

## Ohio State's Meyer concedes he's 'awful loser'

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**By RUSTY MILLER**

**Associated Press**

COLUMBUS — Losing has never come easy for Urban Meyer.

Since he was a kid playing baseball, football and basketball back in Ashtabula, Meyer could handle the pain, the long workouts and the criticism.

But the losses lingered and hurt.

Now that he's the head football coach at Ohio State, things haven't changed.

"I've never, no, I've never handled it well. Awful loser," he said recently in his quiet, paneled office inside the Woody Hayes Athletic Center. "I guess I'd rather be known as that than as a good loser."

He knows that much of the country views him as less than a gracious loser. Maybe that comes from having so little practice at it — his teams have only lost 24 times in his 12 years and 152 games as a head coach at Bowling Green, Utah, Florida and with the Buckeyes.

Fact is, he doesn't care what others think about him, or his program. He either ignores or isn't even aware of the opinions of those outside of the bubble he's built around his team.

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"Once again, perception isn't something that drives me, it's obvious," he said.

All of that is important because the Buckeyes are dealing with defeat for the first time in two years.

The 49-year-old Meyer's Buckeyes are coming off a 34-24 loss to Michigan State in the Big Ten championship game on Dec. 7. The setback not only cost Ohio State the conference crown, it dropped it out of the running for a spot in the BCS national title game (Auburn took the Buckeyes' spot against Florida State) and also ended Meyer's and the program's record winning streak at 24 in a row.

Afterward, a photo taken inside the stadium showed a dejected Meyer eating pizza, glumly, while sitting in a golf cart. It went viral on the internet. Indeed, the loss — and all that went with it — was a punch in the gut for the Buckeyes, who had almost forgotten what it felt like to lose.

"Coach Meyer, I could tell it was kind of tough for him because we all were expecting to go to the national championship game," linebacker Ryan Shazier said.

Meyer said a few things to his players in the locker room after the defeat to Michigan State. Then everybody — players, coaches, staff members — took a few days away from each other. They reconvened late last week to begin practice for a date with Clemson in the Orange Bowl.

Meyer, who when younger would withdraw after a loss, appeared at least to his players to have accepted the defeat. After their first workout, Meyer pulled his players around him and bared his emotions.

It was clear that the loss still burned in him but Meyer knew the Buckeyes were watching him to see how to react to it. Meyer called it "a cathartic moment."

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"He's obviously the guy we look at as a template for how to handle things like this," offensive lineman Jack Mewhort said. "He came back from a recruiting trip and came to the middle of the huddle at the end of practice. He was telling us how much he loves us and everything. That meant a lot to us. When you hear a guy like that come in and say things like that, it motivates you to move forward and win another game."

As difficult as the losses have always been for Meyer to swallow, he's made an effort to at least appreciate the wins more.

"We went on a nice run and I kept reminding myself through the journey to enjoy this thing, man. Keep drinking that Kool-Aid (because) someday you might have an empty glass," Meyer said while seated in a comfortable, leather sofa, taking a break from drawing up a practice schedule. "You don't want to live your life always knowing that some pin is going to pop the balloon. But I did enjoy every one of those wins."

Meyer's resume marks him as one of the most successful coaches ever. He won national titles at Florida in 2006 and 2008. He has a career record of 128-24, is 7-1 in bowl games, 11-5 against Top-10 teams and is 4-0 in BCS bowl games.

When he walked away from Florida after the 2010 season and walked into the ESPN booth as a college analyst, he could have avoided all the pressures and stomach ulcers that seem to come with the job of big-time college coaching. But he missed the competition and the kids.

Keep in mind, he left the Gators twice in less than a year. The first exit, though, lasted just a day, and was for health reasons. The second was to be with the family more. So, wrestling with these decisions — obviously — is not easy.

Finally, he came back to Ohio State — a program coming off a 6-7 record and covered in mud after a year of NCAA investigations and sanctions thanks to the ugly end of Jim Tressel's tenure — and almost immediately turned things around.

So those who mock the Big Ten and the Buckeyes, or chide him for abandoning Florida, don't

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bother him. He likes his players, he likes his program and he says he's in good health. He's heard angry critics call him Urban Liar.

And he doesn't care what anyone else thinks.

"I don't listen a lot. I used to all the time," he said. "And I heard some of the most incredible things and I was, like, 'What was that'?"

Next to the computer monitor behind his oak desk in his office sits a framed quote. It was taken from a letter he got at Bowling Green during his first head-coaching stint. After a defeat.

It reads: "Don't fear criticism. The stands are full of critics. They play no ball. They fight no fights. They make no mistakes because they attempt nothing. Down on the field are the doers, they make mistakes because they attempt many things."

Asked whose words those are, Meyer shakes his head.

"It was an anonymous letter," he replied. "It's been on my desk ever since."