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"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

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Geiger Looks Back On Decade At OSU

65-Year-Old AD Preparing His Exit Strategy

By MARK REA

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Managing Editor

Andy Geiger recently celebrated a decade as director of athletics at Ohio State and said he thinks 10 years is just about long enough.

"I'm going to step down soon," he told BSB during an exclusive interview in his St. John Arena office. "I don't know when. A year maybe, two at the outside. I really enjoy what I'm doing, but this job is pretty relentless. And it's probably time. I want to be able to enjoy my family."

In May 1994, Geiger was named just the seventh Ohio State director of athletics in history, succeeding Jim Jones, who retired. Geiger has been an athletic director since 1971, when he took over the athletic department at Brown University at the age of 32.

Now at age 65, with his two sons ready to graduate from high school, Geiger is looking forward to something

other than the daily grind of overseeing 35 intercollegiate sports with an annual budget of \$85 million.

"There are a lot of things I want to do, most of them having to do with family," he said with a smile. "But I have other interests and I'm eager to pursue those."

Geiger is a well-known jazz aficionado and also enjoys such outdoor endeavors as golf and fly-fishing. But before he can think about those hobbies, there is still plenty on his plate at OSU.

For example, when longtime associate athletic director Archie Griffin left the department at the end of 2003 to head up the university's alumni association, it fell to Geiger to complete contracts for upcoming football games.

"That's mostly me now," he said. "And I'm happy to report that we're done for most of the next decade. That includes the open date that appears on our 2006 schedule, but we now have that sold. We just haven't announced the opponent as yet. That will be coming soon."

The football Buckeyes will be playing an impressive array of talent from around the country over the next few years including home-and-home series with Texas (which begins in '05) and Miami (Fla.) as well as Pac-10 foes Southern Cal, California and Washington.

"And as long as they remain popular,



FILE PHOTO

BUCKEYES' NO. 1 BACKER — In addition to heading up the athletic department at Ohio State, Andy Geiger enjoys taking in various contests in person. Here, he was photographed during a recent Buckeye baseball game.

In This Issue Of BSB

• Since we last published, the Ohio State football team picked up its fourth and fifth commitments — a pair of defensive linemen — for its 2005 recruiting class.

In the latest installment of Recruiting Outlook (Pages 13-15) you can read all about those two verbals, Todd Denlinger of Troy, Ohio, and Ryan Williams of California.

• We also have a wealth of information about the OSU men's basketball program. On Pages 16-17, BSB senior writer Jeff Rapp details the events that led to guard Nick Dials leaving the program.

You can get up to speed on the conclusion of the Malik Hairston saga on Pages 18-19, while on Pages 22-23 you'll find our annual "Hot 15" men's basketball recruits whom the Buckeyes should have their eyes on.

• Throughout this edition we also hope you'll take the time to read about how the Buckeyes' Big Ten foes fared in their spring games; former assistant football coach Mark Dantonio's homecoming to Zanesville, Ohio; the men's golf team's fantastic run through the Big-Ten tournament; the conclusion of the OSU baseball season and much, much more.

we're going to continue with the MAC series," Geiger said, referring to the series with Ohio-based Mid-American Conference teams that began in 1997. "I think those games are win-win situations. They certainly are winning situations for us, and I believe they are for the MAC schools that have come in here to play us. For the most part, they have been competitive games, exciting games and games against teams I think a lot of our fans like to see."

Although the Buckeyes' nonconference schedule is set for the foreseeable future, Geiger would like to begin work as soon as possible negotiating additional contracts for a 12th regular-season game each year.

"I know our conference is working hard trying to get 12 as a national standard," he said. "For the financial health of college football, there needs to be a 12th game. And I'm not just talking about the financial health of college football at Ohio State. I think that's the feeling everywhere, at least among athletic directors. The presidents aren't on board just yet, but I think they'll get there."

Geiger said he is much more in favor of an extra regular-season game than he

is an extra postseason affair to determine an undisputed national champion.

"I think there's no question that there will be five BCS bowls in the new contract, but I don't believe there will be a championship game after those bowls," he said. "I don't believe there is anyone much in favor of that other than television."

ABC, which holds the broadcasting rights to the Bowl Championship Series, has proposed several scenarios which would produce a national Division I-A champion on the field. The network has proposed a championship game to be played at rotating BCS sites one week after the BCS bowls. In addition to a tremendous amount of fan interest, ABC believes its proposal would generate huge profits for itself and college football.

