

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

Wednesday, April 12, 2017

Ken O'Keefe



Q. The top two quarterbacks, Tyler Wiegers and Nathan Stanley, where do you see the competition between them? Is it close?

KEN O'KEEFE: I think Kirk mentioned it last week. They separated themselves from the rest of the pack. They're getting equal number of reps every day. It's neck and neck, and they're going at it like it is at this point too.

Q. How is Stanley's accuracy, we haven't seen much of him??

KEN O'KEEFE: His accuracy's been pretty good when we've given him the chance to get the ball out of his hands the right way. Everything's new to these guys right now. So we're working on the whole progression of the pass game. It starts with the drop, their feet end up leading them through their progressions. Their progression effects their accuracy greatly. And we're trying to focus on teaching them the reads, training their eyes to see how we want things done and react accordingly.

So to answer the accuracy question, I would rate us right now somewhat average overall. But it's certainly better than week one and week two.

Q. Do you see them going through August camp, and is it a good thing to have competition like this?

KEN O'KEEFE: I think competition is always good. I have no idea how far it will go or when somebody separates totally from the group. But competition is never bad. It will only help us. They're both sharp guys. The ability to learn and process is pretty good. It's just a matter of getting reps and being able to react to how you process that is probably going to be the thing that separates people in the end.

Q. Stanley was moved up to number two last August as a true freshman. What has Tyler shown you that makes you want to put him in that competition with Nathan when his eyes work he's probably going to be the starter this year?

KEN O'KEEFE: Well, his ability to learn the system. He's an intelligent guy. Understands everything. Knows the protections and how to work within the protections. And can make the decisions that you have to make in that decision. So that's what I've seen so far.

Everybody is still catching up. Nobody's delivering the ball on time the way that we'd like it to be delivered on time at this stage. We still have to work on the anticipation as far as letting the ball, getting the ball out of our hands to its target. So those things I'm hoping to see a big jump this week and next in that area as far as the pass game is concerned.

Q. You, Brian and Kirk will decide on who the quarterback will be?

KEN O'KEEFE: I would imagine. We have one guy who is the head coach, the other guy's the offensive coordinator, and I'm the position coach. So I'm sure it will be a collective decision. With me figured in last in the decision.

Q. How do you know? When do you know? You've been through this thing before?

KEN O'KEEFE: Performance, who is performing better. It's as simple as that. It's not always statistically driven. It's who moves the team. Who is making first downs. You know, Drew Tate, you talked about backing up at a certain point as a freshman, like Nate did, Drew Tate separated himself years ago when he would jump in. He could move the second team during two-minute. He separated himself right there.

Now, I wasn't as worried about how many passes were completed during that particular point in time, but who moved the team into scoring position, or scored in those situations. Who wanted to do the job factored into that as well because nobody wanted to do the job more than him. So those are the things that separate people.

Q. What one or two things are on top of your list?

KEN O'KEEFE: Well, the first thing you're looking for a guy's feet to be under control and to be quick enough to get set, moving the pocket to avoid the rush. Maybe get out of there at times to scramble for a first down, next thing is the release. So quick feet, quick release, decision-making ability is critical, obviously, and the anticipation to get the ball out of your hands when you see somebody about to do something. You cannot waste time letting the ball go.

For us, we'd like that ball to be a third of the way to the receiver by the time he comes out of his cut. If it's less than that, it probably means we're a little late. If it's

earlier than that, that's great. We'll never have a situation where you probably end up getting sacked or a DB gets his hand on the ball, but it can never be more than 50 percent.

But ideally, if you can get to a third of the way to its target by the time they come out of their cut on timing routes, you're in business. Man-to-man, when you're getting knocked around all over the field, the quarterback's going to have to hold the ball, keep his feet alive and deliver it when he thinks it's time to. On the timing stuff, that's what you're after. That's how it gets measured. The guys that can do that are the guys that really succeed at that position.

Q. The timing part of that with the new offense, how does the new offense impact their timing?

KEN O'KEEFE: I think we've tried to treat the progression of everything that it does develop timing. So for instance, we teach the drop where you kind of do it in place where you develop a rhythm for what the drop might be. It's like a dance routine in a lot of ways. So we do it in place and they develop the rhythm. Then we half-speed them through it, we'll full-speed them through it, so they get their feet down.

