's still asking great questions. He's still leading by example. So I have no worries about Matt learning the offense.

Q. The receivers you have right now, I think they've combined for maybe two catches in games. Is it

hard to be a leader when you don't have stats to back it up?

KELTON COPELAND: Stats to me are more for fans. It's more about, like I said, being productive. All right. You don't get stats for digging out that safety, all right. But if my peers see me on a day-to-day basis going in and digging out that safety, and if I'm being efficient in how my coach is telling me how to do it, and I'm excelling and giving extra effort, now I can go out and lead. It's more about the production as opposed to stats, which to me are two different things.

Q. Have you seen enough speed and quickness that leads you to believe you can scare a Big Ten secondary?

KELTON COPELAND: Scare is not really a word that I use. I'm never scared of any opponent that I face. I don't care who it is. Will they respect us? I definitely believe they're going to respect us. That comes from hard work, that comes from preparation, and comes from pure execution. We're talking about, you want to produce and execute, that's how you get that done.

The last thing, which takes zero talent at all, it's just effort. It takes zero talent at all to have max effort every play. I don't care what level you're at, whether it's NFL all the way down to peewee football. If I'm going against somebody and they're giving max effort every single play, I'm going to respect that player. We're going to get accomplished.

Q. How much have you watched your incoming freshmen, whether it's on film? And have you had many conversations with them over the phone about doing this on the side or while you're in high school?

KELTON COPELAND: The incoming guys? Yes, we've had many conversations. As a matter of fact, this weekend I've talked to every one of them coming in. Just to let them know, hey, you need to be preparing. All right, now the opportunity is here. Is there a guarantee? I will never guarantee any young man coming in, whether I'm recruiting him or he's assigned to incoming freshmen that he's going to play. But the opportunity for you to come in and play, absolutely. Now that's up to that particular individual what they do with that opportunity. If you prepare, do the necessary things you need to do so when you get here you're prepared as well as you can be, then the opportunity might come sooner than later. If you don't prepare, you don't take the necessary steps to make sure you're ready to go when you get here, then the opportunity might not be there when you get here.

Q. That's a position in the past, Iowa has played true freshmen last year, Young, a couple years ago and Jerminic and Adrian Falconer. Do you

anticipate a couple, if not more, if they're competitive to take the redshirt off and play right away?

KELTON COPELAND: Absolutely. The opportunity is here and now. Anybody, like I said, a normal fan can look at our roster and see that there is an opportunity for a young guy to come in and play. It's all up to how they prepare before they get here. How quickly they pick up the offense, and how hard they're willing to work once they get here. All those factors and then some. The social, can they handle being a college football student-athlete? Can they handle all of the demands, mentally, physically, socially that it takes to be successful as a student-athlete at this level? All of those factors, which we won't know until they get here, right.

But the opportunity is here. Depending on how they prepare and how they're built once they get here. That will play itself out.

Q. What can they do to prepare before they get here? What would you suggest or recommend them to do?

KELTON COPELAND: There are a lot of things. We send them material as far as training. How to train for what we're going to demand of them once they get here. They've already received a lot of materials like that. How they handle themselves socially, getting themselves ready with just their day-to-day life.

It's different once you get to college, obviously. You don't have mom and dad telling you what to do and when to do it all the time. Once you get into college life, you're pretty much on your own. Outside of the football structure and being inside this building, you're pretty much on your own. That's a big part of it. My experience as a coach, that's separated guys from playing early versus not playing early the most. The guys that can handle the time management. If you can't handle time management once you're a true freshman, you're 18, 19 years old, and you're on a college campus for the first time, if you can't handle time management on your own, then the chances of you playing are slim enough. Because if I can't trust you to do what you're going to do academically when you're away from me, out of this building, so I can't trust you to put you on the field.

Q. What about the route running when you came in and first saw these guys? That probably changes with coach to coach. Every coach probably has his ideas of what he wants to see out of route running. What do you see from your guys?

KELTON COPELAND: These guys have a lot of ability. Whether it's route running, catching the ball, route definition. Things like that. You hit it on the head. It's

how I'm coaching. It takes time. It takes time for them to understand my philosophy, my style of coaching. What is coach asking me to do and how is he asking me to do it? It takes time for all that stuff to translate to me and what I'm asking them to do.

