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"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

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End Brings A Beginning



TIM MOODY

CALL IT A CAREER – Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer is set to retire after leading the Buckeyes for seven seasons, leaving Columbus with a national championship and three Big Ten titles to his name.

Rose Bowl To Be Meyer's Finale

By TIM MOODY
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

There's no one perfect way to sum up Urban Meyer's seven-season run as Ohio State's head football coach.

There's the good – an 82-9 overall record, a 54-4 mark in the Big Ten, a Cotton Bowl win over USC, a Fiesta Bowl victory against Notre Dame.

Then there's the great – three Big Ten championships, a perfect 7-0 mark against Michigan, that Sugar Bowl win over Alabama and the first-ever College Football Playoff National Championship against Oregon. He led the Buckeyes to a 12-0 season his first year in Columbus and didn't lose a game until the following December.

There was some bad, too. The Buckeyes lost back-to-back games to end the 2013 season, first to Michigan State in the Big Ten title game then to Clemson in the Orange Bowl. They fell, 31-0, to Clemson in the 2016 College Football Playoff as well. Then came 2018, when Meyer was placed on paid administrative leave ahead of fall camp before being suspended for three games for mishandling the employment of former wide receivers coach Zach Smith. Then Meyer collapsed with a severe headache during the Indiana game, an issue caused by an

arachnoid cyst on his brain. Those health issues persisted throughout the season – they've actually been persisting for years – and Meyer eventually found himself making a decision that he later admitted had been in the back of his mind for a while.

That all culminated Dec. 4 when, three days after Ohio State beat Northwestern for the Big Ten championship, Meyer announced that he would be retiring after the Rose Bowl, paving the way for offensive coordinator Ryan Day to take over as the 25th head coach in program history.

So came the end of one of the most decorated coaching tenures in program history – one of the most successful careers in the history of the sport, in fact – an end brought on by the negatives, but a career that will be remembered in Columbus for the highs.

The school officially announced Meyer's retirement early that Tuesday morning before holding a press conference in the afternoon. When the time came to give his first remarks as the soon-to-be-former head coach, Meyer took a moment to wish his grandson, Troy, a happy second birthday before expanding on his decision.

"I'm honored to have represented my home state and this great university the past seven sea-

Day Pegged As Ohio State's 25th Head Football Coach

By TIM MOODY
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

When 2018 comes to an end, Ryan Day will have never served as the full-time head coach of a football team. The same will be true the next day, when Ohio State faces Washington in the Rose Bowl.

When Day wakes up Jan. 2, 2019, though, he will officially be the 25th head football coach in program history. But the 39-year-old from Manchester, N.H., isn't your average first-time head coach. In fact, Day will begin his first season as the lead man in Columbus with a 3-0 head coaching record to his name.



Ryan Day

When Urban Meyer was placed on paid administrative leave before fall camp, Ohio State selected Day to be the interim head coach instead of elevating defensive coordinator Greg Schiano, a former collegiate and NFL head coach, or offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson, whose last job was as head coach at Indiana.

That showed a trust in Day from the start, and it also served as a chance for athletic director Gene Smith to evaluate the coach and, in the long run, played a role in him being named Meyer's successor when Meyer announced his imminent retirement Dec. 4, the same day Ohio State named Day the next man up and gave him a five-year contract worth an initial \$4.5 million annually.

"We all know the tremendous job he did and the challenging time," Smith said Dec. 4. "He led our program through unbelievable adversity earlier in the year. He offers us a terrific, terrific skill and talent. We're just so fortunate that he was here."

Day's appointment as head coach comes amid somewhat of a meteoric rise in the profession. He played collegiately as a quarterback at New Hampshire from 1998-2001 then got his first job as the tight ends coach there in 2002. After that, Day had collegiate coaching stops at Boston College (2003-04, 2007-11, 2013-14), Florida (2005 as a gradu-

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OPINION

A Simple Answer To Meyer's Legacy Question



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Charter Member

During the Dec. 4 press conference to announce his retirement from coaching, Urban Meyer was asked what he would like for his legacy to be. He mentioned on-the-field accomplishments, his relationship with his players, doing things the right way – most of what we'd all like for our legacies to be if asked the same question.

But, really ... what should Meyer's legacy be?

Discussion of anyone's place in history is a complicated matter. For example, was Meyer a better coach than Knute Rockne or Bud Wilkinson? I'm not sure that is a question that can be properly debated considering the widely different eras in which each man coached.

I know what the raw numbers say, and they would seem to indicate Meyer is on par with the greatest of the greats.

Rockne compiled a career record of 105-12-5 (a winning percentage of .814) with three national championships in 13 seasons at Notre Dame, but he coached from 1918 to 1930 when the college game was in its infancy. Wilkinson coached at Oklahoma from 1947 to 1963 when football was evolving into more of a finesse game, and he finished with an overall record of 145-29-4 (.826) and a conference mark of 93-9-3 (.900). He also won three national titles with the Sooners.

Meyer, who early during his career seemed to master the complexities of the way the game is played today, finished with a career record of 186-32 (.853) that included a 54-4 mark in conference play with the Buckeyes. No matter the era, that .931 winning percentage is practically unheard of.

For the past several years, Meyer and Nick Saban of Alabama have been regarded as the top coaches in college football, and rightfully so. A team coached by either Meyer or Saban has won eight of the last 12 national championships, and the reason is fairly simple. In addition to being pretty good with their X's and O's, Meyer and Saban simply outclass every one of their peers in recruiting.

What has separated Ohio State from the rest of the Big Ten these past seven years was the take-no-prisoners approach to recruiting Meyer brought with him from Florida. That was never more evident than during this year's 62-39 pummeling the Buckeyes administered to archrival Michigan, an opponent that was working on a 10-game winning streak during which it was outscoring the opposition by an average of 26.1 points per game.

Although they scored 39 points and totaled 401 yards of offense against an oftentimes leaky Ohio State defense, the Wolverines were dominated in nearly every other facet of the game. That was especially true of what had been the No. 1-ranked defense in the nation, a Michigan unit that was shredded for 62 points and 567 yards of total offense.

The players Meyer put on the field were simply bigger, stronger and faster than the ones at the disposal of Michigan head coach Jim Harbaugh, and I contend the Wolverines will continue to struggle in the rivalry game until Harbaugh begins to recruit to the level of his archrival.

When historians begin to write the legacy of Meyer as a head coach, there will likely be a disingenuous handful of ax-grinders who will want to bring up the off-the-field problems at Florida, and I suppose Zach Smith's name will also have to be mentioned.

In terms of a coaching legacy, however, there will come a time when experts as

well as Ohio State fans look back upon the Meyer era, shake their heads in disbelief and marvel at the level of success that included a division title every year, three Big Ten championships, a .901 overall winning percentage, countless All-Americans and first-round NFL draft choices, and a national championship.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Oh, yeah ... and a perfect 7-0 record against Michigan.

In my humble opinion, when it comes time to write the legacy of one Urban Frank Meyer III, the first line of that legacy should include the words "the best head coach the Buckeyes have ever had."

Right Man? Right Time?

Unless you peddle in conspiracy theories, it's preposterous to believe one of the reasons behind Meyer's retirement was the way he was treated by university president Michael Drake and athletic director Gene Smith during the time that led to his suspension earlier this year.

While I'm not totally buying what the coach and athletic director went out of their way to profess during the retirement press conference – that they share a deep and abiding friendship that borders on some kind of "bromance" – Meyer and Smith have had a good working relationship, and it is one that could have continued for many years.

The simple truth is that Meyer cannot continue working in a pressure-cooker environment when the reportedly inoperable cyst on his brain reacts unfavorably to stressful situations. With the demands of Meyer's chosen career, it's a wonder some coaches last as long as they do.

Ara Parseghian won nearly 85 percent of his games and two national championships in 11 years at Notre Dame before he retired at the age of 51, telling friends he was exhausted by the demands of the job. Two decades earlier in South Bend, Frank Leahy, who led the Fighting Irish to four national championships in the 1940s, retired in 1953 at the age of 45 because of what were described at the time as stress-related illnesses. Leahy apparently indicated in later years that he walked away because he no longer felt wanted by university officials and boosters, but he did collapse during halftime of a 1953 game and was actually administered the last rites of the Catholic Church when it was feared he was dying.

