The Associated Press

COLUMBUS — Nine games and as many wins into his first season at Ohio State, Urban Meyer believes his Buckeyes are onto something.
“This is a special team. They’re fighting for each other. It’s a refuse-to-lose type atmosphere,” he said on Monday. “Some of us have seen teams that play really well, and they’re blowing teams out all the time. We’re not that type of team and I can give you 150 reasons why. However, we are a bunch of guys that work really hard, a blue-collar approach, that show up every (week) and want to get better. You don’t want anything else as a coach.”
His sixth-ranked Buckeyes have won close games and routs, relied on their defense and on quarterback Braxton Miller. When the stars didn’t come out, a no-name made a big play. Through it all, despite being within a whisper of losing at least a couple of times, they’ve persevered.

“I wish that everybody in the world could see the kind of camaraderie that we have between all of us. It’s unbelievable,” wide receiver Evan Spencer said. “We haven’t played perfect. And we haven’t really played good at times. But at the end of the day we’d give our right arm for the guy next to us and that’s what making us win.”
Ohio State (9-0, 5-0 Big Ten) came into this season in flux. The Buckeyes had a new coach who brought with him a new spread, hurry-up offense. The defense was basically the same as in years past, although it was thin in spots.
No one knew exactly what to expect since the Buckeyes were banned from going to a bowl game because of NCAA violations committed under 10-year coach Jim Tressel.
Without that big carrot at the end of the stick, what would they play for? With no possibility of a Bowl Championship Series berth, or even being listed in the BCS rankings, would the team lose focus and founder?
Instead, it has shown a certain resilience.
The Buckeyes trailed in the fourth quarter against California, but Miller found Devin Smith on a 72-yard scoring pass with 3:26 left to forge a narrow win. They were barely hanging on with 10 minutes left at home against lopsided underdog UAB, but the defense held and Miller scored on a short keeper for a 29-15 win. They went to No. 20 Michigan State in the Big Ten opener and made a narrow lead stand up in an 17-16 victory.
Indiana ran off 22 points in the fourth quarter and fell just short of catching Ohio State, 52-49. Then Purdue led by eight points with 47 seconds left but backup quarterback Kenny Guiton came on for an injured Miller to lead a gutty drive that forced overtime with 3 seconds left — with the Buckeyes going on to make all the big plays again for another close win.
“We find ways to win football games,” defensive line coach Mike Vrabel said. “We’ve got a bunch of guys that are believing in themselves.”
A case in point is Zach Boren, who became a regular at fullback and was midway through his senior season when several injuries led Meyer to ask him to move to fullback. He did. And the Buckeyes just kept on winning.
“We put in so much work during the offseason and became so close. Things were so hard and

miserable at times that you just came together as a team," he said. "Late in games when we're down, someone makes a play. We have that fighting mentality that great teams have. I don't know what it is. It's remarkable."

Perhaps the bleakest time came early in the spring when the offense clearly didn't have a clue what it was doing. Meyer called it "a clown show," with players running into each other, missed assignments and the ball frequently squirting loose.

The Buckeyes are a long way away from that.

"Where we were and how far we've come and how far we still have to go, it's a testament to just the commitment of a group of guys who just refuse to lose a game," wide receivers coach Zach Smith said. "I wouldn't say we are an undefeated team that is sitting here just dominating people. It's more the chemistry and the guys involved are kind of pulling together to win because they don't want to let each other down."

Ohio State has the inside track toward winning its division in the Big Ten, up by a game and a half with just three games remaining. After Saturday's home game against struggling Illinois, there's a bye week followed by a huge test at Wisconsin and the annual season-ending showdown at home with rival Michigan.

The Buckeyes know they can't play in the national championship game or impress voters with how they play in a bowl. They're still climbing the charts in the Associated Press Top 25, which unlike the coaches poll or BCS allows teams on NCAA probation to be ranked.

There's so little to play for — and yet so much.

"We feel that if we go 12-0, we're the best team in the country because no one beat us," defensive back and special-teams demon Adam Griffin said.

"Who's to say we aren't?"

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