

Big 12 Conference Football Media Days

Wednesday, July 12, 2023

Arlington, Texas, USA

Kansas Jayhawks

Lance Leipold

Press Conference

LANCE LEIPOLD: Thank everyone for being here today. I guess first I'd like to welcome our new additions to our conference. I think it's been said many times today, the balance from top to bottom in the Big 12, what it was last year, and I know we've added even more strength to make it the most exciting conference in Power Five football.

Last year was an exciting year for us to take a big step forward as a program, getting off to a good start, getting bowl eligible for the first time in over a decade, battling back in a highly competitive bowl game.

It showed the resiliency of our team, and we're excited to take another step this year using that end of the season towards motivation, of course, to get us to be the consistent bowl team we want to be and find a way to turn that into victory.

Q. Obviously protecting the quarterback is very important, especially one as high caliber as yours. You go and add Logan Brown out of Wisconsin. What kind of dynamic does he bring to your offensive line?

LANCE LEIPOLD: Well, Logan was a highly touted player out of high school. Played a fair amount at Wisconsin. We look for Logan to add to our offensive line that already returns four starters.

The thing I like about where we're at holistically as an offensive line is the amount of starts we have returning, the amount of depth that we have now with not just Logan, Spencer Lovell is a transfer from Cal; Kobe Baynes joined us last August from Louisville.

So we have some movable parts better than we've had before that, not only just keeping Jalon healthy and adding depth that we have within the skill positions, I like our movable pieces that we're going to have a solid unit across the board.

Q. What have you seen from Jalon as far as just his



further development this spring heading into the year?

LANCE LEIPOLD: Again, keeping Jalon where he's in a position staying healthy. He's making all the throws, everything that we need him to be. I've started to say this a little bit more today on the back half of the day. I think the one thing we sometimes forget about Jalon and everything he brings to our program, he's an Academic All-American.

What we put on his plate and what we ask him to do and whether it be just things in our offense, retaining the information, verbalizing it back to others, getting others lined up, I think he does an outstanding job.

As we know, everybody has had a chance to see when he's healthy what he does as a dual-threat quarterback. I think the other thing is his leadership abilities, his charisma. He's a guy that doesn't get too high or too low.

Again, I've said it from the start when he burned his redshirt our first year, he's a special man and a special individual.

Q. This is a league that can produce quick turnarounds. You guys a year ago, TCU, Baylor the year before that. For you to go from 2-10 to that first bowl game and making that step, what were the foundational elements for you guys a year ago?

LANCE LEIPOLD: I just think finally we've been able to build some routine and trust, first of all, within our program, for us to be -- our young men had gone through a lot of transition. I think the daily process of getting better and really holistic development has been a key for us as a program.

I think when we went on the road to Morgantown and then went down to Houston and battled back from deficits and found a way to win on the road, the confidence and belief started to really take even a larger step and kind of built on the momentum that we had early.

We talk about it. I think everybody does, but our locker room and leadership from our upperclassmen and people I



think have allowed us to take that step, and quite honestly it was night and day difference ahead of what we were at our last stop as far as becoming a player-led program.

And I know those players, and especially the four men that are here today have embraced that and they're ready to take it another step.

Q. Have you had to manage expectations?

LANCE LEIPOLD: Yeah, the same thing. You want expectations. This program hasn't had many expectations of late, so embracing those but keeping them in balance. But I think any program at any state, you have to focus on where you're at at the moment and making sure you don't get too far ahead of yourself, and no offense to anyone, we can't spend a lot of time reading all the positive things you're going to say because all of a sudden we're not staying focused on what we need to at the moment to get better.

I think this group gets it, but at the same time, for a program like Kansas, we need to embrace some of those things of, A, expectations and the positivity that's surrounding our program.

Q. To speak on what you just talked about a bit, can you tell us what the investments the university is making in your program mean for the trajectory of what you're trying to build, and talking about future stadium plans, renovations to the locker room, things like that?

LANCE LEIPOLD: Well, it means the world to what we're going to -- we've been able to make some positive steps on the field, in the standings, all those things, and with my discussions with Travis Goff and Chancellor Jerrod and a lot of people talk about what they want to get done. Those two men led us in a position now that we're going to get those things done and get moving quickly.

It was important to me that we were going to be able to do some things that the current players that have helped turn this thing into a positive direction would get some benefit from, so right after spring practice we were working on the renovations of the locker room as you alluded to and the weight room and hopefully they will be finished by August 1.

Stadium announcements and things like that are in the works, and those will be released I think in the near future, and those are exciting because Kansas was behind on those things. I don't think everyone knows that. We're putting ourselves in a position that we've made that type of commitment, and we can be sustainable in the Big 12

Conference.

Q. Your running back, Devin Neal, has proven he's a talented player in this league. What do you think is the next step for him and what do you think he can do better this season?

LANCE LEIPOLD: Well, again, Devin is a highly motivated young man. He played baseball his first spring here, so he made most of our workouts, but again, it was part-time in his time there.

His dedication and understanding holistically some things offensively, he's continued to work as a receiver, blitz pickup, all those things you need to be a complete back.

I think as we continue to evolve what we do offensively, again, understanding different things, he continues to work on and will do that.

He's been outstanding for us on and off the field in his two years here, and also with what he does, we also need a healthy Daniel Hishaw with him to complement him because when those two were together at the beginning of the season, that's a pretty good duo.

Q. You're bringing back not only Jalon Daniels and Devin Neal, but you're also bringing back your offensive coordinator in Andy Kotelnicki. How important was it for him to get the new contract extension at the end of the year and what is the continuity of having him back in this offense do for the future of this program?

LANCE LEIPOLD: Well, of course it was important probably for Andy, but it was well-deserved, and other things, again, as we talked about, program commitment and facilities, I think also our university has made a commitment to our staff.

With that -- and I'll answer your question on Andy. This is the first time in 20 years the University of Kansas had the same set of assistant coaches coming back, so our stability and continuity holistically are going to be in a good spot.

Andy and I have been together for over 11 years. I trust him. He's an outstanding coach.

I've known what a great coach Andy is for a long time. Andy will be a head coach some day. There's no doubt about that.

But I asked the administration what my thoughts were for Andy and where it would be in salary, but also I don't know many coordinators that are getting five-year contracts, and

that shows my faith in him, but also I believe what he's earned, as well.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

