If you polled Buckeye players asking for the word to best describe spring football under Urban Meyer, the winning entry would probably be “intensity”. That’s the tone set by the coaches. That describes the pace of the practices. That’s the driving force behind turning everything they do - right down to their stretching - into a competition under Meyer. As senior fullback Zach Boren predicted at the outset of spring ball, “
There is no on-off switch. Everyone will be going full-go, every play”. And that’s exactly the way it has gone so far.

One thing the first-year Ohio State coach has made abundantly clear is that he will demand the same single-minded will to win in his players that he brings to the job himself. Speaking of identifying team leaders, Meyer had this to say: "We're looking for leadership by doing, by work ethic, by leading. I'm not interested in a bunch of group hugs or team meetings. I really want to see guys lead by not losing. You want to be a great leader, then go win."

It will be five months before he can begin erasing the bad memories from a disastrous season, but for now Meyer can be contrasted with his predecessor by how fast everything moves with him in charge.

Five Wides and Explosive

That will first become evident to OSU fans when the new Meyer-Tom Herman no-huddle offense takes the field at Ohio Stadium a week from Saturday. It's not exaggerating to say this will be culture shock for the OSU faithful, regardless of how prepared or anxious they may be. How well it works at first remains to be seen of course, but it will be new and different.

Meyer himself has expressed some surprise at the pace that offensive coordinator Herman is putting the offense through. Meyer called it “rapid-fire”, and said that it was even faster than what he was used to at Florida. This will be a better conditioned Buckeye team than the 2011 version....both by design and by necessity.

One casualty of Meyer’s drive to prepare for the 2012 season has been practice reps for the “third team”. There has been no such thing in the early going this spring. Meyer wants to have his two-deep firmly established by the end of spring practice, and he isn’t using practice time on players who will be warming the bench in September. In part, this is to help the staff prioritize their recruiting needs for 2013 and beyond. Maybe there will be time for a third unit to get reps in the fall, but it’s not happening this spring.

Fast is also the way Meyer is implementing his offensive scheme. The goal, he said, was to put in the offense in five days of practice. He admits being impatient. It can’t happen fast enough to suit him. And there have been bumps in the road, as you might expect, but the trigger-man of the offense, sophomore quarterback Braxton Miller, is excited about what he’s learning.

“It’s five-wides and it’s explosive”, Miller recently told The Ozone . “I feel pretty comfortable in it and how it suits my athletic ability and my ability to make plays. It’s no-huddle, so I just get the signals from the side. I’m telling the O-linemen what to do. I can flip the play call, whatever. It’s exciting and it’s explosive.

In Herman’s spread, Miller says, “everything is fast-paced and he wears down defenses. It’s about getting the ball into our playmakers’ hands. They’re not out there for nothing, so get them the ball.”

Culture shock. April 21st.

Saying What He Thinks

One noticeable difference from the Tressel years that jumps out at you with Urban Meyer is the shoot-from-the-hip candor from the new OSU head coach. Tressel measured his words carefully, and he was a master at giving the media lots of verbiage without revealing a whole lot. Platitudes wrapped in euphemisms, dressed up with coachspeak. It was sincere and not meant to be misleading, but it was often all bones and no meat. That's not Meyer's style.

The new guy pretty much tells you what he thinks without the dressing. He was very frank about what he saw as the poor conditioning level of the roster he inherited, and he has not been shy about saying he has no idea where he'll find the speedy playmakers required in the offense he runs. The lack of depth on his offensive line, while not a state secret, is still something the former regime might not have been willing to openly call "a problem", as Meyer has in referring to his second string unit.

This is viewed by some people as thinly-veiled criticism of the previous regime(s), but he is not overhyping the progress he and his staff have made since taking over either. "We're doing fairly well," Meyer said in his conference call with media on Wednesday. "The try hard is there...the will is there...but there are weaknesses". Call it what you will...managing expectations...or just telling it like it is...there is a distinct difference in the way the head man communicates with the media. For the most part I think, it's a refreshing and welcome one.

Projecting the 2012 Starters and Key Backups

Based on reports from the practices that are open to media members, plus interviews with coaches, we're able to make some assumptions about who you'll be seeing on Saturdays this fall. Counting their two kicking specialists, the 2012 Buckeyes will have 18 starters returning, with nine on defense, and seven on offense. Here's the way they're lining up in spring ball.

Offense

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