

Big 12 Conference Football Media Days

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Allegiant Stadium

Kansas Jayhawks

Lance Leipold

Press Conference

LANCE LEIPOLD: First of all, it's great to be here today. Thank you all for being here. As I was standing to the side, I was trying to decide did I win a drawing or lose a drawing by following -- I think everybody went to ask the harder questions elsewhere.

We're excited to be here today looking at how far our program's come in the last three and a half years to put ourselves in a competitive position.

A lot of exciting things happening in Lawrence, Kansas. The commitment our university, our chancellor, Chancellor Girod, athletic director Travis Goff, facilities, staffing, those things have continued to improve to give us this chance where we're here today.

Q. This offseason you lost offensive coordinator, Andy Kotelnicki, who had been with you since your days at Wisconsin-Whitewater. Could you talk about the impact losing him off the staff but also the faith you have in guys like Jeff Grimes and Jim Zebrowski that have taken over?

LANCE LEIPOLD: That's a good question. Andy and I were together for 11 years. You look at the time in college football today, that's a rarity. And Andy's loyalty and contributions are greatly appreciated.

Andy and I had conversations for over a year, and really from the time we hired him at Whitewater, his aspirations was someday to be a head coach. One of the things he felt was, in order to continue to grow, maybe an opportunity to work under someone else would help him grow.

So I can't fault him for that. We've had great alignment and loyalty of continuity in our staff as a whole, yeah, that's different but I've said it other times today Jeff Grimes did an outstanding job. I look at our first year in the conference, 2021, unfortunately we didn't make it down to



Dallas for this event, but Baylor was picked right above us in standings, and we were 9 and 10 respectively.

And Coach Aranda and Jeff Grimes and that staff won the Big 12 Conference. And watching what they did when they played us and other things, I just thought we'd have a good fit. Some had knowledge of the conference, and then when we met and we talked about what we wanted to continue to do, did we have the right alignment once again, and I feel very confident that we do with Jeff as a coordinator.

You mentioned Jim Zebrowski. He was the first coordinator I hired at Wisconsin-Whitewater, went on with Jerry Kill at Minnesota and returned to us in Buffalo. Jim called the bowl game for us last December, did a great job.

So I feel very confident that our offense will continue to be diverse and multiple and many things we're doing and continue to grow, and I think with the returning weapons that we have, that was going to be imperative that we continue with terminology and things that we're doing so the players could continue to operate in such a way.

Q. Coach, obviously your starting quarterback, Jalon, he's had an incredible road, pretty much learning to play quarterback, becoming starter as a junior, winning the state title. He has the back injury. How battle tested is he going into this season and how do you quantify his leadership status?

LANCE LEIPOLD: Thank you for the question. Jalon Daniels has been tested in so many different ways through high school, through college, and to persevere and handle it in today's college football world, social media, speculation and all those things.

To watch him on a daily basis walk in with the smile that he has lights up our room, stay positive, be there for his teammates, even when he's not available speaks volumes to me each and every day. It makes me a fan of him as well as being fortunate to be his head coach.

So I know he's tested to handle anything that may come his way. He continues to learn as a quarterback. I think



it's well documented when he's on the field we're a lot better football team. We can be pretty explosive. And he's the leader there.

I feel very good about our quarterback room as a whole, but I continue to look at -- I'm excited to see what Jalon will do this season for us. He's doing everything that doctors, trainers, strength coaches are having him do, and I can't wait to get to August.

Q. To follow up what you were just talking about, with Jalon Daniels, there's no Jason Bean around this time. Like he said previously, Jalon Daniels struggled staying healthy to make it through the season. How important is it to have two quarterbacks just ready to go, throw them to the wolves, just in case anything happens today?

LANCE LEIPOLD: I think that's a dilemma across college football. I think we looked, and I don't have the numbers, somebody probably does there, about how many teams played ended the year with a different quarterback than they started with.

So it's there. Cole Ballard started a game, was a walk-on last year, started as a true freshman. Cole has had an outstanding offseason. I feel very confident in his growth and where his future lies. Isaiah Marshall, Detroit, Michigan, enrolled early, and we're excited about what he gives us as well.

So continued development is going to be key, but it's our goal and expectation that Jalon will play every snap he's able to play dictated by score more than help.

Q. All four Big 12 home games this year will be in Arrowhead Stadium. Does that change the game plan for special teams, kicking, or just prep, field turf, everything?

LANCE LEIPOLD: We're practicing on grass more than we ever have. We'll continue to find ways to do that. All our home games -- the first two are at Children's Mercy Park in Kansas City, Kansas. That's going to be different, gauging -- anytime you've got to gauge weather conditions as it goes, I think we have an outstanding relationship with the Chiefs, and any other nuances that we need to be aware of, we'll have -- we'll be educated on.

