

Copeland prepares for Notre Dame

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Ethan Copeland playing college baseball for Notre Dame is about to become a reality.

The thought of Copeland playing college baseball at any level seemed remote two years ago after a varsity career at Cedar Rapids Prairie.

A solid performer for the Hawks, Copeland was an infielder who helped Coach Todd Rima's team to a 38-6 finish and Class 4A state championship in 2016. The desire to continue playing was there for Copeland. However, there were few offers.

"I wasn't recruited out of high school very much at all," he said. "I had no athletic scholarships offered to me at any point during high school."

Now, two years later, Copeland is playing in the Iowa Valley League, keeping his skills sharp as he prepares to enter Notre Dame in the fall as a junior.

Copeland's original plan had him joining the program at Quincy University in Illinois as a walk-on.

"I wasn't super-happy with the coaching staff and the amount of attention and support they gave

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me," he said. "I also was probably going to have to red-shirt my first year and I wasn't too excited about that either."

Then, near the end of his senior season at Prairie, he got a call that would change his career path.

"My old USSSA coach, Brian Furlong, told me that he got the head coaching job at Heartland (Community College) in Illinois and wanted me to go with him," Copeland said. "He knew I was signed but just wanted to run the idea by me. I told him about my issues and concerns with Quincy and how they were handling me."

"I visited Heartland and ended up committing that night," he continued. "Furlong) sold me on cheap school, the ability to play right away and being in a program where I was wanted."

So just days after helping the Hawks to the state title, Copeland packed his bags and headed to Normal, Ill. Needless to say, it was a beneficial relationship for both sides.

After hitting .385 as a freshman in 36 games for Heartland, Copeland headed to Texas to participate in an intense workout program.

"I went down and trained at APEC in Texas and they played a huge role in the athlete and person I am today," he said. "They did so much for me regarding my diet, weight, strength, speed and mental game. I got there running a 6.8 60 and left running a 6.3."

He also added 15 pounds of muscle to his frame.

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The work paid dividends as Copeland hit .323 and stole 28 bases in 48 games this season, helping the Hawks to a 46-10 mark. It was during his sophomore season that Copeland's play caught the attention of Notre Dame Coach Mik Aoki and his staff.

"Notre Dame contacted me towards the two-thirds mark in our season and said that they had a need for a middle infielder to come in and have the opportunity to play right away," he said. "They came and watched me play on a Tuesday and liked me a lot.

"I visited campus on Friday and committed that Sunday. "It was an unreal experience."

Copeland will be a rare two-year player at Notre Dame. He will be just the fourth junior college recruit to ever play for the Irish and he intends to leave his mark.

"I just hope when I get to Notre Dame I can compete for a spot and work into the lineup everyday to help them win games," he said. "It's going to be the biggest challenge of my life athletically and academically and I'm going to work really hard to try and find success for the team and myself.

"They have a very solid program out there and I just hope to get there and contribute to wins and enjoy every minute of it."

Between now and his Aug. 15 reporting date at Notre Dame, Copeland will be taking summer classes at Kirkwood and playing second base for Red Top. He is enjoying his first summer in the IVL.

"The IVL is a little more laid back of a league but I'm very passionate and play the game very hard because that's just always how I've played," he said. "My parents raised me that way. Something that drives me is just the inner drive I have to see how good I can really be at this game."

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Copeland also wants to continue to reward Furlong for giving him a chance at Heartland.

"He truly changed the course of my life and I owe him everything for taking a chance on me," Copeland said. "I want to have no regrets when my career is over. I have been doubted my entire life and I like proving those people wrong."