

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN


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Vol. 31, No. 12

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Nov. 30, 2011



SONNY BROCKWAY

WELCOME HOME – Urban Meyer flashes a smile Nov. 28 during a press conference to introduce him as the new head coach of the Ohio State football team.

By JEFF SVOBODA
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Urban Meyer is many things.

He's as intense as any football coach in the profession having idolized Woody Hayes and learned from two noted disciplinarians in his father, Bud, and former Ohio State head coach Earle Bruce.

He's an offensive innovator, having developed a spread-option attack that led to great success at Bowling Green and Utah before tweaking it on the way to two national titles at Florida.

He's certainly a winner, having compiled a 104-23 record over 10 seasons despite taking over a trio of programs in various stages of disrepair.

But most of all, Urban Meyer is a Buckeye.

That part has always been true – born in Toledo, raised in Ashtabula and educated at Cincinnati, he was forged in all corners of the state – but it became even more official Nov. 28 when he was announced as the 24th head coach of the Ohio State football program.

"It's great to be back home," Meyer said.

He proved that in multiple ways.

Meyer addressed the media – many of whom he remembers from working as a graduate assistant at OSU in the 1980s – while wearing a scarlet tie dotted with Buckeye leaves, and he described with reverence the time he visited Hayes' office.

He also poignantly talked about how he used to

sneak out of the locker room to see the Ohio State University marching band take the field before home games.

"I would look at the clock, shoot down the stairs and just watch the band come out, play 'Across the Field,' and march across the field," he said.

Upon seeing the sight again this September while working as an ESPN broadcaster for the game against Akron, Meyer admitted, "I was wiping tears out of my eyes and all the memories came back."

Now he'll have the chance to make even more. While stopping short of guaranteeing success – when asked about how quickly he could win the national championship, he quipped with a smile, "I'm just trying to get to tomorrow" – he pledged a relentless work ethic that became his trademark at earlier stops.

The first step in that will be assembling a coaching staff, which will include predecessor Luke Fickell. While Meyer said he wasn't sure what Fickell's title will be, he assured reporters that it would be substantial, and Fickell will continue to coach the team in the upcoming bowl game.

In the meantime, Meyer will focus on filling out the rest of his staff while also hitting the recruiting trail – beginning the night of his hiring – in an effort to keep Ohio State one of the top programs in the country.

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Streak Snapped Vs. U-M

By JEFF SVOBODA
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

In the span of a year, the Ohio State football program had seen its tectonic plates shift like never before. The proud Buckeyes had lost their legendary head coach and their potential Heisman Trophy-caliber quarterback as well as five games in the regular season for the first time in more than a decade.

The one thing left going into the Nov. 26 showdown with No. 17 Michigan in Ann Arbor, it seemed, was the team's unprecedented seven-game winning streak against its most hated rival.

But in the end, the lost season for the 2011 Ohio State football team had to end in a loss.

Even with the benefit of one of its best offensive showings of the year, the Buckeyes dropped a 40-34 decision to the Wolverines, capping one of the most tumultuous 12-month spans in the history of the program.

"It's been a very, very trying 12 months," senior center Mike Brewster admitted.

With the loss, Ohio State fell to 6-6 to post its first non-winning regular season since the 1999 team posted the same record. The team's 3-5 mark in Big Ten play was its first losing conference record since that same campaign.

The loss was, in many ways, a prism through which to view the entirety of the 12-game playing schedule. The Buckeyes made their fair share of good things happen, just as they had all year, and true freshman quarterback Braxton Miller overcame some youthful errors to make a number of impressive plays.

On the other hand, too many mistakes – both in strategy and execution – made the team fall shy of the victory, its fifth loss of the year by seven points or fewer. Injuries and ineffectiveness combined with inexperience – problems all season long – to conspire to keep the team on the losing side of the ledger.

But perhaps most importantly, this edition of the Scarlet and Gray went down swinging, just as it had in so many of the previous losses.

"You saw the fight," head coach Luke Fickell said. "That's what this game is always about. It's not about talent, it's about heart. It's about will. Obviously we didn't get the job done today, but you can't walk away from those seniors and those guys and not say they gave it everything they had."

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Charter Member

OPINION

Ohio State Comes Out Clean On Other Side

To paraphrase the old saying, Ohio State fell into a sewer and came out with a pocketful of fish.

How else would you describe the unthinkable fall from grace by Jim Tressel and subsequent smoldering fallout followed six months later by the hiring of a younger, potentially more successful version of the sweater-vested one himself?

No wonder why everyone else hates the Ohio State football program.

Urban Frank Meyer III has amassed a 10-year résumé that is the envy of his profession – two national championships, five conference titles, the second-best winning percentage among active coaches and a 7-1 bowl record.

And now he has his dream job. How fortunate can one guy and one fan base get?

After several weeks of being the subject of the worst-kept secret in Columbus, Meyer was officially introduced Nov. 28 as the 24th head coach of the Buckeyes. He succeeds Luke Fickell, who will thankfully remain on Meyer's staff with a to-be-determined title of prestige.

Does it really get any better for Buckeye Nation, which has had to choke down every snide and spiteful epithet imaginable since Tressel was forced into early retirement due to the memorabilia-for-tattoos scandal?

Not only is Meyer the absolute level-best coaching option available, his career as a head coach has been nothing short of remarkable. He engineered a quick turnaround of a previously moribund Bowling Green program in the early 2000s before moving on to Utah and transforming the Utes from just another mid-major team to a national power.

Then he took over a flagging Florida program that had posted three consecutive five-loss seasons and produced two national championships in his first four seasons in Gainesville.

Championship rings and winning percentages are but the tip of the iceberg for Meyer. He has exhibited a passion for winning and a penchant for hiring the best assistant coaches on the planet, utilized an attack-style on offense, defense and special teams, and is an absolute beast on the recruiting trail.

He swears the health problems that dogged him during his last couple of years at Florida are behind him because he has learned to delegate responsibility among his assistants – something he said he did better during the early portion of his coaching career.

The cherry on the top of this sundae for fans is that Meyer – like Tressel before him – fully understands and embraces what it means to be head football coach at Ohio State. He is a born-and-bred Buckeye who heaped equal parts boyhood hero worship upon Archie Griffin and Woody Hayes before embarking upon his college coaching career with two seasons on Earle Bruce's staff at Ohio State.

That career has taken him to such far-flung places as Normal, Ill.; Fort Collins, Colo.; and South Bend, Ind.; as well as Bowling Green, Ohio; Salt Lake City; and Gainesville, Fla.; but his admitted dream was always to sit in the same chair once occupied by his idol Hayes and his mentor Bruce.

"Everybody says, 'Is Ohio State your dream job?' That's a term that's thrown around really loosely," Meyer said during his introductory news conference. "To say I was this big and wanted to coach at Florida, (the answer is) no. I'm not from Florida. ...

"(But) I wanted to coach there, I will always be a Gator, will always be a part of that

situation. ... However, this is my home state. And it's great to be back home."

And if that doesn't convince you of Meyer's affinity for Ohio State, remember back to his team's 41-14 win over the Buckeyes in the BCS National Championship Game following the 2006 season.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

The Gators had a 34-14 halftime lead in that game and Meyer had a first national title ring in his sights. Had he chosen to do so, he could have made a major league statement by stomping the Buckeyes into submission. Instead, he chose to take his foot completely off the gas in the second half and coast home with the victory.

Don't get me wrong. I didn't want to like the guy.

Meyer has the reputation (some say well-deserved) for being media unfriendly, several times taking public umbrage with reporters who wrote something he did not particularly like. In this day and age, that might be a badge of honor for the average Ohio State fan still smarting from how ESPN, Sports Illustrated and other media outlets seemingly went out of their way to trash the Buckeyes over the past year. But that kind of behavior can also come off as thin-skinned and petty.

Then there was the litany of off-the-field problems Meyer experienced with his players while at Florida, something the coach tried to downplay during his Nov. 28 news conference. Nevertheless, if there is anything Ohio State does not need in its immediate future, it is players being arrested on a regular basis no matter how trivial the violation.

