URBAN’S WAY

Urban Meyer, The Florida Gators, and His Plan to Win

Notes by Bob Richey
PART ONE – THE ROAD TO GAINESVILLE

Chapter 1—The Cul-de-Sac of Champions

• Much is expected out of those athletes as willing participants in Meyer’s “Competitive Excellence.” All of his former players admit playing for Meyer “is hard!” Those who survive the rigors of mat drills and early morning running punishment for missed class or misbehaving badly, however, have a sense of accomplishment, although, admittedly, maybe not at the time they were stretching over a trash can or laboring to get up the stadium stairs.

• His promise to each player: “I will not QUIT on you.”

• Some coaches talk about “family,” but at Florida the families and children of all coaches and players are encouraged to attend Thursday’s “Family Night Dinner” to hang out at their position coach’s home; parents of players also have direct access to Meyer and his staff at all times.

• Meyer requires his coaches and their wives to “babysit” players and provide a family atmosphere for them as they are mentored through football, academics, and social responsibilities.

• Through disciplinary action, players are given every opportunity to redeem themselves for mistakes made on and off the field.

• Instead of constantly hammering on his players to get results on the field and in the classroom, he “bribes” them with the privileges of a “Champions Club,” almost like a frequent-flier program.

• Meyer runs an offense that he mostly made up, borrowing parts from here or there, but producing a new edition or version every couple of years and adapting it to personnel.

• Good execution in practice is KEY.

• Meyers’ handling of players has come under scrutiny. He believes in conditioning the behavioral system with rewards and extraction. It’s a little trick Meyer learned by the reading of Ivan Petrovich Pavlov via John Wooden.

• The job description of each position coach mandates that he keep a close eye on players. That’s also why players are often guests of Shelley and Urban Meyer for cookouts and other family occasions.

• Meyer was a hard charging young assistant who paid attention and took copious notes, then collated them into a manual of innovative techniques as he moved up on the coaching ladder towards his dream.

• Meyer believes in directly challenging players. Life as a Gator football player begins with throwing your press clipping away and taking a quick inventory of your shortcomings. “One of the biggest misconceptions for these kids is that they think they understand competition. Most of them have never faced adversity.”

• All incoming freshman start with a black piece of tape on their helmets, which is removed in a battlefield promotion. “Just because you’re here doesn’t really mean you are here. You need to earn your way into this core group of guys, and I think there’s merit in that.”
As passionate as he is about winning, Meyer is even more committed to keeping young men out of jail, off drugs, sober, alive, in class, and educated. Meyer is one part football coach and one part Father Flanagan.

From the beginning of his relationship with players, Urban gets to know them through their mom or dad, or both. When parents send him their son, Meyer treats him like one of his own. Sometimes the nurturing of players becomes almost parental in nature, and Urban is not above taking away privileges—the way a mom or dad would take away the car keys from Little Johnny.

One of Meyer’s favorite slogans is on the walls of the Florida facilities – Do YOUR JOB!

Chapter 2—The Man with the Plan

Meyer created a 129 page document that is called the “Plan to Win.”

Don’t mistake the Plan to Win as a trumped up bunch of football clichés and homilies that Urban Meyer writes up on the dry erase board in halftime speeches, because it is a definitive manifesto of philosophy and intent. He says it drives every player personnel issue, every game plan, and every decision that he makes in football.

The four main staples of Urban’s mandate for success and his organizational schematic are:
  o Play Great Defense
  o Turnovers
  o Score in the Red Zone
  o Win the Kicking Game

The real secret, says Meyer, is realizing the infallibility of the plan. If it is followed, he says, “it is a hundred percent guaranteed” to work.

The base philosophy of the Plan to Win is to articulate to the entire team an understandable plan that aligns team goals and balances effort and talent to give them the best chance of winning the football game by tilting the field in our favor.

Included in the 129 page manual is a set of core values for players:
  o Honesty
  o Respect Women
  o No drugs
  o No stealing
  o No weapons

Also included are the guides on how assistant coaches should coach, expectations about player academics, proper player nutrition, acceptable behavior while on a date, and a day planner that covers August through November.

Built around those principles is the schedule, which designates times for such things as “summer brunch/church” to “kicking meeting” to “speed training/upper lifting” and “speed training/lower lifting.”

The magic potion is simply “DO YOUR JOB.” That includes the following for coaches:
  o Take care of your family and your health
- Take care of your players (academic, social, spiritual, family)
- Be an expert at your position and excel as a teacher
- Recruit everyday (expect to sign two to three players per year)
- Be passionate about coaching and football

- The plan was conceived and written with a purpose, out of the need for some kind of blueprint as a new head coach. He had to be prepared for the moment. Urban hammered the document out in a week as he was about to leave Notre Dame for Bowling Green. “How are you going to handle EACH situation?”
- “I never got a book like that from a coach,” he said. “I just kind of put that together myself. I wanted to have a resource when the situation called for it—I didn’t want to have to grab from air.”

Chapter 3—The Book of Urban

- Teams will have to win close games if they’re going to win the SEC.
- The concern for Urban by friends and family is how far he is going to push himself and for how long. Urban says he working on trying to delegate more to his staff.
- That flashback to the Bowling Green version of Urban Meyer is not necessarily pretty to him. He didn’t like what he had become—“a thirty six year old coach out of control.” He was not only a control freak who was driving himself crazy, but everyone around him as well.
- As demanding as Meyer is of his players and assistant coaches, he is maybe more demanding of himself. Driven by his desire to excel in an organized manner and on his own timetable, he races the clock constantly, with every segment of practice timed out on digital clocks.
- There is always an implied message to go top speed, because speed wins in football. One of his mantras is “Four to six seconds of relentless effort.”
- He’s innovative. He’s a scholar of the game. He works hard at it. And he works smart. He allows his intellect to be free. He isn’t fettered by things that he’s afraid won’t work. He wants to do things that he understands will work.
- He is free to let himself learn from anybody and he surrounds himself with good coaches.
- “It seems to me you get somebody who’s either highly intelligent or street smart. Urban’s got both. He’s very, very streetwise, but he’s a very intelligent person. You combine those two things with somebody who’s a hard worker—man! The sky’s the limit.”
- Urban Meyer is equal parts life coach and football coach who takes a “wholistic” approach. Building TRUST is the goal.
- Meyer also coaches everything that moves around his players. He coaches the alumni, the fans, his family and his football assistants. He coaches his players in football, in academics, health, decision making, discipline, physical fitness and accountability.
- One of the cornerstones of Meyer’s coaching philosophy is owning up. If you are a teacher, you teach, and if you don’t teach your players properly, then its on you.
• In Urban Meyer’s program, everybody earns his way, or loses it, by performance. You have to know your guys and you deal with them all differently. A player gets a little different treatment if he’s a ‘program guy’ and is somebody you can trust.
• Earn some of the trust and you make your way into the Champions Club, where the players get better athletic clothing, better food, and the ultimate respect of coaches and peers. It is a circle of trust based on adherence to team rules and putting forth a higher degree of effort in the classroom and on the field.
• And he’s a great communicator. He gets very explicit with his players.
• Urban and Shelley annually invite the new recruits to their house for a cookout, and after the fete, the breaking down of the “over recruiting” is unleashed as Urban tells each of them about every weakness or flaw in his character, game, or academic regimen. Straight talk has worked so far for Meyer.
• In a letter to parents, Meyer tells them: They will be introduced to the core values by which they must live and abide on a daily basis. Honesty, Respect of Women, No Stealing, No Drugs, and No Weapons are the core values of our team.”
• In a manual Meyer hands out to players, they are reminded, among other things:
  o You have responsibilities/obligations; not entitlement
  o Do you job, nothing else
  o You’ve done nothing; thank those who gave us what we have at Florida.
  o Selfish people fail
• Getting these players to apply those principles—that is the greatest challenge. That is called coaching. Meyer claims that what makes a good coach “is what makes a good father.” Some coaches would call that babysitting. “You’re damn right it is,” Meyer admits. “If you are a position coach, you need to know everything there is to know about your player, where he is, what he’s doing, who he’s hanging out with, how he’s doing in class, and what girl he’s dating. If you are a coach, at Florida, yes, you will become a babysitter. And so will your wife.”
• “We worked hard and failed to reach him (Atkins), but we must keep working. We know we cannot save them all, but that is what we must try to do.
• Meyer usually imposes stiff penalties when players violate core values, team rules, or bring embarrassment to the University of Florida. Meyer seemingly seeks to hit the offenders in the pocketbook. The disciplinary possibilities are endless, from suspensions, community service, return of bowl gifts, to academic and behavioral requirements.
• At times he’s borderline brutal with his demands, but would no doubt argue that he’s pushing the players to their maximum.