In those days, Notre Dame was a college football juggernaut. Beginning in 1924 under Rockne and continuing through Leahy's era more than a quarter-century later, the Fighting Irish won nearly 85 percent of their games and captured seven national championships. But there were yips along the way.

In the wake of Rockne's death in a plane crash in 1931, Notre Dame elevated assistant coach Heartley "Hunk" Anderson to the head coaching position. Anderson, who had two years of head coaching experience at Saint Louis, was handed college football's premier program and guided the Irish to a 6-2-1 record during his first season. Two years later, however, after Notre Dame finished 3-5-2, Anderson was fired.

In other words, despite taking over a talent-laden roster and a program infrastruc-

ture that runs like a well-oiled machine, Ryan Day has a herculean task ahead of him. Whether or not the 39-year-old coach is ready for what's coming is anyone's guess because Day has never before been a head coach. He has never been in charge of his own program at any level, much less a program the scope and magnitude of Ohio State.

Yes, Day was successful as Meyer's stand-in during the first three games of this season, but those three games are hardly enough of a sample size to determine future achievement. After all, there was no question that despite being away from the sideline on game day, the program was still very much under Meyer's control.

With the early signing period for recruits rapidly approaching, I understand the rush to name a successor who will provide continuity to Meyer's program and ease the minds of prospective players. But I'm not entirely sure I understand why interest was not at least gauged from other coaches with regard to taking over for Meyer.

I would contend that any coach not named Saban or Belichick would jump at the chance to take over what Meyer has built at Ohio State. But you don't even pick up the phone and ask Bob Stoops if he might be interested? You don't owe it to yourself and your program to pick up the phone and ask Stoops, Chris Petersen, and yes, even Dabo Swinney if they are interested even if you think all you're going to get at the other end of the conversation is uncontrollable laughter?

The point I'm trying to make is that the aforementioned names have proven track records as head coaches while Day does not. The 24/7/365 demands of being head coach at Ohio State are unfathomable to most of us and involve much more than what we see on 12 Saturdays each fall.

First and foremost is recruiting, and Day will have an extremely tough act to follow. In the first 24 hours that followed the announcement of Meyer's retirement, Ohio State already suffered a pair of decommitments in its prospective class of 2020.

Day has been an effective recruiter for Meyer, but there is a huge difference between going on the road to establish a relationship with a player and closing the deal when that prospect is on your campus. Not only could Meyer flash three national championship rings, his was a face the up-and-coming crop of recruits have seen on television practically all of their lives. That strategic edge in recruiting is now lost to Ohio State.

None of this is meant with any disrespect to Day. He has been in the coaching profession since graduating from the University of New Hampshire in 2002. He is a proponent of up-tempo offensive attacks, adopting much of that philosophy from current UCLA head coach Chip Kelly, for whom Day played at New Hampshire and coached in the NFL with both the Eagles and 49ers.

There are success stories to be found with first-time head coaches, and Swinney comes immediately to mind. But again, with all due respect, the program Swinney took over at Clemson is not on par with what Day is inheriting at Ohio State. The Tigers hadn't had a 10-win season in 18 years and therefore had little to lose when they rolled the dice and elevated Swinney after Tommy Bowden abruptly resigned midway through the 2008 season.

And it's worth mentioning Swinney's record was a pedestrian 19-15 during his first 2½ years on the job. Does anyone believe that kind of record would be acceptable at Ohio State?

URBAN MEYER

Buckeyes React To Meyer Retirement, Day Hire

By GARRETT STEPIEN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

A week and a day after Dec. 4, when Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer announced his retirement – effective Jan. 2 as he passes the baton to offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Ryan Day – Buckeye players met with the media Dec. 12 at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center.

With final exams for the fall semester wrapping up and the No. 6 Buckeyes (12-1) shifting their focus from the classroom to the field for the Rose Bowl vs. No. 9 Washington (10-3), how have they taken the news of Meyer's departure and Day's promotion?

Talking to reporters for the first time since the plan went public, team captains and prominent players from both sides of the ball discussed their reaction.

Junior running back Mike Weber on Meyer's sense of relief since he announced his retirement: "You could see it. He's got a smile on his face, coming around in a good mood just feeling like he did what he could for this program. He did a hell of a job, and I'm proud of what he has done for me and my family and I wish him the best."

Fifth-year senior wide receiver Terry McLaurin on Meyer's decision and Day's ability: "The night before he announced it, he called me and (fifth-year senior wide receiver) Parris (Campbell) in and we talked probably about an hour or so. He asked us for our opinions and when he did that, I felt like it was pretty serious. I didn't think he was going to announce it. I thought he had maybe another year or so."

"But that next day, he told the team, and me and Parris were looking at each other

like, 'This is for real.' But first and foremost, his health was his biggest concern. He's always preached to us – his family and us. That's really all he has going in his life. That's all he cares about. When something like his health is affecting the way he can coach and the way how intensive he is, he probably just felt like he couldn't give it his all anymore and he's brought this program to where it needs to be. It's going to be sad to see him go."

"I won't necessarily be here, but I know Coach Day is going to do a great job. He did a great job when Coach Meyer wasn't here. Just his personality with the players – he has that respect among guys, and obviously everybody's seen what he can do for his offense. He's really changed our offense since he's been here. I have no doubt he's going to do a great job. Coach Meyer's leaving it – Ohio State is still in great hands."

Junior defensive tackle Robert Landers on Meyer's team meeting and stepping down: "It was emotional, but at the same time it was one of those things where we understand why he made the choice that he made. I look at it like if you care about a person like that you would understand why he took the route that he took, and like I've said and will say many times, I appreciate everything he's done for me and everything he's taught me."

Sophomore running back J.K. Dobbins on Day replacing Meyer: "I don't think much will change at all. He's a winner. I'm excited for him. We have a great relationship, and I can't wait to see what he can do. He's going to be a legendary head coach."

Sophomore linebacker Tuf Borland on what makes Meyer stand out: "Obviously his record and all the bowl

wins, national championships and all the wins against That Team Up North – that speaks for itself. But I think it's what he does off the field that sticks with players. Real Life Wednesdays and job opportunities off the field, I think that is what sets him apart."

Junior safety Jordan Fuller on why Meyer has been able to have so much success: "It's because he doesn't let anything slip. Coming in as a freshman, you realize pretty quick that if you don't run through a line all the way, it's the biggest deal in the world. If you don't do a rep right, it's the biggest thing in the world. All of the little things we try and take care of."

Sophomore quarterback Dwayne Haskins on Day's NFL pedigree: "I just feel like we have a lot of NFL-

background coaches as far as (Coach Larry) Johnson with the defensive line, (defensive coordinator Greg) Schiano, (wide receivers coach Brian) Hartline played in the NFL and then you have (head strength coach Mickey Marotti), who's coached a ton of first-round draft picks. It just helps to have a whole bunch of insight in this university and this program with people that have to deal with NFL players, dealt with NFL coaches and some have been in the NFL like (linebackers coach Billy) Davis and a few other people. It helps to have a lot of different information as far as trying to get there to the NFL. You come to Ohio State ultimately to play in the NFL. They definitely develop you for

that situation, and I feel like Coach Day will do a great job."

Junior defensive end Jonathon Cooper on Day as head coach: "In the first three games of the season and all through training camp, we had him, he was our (acting) coach. So I kind of know what to expect with him. He's the same way. He's a great guy. He's a guy I can come to and talk to . . . (even though) we didn't see each other or talk to each other that much because I'm on defense. I know that he's a great guy. I know that he's going to take this job and run with it."



Terry McLaurin



Jordan Fuller



Robert Landers

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Meyer Ranks Among Best In Program History

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sons," Meyer said. "I want to thank Buckeye Nation, our students and faculty, our state high school coaches, (athletic director) Gene Smith for giving me this opportunity, my awesome family and most importantly our staff and student-athletes for all they've done during this time.

"My goal has always been to make this one of the premier and most comprehensive programs in America. It's always been a goal to see a healthy, strong program handed to an elite coach and person to make it even better."

Meyer went on to congratulate Day, who is taking over as a head coach for the first time in his career, a move that is almost unprecedented in the history of Ohio State football.

A Coaching Legend

Retirement is usually a one-time thing,

but that's not the case for Meyer. But to get to his second retirement, you have to start at the beginning.

Meyer, 54, was born in Toledo and grew up in Ashtabula, Ohio, where he attended St. John High School. More talented at baseball than football, he spent a couple of years playing in the Atlanta Braves' minor league system before joining the Cincinnati football team as a defensive back and graduating with a degree in psychology in 1986.