Of course, there are plausible explanations for both problems.

First, Gainesville is a small, close-knit community smack dab in the middle of the pressure-packed SEC where fans and their head football coaches have always had a love-hate relationship. If you don't believe me, check out what Gator Nation has to say about Meyer taking the Ohio State job. Most cannot be repeated in a family newspaper, but the comments are peppered with such words as "quitter" and "traitor."

Secondly, Meyer was forced to recruit the best athletes in the Sunshine State, and despite his protestations to the contrary, sometimes the best athletes are not the best character guys. One needs only to think of a certain former Ohio State quarterback's off-the-field indiscretions and the firestorm they created.

Before we get ahead of ourselves, of course, we need to be reminded that Meyer is not Vince Lombardi, Bill Walsh or the second coming of Hayes. His tenure will undoubtedly feature its share of bumps along the road. That is the nature of the beast that is college football today. Meyer isn't going to win every game and fans are going to question his every move – win or lose.

But I simply can't escape the notion that the Ohio State football program is emerging from one of the darkest chapters in its long history having hit the coaching lottery, and a year from now, two at the most, the events of 2011 will be nothing more than an unpleasant memory.

A Legacy Of Winning

I had an interesting conversation with BSB colleague Marcus Hartman while driv-

ing home from Ann Arbor. While discussing this year's team and its 6-6 record, the subject turned to the impact Tressel and his forced retirement had on the season.

Marcus offered his opinion that history would not be kind to Tressel's legacy, not only due to how his decade-long tenure at Ohio State ended but because of the lack of solid NFL players his program produced.

I know many share Marcus' viewpoint because some of you have shared that same opinion with me. I just don't happen to agree.

I couldn't care less how many NFL stars any Ohio State head coach produces. The bottom line is wins and championships, and I don't see how Tressel's tenure can be considered anything less than a bona fide success.

Between 2001 and 2010, the Buckeyes won seven Big Ten championships, including a conference record-tying six in a row. Among those titles were three outright championships. Ohio State had won only three outright Big Ten titles in the previous 31 seasons before Tressel arrived.

There was the 2002 national championship, the school's first consensus title in 34 years, and an unprecedented streak of success against Michigan that punctuated a 10-year overall record of 106-22 and eight BCS bowl appearances, more than any other school during that time.

As far as producing NFL players, I doubt very seriously if Cal fans are celebrating this year's fourth-place finish in the Pac-12 North by clinging to the fact their program produced Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers.

I also doubt very seriously if many Ohio State fans care that Meyer once coached Tim Tebow, a quarterback most observers agree is deficient in NFL-caliber talent.

Fans are much more into the pair of national championships Meyer produced when he was at Florida, and they're eager to find out how many he can produce at Ohio State.

Some Final Thoughts

- Yes, against Michigan the Ohio State defense gave up a lot of yards and the most points since the 2006 national title game against Florida, but you can't squawk about the effort. Defensive linemen John Simon and Johnathan Hankins played their guts out all season, while injuries forced linebacker Ryan Shazier and safety Orhian Johnson to play one-legged through much of the second half. Those efforts alone should have buried the ridiculous notion from some fans and media members that OSU players were giving less than maximum effort down the stretch.

- In case you're wondering if DeVier Posey learned anything while serving his 10-game suspension, don't worry. He did. Following the game, Posey went out of his way to praise quarterback Braxton Miller's performance, repeatedly saying the misfires Miller had on long passes against Michigan were not the freshman's fault. Posey took the blame, claiming if he had been available those first 10 weeks to build more of an on-field rapport with his young quarterback, those passes would have gone for touchdowns.

- I'm not sure what Michigan head coach Brady Hoke is trying to accomplish by continually referring his archrival as "Ohio." If he thinks it's a derisive moniker, he needs to think again since the Ohio State football program has often referred to itself as "Ohio" over the years. Fact is, the lyrics of two of the most beloved songs in Buckeye Nation – "Buckeye Battle Cry" and "Carmen Ohio" – feature the same exact last word sung the same exact way: "O-HI-O!"

COVER STORY

Buckeyes Show Fight In Loss At Michigan

Continued From Page 1

The drive was evident during the four times Ohio State answered a Michigan score with points of its own. It was clear in the way the team weathered a 16-point U-M onslaught in the opening quarter to earn the halftime lead, and it was obvious in the way the Buckeyes buckled down at the goal line to prevent – with some help from the Wolverines in the form of penalties – a game-clinching score in the final minutes, setting up a last-gasp chance to keep the series winning streak alive and put an exclamation point at the end of a rough campaign.

"That's just been the story of our season," senior wideout DeVier Posey said. "Just taking shots and fighting back, and I really feel like that's what we try to do. We'd been in that situation before. We just tried to keep fighting."

But if the way to sum up the season was with the phrase "close but no cigar," that's exactly the way the Michigan game ended. Miller used his guile to push the Buckeyes to a first down to start the final drive, but his final pass on fourth-and-6 was intercepted, bringing to a close what would have been a stunning comeback effort in what went down as one of the most thrilling episodes ever in the 108-game series.

The roar that went up in Michigan Stadium when Ohio native Courtney Avery snagged the deflected fourth-down pass out of the air had to seem foreign to the Buckeyes, who had last tasted defeat in the series eight years prior in the same venue.

"It's disheartening," said a downcast Tyler

Moeller, a member of five previous teams to beat Michigan. "It's very disappointing to put everything into it and not come out with a win, especially in a game like this against Michigan. It's very disheartening."

Added running back Boom Herron, "Anytime you lose to Michigan, it's a horrible feeling."

Yet others felt somewhat validated by the effort. Brewster, a team leader who went into the season embracing what he called the "beautiful challenge" of picking up the pieces of the offseason, was proud of the way the team played in the rivalry contest.

There were some obvious examples of sacrifice in the game. Linebacker Ryan Shazier and safety Orhian Johnson both suffered leg injuries but returned to the field of battle, with Shazier making six tackles after spraining his knee in the second quarter so badly he said the joint kept giving out on him in the second half.

Miller also showed his determination, diving into a big hit on fourth down from Michigan cornerback J.T. Floyd yet still stretching the ball past the first-down marker to keep the team's last drive going.

"Don't get me wrong, it hurts to lose to those guys," Brewster said. "It's the first time I have, but sometimes in a game like that if you leave it all on the field at least you can step away from the game saying you left it all out there. I felt like last week some of us didn't feel like that, myself included."

Brewster's words showed the maturity of a player who had been through every bit of what had happened the past 12 months, starting with the December 2010 announce-

ment that six players had been suspended for the start of this season for receiving discounted tattoos and selling personal OSU memorabilia.

The ensuing months included the bombshell that head coach Jim Tressel hadn't forwarded what he knew of the situation, first resulting in his suspension and ultimately ending with his forced retirement May 30. Three-year starting quarterback Terrelle Pryor soon left, and suspensions and injuries mounted throughout the season.

Those off-the-field issues resulted in losses on a scale the likes of which the current team members had never seen.

"They went through some new experiences," offensive coordinator Jim Bollman said. "They hadn't been through some things like this. The older guys had not been through this at all. So they kept working at it and coming back, and I have to give them credit for that."

The dedication many of the older players gave to the program was obvious. Brewster stayed when he could have left for the NFL knowing the suspensions had been handed down, while both Posey and Herron were lauded for their locker-room leadership despite the suspensions.

On the defensive side, Moeller fought back from multiple injuries, including a career-threatening 2009 head injury, to play six seasons in scarlet and gray, while linebacker Andrew Sweat gamely tried to play

against Michigan despite a concussion suffered two weeks prior. Unfortunately, Sweat suffered an elbow injury during a practice session that prevented him from playing vs. the Wolverines.

The reward for those players in their final campaign wasn't delivered in wins and losses, Brewster said, but in life lessons.

"I've learned a lot," the senior center said, "and I think these hard times will definitely make me grow up even more. I can take a lot away from this year."