So that, in itself, is a process from their end and my end. How am I evaluating them and how they're responding to my coaching, what do I need to change? Because at the end of the day as a coach and my opinion a great coach, he finds ways to coach his players. Every player is different. Different experiences, different ways of learning, different skillsets. So it's not about what I know and how I coach. It's how I get it across to those individual players and get them to perform what we're trying to get them to perform.

Q. When it comes to separation, how much is that you can coach a kid with, and how much is that just natural ability?

KELTON COPELAND: I think it's a delicate mix. In my honest opinion, it's a delicate mix. There is no magic formula. It's 60-40. It's 50-50. Each kid is different. Each kid has different experiences, different learning abilities. Different learning levels on how they learn. Some guys learn off the board. Some guys learn better in walk-throughs. Some guys learn better off a video. Like I said, it's my job as a coach to figure out what makes this guy tick. All right. What buttons can I push? What buttons do I need to push? How do I need to teach them? And that, in itself, is a process. And that is a big part of it.

In these first four weeks, first three weeks going into the fourth week on my end in assessing and evaluating is he responding to my coaching? What do I need to change to get him to perform at the level we need him to perform at?

Q. Never asked about this guy before, but he jumped out at me, Dominique Dafney. What have you seen from him?

KELTON COPELAND: Dafney is doing a great job. He's a young man that takes coaching well. It goes back to the previous two questions. He's a guy that takes coaching very well. He tries to do exactly what you want him to do. Sometimes to a fault.

You don't want him to be a robot. You want him to take the coaching, the fundamentals of what whatever we're trying to get executed and you still have to be yourself. Use your abilities to your advantage to get what we need done within the scheme. All right? He's a guy that's done a tremendous job. He gives great effort every day, day-in, day-out, he's a guy we need to look for in the future because if he keeps progressing, it's

going to be hard to keep him off the field, no doubt.

Q. The passing game struggled last year, do you feel pressure to have this group come through, and do your guys feel pressure?

KELTON COPELAND: Pressure is probably the wrong word. I'm not a nervous person by any means. I don't really acknowledge pressure or listen to the noise outside this building. The way I see it, I was hired to do a job. And the way I'm built, I'm going to do the job the best way I can.

No matter what the circumstances are before I got here or what the circumstances are now that I'm here, it's all about me being the best coach that I can be, and progressing these guys and developing these guys as a group and being the best group we can possibly be this year. That's my approach. No more, no less.

Q. The previous staff had their own way of teaching adjustments. Have you incorporated the same amount of adjustments? Are they different from before? Are you limited more so than you were or they were in the past?

KELTON COPELAND: Honestly, I couldn't answer that question wholly, because I don't know what the previous coaching staff, what they coached and how they coached. So I can only tell you about what we're coaching now as a staff and offensively.

I wouldn't necessarily say it's more or less than any other place I've been as far as side adjustments and hot sides and stuff like that. It's just the system we run, the schemes we run, and we want to be sound in how we do it. So there are times when we're involved in it as a receiving corp and at that position, and there's times we're not. It's just learning and teaching that to our players so we're sound on the whole scheme, on every single play. So that's what it comes out to.

I can't really answer the question, is it more or less, because it's pretty much normal for what I know. It's not more or less than anything I've experienced in my career.

Q. Have they picked it up physically and mentally the way you're wanting to teach it?

KELTON COPELAND: It's never perfect as I want to be. My job is to coach against perfection. If it's not perfect, I have something to teach and something to coach. No, it's not perfect yet. But my goal is to get there. We're getting there. We're getting better every day.

Q. Guys like Adrian and Devonte who have been here a little bit but haven't seen the field a whole lot, what have you seen from them this spring, and do you feel like they can take the next step?

KELTON COPELAND: That's the challenge to get them to get over the hump. And now's the time. I met with those guys individually yesterday. Just by chance, I didn't even know about this press conference at that time. But we met with those guys individually yesterday and that was really the talk. That was the talk I had with them. Like, all right, we have three weeks into it. We have two weeks left. We only have six more opportunities. At that time we'll have six more opportunities to get better and get to that level. Now's the time to push.

Whatever we've done up to this point, that's who we are on film. That's how we talk in our room. What you put on film, that's who you are. No matter what you want to be and who you think you are, what you put on film, that's who you are. That's what the outside world sees. Whether it's your opponent or fans, that's who you are. So if you haven't put on film who you want to be, it's time to change that. Either by effort, execution and production that's the next step.

So, yes, they have moved forward. Is it where we need to be? Absolutely not. Are we getting closer step by step? Yes, we are.