

B1G Coaches Teleconference: Ohio State's Urban Meyer Talks Personnel Changes, Scheme Tweaks Before Michigan State



As Ohio State returns to practice Tuesday at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center for Saturday at Michigan State, perhaps its toughest Big Ten opponent to date, how do the No. 10 Buckeyes (8-1, 5-1) stack up on both sides of the ball against the Spartans (6-3, 4-2) in the eyes of head coach Urban Meyer?

Ahead of the noon kickoff at Spartan Stadium in East Lansing, Mich., Meyer shares several personnel updates and elaborates on schematic improvements out of OSU's 36-31 victory last Saturday against Nebraska. Meyer addressed those topics and more Tuesday on the Big Ten coaches teleconference.

Urban Meyer

- After sophomore safety Brendon White stepped in seamlessly for junior Jordan Fuller, who was ejected in the second quarter of Ohio State's win over Nebraska for confirmed targeting, Meyer mentioned Monday that White "earned the right to be on the field." As Fuller returns, the head coach went into further detail on starting safety for White in the mix with redshirt freshman Shaun Wade and sophomore Isaiah Pryor. Wade started for the Buckeyes against the Cornhuskers after Pryor sat out with a shoulder impingement.
 - "Shaun Wade and (White) are in the rotation," Meyer said. "Isaiah Pryor is back being healthy and he's also battling, so we do have some depth there now."
 - "White and Wade will probably get the start," Meyer said. "But once again, that's why you go out and practice and see who has the best week."
- While some areas improved for Ohio State against Nebraska, the Buckeyes continued to struggle with big plays as the Cornhuskers totaled 450 yards of offense. Specifically with 266 passing yards allowed, OSU continues to search for answers as its week of practice resumes.
 - "That's what we practice Tuesday and Wednesday for," Meyer said. "The good news is that I think we're going to be relatively healthy back there, have all three corners and then some good depth now finally at safety. You're facing a (Michigan State) team that does a lot of stuff on offense. I haven't really studied — I normally do that on a Wednesday — but very talented running backs, very talented receivers and an offensive line, a quarterback that

can run and throw and do the whole package. So they're very multiple. When you ask if we're confident, I'll know more after this week. But I thought we took a good step last week, even though we gave up some yards. We are getting better."

- The run game returned to life against Nebraska as Ohio State's tailback duo of sophomore J.K. Dobbins and junior Mike Weber fueled the Buckeyes to 229 yards on the ground. Meyer, who with his coaching staff graded all five offensive linemen and the two running backs as champions, delved deeper into how OSU worked the past two weeks of practice and finally produced a breakthrough performance on the field.
 - "When your five offensive linemen all grade champions and your two running backs did as well, just the whole two weeks prior were spent on pad level and running through tackles and they'll be challenged," Meyer said. "This'll be a much more stiff challenge this week."
- Asked about contributors from the recruiting classes of 2017 and 2018, Meyer mentioned a handful of players who have stepped up for Ohio State on both sides of the ball. However, he said, his hope is for others up and down the roster to earn bigger roles down the stretch of the season.
 - "We are hoping for more," Meyer said. "Somebody made a good point — those are very highly ranked recruiting classes. There have been some young players to step up over those two classes and we're hoping for more. Like I said, Brendon White stepped up. (Freshman wide receiver) Chris Olave is a guy that's knee-deep in the mix of getting into the rotation and certainly showed signs of being a great player for us and plenty of others. You see (sophomore linebacker) Pete Werner out there starting, (freshman linebacker) Baron Browning, (sophomore cornerback) Jeff Okudah — those are all some of the top guys in the class a year ago."
 - "We got a little better," Meyer said. "(Freshman defensive back Josh Proctor) helping us out on special teams, which is where you first have to get involved with that. But yeah, we're hoping we get more active involvement from the '18s."
- Another player from those classes, redshirt freshman Wyatt Davis, entered in red-zone packages and helped pave the way as Ohio State's success picked back up inside the 20-yard line. Although the offensive line's starting five remains, Meyer pointed to Davis as someone who has earned the right for more time.
 - "We've been bringing up his name quite often," Meyer said. "He's got a fine career here. He's one of our most improved players. He's always had the talent, but now he's just a finisher and very tough guy. So he did play well. We're hoping to get more, get him more involved. It's harder to break up when you have five guys playing together, but he's the next guy in and he played well in the game Saturday and deserved more time."
- Stuck behind sophomore starter Dwayne Haskins on the depth chart and restricted to the sideline since Ohio State's 49-6 rout of Tulane on Sept. 22, redshirt-freshman backup Tate Martell has not played in the Buckeyes' past five games. Meyer updated the status of Martell, who might still see time off the bench in red-zone situations as OSU continues to consider the option for its offense.
 - "We do (have conversations about red-zone appearances) and he's frustrated, but I mean positive — he wants to play," Meyer said. "He's an elite competitor and those are ongoing conversations."
- Freshman tight end Jeremy Ruckert entered Ohio State with as a polished receiver, but needed to improve as a blocker. Ruckert appeared as a leader blocker on two of the Buckeyes' touchdown runs in the second half against Nebraska, catching the attention of Meyer and the coaching staff

as OSU looks for further involvement down the stretch.

- “He’s much improved,” Meyer said. “He is a very good pass catcher. We’re hoping to get him more involved with that as well.”

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