But Geiger doesn't believe the financial windfall justifies prolonging the postseason.

"No, it does not," he said. "How many ways would we be dividing that so-called windfall? We believe that extra game — the 12th regular-season game — is

Continued On Page 6

COVER STORY: GEIGER LOOKS BACK ON DECADE AT OSU



GOOD WITH THE BAD — In addition to presiding over 35 intercollegiate sports, Andy Geiger sometimes has to deal with problems in the department like last fall when he announced the suspension of running back Maurice Clarett.

Tournament Ideas Do Not Bowl Him Over

Continued From Page 1

much more financially rewarding than a Super Bowl-type thing or whatever that championship game would be.

"Also, I'm not sure the hype and hoopla of a Super Bowl atmosphere is what we're looking for. I am very protective of the bowls and the atmosphere and excitement they have meant to college football over the years. I don't think that's something we're ever eager to diminish in any way."

On other football-related topics, Geiger said that OSU fans can continue to expect their favorite team to play night games, but only on occasion.

"I think night games are fine as long as they are limited to special, once-in-a-long-while occurrences," he said. "One thing I can tell you: Ohio State will never play on any day other than Saturday as long as I have anything to say about it. We will not play on Tuesday or Thursday or any other day of the week except Saturday."

On the possibility of installing field turf in Ohio Stadium, Geiger said he is content to stick with the natural grass surface currently in place.

"Switching to field turf in our stadium has not been presented to me as a wish," he said. "We have two grass fields and one turf field (at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center), and the field turf is the same as they have at Michigan and Wisconsin, and Illinois also has it, I believe. We have that in place because we play on it throughout the Big Ten schedule.

"But as far as I know, there is no desire to go to a field turf surface in our stadium. I believe our grass held up very well this past year. We're very happy with the surface we have in there at the present time."

Problems in Paradise

At this time last year, Ohio State was basking in the glow of its first national championship in 34 years.

But that glow soon became a white-hot spotlight of scrutiny beginning with a New York Times article that accused the uni-

versity of preferential treatment toward athletes.

The NCAA cleared OSU of any wrongdoing, and an in-house investigation found no improprieties. Still, the damage was done to the athletic department's reputation, and it took another hit when star tailback Maurice Clarett was suspended for the 2003 season for various NCAA violations.

Clarett, who brought litigation against the university before withdrawing the suit, unsuccessfully sued the NFL to enter the 2004 player draft. As Clarett's attorneys continue to appeal the case, there are some who wonder if the tailback could not somehow seek to rejoin the Buckeyes as receiver Mike Williams is doing at USC.

Geiger, however, believes Clarett is through in scarlet and gray.

"I don't see any possibility that he could come back," the AD said. "To play football here, you first have to be a student of the university, and he has not been a student here for quite some time. Therefore, I see no possibility that he could play football for us."

Clarett's off-the-field problems grabbed national headlines but were by no means the only trouble suffered by Jim Tressel's program. In his three-plus years in Columbus, more than a dozen of his players have run afoul of the law in differing ways.

Most of those players have been dealt suspensions of varying lengths. But when sophomores Ira Guilford and Louis Irizarry were charged with beating and robbing a fellow OSU student May 1, Geiger's tolerance seemed to reach its breaking point.

"They're gone," he said. "That is behavior we simply will not condone and they are gone."

Geiger said he hoped that his message on the subject would be a clear, concise one.

"The message is that we will not tolerate this type of behavior," he said. "It is the hope that this will serve as a reminder to people who may find themselves in similar situations in the future to think twice

about their actions. And if they don't, they'll be gone, too. I don't know how to be any more firm than that. I don't know how to be any more plain than that."

Asked if that was his decision alone without input from Tressel, Geiger replied, "Of course we consulted on that. But I was pretty adamant in the way I expressed my feelings on the subject."

Although the list of off-the-field transgressions by Ohio State football players seems to be growing, Geiger hasn't lost any faith in his football coach or his program.

"None whatsoever," he said. "Coach Tressel is a wonderful person, and I am confident what has happened and what has been reported are isolated incidents.

"We are living in a culture that sometimes runs counter to what we believe or how we're raised. For that reason, I tend to hold the student more accountable than I do the teacher.

