

**January 2, 2014**



An Interview With:

## **URBAN MEYER**

THE MODERATOR: We're now joined by Ohio State Head Coach Urban Meyer. Coach, you've got one day left to prepare for the Discover Orange Bowl. What is left to prepare for you and your team?

COACH MEYER: We've got to get some guys healthy. It's pretty much through our team now. We had a week long battle with some virus stuff. The good thing is it's a less than 24-hour bug. Our Jeff Heurman seems to be the last casualty that we're working through that.

Other than that, it's been a great trip. Practice facility has been fantastic. The Orange Bowl people have been great. Just got to get ready for a great team.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions.

**Q. Urban, how do you view Bowl games? Especially these ones that aren't for National titles and these type of things? Do you view it as a continuation of the 2013 season or as a way to start 2014 or maybe a combination of both?**

COACH MEYER: I'm going to give you a little disappointing, probably, answer because I don't really think it that much through. It's a chance to go compete, whether it's checkers or ping pong. We're going to try to win the game. Our job every time we keep score is to win.

It's the mentality we try to create within our program. Whether it's the Orange Bowl, whether it's the eighth game of the season, we're trying to win Na game.

Early in Bowl practice, we gave a lot of work with the young players and even the plus periods after practice, but the last ten days have all been about trying to compete to win a game.

**Q. Do you ever spend any time -- I'm guessing the answer to this is no, but I'm going to ask anyway. Do you ever spend any time contemplating your own legacy? You have a chance to win a fifth BCS game, third different school. Those things don't happen to normal people, obviously. Do you ever spend any time thinking about what your legacy in this game is going to be?**

COACH MEYER: I took a year off of coaching, and it came up a few times when you have time actually to think back. I always think back to the legacy. We had a bunch of former players come out to practice yesterday, a bunch of guys we've coached in the past, all the way back from Notre Dame days.

At some point, the thing I love most about coaching football, what I miss the most is the relationship with the players, and that's -- because you can't really control what's out there. Our guys work hard. We try to -- we don't try. We do it the right way. I have a bunch of guys that are coaching -- are head coaches now and are doing great, following the rules, doing things the right way. That's good for college football.

If I had to say, what I'm most proud of is our players and coaches are out there doing so many good things.

**Q. Urban, how important is this game maybe for the perception of the program? Michigan State won yesterday, and now -- I guess how important is it for the perception of you guys and the Big Ten? I know it's crazy to look ahead for next year, but a big win over an out of conference team maybe will strengthen the case of a one-loss team.**

COACH MEYER: That's a great question. I think it is big. It's something that doesn't occupy much of our time. We have to stop bubble screens, and those type of things.

I did see the end of the Rose Bowl, and I found myself pulling for the team in green real hard just because, when I sit in these kinds of

environments, it just gets thrown back and forth, what about this? What about this? We can't control what's out there.

But any time a member of your conference does well in a big game like that, I do think it's important because the truth is the upper level Big Ten teams are excellent football teams. The conference is getting better. Guys are working extremely hard to close the gap on the SEC. That's the one conference the last few years that has really dominated. So that's a topic of conversation quite often.

Once again, it doesn't occupy -- because you can't control that. You can control your performance on Saturday or Friday -- I guess Friday's game.

**Q. On the tail of what the gentleman just asked you about the conference, do you think, with the evolution of the playoff system, that more of this conference talk will fade away? It's going to be every man for himself basically because it's going to be every team trying to get to the Final Four. It's not going to be a conference trying to get to the Final Four.**

COACH MEYER: I think that's a good point. It's something, once again, in the off-season -- when the BCS first went with a game removed and it was actually Ohio State versus Florida in '06, it was all how are we going to do this? And just the logistics of one week behind. I think the one thing in most coaches' minds is how is logistics going to work? You have two games back to back with finals.

There's an element that I don't hear much conversation about when you start talking about the playoffs, and that's the academic calendar and the wear and tear on your 85 scholarship players, which we're much below that because of the NCAA stuff. That's the -- we're dealing with some injury and depth issues right now. If you had to play one more after this, I'm just -- those are the things that I know is in this coaching staff's mind.

**Q. That's not what the public thinks about. The coaches think about what you're talking about -- injuries, academic. You've got to figure all that in.**

COACH MEYER: Here's the thing to think about. Most kids start class Monday, and take another week off or ten days off -- I know we're probably going in a direction away from the Orange Bowl, but that's real. I think most coaches are

anxious to see how is that going to affect the student-athlete?

