COLUMBUS (AP) — Urban Meyer met with his defensive coaches and players on Sunday. He wasn't handing out compliments.

"I'm not happy at all with what's going on on defense," the Ohio State coach said a day later. "That includes players, coaches. We can all get better. It's a team effort."

The Buckeyes (7-0, 3-0 Big Ten) kept their record clean even though the defense was gashed for 49 points, 481 yards and a staggering 18 plays that picked up at least 10 yards in a narrow 52-49 win at Indiana on Saturday.

"To go out and give up 49 points against Indiana was just embarrassing to us," cornerback Travis Howard said. "We all feel depressed about it."

Meyer called it "absurd" how many big gainers his defense surrendered and vowed to get more involved on that side of the ball. It sounded for all the world like an "or else" to both the current defensive starters — who may find themselves not playing unless the new head man sees change soon — or his assistants on that side of the ball.

"We're going to demand 4 to 6 seconds of relentless pursuit and effort," Meyer said. Then, he added, "If you don't, I'll be involved in that."

Meyer declined to offer excuses, even though several players are out with injuries. The Buckeyes don't have linebacker Etienne Sabino, sidelined for several weeks with a broken leg, and didn't have defensive lineman/outside linebacker Nathan Williams at Indiana. He didn't make the trip but is expected to return this week for the game against Purdue at Ohio Stadium.

Ohio State's defense looked lost at times on defense, repeatedly giving up yardage in clumps. Where missed tackles in the open field was a huge problem in past games, at times against the Hoosiers it was as if the Buckeyes didn't have a clue how to stop the Hoosiers' spread attack — which threw more down the field than flipping short screen passes.

Defensive coordinator Luke Fickell, the beleaguered interim head coach a year ago during a woeful 6-7 season, hinted at two problems.

First, the Buckeyes lack a distinct leader of the defense along the lines of former players such as James Laurinaitis, A.J. Hawk and Matt Wilhelm. They were middle linebackers who called signals, made plays and were savvy enough to cover up mistakes by others. If a quarterback slipped containment, they could close the deal by bringing him down. If a back found a hole and appeared to have daylight, they might rush to the spot and slow him down until help arrived.

"Are we lacking a little bit of that? Yeah. Sabino went down and maybe that's something that we don't have right now," Fickell said. "That's one of the big things we're trying to find: Who's that leader, who's that guy that doesn't just worry about themselves but can make the others around him better?"

Meyer has said that of the last 10 linebackers Ohio State has recruited, only two or three are still playing due to injuries, transfers or other problems.

Ohio State has tried to hurry freshmen into the picture at linebacker, but for the most part they have been ineffective. First-year players Connor Crowell, Camren Williams and David Perkins are listed as backups, with Josh Perry starting alongside Ryan Shazier and either Storm Klein or Zach Boren.

Last Wednesday Boren was moved from fullback, where he had played for 3 1/2 seasons, to linebacker. Such a stopgap move — particularly on an unbeaten team in the Top 10 — is almost unheard of.

It all relates to the fact that the young players have not contributed.

"We're counting on some really, truly young guys to have to step up and maybe they're not quite ready yet," Fickell conceded.

Meyer, who preaches the gospel of the spread offense, is clearly pleased that his offense has put up 115 points in its last two games. But he also knows that successful programs don't survive for long by playing great on only one side of the ball.

"The (teams) that get to where the air is rarified, the real elite teams, (know) that at some point you have to play some really good defense. And they all do," Meyer said. "The top two right now are Alabama and Florida, the two best defenses in America — and it's not by accident they're 1-2" in the Bowl Championship Series rankings.

Meyer, who won two national championships at Florida with high-scoring spread offenses, added, "The great teams we've had over the years, yeah, we scored some points. But at the end of the day, defense wins games."

The Buckeyes recognize their inability to stop an Indiana team that is winless in a weakened Big Ten.

"We just had a horrible game. I'm not saying anything bad about Indiana, but I just feel that we should not have gone out like that," Shazier said. "We gave up too many yards, too many points. We have way better players than we showed. Nobody played to their standards."

Meyer sounds like a man willing to try anything to alleviate more nightmares like Saturday night, when the Buckeyes had a 52-34 lead and the ball with 4 minutes left — and still needed to recover an onside kick just to hang on for the win.

"Instead of just complaining and whining and making noise, we have to put a plan together to eliminate big plays," Meyer said. "I'm not a big believer in screaming and yelling and throwing Gatorade bottles against the wall.

"Sometimes you have to do that, however, to fix the problem."

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