Can it be just two weeks since Urban Meyer was named head coach at Ohio State? And just slightly longer than that since the Buckeyes lost to their arch-rival to finish the season on a three-game losing streak, with their worst record in over a decade? This was a program that has been waiting since January to "hit bottom" with the announcement of final NCAA sanctions, and has appeared to collide with every possible hazard on the way down.

It is increasingly obvious though, that Urban Meyer is not "waiting" for anything, and that the "bottom" is something that he heard about, but that happened before he got here. It's no surprise that the NCAA is still dragging its feet, nor is it a surprise that Urban Meyer is not. A rejuvenated Meyer has leapt into his new job with energy and aggressiveness, and as a result, OSU fans are as pumped in December as they were despondent in May.

The 180 degree turn in the fortunes of the Ohio State football program during 2011 has been nothing short of amazing. If his early success on the recruiting trail is any indication of things to come, the reaction to Meyer around the Big Ten might be summed up best by Michigan's Brady Hoke. Asked what he thought of the hire, Hoke responded , …"not good". The OSU administration could ask for no higher praise.

With the outgoing coaching staff preparing the team for the Gator Bowl, Meyer is permitted to concentrate on hiring his new staff and putting the finishing touches on the 2012 recruiting class . There is much to report on both fronts, but we'll start with recruiting...

Going After the Best

Meyer hit the door at OSU with the idea that no recruit was off limits, and he is getting the Buckeyes involved with some blue-chip talents that weren't even giving Ohio State a thought until two weeks ago. Long-time observers of the recruiting game say they've never seen

anything like the aggressive push that Meyer is putting on at this late stage of the process.

Meyer is targeting a select group of top-rated prospects...several of whom have already given verbal commitments to other schools...and he has already arranged several weekends worth of official visits aimed at shoring up the roster where it is perceived to be weakest. Clearly that includes the offensive tackle position and the linebacker corps, and they are also focusing on defensive line prospects, and trying to attract play-makers at wide receiver. Some of these prospects aren't able to arrange visits until January, but Meyer has acted quickly to secure three major commitments already.

Sure, But Can He Close?

Se'Von Pittman , the defensive end from Canton McKinley who had given a verbal to Michigan State, visited OSU this past weekend, and Meyer persuaded the 4-star defensive end to stay home and commit to play for Ohio State . Pittman's girlfriend is an OSU basketball recruit, which didn't hurt, but Meyer and Luke Fickell working together seems to be what made it comfortable for him. Grabbing a promising local kid from the grasp of a Big Ten rival was a coup for Meyer...but he wasn't done.

Meyer got the weekend's second feather in his cap when 5-star defensive tackle Tommy Schutt
agreed to decommit from Penn State and give a verbal to the Buckeyes instead. Schutt was recruited by Ohio State from the start, but it never got serious as OSU was in trouble all year, while the 6' 3", 310 lb tackle from the Chicago area piled up offers from the likes of Alabama, USC, Notre Dame and Oregon. Now the shoe is on the other foot, with the Penn State program in disarray, and Schutt
wants to be a Buckeye
.

Worse than missing out on a 5-star recruit from out of state is losing one from Ohio, and Meyer made sure that wasn't going to happen with GlenOak running back Brionte Dunn . Meyer hit the weekend trifecta when he got Dunn to solidify his previous verbal commitment to OSU and cancel a scheduled trip to Ann Arbor set for next weekend. Dunn had been truly undecided

between the Buckeyes and the Wolverines, but whatever Meyer said to him on Sunday did the trick.

It is hard to overstate the seismic effect the first two weeks of Urban Meyer on campus has had on Ohio State football recruiting. The relatively undistinguished OSU 2012 recruiting class had been largely written off by Thanksgiving as the inevitable consequence of a year of turmoil and NCAA scrutiny that the program had endured. Many of the state's best players had committed elsewhere. The first 15 or so OSU commits weren't making the Top 25 rankings of any of the scouting services. As of Tuesday, following Meyer's slam-dunk weekend, Scout.com had elevated OSU to No. 9. They might have added..."with a bullet"

More...

A Top 5 finish for this 2012 class is a realistic thing to project at this point, a notion the recruitniks would have scoffed at two short weeks ago. That's because Meyer has several more big time talents in his sights, and after seeing him close on his first three targets, OSU-watchers are inclined to optimism.

The No. 1 defensive end in the nation is Noah Spence , *(pictured)* of Harrisburg, PA, and Ohio State is now widely considered the favorite to land him. Highly-rated wide receiver Joel Caleb is still in play, and reports were surfacing Tuesday that another Penn State commitment, outside linebacker Camren Williams is considering following Schutt in dropping the Nittany Lions in favor of Ohio State. And the Buckeyes remain seriously in the hunt for 5-star Chicago offensive tackle Jordan Diamond . South Bend linebacker David Perkins will visit Columbus, and OSU has already offered Jamal Marcus

, a DE/LB prospect from Durham, NC.

Meyer is also working hard to flip Cleveland Heights offensive tackle Kyle Dodson , an early verbal to Wisconsin who took an official visit to Columbus and is reportedly very close to announcing a switch to scarlet and gray. If Meyer can reclaim prized recruits from Wisconsin and Michigan State, while preventing a defection to Michigan by another 5-star Ohioan, all in the same weekend, it will go down as a decisive win in Round One of the match with his new Big Ten lodge brothers. In a normal year, Dunn, Pittman and Dodson would have been "all Buckeye" as they say. Still, Meyer's frenzied first fortnight has been nothing short of stunning, and there is every reason to expect more of the same in the weeks ahead.

