

Big Ten Conference Football Media Days

Tuesday July 24, 2018

Urban Meyer Ohio State

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer.

URBAN MEYER: I'm honored to represent the great state of Ohio and The Ohio State University and our football program. Excited to talk about our players and our team here for the next few hours.

And then obviously had to make a change on our coaching staff yesterday. It was the best interests of our team. I'll answer maybe a couple questions about that.

But, once again, our focus is on our team and our players moving forward. Honored to be here and happy to answer any questions.

Q. You said earlier that you were aware of the incident with Zach in 2009. Your inquiry into 2015 was unfounded. You couldn't find anything. Why fire Zach now if you had kept him on staff after 2009?

URBAN MEYER: I'm going to address the 2009 because I've been asked about that. In 2009 Zach was an intern, a very young couple. As I do many times, most coaches and people in leadership positions, you receive a phone call, first thing you do is tell your boss, let the experts do their jobs.

We're certainly not going to investigate. It came back to me that what was reported wasn't actually what happened. And Shelley and I actually both got involved because of our relationship with that family and advised for counseling and wanted to help as we moved forward.

2015, I got a text late last night something happened in 2015. And there was nothing. Once again, there's nothing -- once again, I don't know who creates a story like that.

And then this recent one was you press pause, it's something our team lives by, E + R = O, you press pause and get your mind right and step up, press pause and gather information, get your mind right, gather energy, and then step up to do the right thing. That's the position I hold. That's how we did that.



Q. It's my understanding that Brian Hartline will serve as the wide receivers coach at least on an interim basis. Is that going to be the case? And what have you learned about having him around for the last year or so?

URBAN MEYER: That decision will be made later in the week. Any speculation up to that point is certainly that. I have not even addressed my staff. I addressed several of our staff. It happened rather quickly.

I get back tonight. Tomorrow we'll have conversation. I'll probably release something by the end of the week is what our plans are.

Q. Just to clarify, did firing Zach now, is that -- is it because any of this became public, or is it because there was another incident that led to the latest protective order on Friday?

URBAN MEYER: I'm not going to get into that, Doug. It's a very personal matter. The decision was made. I think the details that I'm obligated to give, I gave.

You're talking about people's lives, et cetera. So the decision was made. It's time to move forward. And we are in a public world. I try not to operate, especially when you're talking about personnel and people, making things because it became public.

But to say that doesn't have something to do with it, it does a little bit. I'm one of those ones I really don't care about that. I try to stay focused on what's the most important thing. That's our players and our team.

But I do understand the value. It's The Ohio State University is bigger than all of us. So you have to do what's right by them. And the timing. It wasn't just my decision. It was a group effort on several people that I rely on.

Q. Knowing your relationship with Earle Bruce, how did that factor into all of this? And obviously you have a relationship with that family and with Zach that extends beyond just him being an employee of yours, how did that factor into all of this?

URBAN MEYER: Well, Zach was first hired because of his skill set. I knew about it because he was with me at Florida. Played for me at actually Bowling Green. But Coach Bruce now is the strongest relationship I've ever

had other than my father. I've made that clear many, many times.

So the big picture that was very important in this particular situation, you know, I think that's one of the hard jobs of a leader; you have to make decisions that are for the best of the program, and I did.

Q. How much of that was it violated one of the core values of the program in dealing with respect toward women and domestic violence? The second question, a football question: Just how talented is this roster from top to bottom in comparison with what you've had previously at Ohio State?

URBAN MEYER: The core values is something that -- there's a difference between a mistake and a core value. When I was six years old, I was sat down by my father, and it was explained to me about what core values are and what mistakes are. Mistakes are correctible. Core values are who you are.

And there are certain things that -- we sat down that day, I remember six years old, trying to think: What the heck is he talking about? But it stuck with me. I'm 54 now, and to this day I still teach my family the same thing. So it is -- core values are very strong. So that was a big part of it.