Chapter 4 – Winning Prevents Anarchy

• One of Urban Meyer’s biggest attributes has been inclusion and the bringing together of all factions. That has included former players. He has involved the fans, the bands, the support staff, and the faculty.
• Winning prevents anarchy
• How do you keep that balance of that and winning? It’s like Satan still dangles that carrot of winning in front of your face. And it’s all well and good, but you
still got to win. That’s the struggle in this profession—to do that in perspective. Just to trust that God is sovereign. Just be obedient and faithful and know he’s going to take care of you. Rather than thinking that either you’re going to have tow in or you’ve got to sell your house.

- One key ingredient to winning is the so-called chemistry.
- Meyer believes victory comes at a price and like everything else in his program, it should be earned.

Chapter 5 – The Good Life in Ashtabula

- Urban learned at an early age that failure comes with a price.
- While Bud Meyer was strict and believed in strong discipline, he also took a keen interest in his three children and gave them leeway in making their own decisions.
- That’s the way God made it. You are supposed to sink every ounce into your children. I always remember that about my own.
- Urban learned to deal with criticism and responded to Kopko’s (high school coach) hands-on approach by getting bigger, stronger, and becoming a leader.
- When he called Bud, however, that idea was quickly quashed. Urban made every excuse possible—“the coach didn’t like me…didn’t like the way I talked…didn’t like the way I parted my hair,” he told his father. To which Bud responded, “OK, you’re seventeen and you’re grown. So you’re capable of making your own decision. But by the way, you’re not welcome back here. I’m sure your mother would want to see you at Christmas, but other than that, you’re not welcome. There are no quitters in the Meyer family.” (after contemplating quitting)

Chapter 6 – Bud and Earle

- Earle’s direct, nose-to-nose approach and the Way of the Scarlet and Gray had rubbed off on Meyer.
- Bruce was focused on doing everything “the right way,” but was far from perfect. “He lost his temper and sometimes his self-control,” said urban. “But there was never cheating. No chance of cheating on your wife. The loyalty, all the things that he taught, to this day is still the key.”
- Coach Bruce tells you what’s going on. At the end of the day I hope people say that about me. There’s no BS. Coach Bruce is the best.
- Had it not been for the comforting words and strong encouragement of his wife, Urban Meyer the coach might have been Urban Meyer the banker or insurance man.
- At times, coaches’ wives make a huge difference in the careers and lives of their husbands—as well as the football future of some schools.
- If Meyer learned anything in his first real coaching job at Illinois State it was that without good players, coaches would surely become candidates for road kill, because the Redbirds would certainly get run over.
• “We got our brains kicked in that first year, but I learned a lot of football. I actually thought about getting out of coaching. I was worried about surviving. It was so competitive to get a job, so saturated.”
• It was more than just a job for Urban—it was beginning to feel like a calling. He and Shelley were about to embark on a partnership of mentoring players by providing them a family environment, encouragement in schoolwork, and counseling about personal problems.
• From Lubick, Urban learned the importance of treating people right. That meant compassion for players and respect for all members of the football organization—from secretaries to janitors to ball boys.

Chapter 7 – Loving Fort Collins

• Known on the staff as a no-nonsense wide receiver coach who drove his players hard and demanded near perfection, Urban often made his point at their expense.
• Mayer also had some rough edges that needed smoothing.
• Urban was so tough on his players, however, that attrition became an issue. He would scream at them, grab them by the face mask, and generally humiliate them in front of their teammates. “I was out of control.”
• Ban witnessed from the inside what he considered mutiny as staff people turned on his mentor and he made a mental note about the importance of loyalty.
• The new coach, Sonny Lubick, at first said he had no place on his staff for Meyer. With no money in their savings, a two year old daughter named Nicki, and one on the way, there was cause for concern. “I was going to go into insurance or banking.”
• Then came the good news. Lubick, a former Miami defensive assistant, had a change of heart and decided to retain Meyer. “You don’t know who I am, but you will never be sorry for keeping me,” Urban said.
• The learning curves was about to get steeper for Urban, whose feisty attitude and combative coaching style would get him reprimanded by the boss. “This kid quit. You know hwy he quit?” he asked Meyer. “He quit because of you.”
  o “From that day forward I changed,” said Meyer.
• Urban became more of a teacher and less of a drill sergeant.
• “I had grown up in an era when the louder you are, the more you get done. Just to watch coach Lubick operate, the way he treated everybody—secretaries, everybody! And our success rate was off the charts. We went ten and one that year.”
• “Are you changing people’s lives? Are you really involved? Are the forty yard dash and the vertical jump more important than trying to save a player’s life? And that’s when I changed. When he first started talking, I said, WOW.”
• It’s different now. I still confront them with a purpose. Years ago I would have beat that kid down.

Chapter 8—Lou Holtz Calls
While less harsh, Urban was still no pussycat with his players.

“Before we ever introduced ourselves, he said, ‘Stand up and take your shirt off, I want to take a look at you. You look like you’re about half of what a scholarship athlete at the University of Notre Dame should be. This meeting is going to be pretty short, because you obviously need to get in the weight room.’

“He was like Bobby Knight intense. In your face. His way or the highway. But the man could coach.”

As the up and coming wide receiver coach for the Fighting Irish, Meyer would refine his coaching skills and begin to raise his football IQ.

Marotti had learned about their psyches. He was convinced that to get the best out of athletes, it would take more than regimen, discipline, and veiled threats. He and Meyer would scheme up ways later at Florida to entice the players to work harder—a sort of a caste system of the locker room. Those who worked hardest on the field, in the classroom, and in the weight room—plus kept their personal lives in order—would be rewarded with better living. That meant better gear, better food, and more privileges.

“That’s when I really got it how good they were as coaches. Not just X’s and O’s, but they ere really good with players. Greg Mattison was unbelievable. Players were over at his house all summer long. It was almost like a battle: Who would have more players over at their house, me or him?”

Relationships with players became everything

Mattison did it by being there as a father figure, with off-the-field mentoring and nurturing in the privacy of his home.

Among the privileges for special teamers when Urban became a head coach: First in line to eat team meals and flying first class on the team plane. Special team, after all ,were the soul of the team, a place where desire often won out over skill, where speed and athleticism were advantages, where sneak attacks and the element of surprise were almost like guerrilla warfare.

This was where battlefield promotions were awarded—sometimes even full scholarships, right on the spot.

More significantly, at Notre Dame Meyer began to search for a way to get the ball in the hands of his best players.

David Givens Story, WR for Notre Dame:
  - “Coach, I didn’t touch the ball today.”
  - His words jolted Meyer. He realized that he had not put the ball in the hands of his best playmaker and he vowed never to do that again. “You have to fire me immediately if I ever let that happen again.’ I didn’t do my job that day. My job is to get that kid the ball.”
  - Out of David Given’s tears the idea for the Spread would be born—at least Urban’s version of it.

“When Urban got the job at Bowling Green,” said Mullen, “we went around to all those places and took the thoughts and beliefs back together with us. Instead of saying we ere going to run ‘this offense’ or ‘that offense,’ we took all the different ideas and philosophies, put them together, and said, ‘OK, which direction do we want to go in—we want to run our own offense.’”
Notre Dame would give Urban the last two pieces of his repertoire as a head coach: the Spread offense and the Plan to Win. Both were formulated in his final days there.