Meyer could sign five, or possibly even six more recruits in this class, and in a perfect world that might mean landing Spence, Diamond and Dodson, one of the wide receivers (Caleb or maybe DaVonte Neal?) and one or two of the linebacker prospects (Marcus, Williams and Perkins). There are of course fallback options in the event the main targets get away, but the aggressiveness and the work effort at the top is what is making the difference in turning this recruiting class around.

Backup OSU quarterback Taylor Graham has asked for, and been granted a release from his scholarship with the intention of transferring. Graham is a pro-style dropback passer whose father Kent started for the Buckeyes in 1991. His prospects for playing time at OSU weren't improving with the Meyer regime, and he can hardly be blamed for wanting to play college football rather than watch it. We wish him the best wherever he lands.

Side by Side

In a slightly unusual set of circumstances, the 2011 OSU coaching staff is preparing for the Gator Bowl, while Urban Meyer directs the program's recruiting efforts and assembles his staff. The school has been granted a waiver by the NCAA to exceed the total number of coaches permitted, while continuing to limit the number of coaches involved with recruiting to the same seven that all schools are allowed.

On Friday's "PTI", Michael Wilbon said it was "irresponsible" for the NCAA to allow OSU "two coaching staffs" at a time when the NCAA certainly owes them no favors. But Meyer is the only new hire added to the program who is actively on the job at this point. Wilbon should have read his own network's coverage of the issue to see that the waiver is hardly unprecedented in coaching transitions like this. And Wilbon wasn't the only one whining . As it turns out, there will be quite a bit of overlap between the old staff and the Meyer regime.

Stan Drayton , who coached running backs for Meyer at Florida, is reportedly staying on after one season as receivers coach in Columbus, and he has been one of Meyer's recruiting emissaries in the first week and a half on the job. As previously announced, Luke Fickell will stay on in some capacity, and cornerbacks coach Taver Johnson is also reportedly being retained. One question mark that remains is the status of

Mike Vrabel
, who was brought in as linebackers coach for 2011 under Fickell. Vrabel has been seen out on the recruiting trail for Meyer, and it is unclear at this point if he'll be on the 2012 staff.

Tom Herman was announced Friday as Meyer's new offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach, but Herman is preparing his Iowa State Cyclones offense for their own bowl game, and won't have any official duties until January. Herman *(pictured)* is a natural fit for the new OSU coaching team....
a bright offensive mind
who is in tune with Meyer's spread offensive philosophy, but not so established and well-known that he can demand play-calling duties, which will he handled by Meyer, at least at the outset. Herman's
track record
of generating highly productive passing offenses at Rice and at Iowa State is impressive, and he is widely regarded as an excellent recruiter.

Another name that has been persistently connected to the OSU coaching search is Notre Dame assistant coach Tim Hinton . There have been unofficial reports in recent days that Hinton has accepted a spot on Meyer's staff, possibly as tight ends coach. He joined the ND staff in 2010 after six seasons at U. of Cincinnati. Hinton attended graduate school at OSU and served as a graduate assistant. He coached high school football in Ohio as well, serving as head coach at (Marion) Harding H.S. from 1993-2003.

So with Meyer, Herman, Drayton and possibly Hinton as offensive coaches, the staff on that side of the ball is almost complete, with the notable exception of the offensive line coach. The defensive group Meyer is putting together either hasn't leaked to the public yet, or hasn't been

finalized at this point.

By my count, five additional assistants will be added...coaching spots for receivers, tight ends, O-line, defensive line, linebackers, safeties and special teams have yet to be filled or defined. Fickell's responsibilities going forward haven't been clarified publicly either. It's possible he'll be a "co-cordinator" of the defense, or he could be titled as "assistant head coach", and take on a defensive position group as well.

Who's On D?

At first the speculation on Meyer's new defensive coordinator centered on former Arizona coach Mike Stoops, but Stoops has been rumored to be in line to rejoin his brother Bob at Oklahoma, and he may have some head coaching opportunities as well. We know that Meyer and Stoops have had discussions..and we know we won't have long to wait to hear how it shakes out...and that's about all we know.

It was reported Monday that Everett Withers has accepted a position on the Ohio State coaching staff, a move that has not been confirmed by the university as of this writing. Withers could be named defensive coordinator, the position he held for the last four years at North Carolina before being named interim head coach for the Tar Heels to finish out the 2011 season. Withers coached defensive backs for the Tennessee Titans under Jeff Fisher from 2001-2006.

Chuck Heater, current Temple defensive coordinator and a former Meyer assistant at Florida, has also been prominently mentioned as a possibility for this staff. Heater played at Michigan, and is a 35 year veteran of the coaching profession, with stints as an assistant at Ohio State, Notre Dame, Colorado and others before working as safeties coach for Meyer, and taking over as defensive coordinator at Florida in 2010.

Off The Field Hires

Meyer has filled two administrative positions on his staff with the additions of Mark Pantoni as director of player personnel and Brian Voltolini as director of football operations. Both men worked with Meyer at Florida. Pantoni will serve as recruiting coordinator at Ohio State, and Gator fans are perhaps more aware than anyone how much he'll be missed in Gainesville. More here on how Pantoni does what he does. Voltolini functions in more of a logistics and organizational role for the program, coordinating visits, recruiting trips, team travel, camps and clinics.

Another new Meyer hire that has not yet been confirmed by the university is that of Mickey Marotti as strength and conditioning coach. Florida coach Will Muschamp confirmed that Marotti will be leaving to join the Ohio State program. Marotti has been at Florida since

2005, and previous to that he served in the same capacity at Notre Dame for eight years and at Cincinnati for nine. He knows Meyer from the 80's at Ohio State when both men were graduate assistants under Earle Bruce. More on Marotti
here
and
here
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Ohio State's safeties coach Paul Haynes was named the new defensive coordinator at Arkansas on Friday, so the coaching shuffle is in full swing...in both directions.

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