From there, Meyer became a Buckeye, serving as a graduate assistant under Earle Bruce from 1986-87, forging a lifelong bond with both the school and the head coach.

After that, Meyer had various coaching stops as an assistant, including stints at Illinois State (1988-89), Colorado State (1990-95) and Notre Dame (1996-2000).

Then came his first head-coaching gig back in the Buckeye State at Bowling Green, where he posted a 17-6 record in two seasons. Then Meyer went 22-2 in two years at Utah before taking over the Florida program in 2005. In his second season with the Gators, Meyer led his team to a national championship victory over Ohio State, of all teams.

In total, Meyer spent six seasons with Florida, winning two national titles and posting a 65-15 overall record. He nearly quit after the 2009 season before deciding to return, then he retired after 2010, citing some health concerns and a need to spend more time with his family – his wife, Shelly, his daughters, Nicki and Gigi, and his son, Nate.

That ended up being a one-year hiatus before Gene Smith hired Meyer to replace Jim Tressel (there was a season with Luke

Fickell serving as interim head coach in between).

That marked the start of what Meyer called a collective effort to build Ohio State into an undefeated, bowl-banned squad in year one, a national champion in year three, and a three-time conference champion and one of college football's premier programs in every facet by year seven.

"It's not my tenure, it's our tenure," Meyer said during his retirement press conference. "And we did it the right way. I learned this from Woody Hayes to Earle Bruce, to (former OSU coach John Cooper) and Jim Tressel. And that is you have to be a tough guy to play at Ohio State. You have to be a tough guy."

But it wasn't all about the on-field effort in Columbus under Meyer. The Buckeyes churned out graduates and academic honorees in the classroom in addition to first-round NFL draft picks on an annual basis. Meyer built the Real Life Wednesdays program, which serves both as a key recruiting tool and a legitimate outlet for Ohio State football players to be set up for life.

"You have to place a premium on education," Meyer said. "And it's not a wink-wink. You have to place a premium on education. And you have to win every game you play, including that game up north. And that's something that you have to embrace, because not every place is like that."

Gene Smith stressed Meyer's work off the field as well and pointed out the success the Buckeyes have had in all facets during his tenure.

"What Urban has brought to Buckeye Nation by far exceeded expectations," the AD said. "Not only has he elevated the quality and status of our program, but his presence has elevated Big Ten football. To compete with Urban-coached teams, the Big Ten colleagues have had to elevate their programs. Urban has a very, very special gift. He's an elite coach. His Ohio State teams excel both on and off the field. And I emphasize off the field. He was a brilliant leader of men. His command of football strategy is second to none. He's a tireless recruiter and an innovator in creating programs for student-athletes beyond the field."

"The Real Life Wednesday program is certainly an elite program. A hallmark of great leadership is to leave a program better than you found it. There's little doubt that Urban has done that. Buckeye Nation is deeply grateful for the peak experiences we've all had cheering for his magnificent teams."

Meyer reached the top of his profession by being one of the most intense individuals ever to lead a program. He was full-go night and day, texting recruits at the dinner table before getting to the office at 5 a.m. the next day.

The intensity that brought him to the top eventually led to the end of his time with the Buckeyes as well.

Time For A Change

A year ago, retirement might not have been in Meyer's mind. At least not with this timing.

The health issues were real, though, and Meyer had surgery in 2014 to help relieve the stress from the cyst on his brain. He said 2015 was good, health-wise, and 2016 wasn't bad. Then the headaches flared up again in 2017, and the issue got even worse this year, culminating with his

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COVER STORY

collapse during the Indiana game in early October.

Many were quick to point to Meyer's suspension early in the year and all of the off-field issues that came with it, but he stressed that while that was a very difficult time, his health issues were years in the making, and his retirement was a decision made for a multitude of reasons.

"I've had to deal with the headaches for many years, and it came to a head in 2014 and again last year and this year as well," Meyer said. "As difficult a time as (the suspension) was, that didn't have an impact as much on the headaches. But it did have an impact (on the decision to retire)."

He admitted that he started thinking about his longevity in the profession – or lack thereof – while speaking with doctors as far back as 2014. There was the diagnosis, a long-range prognosis and, eventually, a decision to retire now.

With his health issues in mind, Meyer admitted that he tried to take a step back from his intense style. That didn't work, and he had to dive back in. But that style, combined with his health issues and everything else that went into his decision to retire, was no longer going to work long term.

"They style of coaching that I've done for 33 years is a very intense, very demanding, very ... you can ask our former players the expectations, the way I've been," he said. "And I've tried to delegate more and CEO-ish more, and the product started to fail."

"And I had to go right back to – first, I didn't feel like I was doing right by our players and by Gene. And the challenge was can I continue to do that in that style?"

The answer to that question ended up being no, and Meyer made his choice – step down after the Rose Bowl, leaving behind a healthy program and moving forward with

a legacy that features some of the highs and lows for himself personally and professionally.

Meyer wasn't afraid to admit that the off-field issues of this fall will play into his legacy, and it was clear that's something that irked him.

"I'm sure it will," he said. "I haven't really thought that through. That was a disappointing time, obviously. But I think today, and this is about celebrating a new football coach, this is about a very strong program and a group of players that just won back-to-back championships."

"So the legacy is – you can only control so much. And I can lie to you and say that's not important to me. Any human being, that's important to you. And people will have their opinions."

Expanding on his legacy, Meyer simply said he hopes "the truth" will be remembered.

"The truth is that you have a football coach who has devoted 33 years of my life to the love of student-athletes and not just on the football field. I've never treated a player as No. 36 or a number. I've got to know their families. I want to make sure – and we, we, have even taken that to the nth degree now that we want 100 percent job placement when they're done playing. They deserve that."

"I hope it's our legacy. And we won a lot of games and represented this great university and great state the right way."

The Future

Until the clock strikes zero in Pasadena, Calif., Meyer will still be the man leading the Buckeyes. When he wakes up Jan. 2,

2019, though, Day will be the head coach and Meyer will be, well, unemployed.

At least for now.

He admitted during his retirement press conference that he's not quite sure what the future holds, but he doesn't see himself ever coaching again despite retiring once previously.

"I believe I will not coach again," Meyer said before adding, "I'm certain."

So, with coaching out of the picture – whether it be at Ohio State or elsewhere – Meyer has plenty of options. He's an avid golfer, yes, but for a man used to working untold hours, that won't cut it. He's done TV work in the past, and that will certainly be on the table as well.

For now, though, Meyer said he expects to stick around in Columbus, and he and Gene Smith have even discussed a role for the former coach in the Ohio State athletic department.

"I've always been a Buckeye as long as I can remember," Meyer said. "Gene Smith, like I said, our relationship has always been good. It's over the top now. And I trust him with my life. And our families are very close."

"So, when he says jump, I'll still say – I'm going to still call him boss. However I can help this – I believe in Ohio State. I believe in the spirit when you walk around this campus. I believe in Buckeye Nation, because I lived it my entire life. I believe that this is a different place. And I want to help in any way I can. And I believe in our new head coach."

Gene Smith, for his part, joked that he would have put a stop to the switch if

Meyer had changed his mind that morning. He even said he hopes Shelley Meyer will continue in her role as an adjunct professor in the college of nursing, joking that he hadn't actually talked to her about that just yet.

As yet, though, no firm role for Meyer is set. He could take a step back and evaluate, he might help mentor athletes and players from various sports at Ohio State, or he might end up in a role not yet thought up.

For now, though, Meyer still has one more game to coach.

"I look forward to working with our staff and players in preparing to play Washington in the Rose Bowl," he said during his statement at the Dec. 4 press conference. "It's always been a dream of mine and many of our coaches and players to compete in the Rose Bowl. And it's going to be an honor to represent the Big Ten Conference in that game."

After that, it will be the next step for Meyer. And as much as he cherishes winning, and working, and the grind of coaching, it will be the players he'll no longer see on a daily basis that he misses most.

"I called (fifth-year senior wide receivers and two-time team captains Terry McLaurin and Parris Campbell) in last night and we just sat and talked for an hour in my office about maybe this and other things," Meyer said. "The good thing is I'm hopefully in a position I don't lose that. I'm going to miss that. I'm going to miss building teams. But the players without question are what I'm going to miss (most)."