Urban heeded the advice of his father about always having an orderly approach to decision-making and problem solving.

Chapter 9 – The Bowling Green Boys

As Meyer had correctly assessed it, however, it wasn’t “a very good job” at the time.

Bowling Green would give Urban his own laboratory—a place where he could indoctrinate his assistant coaches into some of his own thinking, try out new offensive theories, and explore ways to get the student body and the faculty more involved. He was also going to be learning about the limit of how far he could push players.

He followed the UCLA legend’s advice that players should be treated equally, but rather rewarded for how they contributed to the team.

He was cherry-picking the best idea and cobbling them together with his own fresh, imaginative perspective and growing his football IQ.

Urban seemed “always to be writing down things that he wanted to do differently someday as a head coach.”

Those innovations were tied to the core values of physical conditioning, teamwork, living right and education.

The coaches emphasized academics, following another Bud Meyer tenet: Thou shalt not make poor grades. And thou shalt go to study table. Urban had warned the players in his first meeting that if they missed classes, they could expect repercussions.

Armed with all this coaching new think, Meyer set about to change the losing culture. The toxic waste of failure was so deeply ingrained in the football program that Meyer would have to go deep to remove it, and in doing so, he would go over the line with his disciplining.

How far could Meyer push players to achieve their maximum effort? Urban knew the situation called for a quick and stern action.

“He was definitely setting a tone that things were going to be different, and it was going to be his way or the highway.” – Harris, QB

“We’re going to figure out whether we’re going to be coming together or we’re going to be going apart. If at any point and time you want to leave, you’re more than welcome to quit. But I’m not going to quit on you.” – Meyer to the team

Then he called out a group of people who had been skipping and he said as they were standing before their teammates, “Why do you guys think it’s not important to go to study table? Why don’t you care about this team?”

If you screw up, you run.

Black Wednesday: 2 hours of running and exercising commenced

- “I have never run more or harder in my life. It was an amazing thing. You just pushed yourself to that point because you just knew you had
to...there’s nothing else you had to look forward to except coming together.”
- “That morning was the turning point. We were either going to die together or keep going together.”
- The worst part was having to wait in line to get to one of the trash cans and throw up. Meyer had warned them in advance, “Don’t you throw up on the turf! Don’t you throw up on my turf!”
- Several players did quit that day, and eventually the number grew to more than twenty, leaving only about fifty on scholarship. But the team began to shape up, at least what was left of it. To fill out the roster, Meyer began recruiting walk-ons for the kickoff team by advertising in the school paper.
- Urban won’t ever do Camp Meyer the same way again, however. “It was dangerous,” Meyer said of Black Wednesday. “What I know now is you can’t do that. What happened that day at five o’clock that Wednesday—you can’t do that now.”

- So disgusted with losing were the players that they welcomed coaches who offered a personal touch, who invited them over to their houses and encouraged them to stay committed to their education.
- “Every player just wants to be helped. We were physically players. We owned them after that.”
- The players who remained felt Meyer’s stringent measures were necessary to get the program righted.
- “He walked into the team meeting room and just starts looking at us—basically staring us all down and telling us things are going to change. It’s not going to be the same anymore. He’s not putting up with mediocrity. Basically, calling us a One Double-A football team.
- The Spread was about MATCHUPS
- Thus began the two-year run of success for Bowling Green, starting with the biggest turnaround in the country, from a 2-9 season to an 8-3.
- Urban’s Way began to have an impact with players, who were not only driven on the football field, but nurtured in the homes of their position coaches and given hands-on help with their studies.
- His players feel that way about him. “If he walked into a room today, I would literally run through the wall for that man.”
- “I think he’s a great life coach. Everything I learned my senior year at Bowling Green has made me a better person. Made me better understand how to have a work ethic. How to keep motivated. How to be personal with people. How to trust people. How to earn respect from people.
- “The first day I thought I was going to die. The second day I was sure I was going to die. And by the end of the week I was hard as a rock.”
- “If done correctly, the player-coach relationship is the most meaningful relationship, second only to the parent-child relationship.”
- “I have no hard feelings for him leaving. I think he’s one of the greatest coaches and greatest mentors—one of the hardest mentors—that I’ve ever met.
Chapter 10—Utah: The Land of Diversity

- Meyer would tell his players their team should be among the country’s elite, but few believed that possible at first.
- Some had drug and alcohol issues, just as there were on other campuses. He would come face-to-face with how to deal with troubled players.
- On having a player have a 2nd DUI: When Meyer found out, he immediately suspended Marty and was ready to boot him off the squad for good. Urban was furious. Meyer had a change of heart when Shelley stepped in to plead Johnson’s case. Shelley convinced her husband that if football were taken from Johnson, he might return to drinking and wind up killing somebody while behind the wheel. Shelley followed up to let Johnson know somebody cared.
- That was Urban’s Way: Your teammates decide your fate
- “He always kind of put all the decisions in our hands—whether it was ranch dressing or Italian dressing, or what jerseys and what shoe color or what kind of socks we were going to wear.” Nagahi
- The Leadership Committee decided to give Johnson another chance, but only if he could meet what he remembers was “a list of about fifteen” conditions. He would be suspended from the team for 2003 and told to complete the list of demands.
- Urban vowed that he would never kick a football player off his team unless it was the absolute last resort. From that day forward, Urban had a new unpaid assistant coach in charge of counseling: Shelley.
- Starting off with good players to coach was not just luck, because Meyer says he would never take over a losing program without inheriting some talent. While McBride was an excellent recruiter and left behind good players, the players needed shaping into a solid team.
- “He had a vision, he had a purpose, and he knew where he was going. The first time he met with us he said, ‘You know there are really only about eight teams in the nation that do things the right way. And we’re going to be one of those football teams.’ He was speaking to a bunch of guys who had gone 5-6 the year before. So he was speaking to a bunch of doubters in the room.”
- Sure enough, when Meyer arrived in Salt Lake, out came the trash cans, on the doors went the chains, and the windows were covered with black paper—and the running commenced. This time it wasn’t as harsh and there wasn’t as big an exodus, but there was some negative reaction—and some attrition.
- “We had him over to our house all the time, and I found out the guy was a good kid. He was just a mess. We kept working with him, working with him. He became like a son to me.”
- First they had to endure 12 straight workouts in the weight room, the difficulty of rope climbing, and the grueling tugs-of-war. Their motto became “Don’t let go of the rope” that year.
- When the Champions Club started that year, Evans was a reject. He couldn’t make the cut because his bench press wasn’t good enough. Angry at this rejection, Evans began to work even harder. “It made me so mad that I didn’t make it that I
spent every way imaginable trying to improve my bench,” said Evans. Then Evans made it.