We have over 30 seniors and guys that have done an outstanding job helping us get this turned around. Part of me feels bad that they don't get to play in large or get a chance to play in the new stadium renovated site.

But then there's a part that's excited because much like we

pick venues like this to hold Media Days, we have a chance to play at NFL stadium for conference football games. I think the four gentlemen here today would tell you that locker room's pretty excited about it and we're going to have to be ready to go. And it is what it is. We can't control it.

I'm not going to slow down the investment that our university has made. We're not going to use anything that might be new as an excuse, and we're going to find a way to play our best football yet.

Q. You touched on it a little bit. But, first of all, what's kind of the status right now on Jalon Daniels and his injury? And, two, if there are some issues, what kind of is your plan behind that?

LANCE LEIPOLD: Again, Jalon's doing everything. Shoot, all the stuff they do behind over here, I think we've got to have him stretch or something before they do all that stuff they video back there as much -- I go, if he can make it through everything they're doing to video for pregame stuff, I think he's going to be fine.

Like I said, he's doing everything. We've gotten a lot of opinions, all those things. He's doing the throws that he's supposed to be making, all those things.

Right now, I put the hands of -- each and every day, let me back up, I try not to ask Jalon Daniels more than once a week how is he doing because I know everybody asks him that.

Of course, keep wearing a young man out with those questions. I'll be told by somebody if there's anything going on, and for that, for him, just on that part mentally, that he has a chance just to go about his business. He's excited. He wouldn't be here today if we didn't think he was going to be ready to go for this season. I can tell you that.

Everything else from that is -- I believe our practice format and how we rep players is going to give Cole Ballard and Isaiah Marshall opportunities as well as our other quarterbacks to develop. I think we've been able, unfortunately, in all three years we haven't played one quarterback the whole time.

As I said earlier, a lot of us go through that in this conference. But the emergence and the development of Jason Bean throughout his career was part of that growth and development through playing but also practicing. And I feel that if there would be an instance that Jalon's not available, the growth of especially Cole Ballard who got thrown to the fire last year is going to put us in a good

position.

Q. You made tremendous strides here in your time at KU. Are you going to be treating this season any different from the ones in the past now that expectations are much greater for you and so many people came back, there's a lot of people leaving after this season? So is the season kind of a do-or-die as some would say?

LANCE LEIPOLD: I understand what your question is because it's such a veteran football team. But I think we continue internally to look at it through recruiting and other things as you move on to the next year, and I think this new landscape allows you to continue to stay competitive a lot of different ways.

Approach, no, I think I've said it multiple times. I'll say it again, my challenge is going to be is that to make sure -- I want our young men to be confident. I want them to be proud of what they've done. I don't want that to trickle in to complacency though. And that's my responsibility. It's my responsibility to our staff that we continue to do the things in the type of manner that help us get where we are.

But I also think that our track record as a staff at our last two jobs, I don't care what level it is, it still goes how you go about your business, and we're able to build things for consistency.

It's not that we're going to build it and you're going to disappear for a while. That's going to continue to be our mindset, and we're going to approach it in that way.

Q. What is your relationship like with AD Travis Goff and how has that fostered a bright future for this Kansas football program?

LANCE LEIPOLD: That's a great question. I've said this before. This is the best alignment that I've personally gone through from football coach to athletic director and athletic director to chancellor that I've ever been a part of.

I can't say specifically as an assistant coach, but I would challenge those -- I can remember way back as a graduate assistant, when Barry Alvarez talked about Donna Shalala as the president or chancellor and Pat Richter was the athletic director and that program was able to take the steps to put it where it is today. Without that, you don't have a chance.

And the unique thing that became a tough beginning hurdle, so to speak, at Kansas, was Travis was hired just weeks before I was hired myself.

But the thing is, that partnership and alignment, because we were in it together, allowed us to have conversations and talk about visions and go into it arm in arm that we're going to take this thing on and build something special at Kansas.

Q. When you have three captains that are leaving, what do you look for as a head coach to fill in those leadership voids within the locker room?

LANCE LEIPOLD: Well, first of all, our strength coach, Matt Gildersleeve, does a great job in the offseason, just our player development offseason teams. We do like a lot of places, you have offseason team captains, you draft teams, you do different things, but there's leadership development things.

We've done things to cultivate leadership in anticipation of others leaving, putting them in the roles and responsibilities to make sure some certain things are done within the program.

But you know, some guys, they're better at being really good followers. Some guys aren't as vocal. There are some other things.

But when we're fortunate to have 30-plus seniors, we have a lot of guys who have great maturity, great understanding, and, of course, they bought into what we're doing so they understand to help lead the newcomers into the program, and I feel very confident that we're going to have the type of leadership that we need this season.

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