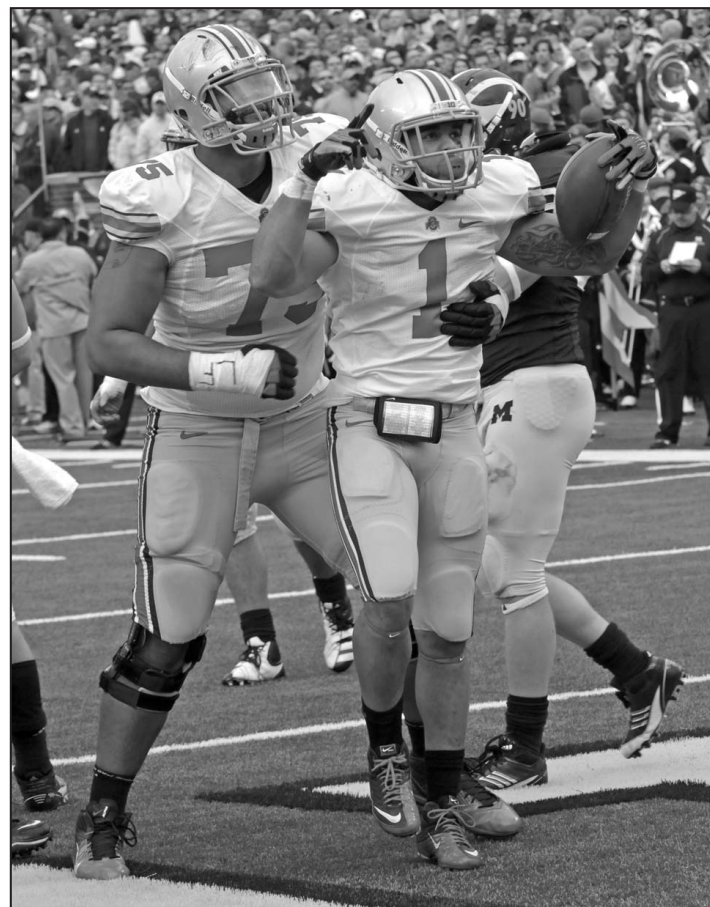
It will be up to the younger players to remember those lessons on the field and off for the next few seasons – especially when future Michigan contests are staged.

"You got knocked down, you get back up," Fickell said. "You have to learn a lot from it. We will. We'll make sure those young guys understand we'll be back here in two years and don't forget those feelings."

End Of An Era

As the game with Michigan neared, more talk seemed to surround the impending earthquake around the OSU football program than what would transpire in front of 114,132 fans in impressively rebuilt Michigan Stadium.

On both Nov. 22 and 23, ground-shaking reports – first on such Internet sites as BuckeyeSports.com and later in such newspapers as The Columbus Dispatch and The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer – indicated that for-



JOSH WINSLOW

NOT ENOUGH – Senior tailback Boom Herron (1) celebrated a fourth-quarter touchdown, but it was not enough as Ohio State lost to Michigan for the first time since 2003.



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COVER STORY

mer Florida head coach Urban Meyer would be announced at some point after the game as the team's new head coach.

Suddenly, the biggest game on the schedule – in fact, the biggest game on any Ohio State schedule – seemed to pale in comparison to the news about Meyer's impending arrival.

Afterward, Posey admitted the talk was hard to avoid.

"I wouldn't say it was a distraction," he said. "The world we live in, the social media world that we live in, it's in our face. It's everywhere we go if you try to turn on the TV or log onto Twitter, but I think our group this week did a great job of focusing. I really felt that we had the best week of practice."

Still, by the time the Buckeyes arrived in Ann Arbor, it was increasingly clear that Fickell would be replaced as the head of the program in the coming days.

The change in the head coaching chair would surely be accompanied by the departure of multiple assistants who had been by Tressel's side during an unprecedented 10-year run of success.

In fact, while the on-field triumphs of the Tressel era had already come to an end with the snapping one week prior of the program's six-year run of Big Ten championships, the game in Ann Arbor figured to be the literal end of what had defined Ohio State football for a solid decade.

The team's response was a combination of looking back and staying focused on the task at hand. The latter part of the deal was impressed upon the squad by Fickell, who made it clear the week was about one thing and one thing only.

"I'm going to have enough respect for this football game to make sure it's about this football game," Fickell said earlier in the week as the reports about Meyer swirled. "I don't think this is the time or the place. This is the most historic rivalry in college football and sports in general. We're going

to talk about the football game. That's the most important thing. I don't care what the situation is. That's what we've talked about in our offices. That's the focus we've got, and that's where we're going to continue to move forward."

Still, the fiery former nose guard and prep wrestler showed at least one sign of weariness when dealing with the press after the loss. Upon being asked if he had been kept in the loop about the coaching situation during the week, Fickell pounded the table in frustration.

"I said it's about the Ohio State-Michigan game. It's been about that since Sunday," he said, closing a fist and slamming it to the table, upsetting a gaggle of media members' recorders in front of him. "This is going to be about that always. That's the way it is."

It was little wonder, then, that the players he had stuck up for all season long – often refusing to criticize their effort or specific errors as the losses mounted – had the coach's back.

"I would just say that Coach Fickell is the most unbelievable coach I've ever played for," Sweat said before the game. "I've had the pleasure of him being my position coach ever since I got here. Not only has he made me a better football player, but he's made me a better person and just an all-around individual."

"He demands excellence out of you every day, both on the field and off the field. He cares about you as an individual and he'll do everything for you. He's so passionate about Ohio State. I think Coach Fickell is the greatest coach I've ever had."

While Sweat was able to forge a bond with Fickell during the coach's years as his position coach, Fickell quickly worked to create a similar feeling among the entire team when named head coach.

It's fair to say the goal was reached, at least as far as Posey was concerned.

"I love Coach Fickell," he said. "He's a great guy and he's a great coach and a great leader. But I can't make that call (whether he should be head coach). All I know is I love playing for the man."

Fickell's chances of remaining head coach apparently went out the window as the team faded down the stretch. There was talk he was the man to build on a foundation that remained strong when the team was 6-3 and in control of its destiny when it came to winning the Big Ten Leaders Division, but ensuing losses to Purdue and Penn State only intensified the talk of Meyer replacing him.

The coach still had the support of his locker room despite the results.

"My support goes to Coach Fickell," Moeller said. "I hope he gets the job. I think he deserves the job. I think you can't judge him based off this year, and even if you do judge him off this year, I think he's done a great job with everything that was thrown at us and everything that we caused as players."

"I think he's done a great job of hanging with that and keeping this team together."

The team was playing for more than Fickell as well. Many team members had the head coach's initials written on their wristbands along with "JT" and "JD," remembrances of Tressel and former OSU assistant Joe Daniels, who has been battling cancer for several years.

Tressel, whose 9-1 record against Michigan set the gold standard for the rivalry, hadn't been around the team for months before popping in to address the squad before it left for Ann Arbor.

Suffice it to say that emotions were flying during the meeting.

"It was great," Brewster said. "Coach Tressel is someone I have so much love for."

He's an unbelievable coach and unbelievable human being. To be able to see him again, hear a few words from him, it definitely got us pumped up.

"It was an honor. It was emotional for some guys, myself included. It stinks when you feel like you got robbed a year of your life with him. He didn't skip a beat. It was like you blinked and it was like, 'Man, is everything a nightmare?' It seemed like he's still here."

As for Daniels, the former OSU quarterbacks coach has battled a number of health problems since being diagnosed with cancer in 2006. He finally had to step aside for good in 2009, turning the job over to Nick Siciliano.

"The biggest one was Coach Daniels," Moeller said. "He's going through some tough times and his family is going through tough times. His message to us was to stay in the moment and finish. We knew he'd be watching the game. That's why a lot of guys put that on their wristband and thought of him. He's just a great guy. He was a great coach here and he's a great guy. He's been through so much these past years, and that's why we wanted it for him."

