When Urban Meyer took the Ohio State head coaching job in November, he did so with the assurances of OSU administrators that the school was unlikely to receive a postseason ban from the NCAA. When they were hit with a one-year ban a few days later despite those assurances, the whole program was taken aback. Meyer held a press conference Wednesday to talk about his 2012 recruiting class, and he admitted that the postseason ban had come as “a bit of a sucker punch”.

In terms of how it affected recruiting, he said “it was damage control for two or three weeks.” Meyer said he called Noah Spence, who became the top-rated player in the OSU class, the night he was hired at Ohio State. Targeting the top uncommitted prospects was only part of the job. Securing some potentially wavering OSU commitments, like GlenOak running back Brionte Dunn, was also a priority.

From that first night, after agreeing to a $24 million contract, and then going home to pick up the phone to talk to high school kids, Meyer has been tireless and aggressive in pursuit of the talent the program needed. Asked Wednesday if he likes recruiting, Meyer responded “You have no chance if you don’t.....I love to recruit and I love to recruit great players."

If the sucker punch of an NCAA bowl ban put Urban Meyer on the ropes, then the last two months have shown him to be a devastating counterpuncher. His class, which will probably grow in number by at least one in the days ahead, is already ranked the nation’s 3rd best (behind Alabama and Texas) by both of the major recruiting services, Rival and Scout. For his

part, Meyer says he has no interest in the rankings...only in bringing in the best players he can to win football games.

The new head coach saluted Tressel-era holdovers Luke Fickell, Stan Drayton and Mike Vrabel for helping in the transition to the new recruiting team, but the lion's share of the credit has to go to Meyer for rescuing a class that was not highly thought of when he arrived, and risked losing some of the top players that had already committed.

Here is the (nearly complete) class of 2012 as presented by OSU Athletics Communications:

2012 Ohio State Recruiting Class - Photos, Bios

Two Additions

23 of the 25 OSU signees had given verbal commitments before signing day, but the day was not without some drama for the scarlet and gray. Most of it centered on Kyle Dodson , the 6' 6", 310 lb. offensive tackle from Cleveland Heights, who had committed early to Wisconsin, but later re-opened his recruitment and was said to be deciding between OSU and USC.

Dodson's decision was the feature attraction at a gathering at Heights High at noon Wednesday, and with a sizable contingent of Cleveland and OSU media present, Dodson invited his teammates up front to share in a creative way of announcing that he would become a Buckeye.

Meyer said that Dodson and Taylor Decker , who flipped from his Notre Dame verbal, were the two offensive tackles the staff had targeted right from the start, and he called Dodson "someone we HAD to have."

The other late addition to the 2012 group was Durham, NC linebacker Jamal Marcus , who announced for Ohio State after considering the home state school East Carolina before making a final decision. Marcus rated just 3-stars from the experts, but no one who has watched his highlight videos can figure out how that happened. Meyer suggested to the media Wednesday

that they
go to YouTube
and check them out, saying that they “bordered on ridiculous”. No argument here.

No So Fast...One More

With one spot likely to be filled before Meyer calls it a class, speculation is now focused on two speedy wide receiver prospects, either one of which would be a great addition to this group. Davonte Neal
from Scottsdale, AZ and
Stefon Diggs
,
(pictured)
a 5-star athlete from Olney, MD have both visited, and Diggs’ visit last weekend was reported to have gone very well.

Rumors were flying on signing day that Neal had wanted to commit to OSU but had been denied by Meyer’s staff. Reports conflict on this story, but if the OSU coaches hesitated to take a letter of intent on Neal, (and with just one spot open) it might indicate a high degree of confidence by Meyer that he has a real shot at landing Diggs.

I have made no secret of my desire to see Neal end up in Columbus, but Diggs is a rare talent. If Meyer can reel in Stefon Diggs, by all accounts the nation’s No. 2 receiver, after being nowhere with him a month ago, they can just start sculpting the statue of him right now.