- “The majority of the team makes it,” Evans said. “You don’t want to be that kid over there eating hot dogs when everyone else is eating steaks.”
- Nagahi would ask himself, “Who is this guy and what are we doing?”
- Meyer spend an inordinate amount of time teaching techniques to individual special teams players. They could never use an excuse of “I didn’t know” if they screwed up.
- First, however, Urban had to win them all over. Meyer soon found resistance form a number of older players on the team to some of the hard-nosed drills imported from Bowling Green. In March 2003 of the first off-season, those players decided to push back.
  - Several older players were among those who went to Meyer’s office and told him they’d had enough.
  - “This is not Bowling Green,” one of them said. “You’re not dealing with eighteen year olds anymore. You’re dealing with returned missionaries, guys who are twenty-five who are married with kids.”
  - They were risking a Meyer meltdown.
  - “There were a lot of coaches who would have said, ‘You know what, guys—forget you! You shut up and listen.; But Urban is a guy who will listen to his leaders if they have proven he can trust them.”
  - “He was great. He told us ‘You know, you’re right. This is as new to me as I am to you guys, and I’m learning just as much as you are. And we’re going to have to work through this together.”
  - Meyer followed that up by embracing the culture of the school, the program, and the state.
- At the first “Champions Banquet” held at the Meyer household, Urban and Shelley noticed something unorthodox.
  - “The married LDS kids were sitting over here, the black kids sitting over here, the Polynesians over there, the Hispanics over here. Nobody’s talking. They couldn’t stand each other. I looked at Shelley and we said, “What is this!”?
  - “This has got to stop”
  - At the insistence of their coach, the Ute players began to find out the family backgrounds of their teammates, their hometowns, their high schools, their like and their dislike. If they didn’t have the correct answer, they had to run.
  - “They finally got it,” Meyer said. “They cared for each other. All that hard work was paying off.”
- “He was up front. Coach Meyer was a person that demanded respect.”
- “At the time, it was blunt to have your head coach screaming and yelling that ‘you’re too weak, you’re too slow, you’re too little, and you’re never going to be able to play like that.” – Alex Smith
- Smith found out in a hurry that he, as the starting quarterback, would be no more important that the 115th player on the team, or the walk-ons.
- “I’ve never been ridden so hard in my entire life.” – Alex Smith
• “They’re talking about how I can’t bench press three hundred pounds and I need to get down and do pushups. So they got me doing pushups in between workouts, then they bring over a ball, and I’ve got my feet on the ball doing pushups between bench presses.” All of the sudden somebody sat on his back, “Pushing down as I’m trying to push up. It was such an intense environment!”
• Such as the time in the mat drills when the quarterbacks were asked to wrestle the linebackers who were sixteen to seventy pounds heavier.
• “I am just getting killed out there,” said Smith. “My nose is bleeding, my shirt is ripped, I’ve rug burn all over me, and they’re telling me to do up-downs because I just got beat and to get back in line because I just got beat.
• “At times you say, ‘Man this is insane, this is crazy.’ But everybody’s doing it. He treated everyone the same—everyone is getting pushed. I learned to appreciate it because everyone is so tight because we’ve been through so much together. Those mental barriers are broken down. You found yourself really engaging that stuff and really wanting it, knowing it as going to make you better and pay off. It was something I’m so thankful I got to go through and to play for Coach Meyer. It’s something that’s going to change my life forever.
• After Utah beat UNC, 46-14, some of the players who had been grousing about Meyer’s tactic began to get the vision. Meyer called them “the most ‘invested team’ in the county.”
• Utah returned to the locker room, and, to prevent a slowing of metabolism, members of the support staff were sent to town to buy energy food (fruit). The players were fed and kept relaxed.

**PART TWO – BECOMING A GATOR**

**Chapter 11—Shelley, the Go-To Girl**

• Counselor, friend, mother, sweetheart, homemaker, cheerleader—Shelley Meyer can do it all, and sometimes does.
• “In this business, if you don’t have the right wife, it can hinder you.”
• Shelley’s Energizer bunny enthusiasm abounds in everything she does. She feeds off the energy of her family, her friends, and her community activities, but she’s also the No. 1 fan of Gator football.
• One key factor in Florida’s favor: Notre Dame was a national school, meaning Urban would be flying coast to coast in the search for recruits. That would preclude Urban being home to see his son and daughters compete in sports. In talent-laden Florida and adjacent states, only short hops would be necessary to recruit some of the best players in America.
• Urban became convinced that Shelley was right and that winning back the lives of player was more important than winning football games.
• “She never said a word, other than, ‘Let’s go, let’s go…let’s keep it going.’”
• Meyer’s style is all in coaching.
• “We took over a team with some serious issues and we still have issues we’re dealing with—more so than I ever dreamed of, more than I ever wanted to.”
“Utah was the ultimate team,” Meyer said proudly. “The 12-0 team, just to give you an example of how tough they were, I couldn’t break them. We were so hard on them the first year. And that next year we had a bunch of good, veteran players who just took control of the team.”

Chapter 12—Getting the Band Back Together

The group of coaches that Meyer put together to help win the 2006 national championship were excellent teachers, strong motivators, dogged recruiters, good in-game decision makers, and dedicated staff members. They had good chemistry and shared a common vision.

“I wanted to pick the best coaches I’d been around and have them on my staff. And then you need a bunch of recruiting foods that don’t mind spending six nights in a row in a hotel.”

The last thing he wanted was a staff of yes-men. “You have to have somebody who’s got enough balls to disagree.”

Disloyalty however would get you fired.

“The last page of the coaching manual says ‘Disloyalty of any form will not be tolerated,’” Meyer said. “It says there right there in the book: disloyalty to the point of where I ask you to do something and you don’t do it. Or you are negative about the program in a public place. Or cheating on your wife. It’s over. You are finished.”

The “Do your job” mantra goes for assistant coaches as well as players. If there is an issue with a player that is a problem for the position coach, Assistants are expected to take on the responsibilities for their players—whether babysitting them, tutoring them, counseling them about their girlfriends, or simply teaching them better fundamentals on the field.

Strong and Mattison were no-brainers because Meyer was already familiar with both and they possessed three important characteristic he wanted:

- They were excellent coaches who knew how to take care of their players.
- They were strong recruiters
- They were committed to being good fathers and husbands.

“Greg is a friend, but I just admire the way he handles players. He and his wife, Ann, just love players. He can recruit. He can motivate.

“If you are a bad husband and bad father, you are a bad coach, man. I sincerely believe that.”

“He’s an outstanding football coach, a great organizer, a great disciplinarian, and really concerned about the welfare of the players. He will tell you in a minute: Coaches take care of the players. Your whole life is around these players.” – Charlie Strong on Meyer

“Meyer was diligent in his chores, but no particularly upwardly mobile. Urban was more about getting the work in front of him done rather than campaigning to become head coach. He never worked at being a head coach. He worked at being a good coach.” Heater on Meyer
“He’s an ‘octopus’ when he recruits, because he wraps his tentacles around everybody,” said Meyer. “He not only recruits the player, but also the thirteen to fourteen people around him. When I go out recruiting with him, he beat me senseless.” Meyer on Doc Holiday

“I think the thing I learned from Urban is how important that relationship is with the kids, how to get involved in their lives and how to develop their trust. We’ve always done that wherever I’ve been, but not to the extent that he does it. He’s got a good scheme on both offense and defense, but just his managerial skills and the way he attacks things is really special.” Holiday on Meyer

By nature a perfectionist, Mullen demands excellence from all his quarterbacks and that means paying attention to the tiniest details of execution. And, as he had proven in his short tenure as an offensive assistant, the final product speaks for itself.

“I loved the way Meyer coached the wide receivers. He as like a line coach. He as up in their jug, on ‘em—he was a wild man and I just loved that about him. I always felt he was a real guy. Hardworking. Wear emotions on his sleeve. Got a lot of juice. Kind of how I am, and was.” Steve Addazio on Meyer

Meyer’s No. 1 asset as a coach, Hevesy says, is the ability to motivate. “I don’t think it can ever say that in seven years that I can recall kids coming out and not playing hard. They’re always ready to play. Maybe if we weren’t ready to play or somebody was better than us, but never because the kids were not motivated to play.

“Discipline,” says Meyer, “is ninety percent anticipation, not reaction. Everybody thinks discipline is making him do one hundred wind sprints. No, discipline is, if the id’s an alcoholic, get him to a counselor before it comes an issue. Discipline is also if you hear there’s a big party going on and there’s going to be a problem, not wake up in the morning and hope something’s not wrong—or, if there is, then punish them. That’s not discipline.

“Discipline is making sure you talk to them before that party and then have someone there if it happens. So that’s in our book. It comes straight from Coach Bruce.”

Chapter 13 – The Spread for Arizona

The first day Urban Meyer set foot on Gainesville soil as the official coach of the Florida Gators and announced that he would run the Spread offense, he drew mostly blank stares and some obligatory nodding of heads.