The only one of that trio to be with the team in Ann Arbor was Fickell, who spent the season talking about how the focus should be on the team and not on the interim head coach.

Given the chance to address his team in the postgame locker room, he delivered a final simple message.

"He just told us he was proud of us and we told him we were proud of him and how much we love him," Posey said.

Next up was the bus ride back home to a place where the rumblings of what would happen next were already beginning.



JOSH WINSLOW

TOUGH WEEK – In the days leading up to the Michigan game, Luke Fickell (center) refused to address rumors that he would be replaced as Ohio State's head coach.

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The Numbers Game

Michigan 40, Ohio State 34

Nov. 26, 2011 — Michigan Stadium; Ann Arbor, Mich.

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4		F
OHIO STATE	7	17	0	10	—	34
MICHIGAN	16	7	7	10	—	40

First Quarter

OSU — P.Brown, 54 yard pass from B.Miller (Basil kick), 12:43; 6 plays, 80 yards, 2:17 TOP.

U-M — D.Robinson, 41 yard run (Gibbons kick), 9:15; 2 plays, 47 yards, 0:35 TOP.

U-M — Safety (Ohio State flagged for holding in end zone), 7:41.

U-M — Hemingway, 26 yard pass from D.Robinson (Gibbons kick), 3:02; 8 plays, 52 yards, 4:34 TOP.

Second Quarter

OSU — Basil, 45 yard field goal, 10:37; 10 plays, 42 yards, 4:15 TOP.

OSU — B.Miller, 19 yard run (Basil kick), 7:51; 3 plays, 31 yards, 1:15 TOP.

U-M — D.Robinson, 6 yard run (Gibbons kick), 3:16; 9 plays, 80 yards, 4:35 TOP.

OSU — Posey, 43 yard pass from B.Miller (Basil kick), 1:21; 6 plays, 66 yards, 1:55 TOP.

Third Quarter

U-M — Odums, 20 yard pass from D.Robinson (Gibbons kick), 9:05; 11 plays, 80 yards, 5:55 TOP.

Fourth Quarter

OSU — Basil, 21 yard field goal, 12:50; 6 plays, 28 yards, 3:20 TOP.

U-M — Koger, 4 yard pass from D.Robinson (Gibbons kick), 8:32; 8 plays, 75 yards, 4:18 TOP.

OSU — Boom Herron, 4 yard run (Basil kick), 7:09; 5 plays, 80 yards, 1:23 TOP.

U-M — Gibbons, 43 yard field goal, 1:59; 11 plays, 54 yards, 5:10 TOP.

Att. — 114,132.

Weather — Mid 50s, partly cloudy; wind, S 10-20 mph.

Team Statistics

	OSU	U-M
First Downs	18	23
Rushing	9	14
Passing	8	8
Penalty	1	1
Rushes-Yards	31-137	50-227
Passing Yards	235	167
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	14-26-1	14-17-0
Offensive Plays	57	67
Total Net Yards	372	444
Third Down Efficiency	5-12	5-11
Fourth Down Efficiency	1-2	1-2
Punts-Avg.	3-40.0	2-47.5
Fumbles-Lost	1-0	3-1
Penalties	5-47	3-29
Time of Possession	24:50	35:10

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) — **OSU**: B.Miller 16-100; Boom Herron 15-37. **U-M**: D.Robinson 26-170; Toussaint 20-120; V.Smith 1-3; Hopkins 1-3; TEAM 1-(-2); Hagerup 1-(-17).

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) — **OSU**: B.Miller 14-25-1-235-2; TEAM 0-1-0-0-0. **U-M**: D.Robinson 14-17-0-167-3.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) — **OSU**: J.Hall 4-32; Posey 3-58; P.Brown 2-76; Stoneburner 1-36; Fragel 1-20; D.Smith 1-6; Herron 1-6; Boren 1-1. **U-M**: Koger 4-40; Hemingway 2-45; Dileo 2-32; Odums 2-25; Gallon 2-11; Roundtree 1-8; Toussaint 1-6.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) — **OSU**: Buchanan 3-40.0-58. **U-M**: Hagerup 2-47.5-48.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) — **OSU**: J.Hall 1-0. **U-M**: None.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) — **OSU**: J.Hall 3-76. **U-M**: Odums 3-57; Gallon 1-20.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.) — **OSU**: Howard. **U-M**: None.

INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.) — **OSU**: None. **U-M**: Avery 1-1.

SACKS (No.-Yds.) — **OSU**: Simon 1.0-3. **U-M**: Kovacs 1.0-10; Morgan 1.0-1; Demens 0.5-1; Van Bergen 0.5-1; Ryan 0.5-1; Black 0.5-1.

TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) — **OSU**: Simon 1.5-3; Goebel 1.5-2; Hankins 1.0-1. **U-M**: Kovacs 2.0-12; Van Bergen 2.0-5; Morgan 1.5-3; Demens 0.5-1; Ryan 0.5-1; Black 0.5-1.

TACKLES (Solo-Assst.-Tot.) — **OSU**: Barnett 5-7-12; Sabino 6-2-8; Shazier 4-4-8; Simon 2-5-7; Moeller 5-1-6; O.Johnson 3-3-6; Klein 0-4-4; Bellamy 3-0-3; Roby 2-1-3; Domicone 2-1-3; Hankins 1-2-3; Howard 1-1-2; Goebel 1-1-2; Bennett 1-0-1; Rice 1-0-1; Hale 1-0-1; D.Grant 1-0-1; C.Grant 1-0-1; Ebner 0-1-1; Cash 0-1-1. **U-M**: Morgan 3-7-10; Demens 2-6-8; Van Bergen 5-2-7; Floyd 3-3-6; Martin 3-3-6; T.Gordon 3-1-4; Kovacs 3-1-4; Heiningner 1-3-4; Ryan 1-2-3; Woolfork 1-1-2; Hawthorne 1-0-1; Avery 1-0-1; C.Gordon 1-0-1; Hollowell 1-0-1; Black 0-1-1.

PLAYERS IN THE GAME — **OHIO STATE**: Offense, P.Brown, Adams, Norwell, Brewster, Mewhort, Shugarts, Stoneburner, Fragel, Boom Herron, B.Miller, Posey, Basil. Defense, Simon, Hankins, Goebel, Bellamy, Shazier, Sabino, Moeller, Howard, Roby, Barnett, O.Johnson, Buchanan. Reserves, R.Smith, Clarke, J.Hall, C.Brown, D.Grant, Cash, C.Grant, De.Smith, Domicone, Spencer, Oliver, Wood, Rice, Klein, Ebner, Hyde, Maxwell, Erwin, T.Jackson, Boren, J.T.Moore, Bobek, Hale, Makridis, Bennett, M.Hall, Fields, Heuerman, Thomas. **MICHIGAN**: Offense, Roundtree, Lewan, Schofield, Molk, Omameh, Huyge, Hemingway, Koger, Odums, D.Robinson, Toussaint, Gibbons. Defense, Roh, Martin, Heiningner, Van Bergen, Ryan, Demens, Morgan, Countess, Kovacs, Woolfork, Floyd, Hagerup. Reserves, V.Smith, C.Gordon, Avery, Taylor, Hawthorne, Gardner, Gallon, Furman, Cox, J.Jackson, Grady, Simmons, Hollowell, Dileo, Jones, Cavanaugh, T.Gordon, Van Slyke, Hopkins, Z.Johnson, Rawls, Fitzgerald, Wile, McColgan, Glanda, Black, Clark, Mealer, Br.Herron, Gyarmati, Brink, Campbell, T.Robinson, J.Robinson, Watson, B.Moore, Pomarico.