"As far as my feelings toward Coach Tressel, all I can say is that I would have absolutely no qualms whatsoever having my child play football in his program. I don't know any higher praise I could give."

Geiger said he remains confident that Tressel is addressing the off-the-field incidents in the proper way.

"Coaching is a lot about parenting, and correcting mistakes is part of parenting," the AD said. "Do you have children of this age? I do. Are you frightened when they leave the house? I am. I'm frightened a lot. But you have to trust them and trust that what you have taught them and tried to get them to learn has been enough that when they are faced with a difficult situation, they are armed with enough knowledge that they can make a wise decision.

"Ultimately that decision is up to them, but you hope what you have taught them will allow them to make that decision wisely.

"But I do know that we aren't going to have 58 assistant coaches standing on every campus street corner all night every night. These are young men who want to be treated as such, and we will do that as long as they act accordingly. I don't think that's too much to ask."

Another, more peripheral incident was last year's crackdown on excessive game-day tailgating in and around Ohio Stadium.

"There was no quote-unquote crackdown on tailgating," Geiger said. "There was an enforcement of laws already in place. To the point where we're trying to manage 105,000 people in a relatively small space, I thought it went very well.

"And it will continue. Again, we're not interested in making things difficult on our fans or diminishing the amount of enjoyment that goes into the atmosphere of our football games. But after what we experienced following the Michigan game in 2002, when our university made the national news and national headlines for all the wrong reasons, we felt clearly that the situation had to be addressed. That was very important to us."

Basketball Comeback?

Several times during and after the 2003-04 stumbles by the men's basketball team, there was speculation that head coach Jim O'Brien would either step down or take over another college program elsewhere.

Geiger said that neither is going to happen and that he remains solidly in O'Brien's corner.

"If my memory serves me correctly, Coach O'Brien's team won the Big Ten tournament two years ago," he said. "That last two years — especially last year — were not up to standard. But I don't think

I'm any more satisfied with the program than he is, and he's not very satisfied."

The 2003-04 season started with O'Brien fighting complications after neck surgery. One of his vocal cords was paralyzed, making it extremely difficult to communicate with his team, and at one point, he reportedly considered stepping down.

"We talked about it a little bit," Geiger admitted. "He was depressed (about his health problems) early on, but that feeling quickly subsided. He's a fighter. He is clearly disappointed at the way the season went and I think he's very eager to come back and have the kind of season he believes this team can have.

"He knows the team underachieved last season and he holds himself accountable. He wants nothing more than to put that behind him and the team and move forward. I have no doubt that he will.

"It was a very difficult season. We thought we were a very different team than we turned out to be. Everybody involved was disappointed. But I'm convinced that help is on the way and we're already on the road to making things better. Also, Coach O'Brien is a tremendous coach. I have no doubt in that at all. So we're not really that far away from where we want to be."

Complicating matters during a sub-standard season was a sort of malaise that set in at Value City Arena. Crowds were seldom boisterous while some openly vented their wrath at the team and O'Brien.

In fact, during one home game, a fan displayed a sign implying that O'Brien should be fired.

Near the end of the season, speculation ran rampant that O'Brien was fed up and making himself available as a candidate for the vacant head coaching job at St. John's.

Geiger said that things weren't quite what they seemed during those times.

"There was the incident involving one fan with one sign at one game that got a tremendous amount of attention," he said. "Then the media came in with the story about the St. John's job, and that was just comical. It was ridiculous because there was never any contact there at all."

As to the crowd atmosphere at Value City Arena, many have suggested that beefing up the preconference schedule with more Ohio teams would help generate more buzz. But while he likes to schedule at least one Ohio team each year in football, Geiger is not enamored with the same idea in basketball.

"First of all, there are so many (Ohio schools that play basketball) that it's an entirely different situation," he explained. "Plus I think there is a different approach to basketball scheduling than football."

"What Coach O'Brien is trying to do — what the philosophy of the preseason is — is to prepare for the conference schedule. That is always the goal. I believe what he is looking for in the preseason is teams with diversity. Different teams are scheduled because of their styles of play, how they play offense or defense, how they react to different game situations, etc."

A common complaint heard about Value City Arena is the lack of students in proximity to the floor. And while Geiger points out that several thousand student tickets are available in the lower bowl of the arena, he does not envision scenarios such as the Cameron Crazies at Duke ever occurring at Ohio State.

