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## **Part 2 - Getting Started: New Program, New Home**

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

The first day on the job was a little weird. The previous staff was all at work in the Woody Hayes Athletic Center preparing for their upcoming bowl game with U of Florida. I hadn't officially taken the weight room over, so I was in a "media room" with some other new members of the football staff. I tried to get familiar with everything that comes with a new job. Meeting with Human Resources, Athletic Directors, operations and facilities people and figuring out phone numbers, copy machines, long distance codes, reimbursement policies - all in my daily job responsibilities. I was also finalizing our new Ohio State Football Strength and Conditioning Coaches manual. I used the existing one I had developed at Florida and just made all the changes that I needed to, based on the new situation at Ohio State.

The first thing I did was to try and put together a staff. The previous strength staff had three full time football assistants. We were going to add an NCAA permitted fourth assistant. All of the assistant positions were strictly to work with football and no other sport. This was the first time in my career that assistants did not have to work with other sports. This is definitely a huge benefit. I was thinking of my staff set up. I wanted an Assistant Director or Associate Strength Coach that had Head Strength Coaching experience.

The first hire I made was actually not a Strength Coach, it was a Sports Nutritionist. I thought it was imperative to have a full time nutritionist working with our football team. I had worked with a nutritionist at Florida and Notre Dame. I had actually started the nutrition program at Notre Dame when I was there as the Director of Strength and Conditioning. I put together a job proposal and responsibility list for our Athletic Director, Gene Smith. I itemized all of the duties and responsibilities for the football nutritionist. Obviously this was important to Coach Meyer as well. We do a great deal with our nutritionist. Training table meals, Breakfast Club, educational meetings, pre-practice fueling station, hydration station, body fat composition, cooking class, pre-game meal planning, supplementation, grocery store tours, as well as preseason meal planning are some of the duties of our nutritionist. Gene Smith was extremely supportive. I had several meetings with our administration regarding this matter. We found a way to hire Sarah Wick, a Sports Dietician (also is a registered dietician) that was currently working through our University Sports Medicine Department. The athletic department would then "contract out" these nutritionists for our student athletes. I was asking to take our football sports nutrition program to the "next level".

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Sarah would be with football the entire time. Being around the team and developing relationships is very important for the nutritionist.

I also wanted to have a staff with familiarity of our football program philosophy and that I had worked with in the past. Our methodology and philosophy is a little unconventional so it was extremely important to get someone with our experience. A couple of assistants that were on staff at the time of my hiring came very highly recommended. Both were ex-Buckeyes, both played in the NFL, both had experience training athletes. Jeff Uhlenhake was actually an athlete when I was here as a GA back in 1987-88, so I had known Jeff for a long time. Anthony Schlegel was relatively newer in the profession, with a boat load of energy and excitement. I had talked to both of them about possibly being a part of the staff, but I had not officially hired them, probably because I wanted to hire an Assistant Director first. This position was extremely important because of some of the other job responsibilities I was going to have.

I had talked to a few guys that I had worked with in the past and ended up hiring Rick Court, who was at San Diego State as the Head Football Strength Coach. I had never worked with Rick, but knew him well. He had worked with Aaron Hillmann for 5 or 6 years at Bowling Green. Aaron Hillmann had been a long-time assistant with me at Cincinnati and Notre Dame, so the requirement of understanding our training methods and coaching philosophy was achieved. Rick was also the Head Strength Coach at Toledo prior to San Diego State. He was very familiar with our training philosophy and how we do things. This was a very important hire for us at Ohio State. Coach Meyer and I lean heavily on this position. I had talked about hiring Coach Court in the past, but the timing was not right. We were very excited to have a guy that was going to step down from a Head Strength Coach position to come be an assistant. That right there is the power of The Ohio State University. It also showed me that Coach Court did not have an ego and was not insecure. Too many times in this profession, coaches have huge egos and they think it is all about them, and they are the reason for success. No, they are not. They are merely just a piece of the puzzle. Rick Court, no brainer.

With Rick Court, Associate Strength Coach for football hired, I now had to put together the rest of the staff. As stated previously, I wanted someone that I had actually worked with in the past. Someone who knew me, knew my style, my temperament, my strengths and weaknesses, someone who knew what I expected and probably most important, someone who wanted to work with me again. Once again, I talked to a few people concerning this position and then hired Kenny Parker, who had played his college football at Florida, was a student football coach at Florida, worked as an assistant strength coach with me at Florida, and was most recently the DL Coach, Head Strength Coach, and player development person at Murray State. He had high school coaching experience, college coaching experience, and also (like Rick) had been a Head Strength Coach. Once again, the perfect assistant for what I was looking for. Probably the most important attribute about Kenny is that he is a great person. No drama, no ego, team player, willing to do “ANY” job, understands long

hours, gets “it”, great family guy, lots of juice and energy, has personality, and extremely loyal. Kenny Parker, no brainer.

