

B1G Coaches Teleconference: Ohio State's Meyer, Minnesota's Fleck Share Updates, Preview Saturday



On the Big Ten coaches teleconference Tuesday, Ohio State's Urban Meyer and Minnesota's P.J. Fleck provided updates in several key areas and looked forward to Saturday's noon kickoff on Fox Sports 1 from Ohio Stadium. With the resumption of practices for both programs, the two head coaches broke down the latest from each side before the No. 3 Buckeyes (6-0, 3-0) take on the Golden Gophers (3-2, 0-2).

Urban Meyer

- In three of the past four weeks — between wins against TCU (40-28 on Sept. 15), at Penn State (27-26 on Sept. 22) and vs. Indiana (49-26 on Oct. 6) — Ohio State has either comeback or pulled away in the second half. Meyer credited two areas for why the Buckeyes have been able to bear down later on.
 - “Certainly, I don’t feel the depth like other people say we have,” Meyer said. “We’re dealing with some injuries, etcetera, but there’s two things. One thing is the depth and quality of players that can roll in there. Two is the strength staff. You’ve heard me talk about the conditioning and how hard our guys train and work. They’re prepared for second-half type of ballgames and they perform well.”
- Minnesota’s defense ranks 21st in total defense with 324.2 yards allowed per game. In particular, Meyer mentioned the Golden Gophers’ lack of big plays at 5.7 yards allowed per play.
 - “They’re one of the best teams in the country at giving up big plays,” Meyer said. “They keep it all in front of them and we’re kind of a big-play offense, and so that’s the biggest challenge I see right now.”
- Ohio State ranks 118th penalties per game (8.5) and 119th in yards per game (80.83). Meyer said “it’s always a concern.”
 - “I’m not one of those guys to go crazy on penalties, especially when you’re playing aggressive, etcetera,” Meyer said. “But yeah, that’s far too many. That’s something that

we've addressed constantly and constantly. The ones you can't have are on the kicking game. That's when we lose our mind because those are the most devastating penalties there are. We've had some of those. ... We work extremely hard. Usually, fundamental technique and effort overcomes penalties, and that's something we continue to strive to work on."

- Fifth-year senior Brady Taylor, who had arthroscopic surgery on his left knee, figures to factor into the depth on the offensive line when he returns within the next couple of weeks. Meyer previously said Ohio State hoped for Taylor's return around the Oct. 27 off week, but it might not shake up the second-team unit entirely.
 - "It's just the quality of depth right now," Meyer said. "I don't know what the future holds, but right now, (redshirt freshman right guard) Wyatt Davis is really coming on and he's next in. (Freshman right tackle) Nick Petit-Frere is really coming on and (junior left tackle) Josh Alabi's come on, (redshirt freshman center) Josh Myers. We just need a little bit more depth in there."
- Meyer said there was "no update yet" on Brian Snead, who has been practicing but has not been with Ohio State for its past four games after the freshman running back's last appearance in the 52-3 win over Rutgers on Sept. 8. Asked about Malik Barrow, who has not played since he suffered his torn ACL during the 2017 season, Meyer explained the sophomore defensive tackle's status.
 - "He's still rehabbing and working his tail off to get back," Meyer said, adding that Barrow is still on the roster.

P.J. Fleck

- Asked about Pete Werner, Fleck called the sophomore linebacker "a very active tackler" and "really good in space" with incredible instincts.
 - "As a linebacker, the best quality you can have is you're instinctual," Fleck said. "The closer you get to that line of scrimmage, the more instincts you've got to have, especially down in that box like that. So that's what I think he does for them. He's a really talented football player."
- Fleck relies on freshmen running backs Bryce Williams and Mohamed Ibrahim without sidelined seniors Rodney Smith and Shannon Brooks.
 - "Mohamed is a guy that's really, really tough," Fleck said. "He's got a great center of gravity. He's incredibly strong, one of the strongest players on our team, pound for pound, and he's not that big of a guy, but he's incredibly strong. He's got to continue to work on breaking tackles and things like that, but when he gets in a pile, he push a pile pretty good. He's a one-cut type back, he's got great vision, he can see it, hit it, and when there's one yard to get, he can get three or four, so I'm really proud of how hard he's worked so far."
- Meyer described Fleck's defense as "outstanding" Monday, although Minnesota enters Ohio State off of 90 points in lopsided losses to Maryland (42-13 on Sept. 22) and Iowa (48-31 on Oct. 6) the past two weeks.
 - "When you give up 90 points in the last two games, as a Big Ten opponent, I guess I wouldn't consider it outstanding right now," Fleck said. "But I would say our front seven's playing really well. We wanted to make a lot of adjustments from last year to this year on the front seven and see our front seven improve. We knew we'd be young. After Antoine Winfield Jr. got hurt, we knew we'd have to really get younger on the back end. I think

that's what hurt us against Iowa was our back end, so we've got to clean up some things back there. We've got to protect those young men back there the best we possibly can, but you've still got to play football. So I think our front seven's doing a great job, got to continue to improve in the back end and really have it all come together. But we're getting there. We're closer than we were. The scoreboard is the end result and that's what you get judged on, how many points, but against Iowa, we held them to less than three yards a carry and right around 100 yards. That's what we wanted to do. Both tight ends had OK games, but they didn't necessarily dominate and beat us. But they found a way that, if we're going to lose to Iowa, they would have to do it with Nate Stanley and the other wideouts and they did, and you've got to give them a lot of credit."

- With the Ohio State offense, Fleck pointed to balance and sophomore quarterback Dwayne Haskins among the concerns.
 - "They're very talented," Fleck said. "Just because you don't see the stats doesn't mean they're not very good. When they run the football, they're very, very efficient at it. They're just so good in the pass game. If you're a head football coach and you're designing what you're doing, you're going with what's working. When the quarterback's playing at an extremely high level — he's throwing for 72 percent, so you can get a completion 72 percent of the time or run the football over and over and sometimes get two, sometimes get six, sometimes get one, sometimes get eight — they've got such great receivers and the quarterback's so dynamic that he can be able to run the football plus throw the football. It gives you the ability to kind of lean one way over the other, but I think both their run game and pass game is incredibly balanced. They can do both, whatever it takes to win a football game. That quarterback is really, really talented."
- Fleck returns to Ohio State, where he started his coaching career in 2006 as a graduate assistant. As he enter with his young team, Fleck looked ahead to the weekend back.
 - "We'll go there Friday and it's a huge stadium," Fleck said. "We have 33 freshmen on our two-deep, so it's going to be the biggest stadium they've ever seen in their entire life. They're going to walk in there and we're going to do everything we can to get that moment out of how big Ohio Stadium is but also respect the tradition that it has and the tradition that is has in our conference. I think that's really important for our young players to understand and for our team to understand is the Big Ten has so much tradition and we're a part of that. But it's a tremendous place to play. The fans are just incredibly loyal. It's one of those historic venues that you want to play in, but we're going to get that out of the way on Friday."

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