Season Statistics

Team Statistics

	OSU	Opp
First Downs	202	204
Rushing	118	86
Passing	68	104
Penalty	16	14
Average Per Game/Rush	195.7	142.4
Average Per Game/Pass	124.1	186.2
Total Offense	3,837	3,943
Total Plays	748	777
Average Per Game	319.8	328.6
Average Per Play	5.1	5.1
Penalties-Yards	66-547	70-583
Fumbles-Lost	19-8	19-5
3rd Down Efficiency	65-163	68-172
Percentage	40%	40%
4th Down Efficiency	6-12	8-18
Percentage	50%	44%
Sacks-Yards	23-144	40-217
Time Of Possession Avg.	30:32	29:28

Score

By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.
Ohio State	51	101	76	70	3	301	25.1
Opponents	92	40	45	66	6	249	20.2

Individual Statistics

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Braxton Miller	144	695	4.8	7	81
Boom Herron	123	596	4.8	3	57
Carlos Hyde	101	549	5.4	6	63
Jordan Hall	95	381	4.0	2	25
Rod Smith	29	116	4.0	1	19
Joe Bauserman	19	19	1.0	1	15
Verlon Reed	2	8	4.0	0	12
Jaamal Berry	3	5	1.7	0	4
Chris Fields	2	2	1.0	0	2
TEAM	8	-23	-2.9	0	0
OSU Totals	526	2,348	4.5	20	81
OPP Totals	441	1,709	3.9	13	54

Passing Comp. Att. Pct. Yds. TD-INT Effic.

Braxton Miller	67	134	50.0	997	11-4	133.62
Joe Bauserman	40	86	46.5	492	5-1	111.43
TEAM	0	2	0.0	0	0-0	0.0
OSU Totals	107	222	48.2	1,489	16-5	123.82
OPP Totals	202	336	60.1	2,234	17-12	125.52

Receiving Rec. Net Avg. TD Long

Philly Brown	14	205	14.6	1	54
Jake Stoneburner	14	193	13.8	7	36
Devin Smith	12	247	20.6	4	40
Verlon Reed	9	132	14.7	0	28
Jordan Hall	9	102	11.3	2	38
Carlos Hyde	9	65	7.2	0	12
DeVier Posey	7	127	17.7	1	43
Chris Fields	7	101	14.4	0	33
T.Y. Williams	5	74	14.8	0	23
Reid Fragel	5	64	12.8	0	20
Zach Boren	5	52	10.4	0	25
Boom Herron	4	23	5.8	0	20
Evan Spencer	3	78	26.0	1	33
Rod Smith	2	15	7.5	0	10
Jaamal Berry	2	14	7.0	0	9
OSU Totals	107	1,489	13.9	16	54
OPP Totals	202	2,234	11.1	17	66

Scoring TD EPK EPR EPP FG PTS

Drew Basil	0	34-35	—	—	15-18	79
Braxton Miller	7	—	—	0-1	—	42
Jake Stoneburner	7	—	—	—	—	42
Carlos Hyde	6	—	—	—	—	36
Jordan Hall	4	—	—	—	—	24
Devin Smith	4	—	—	—	—	24
Dan Herron	3	—	—	—	—	18
Joe Bauserman	1	—	—	0-1	—	6
Philly Brown	1	—	—	—	—	6
Chris Fields	1	—	—	—	—	6

DeVier Posey	1	—	—	—	—	6
Rod Smith	1	—	—	—	—	6
Evan Spencer	1	—	—	—	—	6
OSU Totals	37	34-35	—	0-2	15-18	301
OPP Totals	30	27-27	—	2-2	12-16	249

* — Michigan recorded a safety

FG Distance	0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Drew Basil	6-6	4-4	5-7	0-1	15-18
OSU Totals	6-6	4-4	5-7	0-1	15-18
OPP Totals	3-3	2-2	5-8	2-3	12-16

Punting	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long
Ben Buchanan	65	2,653	40.8	0	60
TEAM	1	0	0.0	0	0
OSU Totals	66	2,653	40.2	1	60
OPP Totals	66	2,621	39.7	1	66

Interceptions	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Bradley Roby	3	57	19.0	0	36
Orhian Johnson	3	22	7.3	0	15
Travis Howard	2	29	14.5	0	15
C.J. Barnett	2	2	1.0	0	2
Storm Klein	1	18	18.0	0	18
Andrew Sweat	1	0	0.0	0	0
OSU Totals	12	128	10.7	0	36
OPP Totals	5	1	0.2	0	1

Punt Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Jordan Hall	12	70	5.8	0	27
Chris Fields	5	88	17.6	1	69
Philly Brown	2	28	14.0	0	17
Ryan Shazier	1	25	25.0	0	25
Devin Smith	1	3	3.0	0	3
OSU Totals	21	214	10.2	1	69
OPP Totals	24	126	5.2	0	24

Kickoff Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Jordan Hall	22	619	28.1	0	90
Jaamal Berry	7	150	21.4	0	28
Devin Smith	4	86	21.5	0	29
Carlos Hyde	2	47	23.5	0	24
Philly Brown	1	44	44.0	0	44
Chris Fields	1	15	15.0	0	15
Tony Jackson	1	10	10.0	0	10
OSU Totals	38	971	25.6	0	90
OPP Totals	46	842	18.3	0	42

Def. Leaders	Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks
C.J. Barnett	45	24	69	1.0-4	—
Andrew Sweat	34	34	68	5.0-13	—
Johnathan Hankins	29	35	64	11.0-24	3.0-10
Christian Bryant	34	25	59	—	—
Etienne Sabino	35	23	58	4.5-20	2.0-12
John Simon	28	22	50	15.0-58	7.0-47
Ryan Shazier	32	16	48	5.0-17	3.0-14
Storm Klein	22	23	45	2.0-11	1.0-9
Tyler Moeller	30	14	44	2.0-4	—
Bradley Roby	31	10	41	3.5-23	—
Travis Howard	22	15	37	0.5-1	—
Garrett Goebel	10	22	32	4.0-13	1.0-7
Orhian Johnson	21	11	32	—	—
Adam Bellamy	17	5	22	1.5-8	1.0-7
Michael Bennett	13	3	16	5.0-27	3.0-22
Dominic Clarke	9	3	12	—	—
Nate Ebner	7	4	11	1.0-12	1.0-12
Zach Domicone	7	3	10	—	—
J.T. Moore	7	2	9	1.0-3	—
Nate Oliver	3	4	7	—	—
Doran Grant	3	3	6	—	—
OSU Totals	470	318	788	63-242	23-144
OPP Totals	442	372	814	78-299	40-217

Fumbles Forced: 2 — Travis Howard, Ryan Shazier; 1 — Christian Bryant, Tyler Moeller, Storm Klein, Bradley Roby, Andrew Sweat. **Fumbles Recovered:** 1 — Adam Bellamy, Zach Domicone, Johnathan Hankins, Travis Howard, Storm Klein.

OHIO STATE VS. MICHIGAN

BSB Quotebook: Michigan 40, Ohio State 34

OSU senior defensive back Tyler Moeller on the loss: "It was a tough game. It was a roller-coaster ride the whole game, and at the end we didn't come up with the win. It was definitely disappointing because it is Michigan."

OSU head coach Luke Fickell's reaction to the loss: "I'm hurt, just like every one of those seniors in there."

Michigan head coach Brady Hoke on winning the rivalry game: "It's an important game. Since day one, you know I've said that. It's a great rivalry. But to see those kids, the joys, the tears, that's why you coach and that's why this is such a great game."

Michigan senior wide receiver Junior Hemingway on beating OSU: "If I could put it into words, I would. You come out and have that mind-set, especially with your team, like, 'Let's go out and play Michigan football. Let's go do what we do.' Again, it goes back to what we did in the spring and summer, for the times I didn't want to get up in the morning but I did. I didn't want to leave my seniors or underclassmen hanging. It's about making plays that help the offense go, and that helps the defense even more when we stay on the field."

Hoke on snapping Ohio State's seven-game winning streak in the series: "We never brought up the last seven years. That's not fair to those teams before, and that's not fair to this team – Team 132. We just went out there and wanted to play 60 minutes of Michigan football as a Michigan team. That's what we talked about."

Moeller on Ohio State's motivation before the game: "It was for Coach Fickell. It was for guys like (ailing) Coach (Joe) Daniels. I really wanted to get the win for them, but it's disappointing that we couldn't do that today."