“First of all, there is no ‘offense.’ We don’t have an offense. People say the Spread, because we like to spread the field. It’s all personnel dictated. If we get some really fast receivers here, I’m convinced we can win with the Wishbone—if you have good players, you can win. So that’s why I always take offense to that.”

“When you start saying the Spread offense can’t work…no, not if you have bad players. Can you run the I formation? Yeah, Eddie George did it real well. Can you run the Spread offense? Well, yes, if you have Tim Tebow and Percy Harvin, Louis Murphy and those kind of guys. But if you don’t have those receivers, you can’t win the SEC.”
So it turns out that the secret of the Spread is the same secret of the Wishbone, the West Coast offense, the I formation, and the Single Wing: If you’ve got superb material, you can win with any of those. It’s more about recruiting—getting the right people on the bus—than it is about calling ball plays and formations.

“If I’m the athletic director, I walk down the hall and fire him immediately. Because your job as a coach is to utilize your personnel, not to design some scheme. There’s no magic scheme. You better get your tail out and recruit, because the result is that it changes and you need to match your personnel.”

“We definitely thought he was crazy. The first thing he did was when he came in and talked about there were going to be a lot of changes. He talked about the mat drills and the different things he had done at Bowling Green and Utah. I just remember me and a lot of guys were kind of like, ‘Who does he think he is? This ain’t Utah or Bowling Green. That stuff ain’t going to work.” – Jemalle Cornelius

“It was January and we had this thing called Full Metal Jacket on Friday, and they had us in there doing all this crazy manual resistance stuff. They’re talking all this trash. The workout was so hard that it was to the point of ‘Well, this is a new coach, do I need to transfer?’ I don’t know if I could put up with this every Friday, with all them in your face and challenging you.”

The days of the laid-back Florida athlete were soon over. As it got more competitive in the weight room and on the mats, however, the players began to respond. “They were trying to see who would break and who wouldn’t. I think that right there was the turning point.”

“If you weren’t strong minded and didn’t have any heart, man, you definitely wouldn’t survive on this team. He put you through some stuff when at lot of times you looked at each other and said, ‘What the hell are we doing this for?’ and ‘how does this pertain to football?’”

As a physically fit athlete who considered himself a workout warrior even Vernell found out in early 2005 how tough such events as the “Valentine’s Day Massacre” in the weight room could be.

At the same time, players could also be making progress toward their membership in the Champions Club, which would reward them at another level for the “investment.”

Meyer gives himself a poor grade for not adjusting his personnel quickly enough during the 2005 season, partly because he was so busy trying to change the attitude of the student body and the football culture.

“That night at my house, after LSU, I had Dan Mullen and Steve Addazio come over until the early morning hours. Instead of complaining about how bad we were at certain positions, we changed our whole offense that night.”

Urban was so upset after the trip to Columbia that he had the captain park the airplane and called a team meeting at the gate, challenging any potential quitters to leave the team. Vernell Brown said the flight home from Columbia and the subsequent brouhaha on the plane may have been the turning point for the program.

“This turned into—and I did you not—and hour and a half or two hour speech. And it was basically a man-to-man, heart-to-heart speech. He let you know that if you didn’t want a part of this, now was the time to leave. “If you want to get off, get
off now. But when it’s all said and done, we’re going to get the train back on the track with you or without you.’”

Chapter 14—The SEC Stairway to Heaven

- Leak’s own coaches and teammates accused him of poor leadership.
- “They day we signed Tim Tebow, I called Chris and said, ‘We’ve signed Tim Tebow, but you’re out quarterback.’ And he said, ‘Thanks, I needed to hear that.’”
- Leaders were being called out in January before the title run and one in particular was Dallas Baker.
  - It had taken a while for Baker to grow up.
  - Baker had arrived in Gainesville with a sense of history and a desire to excel for the team he had always loved.
  - Yet Baker seemed to be taking things for granted early on.
  - Dallas struggled with the temptations of his newfound freedoms.
  - He didn’t run an all out route on a key pass against LSU and Florida lost by 3, He dropped a pass in a 7 point loss to Miss. St.
  - “He said, ‘I understand some of you guys may not want to be here. He told us some of us needed to grow up. Some guys were upset…they thought he was going to be too strict.” – Baker
  - “When we worked out, he would not let us use gloves.
  - Meyer informed Dallas that his teammates thought he was funny “but they don’t think you’re very smart.”
  - “In May, me and Coach Meyer had a one-on-one meeting where he spoke to me like a man, telling me he was going to send me home, that he met both my parents and they were great people and he didn’t want to disappoint them like that, but he can’t have me ‘messing up’ his program. And that I could be a great player and I just don’t know how much talent I have and I’m wasting it. I guess that just hit home, because I’ve never had anybody talk to me, telling me how great I could be…but my goofing up was going to mess it up.”
  - “So I just thought, ‘Well, how about I try it his way and see how everything works?’”
  - Dallas stopped the “goofing off” and become a productive performer on the 2005 squad.
- “Whatever we were doing in the past wasn’t working, and that’s what coach preached to us. Even in our off-season workouts a lot more of the stuff was team-oriented instead of individual stuff.” - Siler
- “Mostly it was our mind set, the way we did things. We weren’t going to lose.” – Siler
- Starting in 2006, road trips were to become pleasurable. The mornings of the games would be more about waking players up with a purpose and interacting with assistant coaches the moment their feet hit the floor and making it fun.
- “We didn’t change a whole lot. This came from Coach Holtz. It’s an unusual environment for them, so the coaches go in with a glass of orange juice and a newspaper—rip the door open, throw the sheets back, turn on the TV, throw the
drapes open, get real loud and have fun with them. I noticed the players started getting a kick out of it.”

• “The other thing we did was place more emphasis on toughness.” –Meyer

• Frank Minnifield (New England Patriot), who was so competitive he didn’t even want passes completed on him in practice. Not even in a walk through. That became a battle cry.
  o “Not even in walk-through,” Belichick would say to Minnifield in warm-ups before a game. Minnifield would echo, “Not even in a walk-through.”
  o Meyer borrowed that slogan to use on Reggie Lewis. Meyer would come by an utter, “Not even in walk-through.”
  o “He was a man of his word and he gave me the opportunity. And I made the best of it.” –Reggie Lewis
  o “As for the ‘Not even in the walk-through’ mantra: That’s what gave me the personality that I had. I lived by that quote every day I touched the football field.”

• Knoxville 2006 wiped away some of Baker’s bad marks from 2004, and he was on his way. He had become a member of Meyer’s Leadership Committee.

• Right away, Baker began to encourage young Percy Harvin, a star in the making, who had gotten a celebration penalty. “I told him, ‘Don’t make the same mistakes that I’ve made. Don’t go down the same path. I’ve done some stupid stuff since I’ve been here. Next time, just hand the ball to the official.’”

• Louis Murphy had been booted off the team as a freshman for missing curfew, but given a second chance.
  o Much in the manner of Dallas Baker, Louis Murphy had one foot out the door in 2005 when the light turned on.
  o Meyer said Murphy was also hanging out with the wrong crowd and headed for trouble. To earn a spot back on the team, Murphy would be put through a brutal routine.
  o “I told Coach Meyer that he could try, but he was never going to break me.” Murphy vowed after receiving the details of the punishment.
  o “I was hanging with people who weren’t going anywhere. I don’t know. I guess that was just a teenage thing…not knowing what you want for yourself…going with the wind…following the crowd.”

