

Ohio State Head Coach Urban Meyer Previews Michigan



In the Woody Hayes Athletic Center team room Monday, Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer met the media for his weekly press conference and previewed Saturday's noon kickoff against Michigan at Ohio Stadium. Ahead of the de facto Big Ten East Division title game with the No. 4 Wolverines (10-1, 8-0), how have the No. 10 Buckeyes (10-1, 7-1) turned the page from surviving by a 52-51 edge in overtime? Meyer ties up the win over the Terrapins (5-6, 3-5) and looks ahead to The Game.

Urban Meyer

COACH MEYER: Thanks for being here. Couple comments about last week's game. And I talked to their coach afterwards, Maryland. On behalf of our team, too, just much respect to the Maryland players, coaching staff and their fans. What they've gone through, the tragedy in the spring, and that was a tremendous effort. And I hear about attendance. When I looked up, it was packed.

And also, I always thank Buckeye Nation for being there full force. I think we had almost half the stadium, and much appreciation for that.

Defense, champions, Dre'Mont Jones, graded out at champion. Chase Young had two sacks. And Malik Harrison had three tackles for loss and fumble recovery. Player of the game was Tuf Borland.

And on offense, offense, you had offensive line, which played 105 plays, Isaiah Prince graded out well. Demetrius Knox, Michael Jordan, Malcolm Pridgeon and I think Josh might be his first one.

Josh came in and played — I should have that for you — how many plays he played. But he played hard for us. At tight end, we had two of them. Luke Farrell graded out at champion and Rashod Berry with two catches for 15 yards, and I think they're both in overtime, if I remember.

Running back, you had Demario McCall, which was great to see. Especially in the fourth quarter with 1:40 left on his kick return. And wide receivers, Terry McLaurin, four receptions, 118 yards. Parris, five touches. Johnnie Dixon, six receptions for 102 yards. Bin Victor, two big ones. And then K.J. Hill, three catches, 21 yards — and 19 yards, excuse me. Great touchdown.

Co-players of the game were Dwayne Haskins, 28-of-38 for 464 total yards and six total touchdowns. Ran the ball the best he has. Obviously, and J.K. Dobbins, just can't say enough about that guy. Mike

Weber had a quad contusion. And he had 37 carries for 203 yards and a touchdown.

Special teams player of the game was Demario McCall. 42-yard kick return to get us in field position to strike with no timeouts left. Josh Proctor played well. Two tackles inside the 20, one tackle inside the 20. Two total tackles on kickoff coverage.

And Drue Chrisman, downed a punt — or fair caught, I believe, a punt on the 5-yard line. I just had a chat with our players about that, really tough decision on 38-yard line, fourth-and-5. And if it wasn't for a guy like Drue I probably would have went for it in that situation, which that's you're putting your defense in bad situation if you don't get it.

We went, punted the ball down to the 5-yard line. They went three and out. Seven plays later we scored a touchdown and that was because of our punt execution and our gunners and Drue Chrisman.

I'll answer any questions for you.

Q. After watching video what have you been able to discern about the defense and what happened?

COACH MEYER: A bunch of things happened. Obviously it was very alarming to see — I thought that we started to crack the rock the last few weeks as far as playing good defense, elimination of big plays. And obviously it was not good.

So we're not blaming people, whether it be missed tackle, alignment, scheme, whatever it is. It's a matter of getting ready for this one. We watched it with the defense and it was not good.

Q. Missed tackles, was that a problem?

COACH MEYER: Eight missed tackles for the game. The goal, you want it to be around five. Huge hits and that was a part of it.

Q. You talked about Dwayne and toughness after the game at Maryland. What does it do for an offense when that mindset starts to emanate from the quarterback position?

COACH MEYER: I made this comment, the quarterback position is the most unique position, in my opinion, in really all of sport, where everybody's relying on you. Everybody's looking at you. You have a responsibility what the other ten guys are doing. You have to make all kinds of decisions within 1.8 to 2.5 seconds. And you have to be a tough guy. You have to lead. Everybody's got their own Drew Brees to Peyton Manning and Tom Brady how they lead.

And Dwayne really took a step, really took a step. No more important than the last play of the game when he dropped his pads and had to get in there and he got in there.

