

# 11/28/2011: State of the Big Ten, Volume 44 (premium)

*Every Monday, we will be running a weekly series titled "State of the Big Ten," which will be made available to all members of HawkeyeDrive.com. This series of columns will focus on one major headline regarding the conference and go in-depth on the subject at hand.*

By Brendan Stiles

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One of the worst kept secrets recently in college football was finally revealed publicly Monday when Ohio State introduced Urban Meyer as its new head coach to replace interim man Luke Fickell. Meyer's decision to coach the Buckeyes came less than a year after announcing he was retiring from coaching, citing both health reasons and wanting to spend more time around his family.

This is a big-time hire for Ohio State, a program that was caught not obliging by the rules and found itself essentially forcing out a coach in Jim Tressel that won the school a national championship and brought the Buckeyes to six other BCS bowl appearances of record (Ohio State vacated its Sugar Bowl win over Arkansas last season).

There is irony in this hiring of Meyer, who won two national championships at Florida, one of which came at Ohio State's expense in the 2007 BCS National Championship Game. But there is also some sense in this hire, as Meyer is an Ohio native and was once a Buckeye assistant in the 1980s under former coach Earle Bruce.

In order to stay relevant in the college football landscape, Ohio State needed to make a move like this with Meyer

available. As nice a guy as Fickell might be (and it's worth noting Fickell will remain as a defensive assistant on Meyer's staff next season), 6-6 isn't going to cut it in Columbus. Even if the Buckeyes go and win the Gator Bowl, or whatever bowl they wind up playing in, this was a year to forget both on the field and off of it.

Suspensions of players such as Dan "Boom" Herron and DeVier Posey hurt this team early on, as Ohio State had a pretty garbage offense during the first half of the season. Even when the Buckeyes would win a game like they did at Illinois, they had to do so by running the ball 51 times out of 55 plays from scrimmage.

That game, and the 33-29 win over Wisconsin two weeks later, are what salvaged Ohio State's season and probably made it possible for Fickell to stick around on Meyer's staff. Because even though the Buckeyes lost their last three games, they were at least competitive in all of them, and could have easily won all three of those games as well.

In other words, they never quit. Even last weekend in a 40-34 loss to Michigan, Ohio State hung in until the game's final minutes.

Even more significant was the development of freshman quarterback Braxton Miller, who will thrive in Meyer's offense. Anyone who doesn't think this is fooling themselves. Part of the reason Ohio State put itself in a position to even play in a bowl this year is because of Miller's development from a raw freshman to one that could make plays both in and out of the pocket.

The biggest thing will be recruiting. Can Meyer lock down the state of Ohio at a time when the Buckeyes are and could still be vulnerable while other Big Ten rivals are all strong and in position to take top recruits from that state? Can Meyer bring talent he could have gotten at Florida had he remained there

and bring that up from the Sunshine State to Columbus. That all remains to be seen, but this is where someone like Meyer could and should distinguish himself from other coaches in this conference.

At the end of the day, this is a good hire for Ohio State, and it's a hire that's only going to make the Big Ten stronger. Especially if Brady Hoke continues to have the success he had this season over the years to come up in Ann Arbor. Anytime Michigan and Ohio State are both strong, the Big Ten will be in the spotlight. Fair or not, that's the way it is and has been for years.

That's what should be expected over time with Meyer making this move.