Complete coverage of Meyer's retirement and Day's hiring can also be found on BuckeyeSports.com, BSB's full-service website. The site is free to all print subscribers and signup information can be found on page 5.



Gene Smith

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COVER STORY

AD Smith Skips National Search To Hire Day

Continued From Page 1

ate assistant for Meyer) and Temple (2006, 2012) and he worked in the NFL as the quarterbacks coach with Philadelphia (2015) and San Francisco (2016).

Day was then hired by Meyer in 2017 as co-offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach. He was an instant success, being promoted to offensive coordinator with Wilson in 2018 in addition to receiving \$1 million for this year – one of the first two assistant coaches in program history, along with Schiano, to make seven figures.

Then, after leading Ohio State to wins over Oregon State, Rutgers and TCU as interim head coach, Day proved to Smith that he was the right man to lead the program forward while replacing one of the most successful coaches in Buckeye history.

"We all are part of something special here at Ohio State," Day said. "And the culture that

Urban Meyer has created here is strong. And my pledge to the players is that our staff is going to give you every opportunity to maximize yourself as a football player, as a student in establishing your career after football."

No Search Needed

In almost any scenario, Ohio State would undertake a national search while trying to replace a coach, let alone a coach like Meyer. Smith admitted that he considered that option this time around before deciding he did, in fact, have a ready-made replacement.

"I'm blessed," Smith said. "As I said earlier, it's rare that you have the opportunity to create a succession plan where you have the right person in place. Any CEO in the public or private environment, you hope that you have that opportunity.

"We recognized the talent that Ryan Day had early. And I spent a great deal of time getting to know him. I did that this summer.

"This is a complex place. And so having someone to be able to continue the stability and consistency that we have was important to me. So I did not feel I needed to conduct a public national search."

Not only was Smith comfortable hiring Day as the coach, but he felt the chance to have some stability within the program is key. Almost as soon as Day was hired, multiple reports surfaced saying that he would keep four key staff members – strength coach Mickey Marotti, director of operations Brian Voltolini, director of player personnel Mark Pantoni and director of player development Ryan Stamper – in place. Those four are Meyer's men, and they'll help Day mold his program going forward.

"Our program does not need disruption," Smith said. "It does not need to blow up and have people come in and try and adapt to our standards of operation and try and change



SONNY BROCKWAY

NEXT UP – Ohio State announced Dec. 4 that Ryan Day would replace Urban Meyer as head coach after the Rose Bowl.

the infrastructure that we've put in place for the student-athlete."

Smith wasn't the only one comfortable with handing the keys to Day. Meyer, who has called Day "elite" on a regular basis, stressed that his goal was always to "see a healthy, strong program handed to an elite coach and person to make it even better."

That's what the Buckeyes are attempting with Day, despite his lack of experience.

Game Plan

During his statement at the Dec. 4 press conference, Day made it clear that he gets it – as in he gets the expectations at a place like Ohio State. He knows the importance of winning on and off the field, of recruiting, of beating Michigan on the Saturday after Thanksgiving.

"On-field expectations," Day read from his prepared speech, "it didn't take long for me to figure out what the expectations were of Ohio State football. Number one, win the rivalry game. And number two, win every game after that."

He went on to describe a setup that will feature energy and creativity on offense, built around the personnel each season. He said the defense will play with aggression and simplicity, allowing the players to thrive. And special teams – Meyer's baby – will continue to be key.

Day also addressed Ohio's high school coaches directly, stressing that recruiting within the Buckeye State will be paramount. And he acknowledged the school's deep commitment to molding players on and off the field.

All in all, he was a coach getting ready to fill the biggest shoes imaginable, and he made it clear he understood that.

"And lastly," Day said, "every coach who ever put a whistle around their neck strives to be the head coach at the Ohio State University. I fully understand the challenges that await for me. And being on the same list as Paul Brown, Woody Hayes, John Cooper, Jim Tressel and Urban Meyer, it's extremely humbling, but I'm prepared and ready for the task."

Complete coverage of Meyer's retirement and Day's hiring can also be found on BuckeyeSports.com, BSB's full-service website. The site is free to all print subscribers, and signup information can be found on page 5.

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No Consensus Yet On Meyer's Future, Legacy

By TIM MOODY
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Urban Meyer announced Dec. 4 that the Rose Bowl would be his last game as Ohio State's head football coach.

The move came just three days after the Buckeyes secured a second straight Big Ten title and just over a week after Ohio State dispatched Michigan, 62-39. Those wins marked Meyer's third conference championship and seventh win in The Game since taking over as Ohio State's head coach for the 2012 season.

As Meyer announced his retirement, the school also announced the hiring of offensive coordinator Ryan Day as the 25th head coach in program history, bringing an end to one of the most prolific tenures ever in Columbus.

After Meyer announced his decision, opinions poured in about his choice, his future and the future of Ohio State's program under Day's leadership. What follows is a collection of opinions from columnists – both local and national – regarding the changes in Columbus.

• **Dave Briggs, The (Toledo) Blade:** "Meyer leaves behind an outsized legacy and – for Ohio State – a bigger question. What now?"

"For me, the hire of offensive coordinator Ryan Day felt a little reactionary and rushed. When Meyer arrived here in November 2011, Ohio State was already as plum as any job in the country, and his name-taking tenure only elevated it. To promote a 39-year-old first-time head coach without a national search struck us as a long-term decision based too much on the short-term aim of preserving the Buckeyes' latest – and soon-to-be-signed – blue-chip recruiting class.

"As far as Ohio State remaining a national powerhouse, a cynic might call the succession plan a *secession* plan. Now, we won't go that far. I like Day and believe he can be very good. He is a bright offensive mind, a nimble recruiter, and understands the expectations here."

• **Doug Lesmerises, Cleveland.com:** "Had the Buckeyes put this job on the market, candidates like Iowa State's Matt Campbell, Syracuse's Dino Babers and Northwestern's Pat Fitzgerald may have been interested. For a coach like former OSU assistant Luke Fickell, now the head coach at Cincinnati, this was always the great conflict. If Ohio State was your dream job, you almost certainly needed to leave Ohio State to have a chance at it. You needed to run your own program in order to prove you could lead the Buckeyes.

"That idea has changed.

"There are plenty of reasons for Ohio State fans to be enthused about Day's hiring. He's an innovative play caller, and the offense should continue to thrive. He's proven he can recruit on a national level, helping the Buckeyes land players like five-star Texas receiver Garrett Wilson, who tweeted (Dec. 4) that he remains committed.

"I was impressed his fellow assistant coaches while leading the Buckeyes through training camp, and the first three games of the season, while Meyer was on administrative leave and then under suspension. ...

"... But Day must have the freedom to shape his own program. This isn't an interim coaching situation, or a guy filling in for a suspension.

"This is 39-year-old Ryan Day, first-time head coach, taking over one of the top five programs in college football and replacing a three-time national champion.

"There is reason for optimism. But there's some risk to it as well."

• **Rob Oller, Columbus Dispatch:** "If Meyer's exit was obvious, his next chapter is a mystery. He could take a few years off, get healthy and return to coaching in some capacity. Or he could take a job as a TV analyst – as he did in 2011 after leaving Florida, also for health reasons – and spend more time with family. He is 54. Ara Parseghian was only 51 when he retired from Notre Dame and moved to the broadcast booth, never to return to coaching.

"Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith said he has plans to keep Meyer plugged in to the program – possibly to help with recruiting? – and Meyer wants to stay involved. Just not as a coach. 'I'm certain, yes,' he said, reiterating that his coaching days are behind him.

"I'll believe it when I don't see it. Mack Brown thought the same thing but recently came out of retirement at age 67 to return to coach North Carolina. ...

"... The hire (of Day) comes with some risk. The step up from offensive coordinator to head coach is like a baby doing ballet one day after learning to crawl. It can work – look at Oklahoma, where 35-year-old Lincoln Riley has the Sooners in the playoff for a second straight year despite no previous head-coaching experience before last season – but Ohio State is not a place where you learn as you go."

• **Marcus Hartman, Dayton Daily News:** "On more than one occasion, I have heard John Cooper say something to the effect of, 'If you are coaching football at Ohio State, you're going to win games if you don't screw it up.'"

"Win games Urban Meyer did, and at a higher rate than anyone else ever has. (The fact 'anyone else' includes six College Football Hall of Fame members is probably worth mentioning.)