Q. Why do you think that happened? Had there been ongoing discussions about that?

COACH MEYER: Sure. I think Ryan Day is a great football coach. And the two of them — everybody has big dreams and part of being a big dream is being that guy that can move a team, not just throw a pretty pass but do things you have to do to win a game.

Q. Understanding what you had at that position the last few years, how much did you feel that was missing from that offense, that element?

COACH MEYER: Yeah, it's been missing big time. But you've got to make those yards up somewhere. And obviously yard-wise we're one of the top offenses in America. We picked them up in the pass game.

But the tougher the opponent you're going to have to — just the sheer numbers of the college game, you'll have to find ways to get those yards.

Q. Thayer Munford got rolled up on. Do you expect him to play this week?

COACH MEYER: He's probable. As a matter of fact the last 20 minutes I went and saw him. He's doing good. I think we'll get some practice out of him tomorrow.

Q. Offensively this year, when you guys go up-tempo, it looks like that's your most effective plan, at least to me. Are you seeing that when you analyze the film, that up-tempo is most effective?

COACH MEYER: It was effective Saturday. Kind of wore them out. Very big, strong team that got wore out a little bit. A lot of it is game management of the entire scenario of offense, defense, kicking, et cetera. Those are game management decisions as we're going.

Q. Back to the defense. I think these numbers, the total defense would be the worst in school history and that's really a mouthful. I wonder, that's not just a one-game thing. Have there been conversations with the staff? Have they justified that it's not as bad as those numbers would make it seem? What have those staff discussions been like?

COACH MEYER: Uncomfortable and direct. And I was saying around here: Win the moment. The moment is to get ready for the next one, not what happened against Oregon State or even last week. That's hard to do.

Your question is legit and very uncomfortable to discuss but our players deserve our best and that's to focus on today and that's what's coming next.

Q. The one thing that Coach Schiano characterized on Saturday it's one week, and college football oftentimes you can look like a very different team from one week to the next. How does this defense get where it needs to be to win in a rivalry situation on Saturday?

COACH MEYER: Game plan and spend a ridiculous amount of time in there, from 6.00 a.m. to probably 11 tonight and come up with a scheme and make sure our checkers are in the right place. And my job is to make sure our team is rested and it's a busy week. Had band here yesterday. We have the senior tackle. We have Thanksgiving and then we've got the rival.

Q. The quad bruise for Weber —

COACH MEYER: He's good. Baron Browning is cleared too.

Q. Michigan's defense is best in the country by a lot. When you watch them on tape, what stands out to you and how big a challenge is this going to be with this offense?

COACH MEYER: Whenever you face an elite team, elite defense, which they are, personnel stands out, front seven stands out. And also very good, I think they're number one in the nation in pass defense. And just very good personnel, very well-thought out scheme and very good defense.

Q. And you guys are underdogs for the first time in a long time. Your record in those kind of games is very good. What's your message to the team about the fact that even though you're 10-1, just like Michigan is, there's a lot of doubters about this team.

COACH MEYER: We don't talk about those things. We talk about how to — it's really about game — we have a saying around here: The most prepared team will win the game. It's not who's favored and who is not. I didn't know that. And I don't imagine our team really does, I guess. If they are, then they're looking at the wrong stuff. They ought to be working on how to win an individual battle against a good

team.

Q. As a psychology major, I imagine you're going to use that later in the week?

COACH MEYER: I don't think I will. I don't usually go in those directions when — depends on what kind of team you're dealing with. One side is about getting everybody healthy; one side is about getting confidence and play your very best in the biggest game of the year.

Q. As you mentioned, I think you guys, you're second in the nation in yards per game on offense, eighth in nation in points per game on offense. We know with Dwayne and this style of quarterback it's just different than what you've done most of your career. To be at this point, with the top 10 offense, clearly, just how do you feel about how you guys have made this work with Dwayne's skill set, what you like to do offensively? You've changed in the course of the season but here you are. What's it been like and how would you evaluate it?

COACH MEYER: Well, we're an evaluation-friendly business. I would evaluate — other than we have seven turnovers, I believe, or I think it's seven fumbles. That's always my concern. My concern, if you recall, several weeks ago it was red zone offense and balance. And you're seeing our guys work tremendously hard at that.

