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Getting Started: New Program, New Home

By Mickey Marotti – Asst. AD for Football Sports Performance at The Ohio State University

It is a very exciting time when you get a chance to start up a strength and conditioning/ football program with a new football coach and staff. A great deal of thought for both the strength program and football program goes into it prior to the initial startup. In early December of 2011, I got a chance to accompany long-time friend and coach, Urban Meyer to Columbus, Ohio and work as Asst. AD for Football Sports Performance at The Ohio State University.

We had previously worked together at Notre Dame and Florida. From early on our philosophy and methodology to strength training and coaching in general were very similar. We believed in tough, hard-disciplined work with energy, passion and excitement. We believed that challenging the student-athlete mentally was just as important as challenging them physically. Our ultimate goal was to help create a work ethic like none other. We wanted to set the culture as giving relentless effort as a player and really understanding what it means to “Go Hard” when in the weight room or on the practice field.

I had the opportunity to help Coach Meyer and his staff develop The University of Florida into one of the best programs in the country. We were privileged to win 2 National Championships, 2 SEC Championships, a Sugar Bowl Championship and win 21 games in a row at one point. We began our time at Florida really focusing on improving as a player, being accountable, and really teaching and bringing a hard training, hard practicing mentality to Gainesville. That being said, it was very exciting to start up again, but this time in Columbus, Ohio.

The ironic thing about Ohio State, it is where I began my strength training career 25 years ago. I was a graduate assistant from 1987-1988. I worked for Steve Bliss, Head Strength Coach and Earl Bruce, Head Football Coach. I actually met Coach Meyer while he was a football GA at the same time, so not only was it exciting to venture back to where I started coaching, but to come to OSU and start up a program.

From the time I accepted the job, until the first day I arrived, I spent all of my time jotting down notes and thoughts regarding what I would do at OSU and what we had done at Florida. Of the things we did, what exactly would we bring to Columbus? I did a SWOT analysis of Florida, from the time I arrived in Gainesville, to the time I left. A SWOT analysis looks at the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the program. I believe that this is very important to look back at the things we did and analyze everything. Some people say that if you do not learn from history, you are condemned to repeat it. The good, the bad, the wish I would of, the wish I could of, the glad we did, and the glad we didn't. Throughout the years what areas of coaching and training were we excited about, and what areas were we not so excited about?

I then started to formulate a general plan of attack for the Ohio State program. Although my job title was different, Asst AD of Football Sports Performance, I was still going to set up and formulate the strength and

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conditioning plan. My responsibilities were dramatically increased and I had to really be organized going forward. Some of my responsibilities are to help Coach Meyer with the performance areas of the football program. We have a performance team that is comprised of athletic trainers, nutritionists, equipment personnel, academic advisors, personal development staff, and operations. I help direct these areas in terms of how the head coach wants information and also how we can make all the areas more improved.

I also started to look back into my files and certain research. I just wanted to be on top of everything. I wanted the t's to be crossed and the i's to be dotted. Over the years as a coach, you collect a great deal of STUFF. Some of that stuff is very valuable, some not so much. I like to look back at each year of setting a program up and see what we did. I also like to look at each situation and look to justify why, what, & how we did things. Every situation is different, every academic calendar a little different, every school has different expectations, so I thought it was a good idea to look back.

I also spent a lot of time reading and investigating various coaching and training, motivation, leadership, team chemistry, anything that dealt with building a team. Although you never get away from your general philosophy of doing things, you just want to make sure that you're on the right track. From time to time, new research findings can definitely influence some of the training. I also talked to as many colleagues as I could. Just the freshness of seeing and hearing what others are doing will help justify what you are going to do. The bottom line is results. As long as positive results are happening then you are on the right track.

I also kind of did a self-evaluation or more so "self-check". Where I was as a person, coach, and teacher? What things I could do to improve myself in all areas? I then started to formulate the plan, first in my thoughts, and then I would jot some stuff down on paper.

All the areas of the strength program were going to be dissected and evaluated. Find out where we were, and what was the best case scenario for facilities, equipment, staffing, travel, support staff, etc.

To be continued, more from Mickey Marotti coming soon.