With Rick Court and Kenny Parker hired, I now had two positions left. Anytime you have to put a staff together, chemistry and the right fit are very important. I wanted different personalities as well. I did not want 5 strength coaches with the exact same personality. Not a good practice. With 105-115 members of a college football team, players will react better with different coaches. I think it just makes sense to have a “melting pot” of people in regards to their personality.

The one thing you understand about Ohio State when you work here is it’s a very prideful school. The Buckeyes always look out for the current Buckeyes. Every member of the teams of the past has a special love for their University. This is true with a lot of schools. But with Ohio State there is something a little different. Can’t really explain it. You just have to experience it for yourself. So that being said, I hired two ex-Buckeye football players, that happened to work as Strength Coaches with the previous staff; Jeff Uhlenhake and Anthony Schlegel.

I had known Jeff for many years. He was one of the players that I trained when I was a GA strength coach back in the 80’s. I followed Jeff’s NFL career and his coaching career throughout the years. When he was hired a few years back as an Assistant Strength Coach at OSU, we had reconnected. He has a great deal of experience playing and coaching. He has obvious expertise was the offensive line. I also understand that if you have a tough, mean, prideful, offensive line with the needed talent you have a chance to have a good offense. Talking to Jeff and knowing his personality and knowledge it was important for us to have Jeff as part of the staff. He has a calming demeanor, but stern. This is a good contrast to Rick Court and Kenny Parker; All three different. Jeff made it clear to me that he would do any job to remain a part of the Ohio State family. Done, hired, no brainer!

The last person I hired was Anthony Schlegel. Anthony played linebacker at Ohio State a decade earlier. He had originally started his career at the Air Force Academy. I had remembered his story back when he transferred. I also remembered Anthony when he played at Air Force. Notre Dame played Air Force back in 2002. Anthony had come highly recommended from Luke Fickell who had coached him and worked for Luke when he was interim Head Coach in 2011. After talking with Anthony a few times about the position, I knew he was a perfect fit for the staff. His energy, enthusiasm, and passion for strength training and Ohio State were overwhelming. He also was highly involved in FCA activities. As a college strength coach, you spend a great deal of time with the athletes, probably more than anyone else in their lives. We, as coaches, assume the role of teacher, motivator, cultivator, and role model - someone for them to look up to, to help lead them, to teach them, to assist them in all endeavors. Anthony having a spiritual element to his resume was indeed a huge benefit. His energy reminded me of myself 15-20 years ago. He has a very similar personality to me. The only difference was that I am 15 or so years older and “wiser” than him. I like the way I coach. Now I have

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someone on staff who coached like me, but a little different. He also has some expertise in being a linebacker, and a linebacker at The Ohio State University. No Brainer !!

Understanding the chemistry and the complete alignment of a staff and what it is going to take to work well together, has taken a number of years. The leader must not have an ego, nor should he or she have an agenda. They must be secure with who they are and have the confidence in their talents and knowledge. They should always be on the offensive in terms of learning and finding the best ways to train and develop their athletes. They must FULLY understand the mission of a strength program. They must fully understand that it will take different personalities and different ranges of experience and knowledge. The all must be qualified and certified. They must all be in this profession for the right reasons. They must all understand the mission of the football program. Our strength staff must understand that we will “support” the football program in any way needed. We may have to do tasks that may not be typically associated with training, but they are typically associated with developing and being part of a successful organization.

The strength staff was put together with a plan and with certain criteria. Head coaching experience, training familiarity, ex player, position expertise, good people, no agendas, team player, willingness to grind and learn, love and respect of the head football coach and/or university. All of these criteria were thought of and desired. Another big issue for me was not to have any drama on our staff. No personality conflicts and no egos!!

Our staff has over 27 years of head strength coaching experience at the collegiate level. 3 national championships, nine conference championships , 12 years of NFL playing experience, 2 years of NFL coaching experience, 5 years of on the field college coaching experience, over 20 years of participating in college athletics, trained numerous NFL 1<sup>st</sup> rounders, and has a total of 12 children and more on the way !!! So we do have a family atmosphere within our staff and I can say that this staff is truly one of the best strength and conditioning staffs in the country.