Michigan senior defensive tackle Mike Martin on the legacy of the U-M seniors: "We're just really caught up in this right now. We worked so hard to get to this point and to make sure we were successful. How much we've harped on this game – this is a big game for us and for this program. For us to take this step as a team is huge and it's something we're never going to forget – something these fans and this fan base are never going to forget."

Moeller on what Fickell told the team after the game: "He said, 'Remember this feeling. Remember how you feel right now. Take that into next year.'"

Fickell on his situation and the continued rumors Ohio State was ready to announce Urban Meyer as its next head coach: "Out of respect for the Ohio State-Michigan rivalry, that's all we've talked about. We tried to focus ourselves, on the things that we can control and I told them I wouldn't worry about it. If we spend our energy on that we'd problems, so out of respect for the Ohio State-Michigan rivalry I wasn't going to think about it and I wasn't going to talk about it."

Moeller on the same subject: "It is disappointing. I played my butt off for Coach Fickell and I feel like I let him down. That's the biggest thing that hurts – letting him down. Nobody sees how hard he works and what he does for this team and what he's had to go through because of our mistakes. Not because of his mistakes or anything he did. It is because of the players' mistakes. It is disappointing when you let him down. I think of him so highly. He is a great coach, he is a great man, and he is a Buckeye."

Fickell on OSU's offensive production: "We



SONNY BROCKWAY

DISAPPOINTED – Ohio State head coach Luke Fickell (right) saw his Buckeyes lose to Michigan, ending a seven-game winning streak for OSU in the series.

asked them to believe, and that's what it comes down to. You have to believe that no matter the situation, you have to get it done and that's what you saw from that unit. That's what you want, and we could tell that they had hope and we were connecting with them."

OSU freshman quarterback Braxton Miller on the team's final drive: "(I was trying to) just take it play by play. I wasn't rushing anything. I was just trying to get the job done. (The missed throw to senior wide receiver DeVier Posey) was a hard pass."

Fickell on Miller's ability to try to make big plays: "Your juices get flowing when you take shots like that (on deep passes). It comes down to making the plays, whether the ball is under- or overthrown, but again, those shots can loosen the defense up. It is all part of the game, but when it comes down to it, the game is about big plays and whoever makes the big plays is going to win the game."

Moeller on all the injuries OSU has had to endure on defense: "When you lose guys of that caliber, it's tough. Christian (Bryant) is a great player. Andrew (Sweat) is a great player. It's tough when you lose guys like that. Guys were banged up today. Orhian (Johnson) was banged up. (Ryan) Shazier was banged up, but they did a great job toughing through that. They played their hearts out, and I'm proud of them for that."

Miller on going head to head against Michigan QB Denard Robinson: "I wasn't paying attention to that. I was just trying to win the game – do what I can do best to help my team."

Moeller on Michigan's last drive, one that had a Fitzgerald Toussaint touchdown run overturned by review and a Robinson TD burst called back because of a holding penalty: "It was a roller-coaster ride. I was on that tackle on the goal line and he scored and I obviously thought it was my fault because I didn't tackle him before the line. Having that second chance and us getting that holding call, it was a big momentum swing. Football is based on a lot of momentum and once you get it on your side it can change a lot in the game."

Fickell on the team's thoughts when getting the ball back down six with two minutes to play: "We had belief. We asked those guys to believe in everything that we do and that's what it comes down to. You have to believe whatever the situation is that you're going to get it done. That's what you saw. You saw the eyes of those guys on the sideline, they didn't have any doubt and that's what you want."

Michigan senior center David Molk on Robinson's performance: "He did great. It is apparent how he has matured throughout the season, how he has matured with me watching over him. He did great. As an offense, we did great and drove down the field. We were always composed. We were always ready for another drive. There was absolutely nothing that was going to stop us today."

Robinson on his performance: "I was out there playing for the seniors. I played my heart out and the other guys did, too. That is what happened. I was just doing what I had to do – playing for the seniors and playing for Michigan."

Moeller on his emotions before the game: "My mind-set (the night before the game), I was thinking, 'Who do I play for? What am I playing this game for?' And it is for Coach Fickell and for this coaching staff. They have done a great job no matter what anyone thinks of pulling this team together and staying through all this adversity we've gone through. He has done a great job."

Posey on the locker room atmosphere after the game: "After a loss it's always eerie. We've never lost to Michigan. It's just an eerie feeling. It's a weird feeling in your stomach, but for the most part you just try to learn from these things."

Shazier on the attitude that he had to keep playing despite suffering a second-quarter knee injury: "I bought into that. That's how we've been fighting all year. We've been through so much stuff and we're going to need every player we can, no matter what injury or whatever happens. We have to keep pushing."

COVER STORY

Meyer Has Succeeded Everywhere He's Been

Continued From Page 1

"I've done a lot of research," he said. "I don't think Ohio State's broke. I think there's some obvious mistakes made in the grand scheme of things, mistakes that are very correctible."

"My goal right now is to put together a fantastic recruiting class, and I've been very fortunate. If you look back at the last 10 years of being a head coach, I've coached with arguably the best group of assistant coaches. A good majority of them have either been head coaches or they are head coaches now. I think Ohio State deserves the best group of assistant coaches in America."

Meyer will get help in that regard from athletics director Gene Smith, who has pledged an open checkbook when it comes to putting together the best staff in America. On top of that chain will be Meyer, who will be making \$4 million per year in his six-year deal, which includes additional incentives if he remains head coach in January 2014, '16 and '18.

To hear Smith talk, that's a bargain given that Meyer represents everything he was looking for in a head coach.

"He's a great football coach," the Ohio State AD said. "But more importantly, he's an outstanding person. He's a great leader in our industry. He's from Ohio, born and raised. And when we went out looking for a football coach, we were particularly looking for an individual that had integrity, one that demonstrated outstanding leadership."

"This is the right time for Urban Meyer to lead our football program."

Back In The Game

Meyer was available after a well-publicized yearlong sabbatical from coaching brought on both by health issues and a desire to spend more time with his family, including his wife, Shelley, daughters Nicole and Gisela, and son Nathan.

The first warning came after Florida fell to Alabama in the 2009 SEC title game. Three weeks after the loss, Meyer shocked the sport by announcing his resignation. He admitted he had checked into a Gainesville hospital after the Alabama game and had suffered from stress-related chest pains known as esophageal spasms as well as headaches brought on by an arachnoid cyst.

However, just one day later, Meyer took back his resignation, turning it into a leave of absence. By March, he was back at the controls, and Meyer won his 100th game in 2010 while piloting the Gators to a disappointing 8-5 season.

At the end of the campaign, Meyer announced he was stepping down again, pointing to the lack of balance in his life.

Now removed from both situations, the coach admitted he had let things get the better of him.

"I call it the pursuit of perfection," Meyer said. "I think at the end of the day we all know there's no such thing. I fell victim to that. I've been to a place (that) I'm not going to go back."

Adding to the stress factor was the fact that a number of Meyer's most trusted assistants left for more high-profile jobs, leaving the coach feeling in some ways like he had to do it all.

So Meyer stepped back. The family went on numerous vacations during the year, and he spent time watching his daughters play volleyball – Nicole suits up for Georgia

Tech and Gisela plays at Florida Gulf Coast – while coaching his son's baseball team.

But as time went on, Meyer felt the call again.

"I know he missed it so achingly bad," Shelley said. "He made it clear to me for several months now that he couldn't not coach again. I just wanted to make sure that he had the energy. We had family discussions. We fired hard questions at him – even the kids – and at the end we all knew it was the right thing."

To that end, Meyer said he feels he is in great health, and during his time off he met with coaches from around the country and found out some of the best ones were able to find a balance in their lives.

After admitting to second, third, fourth and fifth thoughts about taking the job, he reached into his pocket to show he was serious.

"This is a contract that my kids made me sign before I was allowed to sign a real contract," he said, pulling out a pink piece of paper sent to him by Nicole that stipulated he must continue to stay in good health.