"Meyer did not face the rebuilding job Cooper did when Cooper was hired in 1988 or have as many fires to put out off the field as Jim Tressel reportedly did when Tressel replaced Cooper 13 years later.

"But Meyer did arrive to almost impossibly high expectations and came about as close to meeting them as anyone could, winning three Big Ten championships and a national championship.

"In light of news he plans to retire next month, it is appropriate to acknowledge Meyer did what he was hired to do – steer Ohio State through the wake of the NCAA mess that ended Tressel's time, continue dominating the Big Ten and win the national championship again.

"As high as the program rose under Tressel, Meyer was expected to bring it to another level and he did.

"Now in tapping Ryan Day to replace Meyer as head coach, Ohio State is betting not only is Cooper correct the program is practically too big to fail but also that Meyer unlocked the best practices for maximizing its potential."

• **Pat Forde, Yahoo Sports:** "When Meyer returned to the sideline, he was misery personified – doubled over at times, grabbing his head, appearing the very antithesis

of calm and collected. At times he appeared to barely be keeping himself upright and functioning. Amid nationwide conjecture about his well-being, Meyer attempted an explanation a few weeks ago by publicly discussing a cyst on his brain that he said has caused him persistent pain, and for which he had surgery in 2014.

"Still, it was fair to wonder whether this was actual physical pain. Had Meyer been sucked back into the vortex of tunnel-visioned, winning-obsessed stress that nearly ruined him at Florida? The sideline discomfort flared during this wildly inconsistent season that saw Ohio State frequently underachieve and flirt with defeat. When the Buckeyes played their best game of the season and blew out archrival Michigan on Nov. 24, Meyer looked rather comfortable on the sideline.

"Whatever it is that has ailed Meyer this season, it is chasing him off the sideline. For now, he leaves a giant void at Ohio State and in college football in terms of coaching acumen and accomplishment – but also carries enough baggage with him to significantly complicate his legacy.

"It's been an incredibly dramatic ride for Urban Meyer since the innocent days at Utah. A fragile genius walks away, and nobody knows what comes next."

• **Adam Rittenberg, ESPN:** "The (Big Ten) needed a jolt.

"Meyer immediately provided one, especially when it came to recruiting. As Meyer retires from Ohio State, his impact on a league he dominated – three conference championships, division titles in all seven seasons, a 54-4 record in conference games – is undeniable.

"Not only has he elevated the quality and status of our program, but his presence has elevated Big Ten football, Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith said during Meyer's retirement news conference. 'To compete with Urban-coached teams, our Big Ten colleagues have had to elevate their programs.'

"The Meyer effect was felt most on the recruiting trail. Meyer didn't care about the Big Ten's outdated gentleman's agreement

not to pursue players verbally committed to other league schools. His first full recruiting class in 2013 ranked No. 3 nationally, according to ESPN. ...

"... Ryan Day hopes to be the next Buckeye coach to bully the Big Ten. Thanks to his predecessor, it will be a much tougher task."

• **Teddy Greenstein, Chicago Tribune:** "The news of Urban Meyer's pending retirement – in a scoop delivered by Yahoo's Pete Thamel and confirmed by Ohio State – will elicit strong reactions around college football.

"Will people offer their honest take? Probably not. So I will hazard a guess.

"Michigan fans: *Hallelujah. Now we have a chance.*

"Big Ten Commissioner Jim Delany: *Oh, great. The Big Ten whiffed on the playoff the last two seasons. And now we'll be without the coach who won it all in 2014 and got back in the final four two seasons later.*

"ESPN's Paul Finebaum: *I was right! I predicted 2018 would be Meyer's last season.*

"Stadium Network's Brett McMurphy: *My reporting on Zach Smith, which was shredded by the Ohio State mob, will never be forgotten.*

"New Ohio State coach Ryan Day: *Yea, I'm getting my chance!*

"Also Ryan Day: *Oh, man, I have no chance to be as good as my predecessor. He went – gasp – 54-4 in Big Ten games, 82-9 overall and 7-0 against Michigan.*

"Michigan coach Jim Harbaugh: *Where do I send the thank-you note?*

"Buckeyes players: *Morning, Coach Day. Can I get the door for you?*

"Buckeyes recruits: *Hmmm ... should I look around?*

"Washington coach Chris Petersen: *Ugh. The Buckeyes might have sleepwalked into the Rose Bowl. Now they'll be pumped to send Urban off right.*

"Meyer's doctor: *Smart move, sir.*

"Meyer's family: *Thank you.*

"Guys like me: *Bummer.*

"No joke. The perception is that Meyer is dour and unpleasant to be around. That's not so at all."



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Meyer Retirement Boosts Lackluster Bowl Season

If it weren't for the chance to see Urban Meyer coach in his last game in the Rose Bowl (and at least one more game of Dwayne Haskins), there wouldn't be much to look forward to as the season winds down.

EXNER POINT Rich Exner

For so many reasons, the time is gone to keep clinging to the old bowl structure. The playoffs removed so much that was good about the reward of a trip to one of the big bowl games.

We will hear repeatedly in the coming weeks from those involved about how exciting it is to participate in a Rose Bowl. Yes, the Rose Bowl is still a big deal – the biggest and best of the bowl games, in fact. But it's not what it used to be.

It is no longer part of the showcase day of college football, because the biggest day no longer is Jan. 1. Gone is any possibility that the winner of the Rose Bowl, or any other New Year's Day game, will be considered for the national title.

The playoff semifinals will be played three days earlier. The championship game will come later. Sandwiched between are bowl games for the noncontenders.

College football went from a not-so-perfect system of only bowl games to a system with a small playoff bracket that is lacking.

The bowl games for the past several years have been largely on cable television. The TV audience is down from the heyday on network TV. And take a look at the empty seats at many of the games this bowl season, though the Rose Bowl will be filled. The interest just isn't there for so many of the games when there is so much focus on the playoffs involving just four schools.

Players, making economic decisions, are skipping the bowl games to remove the possibility of injury before the NFL draft. Those are understandable decisions but a reminder of how little significance the bowl games carry.

A System That Falls Short

The problem is college football has switched to a playoff system that does not work.

Some 129 teams play in the NCAA's top football division. Only 65 realistically have any chance of making the playoffs, regardless of how well they do. Ask Central Florida, which is undefeated for the second season in a row. The only real contenders are the schools from the five major conferences, plus Notre Dame. This is not the case in any other NCAA or pro sport at any level.

Just four college football teams are given a chance to prove they are the best. And it comes down to opinion in picking those teams, not results.

I watched Oklahoma and Ohio State closely in their last two games, comparing the teams every way I could. I believe Ohio State was better heading into the postseason. But that's just a belief. I can understand someone believing Oklahoma was better.

And certainly I didn't believe a two-

loss Georgia team, whose best wins came against No. 10 (in the final rankings) Florida and No. 14 Kentucky, deserved to be ranked ahead of either Ohio State or Oklahoma. Don't forget, Georgia had a blowout loss as well, by 20 points to LSU.

The system is too subjective.

An eight-team playoff is needed. That's one extra game. If that's one too many, go back to an 11-game regular season for everyone.

With an eight-team playoff, I would place an emphasis on results, not opinions. Seven spots for conference champions decided on the field, one spot at-large.

Sure, this wouldn't put the eight best teams in the playoffs. But the playoffs shouldn't be about determining the eight best teams; the playoffs should be about determining the champion. If you're not good enough to win your conference, you're not good enough to win the national title.

No longer would we have to guess whether an Oklahoma is better than an Ohio State. Win your league and you're in. And no longer would we exclude an undefeated, even if untested, team we really know little about. UCF, you're in if you go undefeated.

Cut the debate. Decide it on the field.

If eight teams are too many, a compromise could be a six-team playoff – champions from the five major conferences (no subjective picking there) and then just one piece of guesswork for the sixth spot.

No. 4 would play No. 5, for the chance to play the top seed in the semifinals, with the No. 3 team playing No. 6 for the chance to play No. 2.

Do you know what that would have meant this year?

With the at-large spot going to No. 3 Notre Dame, Georgia would have been out of the mix. Then that would have set up a game between fourth-seeded Oklahoma and fifth-seeded Ohio State.

Now, that's a game worth really getting excited about.

My Top 10

Here's my top 10, and why I differ a little from the playoff committee's vote.