Flippin’ Great

Among the 25 players signing letters of intent with the Buckeyes this week, nine were kids that had previously committed to other schools. Asked about the tactic of pursuing players who have given a verbal commitment elsewhere, Meyer explained, "You ask a question 'Are you interested?' And if they say no, you move on." It goes without saying that after Meyer was hired at Ohio State, a lot of players became interested.

Of SeVon Pittman, the 4-star defensive end from Canton McKinley who was a Michigan State verbal, it was said that “he was recruiting us” after Meyer was hired as OSU’s coach. Without

naming him, but clearly referring to former OSU commit and current Michigan signee Kyle Kalis of St. Edward, Meyer remarked, "We went after a kid up in Cleveland and asked if he was interested and he said no. So we moved on."

The game works both ways, of course. Ohio State lost out on several recruits, Kalis most prominent among them, that probably would have been Buckeyes had it not been for the scandals of 2011. As it turned out, Meyer benefited from Penn State's recent turmoil by signing four players (Reeves, Williams, Schutt, O'Connor) who had at one time been committed to the Nittany Lions.

Meyer also picked up two signees that had been Notre Dame "verbals" (Perkins, Decker), one from Michigan State (Pittman), one from Miami (Southward) and one from Wisconsin (Dodson).

Wisconsin coach Bret Bielema made some noise Wednesday about not being happy with some recruiting tactics he's seeing in the Big Ten, and mentioned Meyer by name, and even used the word "illegal". He says he "reached out" to Meyer, and things were "rectified", all without giving any details. So...if it was rectified, Bret...what's the crying about? (By the way, why did almost your entire coaching staff leave?)

Random Meyer Notes

Other notable Meyer statements from the press conference:

Asked which signees he thought might redshirt: "We don't redshirt. We're going to recruit the caliber of athlete you do not redshirt at Ohio State."

Under Tressel, about half of any incoming freshman class could be expected to redshirt. It is a necessity at times, because of injuries, or established young starters in place. Previous coaching regimes have also wanted to work on building some players up in the weight room before putting them on the field. But Meyer wants all of his recruits to come in with the attitude and the assumption that they are going to play right away.

The reality will probably be different, but in general it's hard to argue with the premise. The kids who are good enough to play as freshmen will play anyway. If a freshman isn't good enough to see the field, even on special teams, chances are decent you might not want him tying up a scholarship for five years.

When questioned about the roster numbers and possibly oversigning: “I never oversigned” Meyer said he didn’t ever oversign at Florida, “and obviously we’re not going to do it here”.

Meyer said he thinks they are at 81 players with the 25 new recruits, leaving them just one opening under the 82-man roster they will be held to under NCAA sanctions once fall camp begins. Those who crunch these numbers say that means there are three additional players from 2011 that won’t be returning. Those players’ identities have not yet been revealed to the public, but Meyer indicated he would be providing those names in the near future.

Meyer called his defensive end recruits Noah Spence, SeVon Pittman and Adolphus Washington “the prize” of the recruiting class.

He also confirmed that Pickerington wide receiver Roger Lewis, a verbal commit for 2012, would not be joining the program.

YahooSports’ Dan Wetzel landed an interview with Meyer that was published this week, and it’s worth a look to get some more insight into Meyer’s evolved approach to college football. Talking about what he has to “sell” to potential OSU recruits, this was one of my favorite clips...

“You’re going to get a very prestigious degree....You’re going to have one of the most powerful alumni bases in America. And we have a plan in place to go and compete for championships. The plan works. The plan involves great coaches and great players, but it works.

“This isn’t our first rodeo. We’ve been to the mountaintop. We’re not devising a plan. We have a plan. And I think that’s important for a kid to know that.”

More on 2012 OSU recruiting here:

Buckeye Leaves - Recruiting Update - 1/22/12

Tress Landing?

It was reported early this week that Jim Tressel had sold his home in the Columbus area. Then Wednesday comes a Plain Dealer report that he may be about to take a position at the University of Akron as an administrator. Here’s wishing him the best, whatever he decides to do.

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on Twitter at @dwismar

Dan's OSU Links and Resources

STO cover photo courtesy of Buckeye Battle Cry