Number two, very talented team. Very good people. Guys have worked hard. We have a tradition that Coach Mick will hand me the teams on August 2nd before we start our work on August 3rd, and I'm anxious to see them go.

The difference between today's calendar as in years past, I see them all the time. I've been at the last four workouts, I believe. I know what we're getting. Even the young players, a lot of times you have no idea what you're getting until you watch them go.

But the incoming freshmen, we have a good feel. Obviously not the contact part, but the athleticism. Very good team. Gotta stay healthy and be smart. The key word "stay efficient." 25 practices, no two-a-days, and a day off during training camp. Have to be very efficient how we get ready for Oregon State.

Q. First of all, just your expectations for Dwayne Haskins this year at quarterback? And also can you give an update on Tuf Borland, his injury status, how he's coming along?

URBAN MEYER: Dwayne Haskins, the position will never change: The expectation is to be the best quarterback in the Big Ten, which is very hard because we have some excellent quarterbacks.

The one -- the void is going to be the leadership component that that guy -- I can't remember his name -- was there for four years prior, J.T., who I love that guy, always will. And what he did for our team inside, not many people were aware of, I'll forever be indebted to J.T. Barrett, that's how good a person, leader he was.

This guy is very skilled. The guy behind him is very skilled. We took the snap today, I made it clear that Dwayne would be the quarterback, but 30 days from now, a lot happens in 30 days.

Matt Baldwin is our third team quarterback, he's up to 209 pounds right now, he's gained 20-some pounds. He had a tough injury, but I watched him work, watched him throw. I wish we had one more, because you like to have four. But Dwayne is very talented throwing the ball.

But that's one-third of what a quarterback has to do. And lead and toughness are the other two.

Tuf Borland is doing great. He's got the same pain threshold as J.T. Barrett. J.T. Barrett, when the doctors told me after our rivalry game it's going to be several weeks, I kind of laughed as I walked out of the room, said: That means he'll be five days. Same with Tuf Borland. Well, it's a really tough injury. I'm looking at Tuf, smiling, he winks at me. He's on course to perform this fall.

Q. I want to ask the Barrett question about Dwayne Haskins. From the moment it was apparent that Joe was not coming back, have you seen Dwayne seize leadership of the offense, the team? It would be impossible to perhaps match what J.T. did, but in your mind is he putting himself in the right spot for that?

URBAN MEYER: Yes. And the big word is respect and earned trust. It's the job of a leader. Earn trust. That's the most -- all due respect to other sports, this is the most unique position of all of sport. You have to understand the entire defense, have to understand all other ten players, what they're doing on offense. He has to make decisions in split seconds. And, by the way, he's got people like Bosa trying to tear his throat out.

And so very unique position. But he's done very well. And Tate has done very well, too.

Q. Urban, have you ever been in a position like this where you've had to replace a coach this close to the season? And how do you do that? How do you move forward from that?

URBAN MEYER: I've been fortunate we've had very

little -- we've had turnover where people have gone on to become head coaches, or like Kerry Coombs decided to go to the NFL, but this is a unique situation.

It's also very unique I have the strength of young coaches I have on my staff. This has been a very -- this is the best group of young coaches I've had on both sides of the ball. And they're very involved with our preparation game plan and development of our players.

Q. With all due respect to the Ohio State-Michigan rivalry, which is storied and among the best in the nation, Michigan hasn't made it a rivalry with you on the field since in quite a while, but Michigan State has. I know that you greatly respect Dantonio. He feels the same. Can you talk about that Michigan State-Ohio State rivalry, please?

URBAN MEYER: I think it's always been there. I remember back in the day, we lost -- 1986 we lost to Coach Perles at Ohio Stadium, scored on the first play of the game.

When I was at Notre Dame, we played there and played against them every year.