1. Alabama (13-0). The clear choice.

2. Clemson (13-0). Unimpressed with the résumé. The only teams Clemson beat in the committee's final rankings were No. 19 Texas A&M and No. 20 Syracuse. But the Tigers appear better than Notre Dame.

3. Notre Dame (12-0). As an undefeated team, the Irish are not that impressive. But going undefeated is impressive. The Irish deserve credit for winning every time out.

4. (sixth by the committee) Ohio State (12-1). Here is where I differ from the committee. I look more at wins than losses. OSU had more impressive wins than anyone but Alabama. There were routs of No. 7 Michigan and No. 22 Northwestern, and a close win over No. 12 Penn State.

5. (fourth by the committee) Oklahoma (12-1). The Sooners' offense is great, but the defense is awful. Oklahoma was 108th in the country for yards allowed. OSU's defense was not good, but it was at least in the middle of the pack at 67th of the 129 teams.

6. (fifth by the committee) Georgia (11-2). The nation's best two-loss team, but not deserving of being any higher.

7. (eighth by the committee) UCF (12-0). Guesswork here, but this team did not lose. Everyone else from here down lost at least twice.

8. (seventh by the committee) Michigan (10-2). So strong from games two through 11. Not so strong in games one and 12. Only losses came against my third- and fourth-ranked teams.

9. Washington (10-3). Credit for finishing strong with wins over No. 13 Washington State and No. 17 Utah.

10. (13th by the committee) Washington State (10-2). At this point in the rankings, all the teams have some blemishes. Give the Cougars the edge, in this order, over West Virginia (8-3), Penn State (9-3), LSU (9-3) and Florida (9-3).

The New Coach

We really don't know how Ryan Day will turn out as a coach.

I trust the judgment of Meyer in endorsing him for the job. I liked what Day did in winning all three of his games as a temporary coach this season.

There almost always is optimism about a new coach once the choice is made.

Earle Bruce, John Cooper and Meyer all seemed like really good hires at the time. If there were questions about one of the recent hires, it was the uncertainty surrounding Jim Tressel, since he had been a head coach only at the Division I-AA level. Tressel, of course, proved to be ultra-successful at Ohio State, just as he was at Youngstown State.

Time will tell whether Day can put together a record that comes somewhere close to that of Tressel and Meyer. But, despite the lack of a track record coming in, there's one reason I really like the hiring of Day. The choice allowed a smooth transition in the recruiting game just before signing day. That's important.

Meyer raised the program to elite status in part because of the way he recruited nationally. Picking from within increases the odds of keeping that status in place.

Advantage For Day

While Day walks into a program established as a winner at the national level, Meyer never enjoyed that chance at any of his coaching stops.

Bowling Green was 2-9 the year before Meyer arrived. He went 17-6 in two seasons. Utah was 5-6 before Meyer. He went 22-2 in two seasons. Florida was 7-5 before Meyer. He went 65-15 in six seasons. Ohio State was 6-7 before Meyer. He is 82-9 in seven seasons (this does not include the three wins during his suspension this year).

On His Terms

Meyer is the first Ohio State football

coach in at least 68 years to leave the job without being fired or forced out.

Tressel during the spring of 2012 was canned, despite his 94-22 record, after committing infractions that led to NCAA probation. Cooper lost his job after the 2000 season because of his record, 111-43-4, including a 2-10-1 mark against Michigan. Bruce was axed just before the Michigan game in 1987, then went on to close out his OSU career at 81-26-1. Woody Hayes punched his way out of work in 1978, ending a 28-year career at OSU with a 205-61-10 record.

You have to go back to at least Wes Fesler in 1950 to find a coach who left on his own, though Fesler is said to have cited "excessive pressure for winning football games" as his reason for leaving. This is according to Wikipedia, which sourced Mike Bynum's 1991 book, "Woody Hayes: The Man & His Dynasty."

1st-Time Coach

Ohio State is also dipping into unfamiliar territory in hiring a coach who has never before led a program.

Meyer built up a record of 104-23 at Bowling Green, Utah and Florida before landing the OSU job. Tressel was new to Division I-A football, but he was 135-57-2 in 15 seasons at I-AA Youngstown State. Cooper was 81-41-2 in 11 seasons at Tulsa and Arizona State. Bruce was 46-34 in seven seasons at Tampa and Iowa State. Hayes was 33-11 in five seasons at Denison and Miami (Ohio). And Fesler was 10-14-1 in three seasons at Wesleyan and Pitt.

You have to go back to 1946 to find a coach, Paul Bixler, who got the OSU job without previous head coaching experience. Bixler lasted just one year at OSU, before the hiring of Fesler.

This list does not include interim coach Luke Fickell in 2011.

Closing Out The U-M Record

Meyer, in going 7-0 against Michigan, leaves as one of only three perfect coaches in the series. The other two coached in just one game each – Michigan's George Little in 1924 and Michigan's Gustave Ferbert in 1897.

The next best winning percentage belongs to Jim Tressel, 9-1 in 10 games, including one win later vacated by the NCAA.

For wins, Hayes (16-11-1) and Michigan's Fielding Yost (16-3-1) lead the way.

Michigan's Rich Rodriguez was 0-3 against Meyer, and Jim Harbaugh was 0-4. That ties Harbaugh with Ohio State's A.E. Herrstein (0-4 from 1906-09) with the worst record in series history.

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THE FACTS MAN Mike Wachsman

That young man was Ryan Day, and he is now more than just a part of it. He is the newest head coach of the Ohio State Buckeyes. It's a list that isn't very long but is very accomplished. Recent vintage has seen national championships from Jim Tressel and from Day's predecessor Urban Meyer, who decided that the Rose Bowl will be his last game as coach of the Buckeyes. After a tumultuous season, Meyer is stepping away. What he will do beginning Jan. 2 is unknown, though it sounds like he and athletic director Gene Smith are concocting a way for Meyer to stay involved with the school and athletics in one form or another.

As for Day, it would be foolish to think that he doesn't realize the magnitude of his new position.

"I remember being on my grandfather's couch and watching The Game," he told the assembled media the day the hiring was announced. "The respect I had for this place, and it was always a dream of mine."

Dream becomes reality, a reality that Day knows is filled with expectation.

"It didn't take long for me to figure out what the expectations were of Ohio State football," Day said. "Number one, win the rivalry game. And number two, win every game after that."

He sounds like a grizzled veteran already. Meyer has had thoughts about stepping away before but always changed his mind. During the 2014 national championship season he had flare-ups of the arachnoid cyst that's on his brain but had surgery to alleviate some of the issues. He said 2015 was good and 2016 as well. Things started turning for the worse at times in 2017 and then full on this season. From the stress of the investigation into his handling of assistant Zach Smith in the wake of domestic violence allegations to missing the first three games of the season – games in which Day ably led the team to victory – to a campaign fraught with close games and a blowout loss to Purdue, Meyer just seemed anguished, pained. He was not himself, and that inability to coach the way he wanted was the final straw.

"The style of coaching that I've done for 33 years is very intense, very demanding," he said. "You can ask our former players the

expectation, the way I've been and I've tried to delegate more and the product started to fail. And I had to go right back to – first I didn't feel like I was doing right by our players and by Gene. And the challenge was can I continue to coach in that style."

Meyer had an inkling that things might be heading downhill in the latter part of the 2017 campaign.

"Penn State last year, it hit really hard," Meyer said of the headaches. "And we have a great medical team that was over the top trying to help me get through it. I was on medicine and all of that."

"But we had conversations back then about longevity and about the seriousness of it. Because, as they said, it's not your foot or your elbow. We're talking about something else. And that was the – but I also had conversations, to be honest with you, in '14 when we had the whole scenario."

With a Rose Bowl victory Meyer would end his Ohio State career at an almost ridiculous 83-9, and it's fair to ask whether he is the greatest coach in Buckeyes history.

While it certainly doesn't diminish the accomplishments of Woody Hayes and Tressel, the heights Meyer has taken the Buckeyes to may never be equaled. And this is in an era when it is more difficult to dominate, when talent is spread out all over the country. Yet there are the Buckeyes, each and every season, involved at some point in national title and playoff talk. Much of that is because of Meyer and his tireless recruiting, his ability to pull in the best players year after year after year. This is the golden age of Ohio State football, so bask in it. Because what's ahead is unknown.