• Vocal encounters became more heated and players screamed at each other. Leak was the focal point of criticism by the teammates, several of them calling the offense “a bunch of BS.” Helmets were thrown. –After loss to Auburn
  o One of the assistant coaches warned Meyer that he’d better break things up. Meyer declined, remembering a similar incident at Colorado State and how Sonny Lubick had handled it.
  o “Let it go,” Meyer told him.
  o “I wanted to hear what they were saying,” Meyer said. “If they think Chris Leak’s not very tough, I want to hear it. If they think the offense sucks, I want to hear it. Go ahead and get it out. Catharsis. I’m a big believer in that. You’ve got to release a little bit. So I let them release. Once it started to calm down and I got control of it, we knelt down and said a prayer.”
“And then he said, ‘There’s one thing about being knocked down and getting back up: It’s easier to win and win them all, but there’s something about a team getting knocked off course and end up finding a way to come back and do something special.’ Coach Meyer gave us a card of that, with a whole quote of Danny’s, and that little thing we kept to ourselves—a card with the SEC championship rings on it. It was something we kept with us the rest of the year.”

- Though it hadn’t been made public yet, Florida would be losing its best defensive players and the anchor in the middle of the line. Having rejoined the team against LSU after a 2 game drug related suspension, Marcus Thomas was kicked off for good after the Georgia game for violating the terms of his reinstatement. This was yet another serious blow to the Gators’ championship hopes.
- Right here is where the nurturing and care of players was about to pay off for Meyer.
- “God didn’t make enough coach Meyers. He’s a genuine caring person, not just a football coach. He treated Ray like his own son. You can feel the love and the passion from him and his family.” Father of player
- “When he talks, he knows what he’s talking about. When you’re playing for somebody like that, you really believe in what they are saying and you want to make them happy.”
- While some people might call that fate or luck, Meyer says definitely that the blocked field goal was the result of players training hard in practice and executing in games. The blocked kick was fate, perhaps, in a spiritual sense, but Moss also agrees with his former coach that design and rehearsal played a big part. (after the block FG against South Carolina)
- The only different wrinkly, said Smith, was that Meyer backed off a little on some of the grueling workouts because the athletes at Florida were the elite recruits that he didn’t have at Utah. “At the same time he kept his sternness about him, but the players at Florida weren’t used to it at all.”
- “It was like déjà vu,” Smith said of watching Meyer operate at Florida. “I’ve already seen what it did for us and how we ended up 12-0 and a top five team. I’ve seen it work. To see the process—it was a good experience for me…and basically the same thing happened again.” – Alex Smith
- “I think his whole aim is to change lives. A lot of coaches go into the job saying, ‘I’m not your babysitter, I’m you coach.’ He says, ‘I am your football coach but at the same time, I’m going to hold you accountable and I want to make you a better man.’ And that’s what I really loved about being under him.”
- “Part of playing quarterback is improving the level of play of the other ten guys around you. It’s also having communication with your coaching staff, giving recommendations, and that was nonexistent a year ago. When he would come over to the sideline everybody would sit there and look at each other. There was no discussion. Chris has done a great job, and that was his best job as far as discussion, recommendations, and then more importantly than all, execution.” – Meyer on Leak after the FSU win

Chapter 15 – Two Battles to Win in Atlanta
“What is courage? Is that the lack of fear? No, courage is being afraid, but doing it anyway. That’s what I love about Urban. It rips his heart out. But he still makes those tough decisions. And he’ll throw his balls out there.’”

“I believe in well-trained guys who work hard in practice and hang on to the ball. It called competitive excellence. If you believe in fate, why do guys work hard? Why not just hope fate takes over? We believe in hard work and being trained for the moment when you number’s called.’”

“He dropped the ball because he knew he was going to get whacked. That’s how we teach our players; There’s no such thing as luck. It’s competitive excellence. So when your number is called, you make that play.” Referring to the dropped punt by the Arkansas player in the SEC championship that changed the game

Chapter 16 – The Joy of Winning It All

During preparation Urban would, of course, consult regularly with his mentors. He called Lou Holtz, who advised him to keep his team’s emotions in check and evenly paced until the night before the game, then give his motivational speech.

- Holtz warned Urban against getting the team fired up too soon, telling him, “Don’t play that game night until January eight. You don’t need to play it December sixth.”
- Out of the conversation with Holtz came the idea of breaking the forty-one days head into increments and keeping players on tasks for each segment of the plan. At the same time, Urban wanted his team to keep that chip on its shoulder. So he went a little old-school with his psychological warfare.
- Preying on the angle that nobody was showing his Gators any love, he pulled out the oldest trick in the book: the dreaded Bulletin Board.
- This was not just any old bulletin board, but a ten foot monstrosity strategically placed near the food table the week before the game, which Meyer called “ten feet of nonsense.”
- On it were clippings about Ohio State’s superiority and Florida’s fallibility, taken from newspaper or magazine stories, the Internet, and, in some cases, right out of a fiction book.
- “Half of it was real and half of it was made up. And the half that was made up I signed ‘Kirk Herbstreit of ESPN,’” Urban confessed.

Reggie Nelson had bad news about his mother. Meyer and assistant coach Charlie Strong had paid a visit to Reggie’s mom in Melbourne, Florida. A few days later, Meyer received a card from his All-American safety, which read, “Words can’t express how much your thoughtfulness is appreciated. Thank you.”

By now it had become tough to contain his optimism. Meyer was telling his staff members, closest friends, and relatives that he loved everything he’d seen on tape about the matchups. The night before the game, Urban pulled off his masterpiece. He had made up his own “Tale of the Tape,” pitting position versus position and stat versus stat.
In his “How We Are Going to Win” speech, Meyer drove home the point that his Gators had played the toughest schedule in the country. “We can beat Ohio State,” Meyer told them. “They have no idea what they are talking about. We’re a better football team.”

No Confusion = How to beat Ohio State (Get your Position Group to Play Better than Ohio State’s)

Ohio State was proud of its completion percentage, but Urban wanted to emphasize his quarterbacks faced better defenses. Urban put a big orange “F” next to “Quarterbacks” for “advantage, Florida.” And so on.

If there had been any doubt by any of the Florida players about whether they were the better team, it was pretty much erased.

“So the kids went to bed that night knowing that we had the advantage,” said Meyer.

“The whole year, Coach Meyer was saying something like, ‘Something big is going to happen in the game, but don’t let it get to you,’” Baker said, “because we had a couple of close games.”

The doctors told Meyer to “cool it with the screaming and yelling” which he did until he became a head coach at Utah.

So this time, on the Florida sideline, with just sixteen seconds gone in the biggest football game of his life, Meyer turned and walked away calmly, almost dispassionate and expressionless. At least outwardly. Deep inside he was fearily seething, because he knew his team had to make an immediate answer. Ryan Smith, as did other players, looked into the face of his head coach and didn’t see any emotion. –after Ohio State returned the opening kickoff for a touchdown.

“When you work hard, when you keep doing the right things and you are a good person, you know, you get your schoolwork done, you graduate, when you are doing all the right things, eventually your time is going to come. This team has worked so hard, done all the right things. I am so proud of these guys, the way they have handled themselves.” – Chris Leak

“As far as a defining moment, you’re not evaluated when you pick up a crystal ball,” Meyer would say months later, looking in the rearview mirror at the night in Glendale. “Any nut can do that. You’re evaluated when you get hit right in the mouth, as hard as you can, because you spit blood out and you go after that guy. Or do you put your tail between your legs? I’ve seen it handled both way.”

In football and in family, that measure of mental toughness is how Meyer judges himself and those around him.

The national championship was textbook Plan to Win, and it had worked to perfection. Great defense and special teams play produced favorable field position, which led to the desired short field. And in all those trips to the red zone, they scored almost every time down.

“For over thirty days they said the Florida Gators did not belong,” Meyer said. “Little did they know we had a group of seniors who were the most motivated group I’ve ever been around.”

Many tears were shed at the football banquet that spring, especially by the Ray McDonald family and by Dallas Baker, who sobbed as he was crediting Urban Meyer with turning his life around and Coach Billy Gonzales for being like a
father to him. Urban Meyer said he cried for nearly a minute and the tears had nothing to do with how much he was going to miss the leadership of those twenty one in the upcoming 2007 season.