"It's tougher than any other contract I've signed in my life," he added. "I will be the same guy that I was at the beginning of (Florida) tenure, and that was a guy that did have balance, a guy that took care of himself, a guy that did not try to get involved and change everything."

Once his family agreed Meyer was able to get back into coaching, things moved quickly with Ohio State. Smith said Meyer was the chosen candidate of a search committee including the athletic director, president Dr. E. Gordon Gee, university administrators Chris Culley and Jeff Kaplan, and trustees Alex Shumate and Robert Schottenstein.

Smith said he first contacted Meyer on Nov. 20, one day after the Buckeyes' loss to Penn State, met with him three days later, presented him an offer Nov. 27 and introduced him a day later.

"I'm grateful for the opportunity," Meyer said. "If it was but for the coaching position at The Ohio State University, I would not have coached this coming year."

A History Of Success

Meyer brings with him to Columbus an almost spotless résumé, including a grand total of zero losing seasons as a head coach in two years at Bowling Green, two more at Utah and six at Florida.

The 47-year-old is most known for the two national championships he won at Florida. His Gators knocked off Ohio State in 2006 and then downed Oklahoma two years later. In all, Meyer has been to four BCS bowls – three at Florida and one at Utah – and won all of them on the way to a 7-1 career postseason record.

Meyer played minor league baseball and then college football at Cincinnati before taking a high school coaching job at Cincinnati St. Xavier in 1985. One year later, he moved to Ohio State, spending two seasons as a graduate assistant on Bruce's staff.

From there, Meyer served as an assistant at Illinois State (1988-89), Colorado State (1990-95) and Notre Dame (1996-2000) before taking over a Bowling Green program that had gone 2-9 the year before. He immediately turned around the Falcons' fortunes, posting records of 8-3 and 9-3 with wins against BCS foes Missouri (twice), Northwestern, Temple and Kansas, while installing a hardworking ethos and befuddling opponents with his offense.

New Ohio State Head Coach

Urban Meyer



Urban F. Meyer III was named the 24th head coach in Ohio State football program history. Here are some quick facts about the new leader of the Buckeyes:

- Born in Toledo on July 10, 1964; raised in Ashtabula, Ohio.
- Was a graduate assistant under former OSU head coach Earle Bruce for two years while pursuing his master's degree from 1986-87.
- Spent the next 13 years as an assistant coach at Illinois State (1988-89), Colorado State (1990-95) and Notre Dame (1996-2000).
- Was head coach at Bowling Green from 2001-02, where he led the Falcons to a 17-6 record, including a 5-1 mark vs. schools from BCS conferences.
- Took over as head coach at Utah in 2003 and spent two years leading the Utes. While there, Meyer's teams compiled a 22-2 record. His 2004 team became the first non-BCS conference team to play in a BCS game, capping an unbeaten 12-0 season with a Fiesta Bowl victory against Big East champion Pittsburgh.
- Became the head coach at Florida in 2005. In his six seasons with the Gators, Florida posted a 65-15 record and won two national championships. One of those came at the end of the 2006 season when Florida routed then-No. 1 Ohio State in the BCS National Championship Game.
- Was named national Coach of the Year in 2003 by the Sporting News and the Eddie Robinson Coach of the Year and the Home Depot Coach of the Year in 2004.
- Has a wife, Shelley, and three children: Nicole, Gisela and Nathan. Nicole plays collegiate volleyball at Georgia Tech, Gisela does the same at Florida Gulf Coast and Nathan is 13 years old and in middle school.

"You could see the greatness in him," Meyer's former Bowling Green quarterback Josh Harris told BSB. "To be able to tell the story and sell the dream like he did for us – the way that he would look at us, the things that he would tell us and get us to believe, it was so real in his mind that we were able to manifest a lot of it on the field. I love him as a coach and love him even more as a person."

From BG, he went to Utah and utilized the talents of future NFL top overall pick Alex Smith to produce a 22-2 mark in 2003-04. The Utes were an undefeated 12-0 in '04, ending the season with a BCS-busting blow-out of Pittsburgh in the Fiesta Bowl while earning Meyer multiple national coach of the year honors.

That opened the door to the Florida job, and Meyer replaced the ineffective Ron Zook with style. After a 9-3 record his first season, Meyer led the Gators to a 12-1 record and the SEC title in 2006.

His Gators then overtook Michigan in the final BCS standings, setting up a national title game with Ohio State. The game was no contest as Florida's spread offense kept OSU off-balance and the defense dominated on the way to a 41-14 win that became known in Buckeye lore as "The Debacle in the Desert," a game Shelley described as tough for their Ohio-bred families.

Florida took a step back to 9-4 a year later, but quarterback Tim Tebow had one of the best seasons in college football his-

tory, picking up the Heisman Trophy for his work.

A year later, the Gators were back on top, with Meyer's squad going 13-1 overall and upsetting top-ranked Alabama in the SEC title game. That vaulted Florida to the BCS National Championship Game and another crown, this one the result of a 24-14 win against the Sooners.

The Gators were ranked No. 1 to start 2009 and finished the regular season unbeaten even after Tebow suffered a concussion near the midway point, but soon came the SEC title game loss to Alabama and Meyer's health issues. Still, he was named the best coach of the decade by both Sports Illustrated and Sporting News.

Now ready to make an impact in a new decade at a new place that seems familiar, Meyer had a message for the Ohio State fans.

"It's great to be home," he said. "I told the players a little bit ago that I realize those players didn't choose me. I chose them. I chose to pack up and move the most precious things in my life – my family – back home."

"It's a decision I'm very proud of, a decision that was not thought of overnight, a decision that had a lot of prayer, a lot of research. At the end of the day, to tell you we're excited to be back, once again, is not a strong enough statement. We're grateful to be welcomed back home."

Michigan Game Highlighted Fight In Fickell's Men

I'm going to make like Luke Fickell and talk about the Michigan game and the current team. There will be plenty of time in the future to talk about new coaches and the future of Ohio State football.

Chalk me up as one of the optimistic ones who thought the Buckeyes would defeat the hated Wolverines for an eighth straight time and Fickell would ride off into the Ann Arbor sunset on the shoulders of his jubilant team. I had seen it happen to Earle Bruce under somewhat similar circumstances in 1987. I enjoyed it then and I was ready to revel in another emotional victory in 2011.

I thought the Buckeyes were going to score the upset when they got off to a fast start with a 54-yard touchdown pass from Braxton Miller to Philly Brown, followed by holding Michigan to a three-and-out on its first possession. And I still thought the Buckeyes were going to score the upset when, after the Wolverines drove to within inches of the goal line late in the fourth quarter, a strange sequence of events forced them to settle for a 43-yard field goal to make the score 40-34 with a full 1:59 to play.

The fairy tale ending was not to be, however.

The game was somewhat of a microcosm of the season for the Buckeyes. They battled and battled in the face of adversity but fell just short in the end. The game was also in some ways the story of Fickell. He battled and battled to keep the team together in the face of unprecedented adversity but fell just short in the end.

Few Buckeye fans are satisfied with a 6-6 season, and after seven straight wins over Michigan and nine victories in the last 10 meetings between the heated rivals, a loss to the Wolverines is tough to swallow.

But those same fans owe a debt of gratitude to Fickell.

Through all of the things thrown the program's way in the last year – the initial news of "Tattoogate" last December, the revelations that legendary head coach Jim Tressel knew about the violations and failed to report them, Tressel's ouster, the departure of star quarterback Terrelle Pryor, new revelations of NCAA violations, more suspensions, the specter of NCAA sanctions, the collapse at Nebraska and the swirling rumors about Urban Meyer – somehow Fickell kept the team together and competitive right down to the game with the resurgent Wolverines.

In retrospect, it's easy for Monday morning quarterbacks to point out instances when Fickell perhaps misused the clock or his timeouts, maybe didn't take an active enough role in the offense or couldn't get his team off to fast starts in games. Perhaps a more experienced coach might have done better in some of those situations. But it would have taken Tressel himself to do as good a job of keeping the team together, keeping the players focused on the task at hand, keeping them from pointing fingers and lamenting their situation to the media and the outside world.