And I agree with what you said, maybe all the focus is on all the rivalry, that will never change. And I don't believe it's just Coach Dantonio, I believe it's Michigan State, Ohio State. There's incredible history there. It just so happens we're in a seven-year -- this will be the seventh year that every game comes down basically to the wire. A lot of times it's for the championship, and that's a credit to not just Coach Dantonio but, my gosh, they've got good players.

The good thing is getting ready for that game, there's zero motivation; our players have so much respect for that team that they're going to be ready.

Q. I know at the end of spring football that Joe and Dwayne were pretty neck and neck, what seemed to be neck and neck. Is there any more insight in how that conversation went with Joe or how he decided to move on and go to LSU?

URBAN MEYER: Very tough conversation in a positive way. Joe Burrow, the last two weeks of spring practice, did about everything he could to win that spot. I really haven't talked much about this, but it was right there.

Joe and his family and I had open conversation all the way throughout, including conversation after the season about how we're going to handle the spring. Ryan Day did a phenomenal job. Even Joe and his family were very gracious and thankful.

I think the graduate transfer rule is very fair. I know

that that's a lot of conversation about that. It's very fair. Because the ultimate objective academically is to graduate. He fulfilled that obligation and he should have a right to do what he wants to do.

Do I wish he was still with us? I do. I love Joe Burrow. I love his family and have great respect for him. And that's not going to stop. That relationship will continue for many years.

Q. Last season was the first time the Big Ten missed the College Football Playoff. I'm sure you're not concerned with an outside perspective; however, do you feel that the league is set up despite missing what is the ultimate goal for a lot of programs?

URBAN MEYER: We had a great conversation in the spring meetings at the Big Ten. We have to make sure that scheduling is a big part of it.

The Big Ten Conference not making it to the playoff, I don't blame others. I blame ourselves.

It's not my job to worry about anything else in this country other than Ohio State. And we lost two games. We have a very tough schedule. Our schedule last year was very hard.

So I think the Big Ten Conference has moved from -- I can only give you the historical perspective from 2012 to 2018. It's not even close.

The competitive level at the Big Ten Conference right now is as strong as I've ever been in any conference. Speaking in particular about the Big Ten East -- once again, I can just give you my historical perspective of the different conferences I've worked in -- it's the most competitive division that I've ever been a part of.

So how that relates to the College Football Playoff, that's too abstract. There's committees involved and other things involved. That's an issue the Big Ten is going to have to face.

But the SEC faces it as well. All conferences face good teams within their conference. You lose two or three games or a couple games in that conference, it's tough to make the playoff.

Q. The new rule regarding redshirts and the ability to have four games now leeway to make decisions on players, as you go into your process of evaluating and depth charts and assigning playing time, that sort of thing, what changes for you, if anything?

URBAN MEYER: That's a great question. We've had conversation amongst our staff. There's not a template

to say how we're going to handle this. I know every year when it starts getting down to that November run, you're dealing with injuries. You're dealing with other issues, fatigue, et cetera. You'd like to have some bodies available.

What happens remains to be seen. You hate to save a guy for those last four games and not put them in the game. So it's still to be determined. I think the rule's good. I think it's good for the student-athlete, which is what matters.

And I'm excited to see how we can utilize it. But I can't tell you exactly how we're going to do it right now.

Q. You've been on both sides of the coin with the Big Ten champion in the playoff. How much of a concern is it to you long term that this conference, with all this depth, hasn't had its champion make the College Football Playoff the last two seasons?

URBAN MEYER: It's very concerning. Once again, I don't -- for someone to speak on someone who hasn't spent a lot of time studying why and how, I'm too busy doing other things.

I imagine Jim Delany and the higher-ups are having conversations that that should not happen from one of the premier conferences in America.

But, once again, for me to give my input, I don't know enough about what exactly the committee -- originally I was told about different levels, what's important to make the playoff. And I don't know if we live by that. But, once again, that's just my opinion.

I've not studied it. I'm not going to study it. It's none of my business. My job is to go get ready for Oregon State. But I think there needs to be conversation and further conversation about that.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.