PART THREE – THE SEASON INSIDE GATOR FOOTBALL
2007

Chapter 17 – Making History, Maybe

- “The national championship is a powerful, but potentially evil, thing, I found out. Obviously it’s great, but it also throws high expectations on people.” –Meyer
- They were young and they were fast, but they were also foolish, which is why on soap-opera nickname for this team was “The Young, the Fast, and the Foolish.”
- Belichick bluntly told the squad, “You woke up on third base, but you never hit the triple.”
- Meyer said to them, “You’re not that good. First of all, most of you guys were wearing ball caps on the sideline, watching other guys do it—you certainly didn’t pay the price.
- “Discipline is not dismissal in our opinion. Discipline is education and correction, then doing what you’ve got to do. We’re in the process of doing a lot of educating, a lot of correcting, and putting a product on the field.
- Summer practice was tough, hard and hot.
- A walk-on Joey was on the short list of three that were close to earning a “scholly.” He would be painted in a corner with a series of pressure kicks that would decide his fate.
  o Urban yelled to Iijas, “Make this one from fifty-two yards and you have a full scholarship. Right here, right now.”
  o The players began hooting and hollering. Urban stood right next to the holder and was screaming at Iijas, who nailed it, long, high, and true, right down the middle. Meyer high fived his new scholarship kicker. It was a good way to end a really tough practice.
- Urban remembers worrying about “ego, selfish approach to the game—all things that are conducive to not being a very good team.”
- “We’re not like other schools, because we don’t practice at Florida Field. We only go there a few times a year. We need to own it. WE let it slip away a little from us a few years ago, but now we’re taking it back. We need to respect it and make sure others respect it. And the way to do that is not talk a bunch of crap to the other team.”
- “You go as hard as you can, as fast as you can, you hit them in the mouth and you get up and pat each other on the back. You don’t talk trash to the other team.”
- Since the culture of Meyer’s football team was built on sweat equity, with players receiving status through their conduct on the football field, in the classroom, and in their social activities, there was an order to everything. Even who got to eat first.
• On occasion there is laughter, but not loud and raucous. By now the ice cream sundae bar is open and a movie is playing next door—tonight’s selection by Director of Football Jon Clark is 300.
  o Food, food, everywhere. The Gators eat well.
  o Pasta, beef, chicken, potatoes—topped off by sumptuous make-your-own ice cream sundaes. Then, after meeting, the groaning board reopens—hot dogs, hamburgers, fries, milk shakes and—oh yes, smoothies. Mickey Marottie’s smoothies machine constantly whirs, and Tebow is a regular partaker.
  o There is also a little football homework on what Meyer like to call “the best Friday night in Football.”
• 4 to 6 SECONDS OF RELENTLESS EFFORT
  o That “4 to 6 seconds” slogan wasn’t just some inspirational bumper sticker on the wall, because it was a mandate drilled into the heads of Gator football players as if they were Manchurian candidates.
  o At Florida, everybody’s on the clock all the time.
• It’s the opening game and there are bound to be blown assignments on offense. As Florida breaks out of the huddle, Meyer mutters, “We’re all screwed up. You’d better get the tailback in and get it straightened out!”
• “This is a good football team. We could be a great football team. Just take care of business. I know there are a bunch of others who played hard. We’ll take care of you on Monday (recognition) when we’ve had a chance to evaluate the film.”

Chapter 18 – Waltzing Past Tennessee

• Right under digital clock on the wall hung the sign that said, “DO YOU JOB.”
• The one common denominator in the room is the bellowing rap music, apparently considered part of the mental preparedness that builds toward that moment when they will burst out of the locker room and onto what Meyer calls “sacred ground.”
• Now Meyer’s brief pregame speech: “Take care of business, Look out for yourself; Look out for each other, C.I.!” (calling on CI to lead the Lord’s prayer)
• Overhanging the doorframe reads the sign, “ONLY GATORS GET OUT ALIVE.”
• “This offense is fun. Just throw it, catch it, and run. We have so many playmakers on this team, you never know when somebody will break it open.” –Percy Harvin
• “Bloody Tuesday,” as always, would be the toughest day of weekly practice.

Chapter 19 – Learning the Truth in Oxford

• Good coaching cannot overcome football players acting badly off the field, the bounce of the ball, the twisting of an ankle or the bruising of a shoulder, or, worse yet, the death of a player. These were a few of the experiences of the young Florida football team in 2007.
• Meyer’s Plan to win does not include luck, because it is designed down to every last detail, implying that proper work ethic fuels the engine that leads to success.
“What happened is that we had some dynamic personnel making plays. That wasn’t a good team, and that team that won that Tennessee game wasn’t a good team. We had some great players.”

The following week in practice, the Florida team was smitten with a near-epidemic of swelled heads. Some began to fall behind to a point where Meyer warned them “You may not be good enough to play here—not because of talent, but lack of effort.”

When the players first hit the chairs, they were immediately hydrated with Gatorade and water. They ate organs and bananas and talked among themselves.

There were no real Win One For the Gipper speeches as the coaches conferred in clusters, formulating the plan. This was about strategy and not emotion.

Then Meyer takes the floor. “Listen UP! Nonplayers, get out of the way. Players gut up here! They’re playing with two deep safeties. We need to run the ball and force them to load the box and go to man coverage on the outside.”

Old School style, Tebow was more like Bronko Nagurski or Jim Brown than Peyton Manning. He wanted the ball. He wanted to win the game. And he was “always in my ear,” according to Meyer.

“Some of our players gave in that game. Later on, some of those kids gave in. and giving in is when you lose. I think there is a lot of confusion about winning and losing. Losing a game is when someone gives in. That’s why I feel like football is the greatest team sport of all. You can play with then guys going as hard as you can, and one guy gives in and you lose. And I saw guys give in. Boy, it got real hard.”

Chapter 20 – Murderers’ Row 2

This year the Gators were national champions with a target on their backs and Urban’s young team seemed to lack fight.

He was going to have to love them, because they were about to go through some tough times together over the next four weeks.

A few days later defensive captain and team leader Tony Joiner was charged with felony burglary when he attempted to pick up his girlfriend’s car from Watson’s Towing lot.

There would be no words of legends to pump the Gators back up this time.

“I have been asked how this compares to last year, and I think we are on a different planet than a year ago. Our whole intent is to make sure that we get a little better. That is it. There is not going to be a big rally cry, and we’re not going to have a bunch of slogans around here.”

Chapter 21 – Madhouse in Baton Rouge

Urban had already had a tough week of dealing with Joiner’s situation and had wound up stripping the captaincy from the senior safety even though the charges were dropped. But that didn’t excuse Joiner’s presence at the towing lot at 4:30 AM.
LSU postgame press conference after a tough loss: He even went a step further, buoying the troops as he prepared for an open date: “The future of Florida football is terrific, it really is. I guarantee we’ll be back. The Florida Gators will be back. Smokin.”

Chapter 22 – Remember Sunshine

- Meyer tried to lighten it up with an impromptu pickup game between the coaches and players, during which some of the players chided their fumbling coaches for their lack of ball security.
- His teammates put a Sunshine sticker on their helmets and would later add an orange bracelet with that nickname on it—plus the, inscription NEVER LET YOUR TEAMMATES DOWN.
- “When I saw LSU lose to Kentucky, I started calling the guys up, whatever time of day or night that was. I sat there for an hour just calling our guys, making sure they’re, first of all, just living right.”
- “Nowadays it’s constant motivation. Wake up in the morning and motivate them. Go to sleep at night and motivate them. Constant motivation. I think any time those kids understand that, man, there’s a light at the end of the tunnel, they’ll go to the wall for you. I think that’s it.”

Chapter 23 – The Georgia Surprise

- Reluctant even months later to talk about Georgia’s premeditated penalty, Meyer would only say, “That wasn’t right. It was a bad deal. And it will forever be in the mind of Urban Meyer and in the mind of our football team.”
- “So we’ll handle it,” promised Meyer, meaning any response would be done within the rules. “And it’s going to be a big deal.”