Day has the kind of work ethic and recruiting ability to be a rousing success and knows that players are the lifeblood of any program. He will work to make sure the product does not drop off, though that may be easier said than done.

At the end of the day, it is about the players.

"A head coach position, as I've learned over the last 17 years, is very complicated," Meyer said. "It's management of people. The one advice I give coaches all the time – and Ryan, I see it with him – you've got to have a genuine love and care for that student-athlete. And I underline genuine. It's not number 78. It can't be that guy. It's got to be his first name, last name, where he's from, his sister, his brother, and what he does after his football career is over."

"Once those players know that you have genuine love and care for them, they'll move mountains for you. And I saw that with Ryan Day."

Meyer said during the press conference that he is fairly certain he will not coach again. I've been around this profession long enough to know to never say never, but

Meyer sounded sincere. It is known that his dream jobs were Ohio State and Notre Dame, so unless a position opens up in South Bend – and the Irish are in the CFP this year so Brian Kelly has bought himself a little bit of time – it is difficult to envision Meyer getting back into "the grind," as he often calls coaching. The health issues are real and cannot truly be fixed, so any stories fans see about Meyer using this as an easy out, a rest period until the next big coaching gig – USC? Auburn? – comes open can be taken with an entire shaker of salt.

"(Ohio) is where I grew up," he said. "It's not healthy, but I came to work every day with fear of letting people like Archie Griffin and our great state of Ohio and this university down, because this is home. I'm a graduate of Ohio State. And we have the best fans in the land. And I didn't want to let them down. So I dealt with – in 2014 I had that surgery. And it recurred last year. I started dealing with some issues last year. And I hired Ryan Day because I thought he was a very good coach. I knew he was because he was with me before. What I found out was that he's far past these thoughts. He's elite."

How does Meyer know that? Well, look at Ohio State's numbers this season.

Day helped mold an untested, first-year starting quarterback into a Heisman Trophy finalist, and Dwayne Haskins has his name etched into Big Ten record books in various categories after throwing for 47 touchdowns and over 4,000 yards – numbers that are a career for many Ohio State quarterbacks.

In the days leading up to the Rose Bowl, both Meyer and Day will "sprint into" recruiting and the early signing period, which begins Dec. 19. After that it's preparation for the Rose Bowl and just staying busy, with Day trying to keep busy and not be distracted by the fact he is now the lead dog for the Ohio State football program.

It's a position for which he feels more than ready.

"Every coach who ever put a whistle around their neck strives to be the coach at the Ohio State University," he said. "I fully understand the challenges that await me. And being on the same list as Paul Brown, Woody Hayes, Earle Bruce, John Cooper, Jim Tressel and Urban Meyer – it's extremely humbling. But I'm prepared and ready for the task."

He had better be. Because the lights in Columbus shine brightly, and if you're winning everyone will know about it. And if you're losing everyone will see it. Even as far away as Manchester.

Going Out A Winner

Meyer's decision to hand the reins over to Day caught many by surprise, but now that it's a done deal it makes for a very interesting Rose Bowl.

You always assume that coaches have been everywhere – John Cooper seemed to know every other coach in the game and always had stories about road games his teams played. So to learn that Meyer has never been to the Rose Bowl, that it was a bucket list item for him, seems only fitting.

The Buckeyes have certainly saved their best for last, putting together two excellent performances in the season finale against Michigan and the Big Ten championship against Northwestern.

There was a hope – fleeting, but still hope – that Ohio State might inch its way into the College Football Playoff. It didn't happen, but the Rose Bowl is certainly not a consol-

ation prize. It is one of the most tradition-rich, revered football games in the country, and finishing the season in Pasadena at the foot of the San Gabriel Mountains is a great conclusion. A more idyllic scene, with the sun setting in the background, cannot be found in all of college football.

And the Buckeyes and Meyer get to be a part of that.

Washington was the best team in a down Pac-12 this season, and while the Huskies can bring it defensively – and may have the best secondary Haskins will see this season – they are offensively challenged. Myles Gaskin is a force at running back, but senior quarterback Jake Browning has regressed since bursting onto the scene as a freshman. He's been more of a game-manager than game-changer, and the thought here is that if the Buckeyes score more than 21 points they will win.

It will be another audition of sorts for Day, a mirror into what he might do going forward when the clock begins ticking on his tenure as head coach moments after the final gun sounds. Meyer should be able to soak everything in, and maybe, just maybe, not be quite as anguished as he appeared to be on so many occasions this season. And when the clock reads zero and the game is over, don't be surprised if Meyer stops to take everything in one last time as a Buckeye.

He's earned that, hasn't he? And it's not like he's going away. He'll be in town, around the program in some yet to be determined capacity and likely doing something to mentor young people.

Oh yeah – he'll also be watching Day to see if he is upholding the nearly impossible standards Meyer set for the program.

"I'm sure he'll have a remote and be looking at punt protection and everything else on a weekly basis," Day said. "And he'll have his comments and he'll have things written down. So he'll always be a resource."

Most Wonderful Time

With apologies to jolly Saint Nick, the best time of the year is the football postseason. It isn't just that there is a College Football Playoff – albeit a clunky, convoluted one – but there is a smorgasbord of bowl games to satisfy every palate.

If the Camellia Bowl and Gasparilla Bowl are the fruitcakes of the bowl season, New Year's Day is that much-anticipated present you've been waiting the entire year for. It's almost the way it used to be, with the Fiesta, Rose and Sugar all being played on 2019's opening day. If only the Orange and Cotton were in the mix it would truly be nirvana.

The Big Ten is well-represented in the postseason and will have a chance to show that it belongs among the top conferences in America. Nine league teams will be bowling, and predictions follow:

Quick Lane Bowl – Minnesota 28, Georgia Tech 27
Pinstripe Bowl – Wisconsin 24, Miami (Fla.) 20
Music City Bowl – Auburn 34, Purdue 28
Peach Bowl – Michigan 23, Florida 21
Redbox Bowl – Oregon 28, Michigan State 17
Holiday Bowl – Utah 27, Northwestern 23
Outback Bowl – Mississippi State 21, Iowa 18
Citrus Bowl – Penn State 35, Kentucky 24
Rose Bowl – Ohio State 38, Washington 21
Happy holidays, enjoy the games!

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Football Coaches Like Meyer Don't Step Away Lightly

Where to even start.

I guess we'll start at the top – or what is the top for the next couple of weeks anyway. And that would be with Urban Meyer.

I guessed wrong on this one. While anyone who had a cousin who had a friend who knew a groundskeeper at Ohio Stadium was offering their insider information that Meyer was leaving after this season, I thought for sure he would be back.

Why was I so sure?

Because Urban Meyer is a football coach. And the really great football coaches – and even his most ardent detractors (almost exclusively out-of-state or on some radio, TV or Internet platform – or both) would agree he is a really great football coach – are football coaches 24/7/365. Coaching is what Urban Meyer lives for. What would he do if he wasn't coaching? Stay at home and drive Shelley crazy? Or have Shelley drive him crazy?

He could go to the broadcast booth, as he did between his gigs at Florida and Ohio State. But would watching the Ohio State-Michigan game from the booth give him the buzz you know he got when his Buckeyes, erratic and maligned much of the season, put 62 on Jim Harbaugh and his No. 1 defense in The Game, basically humiliating the Wolverines in what was supposed to be their year. That three or four hours are what people like Urban Meyer live for. All the other hours are just preparation for the ultimate high. I am sure he felt the same way when his Buckeyes defeated Alabama on their way to the national championship in 2014.

Broadcasting is just not the same.

On the other hand, no one other than Meyer, not even his doctors, knows the pain that the coach has endured from the cyst on his brain over the last few years. I don't know that I have ever seen someone knocked to the ground by shooting pain, such as Meyer was on the sidelines earlier this season. That's not your run-of-the-mill Excedrin headache.

But while we may not be able to identify with Meyer's pain, I think we can all get a pretty good feel for what the coach's summer and early fall must have been like with the constant questions about the Zach Smith situation, the constant criticism from people who hate Meyer and Ohio State just because they hate Meyer and Ohio State, and most importantly, the forced exile from the team – his passion.

Maybe the off-field distractions exacerbated his health issues, maybe they didn't. But you throw in his team's frequently exasperating performances and it all added up to a situation that couldn't have helped his physical condition.