**Q. Urban, you've had like a month now to sort of shuffle around the defense a little bit. You're dealing with an injury or a situation with Noah Spence where he's not going to be here. What do you expect out of that group on Friday night? Do you expect an inspired performance? What's your take on what's coming?**

COACH MEYER: We've practiced really hard. Our pass defense has been a major issue at Ohio State, not near the standard we expect. Whenever that happens, you look at personnel. You look at scheme. That's both been evaluated.

And then at this time of year, it's just go work as hard as you can, and so we have Tyvis Powell and Vonn Bell will be starting at positions they've never started before at. So that's personnel. We've made some adjustments to scheme.

And then we do what we do, and that's go out and work as hard as you possibly can. So I'm expecting -- the issue is going to be the team you're playing, and they're very good at what they do. It's not just covering, but it's getting them on the ground because their skilled positions at Clemson are as good as anybody in America.

I'm anticipating that our guys play very hard.

**Q. Question I have, down the stretch, Braxton was maybe not as efficient throwing the football perhaps as you would have liked. He only averaged about 130 yards a game. I don't know if you put a number on what you want to throw for in this game, but it's probably not going to be enough to get the job done. What have you done with him, working with him to bring him along so you guys can make the plays you need to make in this game?**

COACH MEYER: Braxton has got to play better, but the guys around him have to play better too and what the coaches have to do too. It's a team effort. I think everyone understands that.

If you closely evaluate the last few games, two were weather conditions, one was a game where we didn't throw the ball very much because the run game was working so well and we had to go win the game obviously.

The last game was one we have to play

better, but that's not just -- you can't throw -- I always try to deflect praise and deflect blame, especially on the quarterback position, because that's one of the most, if not the most unique position of all of sport. It's completely dependent upon those around you.

So we just -- you're going to get tired of this. Just go out and work your tail off and play better. Our receivers had a pretty good week of practice too.

**Q. How important is the outcome of tomorrow's game in determining just how successful this season should be viewed? If you win, the season is blank. If you lose, the season is blank.**

COACH MEYER: I think any time you're in a Bowl game -- I guess the gentleman asked about, is it part of last season, this next season, whatever? It's part of this season. We're 12-1. 12-2 is a lot different than 13-1, and winning a BCS Bowl game is very important.

**Q. This is -- today will be your last day, walk-through with this group. What will be your message to them? Have you sort of thought about what you'll tell them? Today being the last time you guys will gather for practice and walk-through and whatnot.**

COACH MEYER: We've had the conversation. I love this group. This group -- I think you guys know me well enough that I'm very honest about evaluation of people, sometimes to the point where it's sometimes too honest or too forthright. I love these guys. These guys -- our leadership was very poor after last year in January and February.

We went on about an eight-month class to teach leadership and to present situations for them where they had to respond, the whole event plus the response equals the outcome, and they've done a really good job. I mean, the Philly Browns of the world are different human beings, and I'm anxious to see guys like that go on in their life because of what they've learned and how they've responded.

I have great admiration for these players, and they've earned that right. Now they've got to finish strong. I think the Buckeye nation knows exactly the way the staff feels about this group of players, especially the ones walking out the door.

**Q. Just kind of a procedural question. Did you guys name like permanent captains at the end of the year at the banquet or anything?**

COACH MEYER: I'm not sure yet. It's kind of a unique situation where there's just a group of players. Mike Vrabel said it best to me, and he said, I wasn't elected captain, but he looked at me and goes, I was captain. I was thinking, he should have been a captain. To limit it to three or four.

So I still haven't decided yet. Obviously, some have performed better than others. Jordan Hall is a great example. Jordan Hall is a guy that was our leading rusher first three games of the year. Went through a chronic, a bad knee issue that he's playing better. He had one of his best practices yesterday.

I go back to what Mike Vrabel said. I'm captain. It doesn't matter. You're a leader. We haven't decided that yet.

**Q. In your history as a coach, have you ever had time where players, whether they're seniors or juniors who are thinking about maybe going pro, that there is any distraction about --**

COACH MEYER: Sure.

**Q. -- thinking ahead to Combine stuff, workouts, and how do you handle that?**

COACH MEYER: Have we ever had it? Hundreds of times.