I think the thing that is most impressive is the grace and dignity with which Fickell conducted himself throughout the season, but especially in the days leading up to the Michigan game when multiple sources were reporting that Meyer had already agreed to become the next Ohio State head coach.

Being in the business, I obviously understand why reporters continued to ask Fickell about the Meyer situation, both leading up to The Game as well as following the Buckeyes' defeat. He never wavered from sticking to his task at hand, though, which was leading his team until he was told to do otherwise, and

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

he never took the bait under the repeated questioning, never choosing to bemoan his situation or criticize the way the courting of Meyer was handled.

Despite all the uncertainty, Fickell and his staff kept the recruiting effort churning, trying to keep the existing class intact and even landing one of the top recruits in the state – Cincinnati Taft defensive end Adolphus Washington – at the height of the speculation concerning the coach's job status and that of his staff.

The situation Fickell was thrown into when he took the job back in late spring was bad enough. There had to have been a better way to handle the courtship of Meyer than allowing it to play out in the press, on the Internet and at the water cooler while leaving Fickell as the sole face of Ohio State available for comment. In a year of university PR disasters, the Meyer-Fickell situation might have been the worst.

Granted, it was a delicate situation, but there had to have been some better way to handle it. If it was a done deal, maybe it would have been best to just go ahead and announce it. If it wasn't a done deal, a better job should have been done in keeping a lid on the story.

It is easy to assume that a more experienced coach such as Meyer would have had a more successful season than Fickell, even given all the distractions. It is also easy to assume that Fickell would have done better next season given the chance to install his own staff and (hopefully) with most of the problems behind the team. We'll never know what would have happened in either case.

It would have been curious to see what would have happened had the Buckeyes not collapsed down the stretch but instead beaten Purdue, Penn State and Michigan to go along with the big win over Wisconsin. Would the powers-that-be have retained Fickell or was the decision to pursue Meyer made long before Fickell was thrown to the wolves? We may never know the answer to that question, either.

I do know for certain that Fickell will leave a tough, gritty team to Meyer. And if the Buckeyes do well next season, all the credit will go to Meyer. But savvy OSU fans will know that Luke Fickell will have had a hand in any success the Buckeyes have next season.

Offense Not Culprit

Not only was I optimistic about the Buckeyes' chances against the Wolverines, I was one of those who was optimistic about the team's chances of having a big season this year.

One of the reasons I was so bullish on the Buckeyes, despite the loss of Tressel, Pryor and the looming suspensions, was my belief that Ohio State would once again have a strong defense.

For all the glamour of offense, I still believe defense wins football games, and for all of the criticism leveled at the OSU offense this season (most of it justified), in the end it was the defense that let the team down.

Take a look at the Buckeyes' losses this year. Only in the Michigan State game would I put the full blame on the offense, which mustered only a late touchdown in the 10-7 loss.

Slow starts by the defense against Miami (Fla.), Purdue and Penn State put the Buckeyes

in holes they were never able to completely dig out of. There were also missed interceptions by Christian Bryant against the Hurricanes as well as Bryant and C.J. Barnett vs. Purdue that might have altered the course of those losses.

Against Nebraska, while the offense completely collapsed after Miller was knocked out of the game, had the defense come up with just one stop late in the game, the Buckeyes would likely have scored the major road victory.

And then we come to the Michigan game. Jim Bollman and the offensive staff finally took the wraps off Miller and the Buckeyes scored 34 points, normally more than enough to win a game between OSU and the Wolverines. Unfortunately, the defense gave up 40 points and 444 yards – including an unacceptable 277 on the ground – denying Fickell and his team a satisfying victory.

It was painful to watch the defense merely wave at Denard Robinson as the Michigan quarterback blew by (granted, he's hard to get a bead on), just as they had been missing tackles all season. There is just no excuse for struggling with something so fundamental as tackling – really the most fundamental part of defensive football.

I'm beginning to realize just how much the Buckeyes missed defensive lineman Nathan Williams, out since the first game of the season with a knee injury. The play of the defensive line was solid this season, probably the best of any of the units on defense. But think how dominant a line that featured Williams, John Simon and Johnathan Hankins would have been.

Does it seem to anybody besides me that Simon, who had a great season by anyone's definition, was less of a factor in the final few games than he had been previously? Surely, opposing offensive coordinators worked to try to neutralize Simon as much as possible, something that would have been more difficult if the disruptive Williams had been present.

Watching Robinson stand back as long as he needed and complete 14 of 17 passes against Ohio State made me long for Williams and his pass rushing ability.

What Could Have Been

After watching the Ohio State coaching staff mix it up on offense with such great success against Michigan and score 34 points, fans will forever wonder what might have been had the coaching staff not insisted on spending much of the season running the ball up the middle until down and distance forced them to do otherwise.

Maybe the offensive coaching staff finally realized they weren't coming back next season regardless of the outcome of the Michigan game, so there was nothing to lose by letting it all hang out. Maybe they were just more willing to try things through the air with veteran DeVier Posey back in the fold.

While doing some research on Bruce's famous victory over Michigan in Ann Arbor in 1987, I came across an interesting quote.

The Buckeyes were going with new starting quarterback Tom Tupa that year and also had to rebuild their receiving corps. Cris Carter was lost over dealings with an agent and Nate Harris was gone after struggling with academics. The duo were the top receivers from the

year before, and the Buckeyes had struggled in the passing game before Tupa came on strong, hitting on 65.3 percent of his passes in the team's final three games and averaging 207.0 yards through the air in those contests.

Bruce credited the experience gained over the season by his team's young receivers as a reason for Tupa's improved play.

"Young receivers run bad routes, young receivers are bumped out of place and young receivers drop the ball," Bruce said at the time.

That's exactly what this year's Ohio State coaches were telling us 24 years later when Miller – and Joe Bauserman before him – was struggling with the passing game.

In 1987, Tupa was 18 of 26 during the 23-20 win over the Wolverines, good for 219 yards and two touchdowns with no interceptions.

Posey showed his worth in this year's Michigan game by more than just catching three passes for 58 yards and a touchdown. He alertly recovered a Jordan Hall fumble on a kickoff that prevented an OSU turnover, and he threw a key block on Miller's 19-yard touchdown run in the second quarter.

When he wasn't catching the ball himself, his presence probably helped open things for Miller to connect with seven other receivers in the game. And if you want to know how open Posey was on the failed pass play on the Buckeyes' final drive that would have won the game against Michigan, see the picture on page 10.

How different might things have been for the Buckeyes this season had Posey come back in game five as was originally scheduled?

Nip Them In The Bud

I hope those Buckeyes coming back next season retain a vivid memory of the feeling of leaving the field at Michigan Stadium after a loss and return the favor next season. Why? Because the arrogance in Ann Arbor appears to be back.

While they are both dynamic quarterbacks, if I had my choice of the calm demeanor of Miller (which I originally mistook for indifference) or the obnoxious prancing around of Robinson, I'd take Miller. I'm into the emotion of college football, but the Wolverines and their fans just rub me the wrong way.

In 2003, when Michigan snapped Ohio State's two game-winning streak, the Wolverines and their backers probably thought they were back on track to dominance over the Buckeyes. Instead, they would go on to lose seven straight.

It's time to start another streak. The Buckeyes need to nip that exuberance – and arrogance – in the bud.

Follow The Buckeyes

This is the last weekly issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin for the 2011 season. The next print issue of BSB, including complete follow-up coverage of the Meyer hiring, will be mailed Dec. 13.

There will, however, be an electronic issue of BSB published online Dec. 6. With a new coach in place and a coaching staff to be hired, recruiting activity is bound to pick up for the Buckeyes so you will want to read all issues of BSB, both print and electronic. Don't forget that we have special added electronic issues during January and February to bring you all the latest in Buckeye recruiting info.

If you haven't already signed up to enjoy our 36 additional electronic issues, free to all paid BSB print subscribers, see the instructions on page 5 of this issue.