



Caeleb Copeland Looks To Lead By Example As Returning Senior To Edwardsville Baseball Team, Is A Key Player For Tigers As Team Defends Title

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
March 19 2023 2:38 PM

EDWARDSVILLE - Caeleb Copeland is a key returning senior to the Edwardsville High baseball team and was a major contributor to the Tigers in 2022, as he hit .422 with a home run and 24 RBIs as the Tigers went 36-4 and won the IHSA Class 4A state championship over Mundelein 4-3 in suburban Chicago.



As the Tigers are underway in preseason practice for the 2023 season, which begins Mar. 16 at home against Lockport Township at Tom Pile Field, Copeland feels that things are going along very well for the club.

"They're going great," Copeland said during a recent interview. "Our team, we've got to get the rust off like any other team, but we do that pretty quickly, we're getting into the swing of things, quicker than we did last year and our culture keeps building year to year, getting better. And we've got some star players coming back and we feel pretty confident about that. We've got a lot of young players who are ready to fight for their spot and prove they belong here. I think we'll have another great season."

The culture is a very upbeat and positive one for the Tigers and it's something that permeates throughout the entire Edwardsville athletic program. The culture is something that Copeland is proud to be a part of.

"Yeah, I mean, every single guy out here wants to be here," Copeland said, "and it's their passion. Nobody is sluggish, everybody builds on the other person and it's just a bunch of guys having fun playing baseball and obviously, when we've got to do business, we do business. But most of the time, we're having fun and we're also getting our jobs done."

The feeling of the team after winning the championship game on June 11 in Chicagoland was a very special one indeed for the Tigers' players, coaches and fans alike. It's a feeling Copeland and his teammates won't soon forget.

"Unlike any other I've had in my baseball career," Copeland said. "The emotions came as soon as that third out was got in the bottom of the seventh. And I think I can speak for everybody, all the guys who were on that team, saying that was the best moment of their baseball careers, because it was mine, by far. And we're just trying to recreate that feeling."

Copeland is seeing his role on this year's team as one of a leader, who'll show the younger players the ropes and how things are done the Edwardsville way, which adds to the positive atmosphere of the team.

"I'm just trying to be a leader," Copeland said. "I try to lead by example, because I've started for about two years here and I think there were a lot of young guys who can just be shown the ropes and we can continue that culture, because it's been embedded in me by coach (Tim) Funkhouser and the whole coaching staff and previous players before me. They showed me the ropes and I think it's just time for me to show, lead by example and just be the best leader I can be."

Copeland also likes the Tigers' chances of repeating as state champions in 2023.

"I mean, every year, we're going to have a chance to win it," Copeland said. "I don't want to come off as arrogant, but I mean, I think if you don't have a chance to win it, you're not going to win it. So, I think everyone on this ball club believes we've got a good chance to win it and we're going to give it our best shot, that we're going to put all the hard work we can."

Copeland knows that his team wants to start off well right off the bat when the Tigers face Lockport Township in the season opener at Tom Pile Field on Mar. 16.

"Yeah, we've got a tournament against a bunch of Chicago teams coming down, that we may see later in the year," Copeland said. "It should be a good test and I think we're up to it. We did it last year and we'll do it again. And I think every single player on this team is up to the challenge. I'm just ready to play baseball, very excited."