Now a father with a son playing college baseball, and a grandfather to boot, maybe it really is time for Meyer to stop and smell the roses, and I don't mean the roses that he will smell in his swan song on Jan. 1.

I am sure his retirement will be hard at first. He probably won't know what to do with all that time on his hands. But he'll adjust.

I was struck – but not surprised – by the words of former Buckeye basketball coach Thad Matta when he was recently honored at an Ohio State basketball game. Matta is somebody who, like Meyer, was able to achieve a high level of coaching success while battling physical ailments.

"I wake up every morning and I say, 'Something has to go wrong because I feel too good.' I am not going to apologize to people for being happy," Matta said. "I feel really good."

Maybe Meyer will end up feeling the same way. Don't forget, however, that Matta's ailments eventually caught up with him and certainly contributed to what most perceived as a decline in his program at Ohio State. As I have

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

said over and over, good coaches don't suddenly become bad coaches, so there was something more to Matta's descent.

By his own admission, Meyer knows only one way to coach, and that style is what lifted him to the top of his profession.

"The style of coaching that I've done for 33 years is very intense, very demanding," he said upon announcing his retirement. "You can ask our former players the expectations, the way I've been. And I've tried to delegate more and be CEO-ish more, and the product started to fail."

And the one thing coaches like Meyer detest is failure.

So maybe this is the right time for him to step aside and not be forced out like Matta.

In fact one of the refreshing things about his retirement announcement was that he is one of the only major coaches at Ohio State to leave on his own terms in many years. In the 38 years of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, I believe he is the only one save basketball coach Gary Williams, who left for his alma mater Maryland after just two years in Columbus, and legendary women's hoops coach Tara VanDerveer, who sought greener pastures at Stanford after five seasons.

One thing we know is that in just seven seasons at Ohio State Meyer proved himself to be among the greatest coaches in Buckeye history, and that's a storied football coaching history. His successes in Columbus have been well chronicled elsewhere in this issue of BSB so I needn't repeat them. Most of you know them anyway, right down to the 7-0 record against Michigan.

More than just wins and losses, I will always remember the never-say-die attitude his teams brought to the field. The Buckeyes' wins over Penn State this year and last quickly come to mind. That type of come-from-behind victories starts at the top with the head coach and his staff, who instill that attitude in their players.

As an aside, however, I remain puzzled by the baffling losses such as at Iowa last season and Purdue this. I am sure Meyer remains puzzled as well.

Meyer's legacy goes beyond just Ohio State. Here he took a program that had always been solid and was already taken to the next level by Jim Tressel and simply improved on that. Where his impact was really felt was in the Big Ten.

"What Urban has brought to Buckeye Nation by far exceeded expectations," athletic director Gene Smith said. "Not only has he elevated the quality and status of our program, but his presence has elevated Big Ten football. To compete with Urban-coached teams, the Big Ten colleagues have had to elevate their programs."

They elevated their programs, especially on the recruiting trail, but for the most part the others in the Big Ten have not been able to reach the level of the Buckeyes, as witnessed by the back-to-back Big Ten championships upon which he will leave.

"Urban has a very, very special gift," Smith said. "He's an elite coach. His Ohio State teams excel both on and off the field. And I emphasize off the field. He was a brilliant leader of men. His command of football strategy is second to none. He's a tireless recruiter and an innovator in creating programs for student-athletes beyond the field."

By the way, one other legacy Meyer leaves at Ohio State is one of his favorite words – "elite." The word is tossed around repeatedly. If you don't believe me, see Smith's quote above or just listen.

Do I think Meyer will ever return to coaching?

Well, I guessed wrong on him coming back for next season, so I am probably not the right person to ask. But as I said earlier, he's first and foremost a football coach.

So we will see.

The New Day At OSU

Both Smith and Meyer seem comfortable with seamlessly moving Ryan Day into the head job at Ohio State, even though the Buckeye offensive coordinator has no permanent head coaching experience. The operative word here is "seamlessly."

"Our program does not need disruption," Smith said. "It does not need to blow up and have people come in and try and adapt to our standards of operation and try and change the infrastructure that we've put in place for the student-athlete."

Many Buckeye fans don't seem so sure, wondering why Ohio State didn't at least go through the process of a national search before settling on Day.

On the one hand, I believe that running a program year-round is lot different than being the interim coach for six or seven weeks. There is no guarantee that Day's success, both on and off the field during his audition in place of Meyer, will carry over to his tenure as head coach. Then again, there is no guarantee that anyone who had been selected for the job would have led the team to success, certainly to the level of success of Meyer.

In thinking about Smith's continuity theory, though, I see the logic.

Usually, when there is a coaching change, a program is in some sort of disarray. If it weren't, there wouldn't have been a coaching change. That is not the case at Ohio State in 2018.

Meyer leaves a Big Ten dynasty in place, with the previously mentioned back-to-back conference championships and many other successes as well. Do you blow things up and run the risk of a setback for a couple of years or more, or do you try to carry on the winning formula? Right away they would have run the risk of doing major damage to the 2019 and 2020 recruiting classes if they had gone outside.

By elevating Day and retaining the backbones of the operation in strength coach Mickey Marotti, director of operations Brian Voltolini, director of player personnel Mark Pantoni and director of player development Ryan Stamper, Smith is banking on retaining the winning formula and retaining the majority of the pledged recruits.

There are other coaches on the staff with more experience who could have tried to maintain Meyer's program. Former head coaches Greg Schiano and Kevin Wilson were obvious choices. But Smith and Meyer have obviously had their eyes on Day. I first noticed this when they raised his salary to \$1 million in an effort to keep him at Ohio State, a figure out of line with what others in his position had been making in Columbus previously and higher than some more experienced coaches on the current staff.

This was a guy Ohio State obviously wanted. Now he is their man.

The precedent for a move like this was set when Oklahoma elevated the 35-year-old Lincoln Riley to replace the highly successful Bob Stoops and didn't miss a beat. Riley has had his Sooners in the College Football Playoff in both of his first two seasons in Norman.

Only time will tell if Day and the Buckeyes have similar success. I think everyone would agree that there appeared to be a lot to like about the new coach during his 3-0 audition and how he gracefully transitioned back to one of Meyer's top lieutenants.

One thing is certain though. If Day does not uphold the standards set by Meyer and Tressel before him, especially vs. That Team Up North, Buckeye fans will turn on him in a hurry.

Of course if that does happen, by then Meyer might be rested and ready to resume his rightful place on the Buckeye sidelines.

No Print Until 2019

Pardon me if I got a little cranky with some of our readers who called in after the Big Ten Championship Game looking for their BSB covering that game with Northwestern. As was stated in several places in the Dec. 1 issue of BSB, including this space, coverage of the title tilt in Indianapolis was provided, extensively I might add, on our electronic BuckeyeSports.com website.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin has 24 print issues to allot over the course of any given year. When we map out the print schedule for each publishing year, it does not pay to designate a paper for the week after the Michigan game because the Buckeyes might not be playing then, especially with BuckeyeSports.com to more than adequately cover the team if it does play for the championship.

I wasn't cranky, however, because people were calling looking for their BSB. On the contrary, we consider it a compliment when people are looking for their paper. When they stop looking for their issue is when we will become concerned.

Why I was cranky was because several readers insisted that they were too old to read anything online. I am as much a Luddite (look it up, Terry from Cleveland) as anybody, but even I have come into the 20th (I'm not saying 21st) century. My parents, the incomparable Jack and Faye Moskowitz, aged 91 and old enough (I'll protect you on this one, Faye), respectively, have been enjoying the Internet much longer than I. In fact my father, who has been a bit under the weather recently, will probably have thousands of emails when he finally gets up the strength to check them.

BuckeyeSports.com is included with your subscription to Buckeye Sports Bulletin. The staff at BSB does an outstanding job of posting daily stories that you won't see in the print BSB, and they are always providing interesting and entertaining discourse with the readers on the popular Forum. Not taking advantage of BuckeyeSports.com is like ordering a three-course meal and eating your main course but passing on your appetizer and dessert.

The next print edition of Buckeye Sports Bulletin will be mailed on Jan. 15, 2019. Don't miss our coverage of the early football recruiting signing period starting Dec. 19 or our reports from Pasadena leading up to the Rose Bowl with Washington on Jan. 1.

Instructions on how to access BuckeyeSports.com can be found on page 5 of this issue. If you still need help, give us a call at (614) 486-2202 and we will be glad to help get you started.