We're always teaching what their reads are as we go along, so they get the rhythm of their feet where they're supposed to be. Next thing you do, you take it out. You take the drop out there, and we teach the routes the same way to a large degree. Okay? So now you take the receivers and now we're going to throw routes. Right? It's all we're going up against. Shouldn't be too hard, should it?

If we have a route that's supposed to be run at a certain yardage and supply, step, drop, the ball's supposed to be off on the plant, we'll start to work on that. We'll focus on that right there. Number one I'll focus on is the ball coming out on the plant like it should be. If that's what I want. Is it coming out? I want hitch. That's another part of it. So those types of things are the things you look for. Is it on time versus air?

Now they develop, hey, this is how it feels in my head. You guys all talk about the clock in your head? That's how you develop the clock in your head. You build the rhythm with the drop and then with the route. Next thing you do is put the readout there. So simple read is flat curl. So somebody covers the flat, you throw it to the curl. Somebody covers the curl, throw it to the flat. Decision making isn't really hard.

Then next thing it comes down to is ball placement. Where do you want the ball thrown? Inside shoulder, outside hit. Whatever it is that you may be teaching, those would be the things that you're after as you

progressively teach the pass game in the order that makes sense to the players and in the order that will allow them to build the timing that you need in the pass game in order to be successful. And hopefully with that comes the anticipation that we're talking about. You know, that makes the biggest difference in the game.

You look, all the great quarterbacks all had great anticipation. You wonder how did he get that ball there? How did he get that ball there? They just did it enough with people that, you know, they understood each other pretty well.

Q. The scheme, is it similar to when you were offensive coordinator?

KEN O'KEEFE: I'm not going to say a lot different, but most everything is different in some respects. So it's a combination of, I think everybody's experiences since I've left here as well. Brian's experience with the Patriots. Certainly I had some experience in Miami. You just heard Kelton at Northern Illinois and Tim from North Dakota State. It's been a collaboration.

You know, Brian seeks ideas, incorporates ideas, so that we're doing the things that are best for us as an offense right now.

Q. Kirk talked Friday about having the quarterbacks in two tiers. Can you talk about the gap? Is it considerable?

KEN O'KEEFE: Yeah, just like he said, that's where we keep it right now. Just stay focused on that at this particular point in time.

Q. The quarterbacks and what stages you have, and getting them to where you wanted to anticipate things. Installing a somewhat new offense, I would imagine. How much can you do? How much can you throw at these guys?

KEN O'KEEFE: I can tell you this, that we're throwing less at them than I got thrown at me in my first day in Miami where I think we installed 41 pass plays the first day. You've got to give them what we think they can handle. But it hasn't been like spoon feeding them and really slow playing it. We've put in quite a bit. Now that you've been through some of these things, somebody talked about how you're into blitz pick-ups, you're into different things that are going on at each stage, the stage is a little more advanced, two men and all that stuff has to take its course. But you can't slow down, really. You can't stop. You can simplify, okay, and cut back once you see that you've exceeded the point where it's beneficial.

But otherwise you keep feeding them as much as you can, because it may show up at some point in the

season if they've been exposed to it at all, and we don't have to teach it as a brand-new concept.

Q. Is that strange for these guys?

KEN O'KEEFE: Totally.

Q. I think they're two pretty cerebral guys.

KEN O'KEEFE: Highly intelligent. They understand football. It's a credit to Greg Davis. He's done a great job of that. Great job teaching these guys. I told them during one of our first drill periods, they should text him and tell them he's done a great job with their feet. I'm going to try not to screw them up, which I may have done already. Anyway, Greg really did a great job with those guys.

Q. Are there other years where you've been here, and the starter hasn't been the starter in the spring. Where are they as far as starters becoming players?