**Q. What do you do as a coach to try to keep those guys thinking about the Bowl while they're also thinking about their future?**

COACH MEYER: Well, every one, we can say that doesn't exist, but that's a flat lie. Every player that comes to Ohio State, every player with a dream of playing in the National Football League, that's a fact. We don't hide from that fact. Our players should, if you do a good job of recruiting, coaching, developing, every Ohio State football player should play in the NFL. What round? That's all up to how blessed the individual is.

But if I see it, if I hear it, I have enough -- I've done this long enough that I've had to have conversations with people. I haven't felt that on this group at all. I've had a couple conversations, many about, hey, we'll discuss this afterwards. Let's go win this game. And I give credit to these players.

But to think that doesn't exist in college football, I'd probably say 99 percent of every senior or junior -- I mean, that's starting -- someone's having that conversation with him, and I hope that we reach the point -- last year we were probably at that point near the end of the season. We certainly weren't with the relationship because we only knew those kids for a year. But I feel like those -- I know these players well enough, and our coaches do, to have any conversations if I see it disrupting a practice.

To answer your question, I've seen it many, many, many times where it disrupts practice.

**Q. Turnover margin is a huge figure in football, but points off turnovers maybe gets a little overlooked. How do you approach coaching your guys on responding immediately after a turnover?**

COACH MEYER: Just what you said, coaching, having that discussion that -- and really, I go back to the event plus response equals the outcome. How do you respond? A turnover to us is an event. I go all the way back to how do they respond to those off-season drills, which are pretty infamous around Ohio State, how hard they are, and that teaches them for those difficult situations you get thrust into.

It's not, hey, hey, we have a turnover here. Let's go out and play hard. That starts a long time ago. So that's really what our whole program is built on, it's training them how to respond to adverse events that take place.

**Q. Urban, Ryan Shazier is playing really close to home in maybe his possible final game for you guys. What has he meant to your team this year? Has his leadership grown without Roby and Spence in there?**

COACH MEYER: The guy in there -- and it's a good opportunity for me to bring his name up. Christian Bryant was our best player on both sides of the ball, and we lost him and his leadership skill.

Last year's game at Penn State was when I really -- because when you're at home, the crowd supplies a lot of leadership when you're at home. Being on the road and creating that kind of environment we did, I saw something I never knew inside of Christian Bryant. He took over the locker room, took over the team, and as a result, we had a heck of a game. I give him a lot of credit for that. So he became our leader.

When he went down, Ryan Shazier assumed a lot of that responsibility, including taking his number, and has done a really magical job at that. He was not a leader a year ago. He was a very good player, by the end of the year, a great player. He's been a very good player this year, but he's done a nice job leading, leading by example, practicing hard, and even being more vocal. That assumes some of the Christian Bryant responsibility.

**Q. Urban, when Dabo was in here, he talked about Florida and specifically South Florida being part of their recruiting footprint. Obviously, you're very familiar with the amount of talent in this state from your time at UF. What has it meant to have the Ohio State brand here for this week? You guys have had some successes here as well. And how do you go about attacking this talent-rich state in recruiting and making sure you can pluck some weeks?**

COACH MEYER: The past few weeks, we've hit it really hard. Joey Bosa, we're going to St. Thomas tonight. I've known their coaching staff forever. Maybe if not the best high school in America, one of the top high schools in America. I can list at least two dozen high schools right in this area that are loaded with talent. We have, not good relationships, great relationships with these high school coaches. A lot of them came to visit us at a Bowl practice.

Ohio State, not surprisingly because it's a national brand, has had great success recruiting in Florida. Ryan Shazier and Sabino was from down here. We attack it. I don't consider it a nonprimary. It's a primary area for us. Because we have so much experience down here, it's nothing new. We know most of these coaches.

And the good thing is Ohio State, people know Ohio State.

**Q. I'm curious how much -- before the Bowl games were set, how much have you seen of Clemson, and what were your impressions?**

COACH MEYER: Well, Clemson and Ohio State have great relationships through the coaching staffs with Chad and with Tom Herman. The two offensive coordinators are very close. Dabo and I have become very close the last five years. There's a great relationship. We actually

studied together in the off-season, offensive football. We share very similar approaches to the game and a mutual respect.

So this is -- I mean, we're going to go as hard as we possibly can to try to beat each other, but this is a game of mutual respect. We actually have some cut-ups of them during the season we'd watch, and real impressed with some of the things they do.

**Q. Coach, what's your comfort level with the couple of guys who will step in for Spence, Jamal Marcus?**

COACH MEYER: Jamal Marcus is going to be a disruptive guy. He's one of the more talented guys on our team. I'm anxious to watch him play. We had a staff meeting this morning at 7:00 a.m., and Mike Vrabel made that comment to me. He's going to be -- he's a quick twitch guy. This is his kind of game. Very talented guy. We're anxious to see him go.