I think Ryan Day has done a phenomenal job doing — and you don't try to force the square peg in a round hole and say, okay, we're going to run J.T.'s offense or Tebow or Braxton offense; you're going to run the Alex Smith, you're going to run the Chris Leak offense that we've had to do.

We've researched the archives but the game's changed so much anyway. I think our offensive staff has done a pretty good job, and the offensive players have done a very good job.

Q. Along the lines of a game like this, regardless who is favored or anything like that, when you're playing any team where the talent is equal, right — they're very talented, you're very talented — versus times during the year when it's just clear you guys have more talent than the team you're facing, how do you coach differently? Do you take any more risks in a game where it's equal talent where if we just butt heads all game we're not maybe guaranteed to win? How does a coach approach that?

COACH MEYER: It's our seventh one. And like you said, it's never been, in my opinion, the talent differential. It's always been extremely close. And also when you play Penn State, I think Michigan State's very close. And you've seen it, for me to say how we play, you've seen it over the years. We have to do what we need to do at the time to win the game.

And does that involve maybe more risk, more this, more that? I think it probably does. You're probably a little more conservative when it is a team that you're better than. But those are all — we're going to have stuff available. It's just how is it going during the game.

Q. Couple of Woody questions, if I may. Did you get to know him at all? You were here, I think, '86?

COACH MEYER: I did.

Q. And your memories of him, any stories in terms of —

COACH MEYER: Shelley was a girlfriend/fiancée at the time, and I remember I met him at the golf course. He was failing in his health, and I remember I met him several times, talked — I didn't really get to sit down and talk to him. Shelley said, can I please go meet him. And I started to walk over there, there was a line of about 30 people shaking his hand.

And I said, I'll bring you over to the ROTC building at some point, we'll say hi to him. And then he passed away. She never got to meet him.

I grew up admiring him, and you see my office, all kinds of Woody Hayes stuff in there.

Q. Second thing, can his methods, could you get away with using his methods today in terms of the —

COACH MEYER: Zero chance. I will say this — I should say that much differently, because I have so much respect for both — I'll say that Bo Schembechler and Woody Hayes, that was the 10-year war, that was the time growing up, so it's just changed a lot.

But guys like Woody Hayes, I'm sure would have adapted. If you would have said in 1972, the way he coached would you be able to do that today. No chance. But he's a brilliant person that would have adjusted.

Q. How about the way he addressed this game. There's always so much respect between Michigan and Ohio State. But with he and Bo, they would go at it a little bit, even publicly. Is today almost too PC with this rivalry? It's all respect, it's don't —

COACH MEYER: I can only speak for myself, and I think the words are critical. I've been that way for several years. Absolutely incredible respect. And how do you respect someone and something, so that someone's your rival, some things are the rivalry game? How do you respect — you work so freakin' hard at it to do your very best.

That's our sign. That's not talking about it, not publicly going after — because we don't, I don't do that. And that's — how do you show respect for them and the game? You work, which we are. We're working so damn hard for this.

Q. How much of Michigan did you watch, do you watch every year?

COACH MEYER: Just (indiscernible) cross over.

Q. And I guess do you put it like in memory bank? Do you like store it away for later use? Or do you just wait until it's this week to break all of it?

COACH MEYER: Our staff surely do. We pay special attention and you try to — as it's going throughout the year you don't want to lose some thoughts.

Q. This week, roots are probably more important, roots for people on this team, roots from where people on Michigan's team came from. There's this thing that fans tend to say a lot, that I've read a lot when things aren't going well: Urban Meyer hasn't recruited enough kids from Ohio, because Ohio players inherently understand what a privilege it is to wear this uniform. Do you buy that?

COACH MEYER: I'm disappointed at times when I see that we see some of these guys that are just playing their tails off and we have opportunities to get, and a lot of times it doesn't even get to me. And I think this recruiting calendar has really put us in a tough situation at times where we don't have spring football in the state of Ohio. And a lot of it at times is projection.

And you see these just fantastic football players that people can say we missed on. And that's true. But they commit so early, some schools are coming offering 20, 25 Ohio guys right away. I kind of wish we could do that.