KEN O'KEEFE: I'm not sure I can remember those other springs right now, to be perfectly honest with you. I think we're pretty much where we've always been. As a coach, you're never satisfied with where you're at. You wish we'd come along faster. Everybody wishes that, but it isn't, and it never is. The nice thing about this is we know that whoever the quarterback is, he's going to be somewhat inexperienced, but we have an experienced line in front of him that he should benefit by. So that part, I feel really good about, and they should as well.

Q. Can they scramble?

KEN O'KEEFE: Yeah, they can move in the pocket. I don't see anybody taking off and running for 60 yards on the first play in a two-minute drill like Brad Banks did against Purdue. He screwed us up and left all that time on the clock. What are we going to do? Slow it down? Anyway, I don't think that will be the issue. But they can move well enough to get out of the pocket and get the first down. That's really what you want.

Q. Would something like that be enough to distinguish one? Are they that different, or is it too similar?

KEN O'KEEFE: It's hard to say. We've had one scrimmage, basically. You know, we've got something else coming up this weekend. And we haven't done a lot where you could really separate totally at this stage. Those guys could separate themselves that much. But they're working with basically the same guys, receivers, running backs, all the skill guys are the same for them. The performances have been somewhat equal as well. So we'll see.

They both can get out on the edge and throw it on the run a little. So I'm not concerned about that.

Q. Right away what did you see from Wiegers that told you it's going to be a competition?

KEN O'KEEFE: He has a lot of confidence. Like I said, intelligence picked up the system, and then has confidence in himself. I think that was critical.

Q. One of your proteges here, David Raih has really moved up the ranks in the NFL. I think he's now offensive perimeter coach from Green Bay. What did you see from his time here at Iowa that made you think or did it make anybody think that he could advance the way he has?

KEN O'KEEFE: You know, sharp guy, real student of the game. Would do anything to move ahead. I mean there wasn't a job that was too small or too big in his eyes. He's worked for some great people. Worked for Norm Chow, worked for Mike McCarthy. I'm not surprised at all. I don't really know what a perimeter coach is, but I'm sure Dave does by now.

But just sharp, football guy that just loves the game, loves coaching with a super personality. Has a good feel for situational football as well, two-minute, and those types of things, I think. So I'm sure that's what they liked about him.

Q. What's it been like for you coming back here? You've known the Ferentz family so long. Did it make this transition pretty easy to coming back?

KEN O'KEEFE: Sure. Knowing the town, knowing the neighborhood, obviously we've seen the Ferentz's for a long, long time, and some other people on the staff as well. So it's been the easiest transition I could make at this stage. It's been good. You know, this has been an easy transition with the facility. I don't have to go too far to get a meal. If I had to go home and cook for myself, that would be a disaster at this stage.

Q. You talk about the anticipation with the quarterbacks and receivers. Knowing the top receivers returning, one is out for academics. One is out for injury. You have a couple coming in in June. How challenging is that when you know that possibly this summer there could be an influx of receivers that could help your quarterbacks with anticipation and getting them in and out of breaks?

KEN O'KEEFE: You're going to go through that whole process again with a new group of guys, that's all there is to it. They've got to learn how to run the routes.

The difference is now the quarterback knows how to deliver it. So they better get their heads around pretty fast when they walk in the door. Because things will be happening a lot faster as far as the quarterback is concerned. The first few times out there, the receivers and the quarterbacks are all on the same page, sort of

slow. But now that things have sped up, that's where the freshmen have trouble, usually, trying to find the speed and the timing involved with what happened. So just get your head on a swivel and be ready.

Q. Is there more a sense of urgency from coaches this spring? I'm sure there is every spring. But to be able to get whatever changes are coming down in the offense, and to be able to translate that with the quarterbacks and wide receivers working themselves together? Is there are things that you need to check off there are more hectic than any other spring?

KEN O'KEEFE: No, I don't think so. Every spring it seems like you're doing it. It's kind of funny. Whether it's here or in the NFL, one-third of your team is changing out every year no matter what. So you just have to roll with that as best you can. So sense of urgency becomes a sense of normality in that regard.

You just teach what you have to do. You have to be patient to a certain degree, and you have to be demanding as Kelton was talking about as well. Take it one step at a time, and try not to jump to step four before you've worked on step two and three, because that's where guys get confused when you're installing something new and you could have trouble.