**Q. How have you approached coming off a loss with your players going to this game a little bit differently? Something they haven't really dealt with this year.**

COACH MEYER: We evaluated that. I think we had the worst part was probably the four days after. All the coaches -- I think three-fourths of our staff left from Indianapolis and went out recruiting. Myself, I went back and went out recruiting.

We came back, and the feeling inside of you the whole three days, you had to go walk in with a smile, and it was the most phoniest smile you've probably ever seen. And you get back, and you see the players you care about and see the pain on their face. We had a real emotional meeting. I don't know if emotional is the right word, but just like you would with any type of family members going through a hard time. From that point forward, they've been fine.

Obviously, the Orange Bowl had a lot to do with that. This is, if not the premier, one of the most premier Bowl games in all of college football. So it's been fine. We're over it, and we've got to move forward.

**Q. Coach, you mentioned Bryant, in your mind, may have been the best player you had on either side of the ball. Can you go inside where he's at right now? And obviously, if he's the best player you have on both sides of the ball, you'd love to have him back. Has**

**he expressed a desire to come back? Where's that at right now?**

COACH MEYER: Oh, yeah, Christian Bryant, I believe the appeal was denied. I'm not sure if there's another one, to come back for another year. He won't be able to play in this game.

There was a little bit of outside hope to get him ready, but the injury that he had was pretty severe. I'm not sure if there's another appeal process left. Appeals haven't been real good to the Buckeyes here lately, so we'll see.

**Q. Did they give a reason for the denial, because of so much game play?**

COACH MEYER: I think it's just sheer numbers.

**Q. With you guys being so close to possibly playing for a National Title, is it hard for your guys to kind of get up for just a BCS Bowl game against a Clemson team?**

COACH MEYER: I don't believe so. If it was against an opponent that maybe didn't have the flash and the talent that Clemson has. That's a very good question, and it's true. We've dealt with that before at the Sugar Bowl, and when I was in Florida, we just missed playing for a National Championship, lost the title game, and they came back and responded very well. Once again, because of the quality of Bowl. I credit that to the Sugar Bowl.

So our players understand that this is -- and the way they're treated, that this is big time football. So I don't feel that. Obviously, the final results will be tomorrow night.

**Q. Both you and Dabo this morning have talked about the national brand of your programs. In your opinion, what does it take to establish a program, as one of those teams with a national brand? And just the pressure of living up to those expectations.**

COACH MEYER: I'm sorry, what's it going to take to establish a national brand?

**Q. To have a program that says, okay, we have this national brand, what does it take to establish yourself as one of those teams with a national brand? And just the pressures of living up to those expectations.**

COACH MEYER: I think there's a few

programs that's been established, and Ohio State is one of them. I think this is -- we went out and played on the West Coast, and half the stadium was scarlet and gray. The alumni base at a place like Ohio State, it is a national brand. We certainly can't take credit for that. That's been going on for over 100 years.

The second part is intriguing. The second part of the question, how you live up to expectations, and that's probably I don't know if you ever do. I've been down that road before. You go 24 of 25 and what happened? We get that, but that's our choice to go coach at Ohio State and come play at Ohio State. If you're not a first round draft pick, what happened to that kid? I don't know. It happens. It's called football. It's called athletics.

So we all sign up for it. There's no one making us. When I talk about us, our assistant coaches and our group of players, they chose a place like Ohio State like people chose Clemson. There's high expectations at places like that. You embrace it, and you move forward.

**Q. Recruiting related question. When you offer a young kid, how important is it to monitor that kid in terms of behavior and how he's progressing? I mean, is that something you guys pay pretty close attention to?**

COACH MEYER: I'd say in the last decade, probably I'd give it a 3 or 4 because just the social media, when I first started recruiting 20 years ago, you didn't know much. You know everything now. I have people full-time jobs, that's what they do is monitor Facebooks and twitters and tweets and all that stuff because we have to find out what's -- I want to know because we're held responsible for all those guys.

So it's taken on -- this is an era, a generation that is -- I'm not sure people -- I guess that's your jobs too. But 18, 19, 20-year-olds, we know everything that's going on every day because of what goes on on these cell phones. Think about that for a minute. 18, 19, 20-year-olds. So it's a big part of what we do, huge.