But you can't. You've got to watch them play and get them to camps and watch — that's just the recruiting process. That's been kind of taken away in the last five years where a lot of times you don't get them to camp. Does that make sense?

Q. Yes.

COACH MEYER: A lot of times they're committed in March of their junior year, and you're, like, I just want to watch this guy play, watch a couple plays in his senior year. So that's kind of what's taking place.

Q. When Ohio kids are on this team, do they approach things differently, when you get Ohio kids on this team —

COACH MEYER: Sure, I get your question, as opposed to a California kid.

Q. Yeah, I'm not saying that they don't play hard, but just the inherent understanding.

COACH MEYER: Absolutely.

Q. And second of all, we talk a lot about pressure. People say did you feel pressure during the game or do you feel pressure to perform or pressure to do this or that. But this week a lot of coaches are judged by their performance in this game. Obviously you've done pretty well. Coach Harbaugh started off 0-3. Do you buy into the coach's pressure of having to perform to get the results during this week? And if the coach does feel that, can it trickle down to your team, in terms of mannerisms, behavior?

COACH MEYER: I'll say this, especially the time and the effort and the players and the coaching staff — and if you're asking me, the head coach — the amount of time and effort that you put into these games — and certainly there's no bigger than this — you know, the word pressure absolutely is there. For someone to say there's no pressure that's not true.

Your question is well thought out: Does it trickle down? And that's where you've got to really do a good job and say, yeah, it's all there. Dwayne Haskins is going to feel pressure, but he's got to have confidence with Ryan Day and myself that we're going to put him in the right positions. Does that make sense?

Q. When a coach does show they're being impacted by the pressure —

COACH MEYER: That could be a negative. That could be a negative. You've got to —

Q. Do you have to watch yourself?

COACH MEYER: You have to display confidence and with the plan.

Q. Speaking of Dwayne Haskins and confidence in the plan, et cetera, do you divorce yourself, weren't standing on the sidelines on Saturday, your offense went on three or four drives that were critical. I mean, one in a game would be huge, but three or four. What did that just tell you about Dwayne in particular, but the offense in general, on maybe the confidence it has that it can rise to the occasion no matter what?

COACH MEYER: I made these notes just as I was walking in, because it's not like me to be the Joe Positive guy. I'm usually the opposite. But he had almost 700 yards against a top 25 defense. We were down by 14 three times on the road. Your quarterback and receivers made incredible plays down the stretch all day.

Your tailback ran 37 times against a stout defense. Your offensive line played 105 plays and there's

nothing more important than the 105th play with a backup left tackle.

And so, yeah, that's kind of the mindset I want to get through this building, too, is that it was not — we're 10-1, we have to move forward. We're going to try to fix our problems. You've been hearing that for a while, but that's what we're doing.

On offense, you try to build them up make sure that one is over get them rested and healthy, 105 plays, right now that's my biggest concern is how do I get through Tuesday, Wednesday practice against this very good defense but yet been be ready to swing because they'll have to swing on Saturday.

Q. Josh Alabi, you touched on him a little bit, how huge was that to step into a game when he did and deliver, what does that just tell you about him?

COACH MEYER: That's been coming. You've heard me talk about him getting better each week. There was a time he had some injury issues, too. There was a time five weeks ago that there was no depth. Branden Bowen was there to go, too, but we have a little bit of depth there.

Q. This game is about microcosm, one-on-one matchup as much as anything. Is Isaiah Prince, in your opinion, I think final home game in the stadium, he's going to be going against probably Rashan Gary a lot you would think, is he up to that task, what's your feeling of confidence there and why do you have it?

COACH MEYER: He is. He's played against Rashan the last year and hung in there. And they're very good. And I think Isaiah's worked as hard as any offensive lineman I've ever had. I saw him today and he's going to work really hard for this game.

Q. One last question about Earle. First Michigan week without Earle. I'm sure you think about it him a lot, but what will you think about Earle Bruce this week in particular?

COACH MEYER: Obviously very close to him. In 1986, that was the first time that I experienced it with coach, and then obviously the 1987 game up in Ann Arbor, that was his last game as a coach. So I think about that quite often.

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