

Kellie Nattress

April 6, 2018

UNC Football Opinion Column

The only positive thing UNC football fans can take coming off the worst season since 2006 is the hope that next season can't get any worse. The hope.

That hope dwindles hearing head coach Larry Fedora go on a spiel about consistency when asked who's performing well this spring, because maybe no names come to mind right away.

That hope dwindles hearing Fedora answer "Yes" when asked if there are any specific adjustments being made, followed by an even quicker "No" when asked if there were any he had to share.

That hope dwindles hearing Fedora praise Nathan Elliott for not turning the ball over once he finally talked about who's doing well, which is like giving a quarterback a gold star for being a quarterback. It also fails to acknowledge Elliot's five combined interceptions against Miami and N.C. State alone.

But that's just Fedora- giving out gold stars. Especially with his compel and committed system, similar to being put on red light or green light in preschool. In preschool, you get a pat on the back and maybe a lollipop for staying on green light. At UNC, you get your name on a whiteboard. That's pretty much the only specific Fedora gave the entire interview of how he is getting his players to do better. He also admitted to going easy on the guys in the locker-room if they seem to have a hard time coping after a loss. Again, preschool.

Fedora also did not have an immediate answer for anything he has seen that makes him optimistic for next season, which tells us that maybe there isn't much. He did say that they evaluate if the guys push their chairs in after dinner, because that's totally going to help them win more games. It's sad when you have to focus on guys pushing their chairs in, because nothing on the field itself makes you excited.

As Fedora walked into the press conference room with his casual grey-blue cotton polo tee and an unshaven beard, it was clear as soon as he spoke that he actually believed in UNC football getting better. He really, really believes it. But his casual approach may not be enough. His belief may not be enough.

With their 3-9 record in 2017, Fedora's team had the fewest wins, points & yards per game in his six years as head coach. So maybe he thinks if he didn't lose his job after that, it can only go up from here.

There are a few gold stars for the Tar Heels, but if they are enough to make the team much better as a whole, especially with its current defense, is still up in the air. Elliott led the Tar Heels to a close game against undefeated Miami in October with only a 5-point loss. He completed over 60 percent of his passes in wins against Pittsburgh and WCU. Another star is Anthony Ratliff-Williams, a wide receiver who led UNC in receptions, receiving yards and all-purpose yards in 2017. The redshirt sophomores could show promise, but it likely won't pay off if the rest of the team can't.

Fedora made many coaching changes, including hiring a new running backs coach, linebackers coach, cornerbacks coach and special teams coordinator.

“When you have any type of change,” Fedora said, “You have to introduce the new coaches to the culture.”

Hopefully not the culture of losing, because that seems to be the current culture. If the Tar Heels want to get any better, they need to create a brand new one.

The defense will be difficult for even the best coaches to fix, however. UNC’s defense finished 101st in FBS with 436.1 yards allowed per game. It gave up 525 yards to Lamar Jackson on Sept. 9, which is the most by one player against UNC- ever. If the defense doesn’t improve, we can hope to see more blown games in the fourth quarter next season.

Fedora got seven new commitments from the 2018 class, but that may not be so helpful either. He got the No. 36 player in Florida, No. 24 offensive guard in Florida, No. 36 outside linebacker in Alabama and the No. 49 player in Alabama, all per 247sports. The best hope is William Barnes, the No. 5 offensive tackle in the country.

The numbers aren’t too shabby, but they also aren’t what you hope for when trying to turn a 3-9 team into an 12-0 team that Fedora seems to think they can be, even this season.

“I’ve never gone into a season ever,” Fedora said, “thinking I’ll be happy if we win 8 games.”

Fedora might want to change that unrealistic and likely untrue mindset, because UNC will be lucky to win six games in the 2018-19 season.