**Q. You've just been asked about kind of motivation coming off a tough loss for this Bowl game. A similar situation, I think, sort of in 2009, where you guys, if you'd have won the SEC Championship Game would have gone on to the National Championship. You still came out and had a pretty good Bowl performance that year. Obviously, not the same situation,**

**but is there anything you can take from that experience and apply to this team?**

COACH MEYER: Sure. I went back and looked at all the practice schedules. I always keep notes, pretty detailed notes of the approach to the game. So much of that is personnel based. Actually, Mike Pouncey was with us last night at practice, and I grabbed him and kind of chatted with him for a minute.

The ultimate complement, or the ultimate player is the competitive person. We use the term competitive spirit. If there's a competitive spirit, then you're going to go play your heart out. And I would anticipate, from everything I've seen with this team, the competitive spirit is there. Now it's just are we good enough, in certain spots, to go defeat this team.

So I feel like -- I've also been in situations where I didn't feel the competitive spirit, and that's where you've got, I'll say, the secret T-shirt or the secret handshake to get guys to play hard. I don't feel that.

**Q. Urban, a lot of people like us keep keeping up with the progress of Braxton Miller as a quarterback, as a full quarterback. Have you seen him take steps even this past month where he will be better than he was the last time people saw him?**

COACH MEYER: Absolutely. I have seen it, and to me, it's -- he's still got a ways to go to be -- I made a comment his first year, I have no idea where his ceiling is. And then the middle of the season where he put together -- he played very well for a while, and everyone around him did, I started to see what Braxton Miller could become as a quarterback, and I can still see that.

He's not there yet, but the ceiling is pretty high, and it's a special place not many guys can go because he's got just incredible ability, quick release, and fundamentally, when he's on, he's on. So we just need to keep pushing that envelope.

I think the important thing is he sees it too. We expect him to get there.

**Q. Do you expect it to be a long conversation with him about the next step?**

COACH MEYER: I don't know. I've gone away from expecting. Who knows? Who knows what's going on? I have a great relationship with Braxton, and I don't know.

**Q. You had the benefit this year of the 15 Bowl practices that you didn't have last year. How beneficial has that been, and who are the guys, the young guys who have really taken advantage of that opportunity?**

COACH MEYER: I haven't thought about it. I'll give you a couple names. I'm going to leave some guys off. Obviously, Vonn Bell and Tyvis have been very impressive. Josh Perry is one of the most improved guys on our team.

Then you see a guy like Chris Worley and Jalin Marshall, Cory Smith, Michael Thomas. Those are guys that didn't play for us this year that are going to be significant roles next year for us. Those are just some examples. Billy Price is another one that's been outstanding the last month.

**Q. Off topic, Tim Tebow has entered the broadcasting world. He said he talked to you and got some advice. What did you tell him? Do you think his playing days are over?**

COACH MEYER: I hope not. I hope his playing days aren't over. I think Tim will excel at anything he does because of his work ethic, his passion for what he does. Tim and I talk frequently. He's like a family member. I hope he's not done playing. I think a lot of people hope he's not done playing.

I hope someone -- I wouldn't even call it take a chance. I hope someone goes and lets him play a little bit. My advice to him is just attack it the same way. I use Mike Vrabel as an example. Mike Vrabel is a guy that doesn't have to coach. He attacks coaching the same way he attacks playing. That's his persona and his spirit. Tim Tebow is the same way. He'll attack this the same way he'll attack playing the game.

**Q. Did you ever talk about Tim joining you at Ohio State in some fashion?**

COACH MEYER: Not serious talks. Last spring he came and stayed with me for a few days because I don't want to disrupt his dream. His dream is to go play quarterback in the National Football League, and I don't think we're there yet that he's in his mindset that he's done. So nothing serious.

**Q. Urban, you've mentioned a lot about Braxton and guys around him having to play well. The one guy you haven't talked a whole lot about is Devin Smith. How has Devin played the last three, four weeks of the season.**

**Has he really not reached that consistency you'd like to see from him? I think you mentioned earlier in the year you'd like to see more of a consistency from him.**

COACH MEYER: Devin is one of the most talented guys we've had at wide receiver. You think against our rivals he'd have made a great play. He's had some performances this year that were outstanding. Consistency is probably the term that's most appropriate with him, just consistency all the way through because he's a great kid and just incredibly talented. But it's got to be day one, day two, day three, and it's a consistency.

But I wouldn't say that he's not performed well. He's a guy that has not maximized as a football player yet.

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