Chapter 24 – The Tim Tebow Show

- “What keeps a team from folding? Everybody says it’s the coach, but, no, it’s not. It’s the Vernell Browns, Jeremy Minceys, and Jarvis Herrings. Those are the guys who refused to give in. Because there are other players who give in in a minute. It’s just the way life is. And if you have too many guys that give in like that, then you lose six in a row. I think Cal lost six in a row. There’s documentation everywhere. That was my biggest fear: If it starts doing downhill fast, how do you get it back? And do we have the guys who can?”
- Great Story on Tebow on page 294
- “We’re running the quarterback and running backs, down and back, half court and back, foul line and back. He’s like in fourth place and he’s running and running…bad form, just trying to will himself across the finish line. He goes from the foul line to the baseline and dives—midair, arms out, screeching across the floor, into the wall.”
“And I’m thinking, ‘He’s just dislocated his shoulder, he hasn’t played a
down for us and he’s out for the year.’ He get ups. Doesn’t win the race. Is
pissed off like you’ve never seen. And I ask, ‘Tim, what are you doing?’”
Tim replied, “I gotta win.”
He has to win everything

- Have you ever seen anything like Tim Tebow? “Never. His love of the game, of
being a competitor. He is a born leader and has all the leadership qualities of our
greatest leaders of all time.”
- “We kind of made the decision to ride the horse with Tim and he was
phenomenal.”
- Tebow makes everybody run hard, but sometimes you don’t realize just how hard
and high and fast he is going. He grinds toward greatness in ordinary increments
that, only when added up, take on the staggering impact of the national debt.

Chapter 25 – The First “Heisman Dinner”

- The last player to arrive on Family Night was Tim Tebow. I was invited to this
otherwise private meal when coaches, their wives, players, and children have
dinner together after Thursday night practices—anot her way Meyer and his
coaching staff get across the family image and role model that parents and future
parents should play.
- The H-word is spoken in hushed tones around Meyer, who considers putting self
above team both treasonous and poisonous. As much as possible, Meyer
discouraged talk about the award because he gets paid to win football games, not
Heisman’s. So he wasn’t going for the hype.
- When Pam, Tebow’s mom, got pregnant, she found out she had contracted
amoebic dysentery through the drinking water.
  - Doctors advised Bob and Pam to abort the fetus because they feared it had
been damaged, but Pam refused because of her Christian faith.
  - After 2 months of bed rest for her, Tim was born, a healthy boy whom
Pam described as “skinny, but rather long,” joining brothers Peter and
Robby and sisters Katie and Christy.
- Once he began competing, Tim was taught early to never, never, never take credit
for anything. His fiery spirit had to be harnessed.
- “My parents made a rule when I was young that I couldn’t tell anybody what I’d
done until they asked me about it.” – Tebow
- “No matter where I am, if I’m preaching to Muslims or in a prison, if you’re in
the will of God, that’s safer than driving down the interstate. That’s how I feel
about it.”
- “He’s better than I thought he would be, but I was concerned a little about his
throwing when we first got him. His downfield passing has always been strong.
His first spring he wasn’t very good at all at his short boots and threw as just
dumping the ball. He’d throw it like a bad dart. He just didn’t have confidence.
Dan Mullen and Tim worked so hard on it. They redid his entire mechanics of
throwing.”
Chapter 26 – “That Was a Wow”

- Once the season was over, Meyer would say of Tebow’s two spectacular plays, “As fine a pair of football plays as maybe I’ve ever seen—back-to-back like that. And you can say, ‘Well, that coaching.’ That ain’t coaching. That’s a ball player! One of the greatest players of our era, making a play. One the headsets, that was a ‘Wow!’ I’ll never forget that.

Chapter 27 – Living Large on Times Square

- Urban Meyer declined media opportunities to stomp his quarterback. He made it clear early on that he wanted no campaign for Tebow.
- “I want to accept this award on behalf of my coaches, teammates, and the entire Gator Nation. This award is more about them than it is for me. I am very pound to represent the University of Florida.”
- Then he led interference for Urban and his wife, Shelley, across the street and through the masses of Times Square to the press conference in the Hard Rock Live Venue at the Hard Rock Café—Tebow with his arm around Meyer’s neck like a high school pal—as the Big Apple parted.
- “I’ll never forget that moment, because that was big-time” – Meyer
- How happy was Urban Meyer? “He’s not my son, but my son gets to go hang out with him.”

Chapter 28 – In the Rearview Mirror

- What went wrong? Lack of experience, maturity, and leadership which was exposed form the Auburn to the Georgia game.
- “That’s a little stretch of games was a reflection of our team. I think we were a poor team then. Auburn, the offense screws it up. LSU, a combination: On five fourth downs and you tell me we can’t make a play and get off the field? We have two turnovers on offense at terrible times—a guy runs the wrong route and the other guy makes a noncontact fumble? That’s a bad team—real bad team. It’s a maturity issue.”
- Urban classified his team early in 2007 as a “bunch of spoiled young players who got much better as the year went on, but at that point and time they never had to fight for anything yet around here.”
- “A lot of kids playing for us, what did they have to fight for? They had to fight for it against Auburn and they failed. They had to fight for it against LSU and they failed.”
- The most important component of Meyer’s coaching schematic is how he treats and values players. As a player advocate, Meyer gives them every conceivable opportunity to succeed, which is what he means by “never giving up” on them. But it does not mean coddling them or allowing them to cut corners or cutting them slack. ON the contrary, there is a huge penance when they do wrong.
• He is passionate about the game, surrounds himself with good people, represents the players interest in everything they do and sees to it that those who give effort are rewarded. But make no mistake. He is forceful.
• This was a testament to how resourceful Meyer was in finding, keeping, rehabilitating, and mentoring his players and teaching them how to lead. To a man, almost, they responded.
• Here is the difference: When a Florida player falls behind academically, commits a misdemeanor, breaks a team rule, becomes injured, gets homesick and wants to leave school, indulges in drugs, overindulges in alcohol, or simply has a fight and breaks up with his girlfriend, Urban Meyer or one of his assistants is there to extend a hand. Better yet, by allowing the players to be in their homes and around a family environment, the position coaches can help ward of those things.
• Valuing the player and the person comes back to reward Meyer. It’s not just about quantity, because Meyer is diligent about reeling in blue chip players that are a good fit for both the Florida program and the athlete.
• Likewise James Wilson, a Parade All American offensive lineman and former Nease teammate of Tebow’s. Injured in his redshirt year and never really able to get into the flow, Wilson informed Meyer that he would like to transfer in the spring of 2008. Meyer said OK, but told Wilson to at least go through spring practice before leaving for a school yet to be name. Before the spring game, Wilson was back on the field competing, enjoying camaraderie with teammates, eventually informing Meyer he would stay a Gator.
• “Discipline” to Meyer is not meting out punishment after the deed is done, but rather being proactive to head off problems in the first place. Discipline is Anticipation.
• It took me a while to figure this out, but when Meyer pays it forward with his players, they want to reciprocate by giving him back their best.
  o That’s the power of Meyer that former Utah player Bo Nagahi talks about: “He does have this power over you and I don’t know how he does it or what it is. I don’t know whether it’s trust—that he’ll sit there and give us the trust, that he brings his family before us and he has nothing to hide. All his cards are on the table. To me, if you’re going to give me all your trust, I’m going to give you all my trust. And that’s the way everybody felt.”
• People fail to put a price tag on momentum. That’s one of the higher priority items in dealing with youth.” – Meyer
• There is also a definite connection through commitment to a standard and willingness to show emotion.
• “I think Coach Meyer is passionate about everything he does.”
• What coaches don’t realize is you have to be that father figure—you have to be able to change somebody’s life.
• “A lot of coaches don’t want to accept that responsibility. And not only does Coach Meyer accept that responsibility, he embraces it. And that’s what I loved playing under him.”