"What has happened in college basketball is a little bit frightening, to be honest," Geiger said. "In some places, the students are right on the floor and while that might look desirable on television, looks can be deceiving."

COVER STORY: GEIGER LOOKS BACK ON DECADE AT OSU

"There have been a lot of problems at different places — Cameron Indoor Stadium at Duke, for example — and I think those universities are not entirely comfortable with their situations. But what can you do? I would never want to get into a situation where anyone — whether that be a player, coach, official or anyone else at one of our games — felt unsafe.

"As for the notion that we don't allow the students close proximity to the floor, we have a certain amount of student tickets that go on sale and many of those tickets went unsold this past season."

Others have criticized the venue, saying the Schottenstein Center is less fan-friendly than venerable St. John Arena. Geiger disagrees.

"I don't think it's the venue at all," he said. "It can be as raucous as any other place I've seen. When Texas Tech was here last year, you couldn't hear yourself think in there."

Geiger believes he knows the answer to why the basketball team doesn't generate as much interest for home games.

"I would like to see us get off television," he said, referring to the fact that all of the Buckeyes' home games are televised in the Columbus area. "We need to create a more unique atmosphere. We need to create a more exclusive atmosphere, and having every game televised in the surrounding area hardly makes for an exclusive atmosphere."

At least one game next season will have a different flavor as the Buckeyes return to St. John Arena for a nonconference contest.

The game, against an undisclosed opponent, will take place during the Thanksgiving holiday weekend when the Schottenstein Center is occupied by another event.

And how will the athletic department deal with those season ticket holders who have suites and PSLs?

"That will be the ticket office's problem to figure out the logistics," Geiger said with a grin. "My problem will be to deal with the complaints."

Other Tidbits

In addition to football and men's basketball, there were plenty of other things on the OSU athletic director's mind during his interview with BSB:

• Geiger said the university has already applied to host the NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament again.

"We have applied for either 2008 or 2009, and from the comments we received about last year's tournament, we're fairly confident," he said.

The games will again be held at Nationwide Arena in downtown Columbus rather than the Schottenstein Center.

"We don't have a choice," Geiger explained. "Our state high school tournaments are held each year on our campus and I think bringing all those families here for the high school tournaments is a wonderful thing. I would not be in favor of moving those games even every once in a while for the NCAA Tournament."

"It was a great thing for the city of Columbus, and after all, we're a neighborhood of the city. We believe getting the games again would be beneficial to everyone concerned."

• Chic Harley will have his jersey number retired this coming season, an honor that Geiger believes is probably long overdue.

"I don't know anyone who has ever seen him play, but I'm told he was very special,"

he said of Ohio State's first three-time All-American. "Our stadium was nicknamed 'The House That Harley Built,' and I understand that he would have been the Heisman Trophy winner had there been a Heisman Trophy at the time that he played."

Harley will be the first football player so honored who did not win the Heisman. Since Geiger had previously indicated the stadium's "Ring of Honor" would be reserved for Heisman winners, it begs the question of when other former Buckeye luminaries, such as Woody Hayes, will be honored.

"We haven't gotten that far yet," Geiger said. "As far as someone like Coach Hayes is concerned, that's a bridge we haven't come to yet. We are right now in the process of honoring players."

• There were published reports following the wrestling team's disappointing eighth-place finish at the Big Ten championships that Geiger was critical of Russ Hellickson and his program and that he would begin to personally oversee the program.

"That is not one of the programs that I oversee," he said. "But let's face it — eighth place was disappointing when we were hosting the meet. That's not where anyone of us thought we would be. Then the team rebounded at the national tournament and made all of us proud."

As far as his criticism of Hellickson, Geiger simply replied, "I've been told by the wrestling community that there is probably not a better state for the sport at the high school level than Ohio. It's not as much about what I expect as what the coaches and the athletes expect. I think you want to come to Ohio State to excel. Once you get here, I believe you not only

want to excel, you want to exceed your expectations. That is what all of us want — students, faculty and administrators."

• Geiger said he takes a lot of pride in the Ohio State women's basketball program, which has been revitalized under the guidance of head coach Jim Foster.

But when Foster was hired, Geiger took some initial heat for not sticking with tradition and naming a woman head coach.

"I remember when Coach Foster was interviewed by the search committee," Geiger said. "It was certainly not meant to be as a criticism of his gender, but that it was clear that he was so good and the right fit for our program that several members of the committee said they wished he was a woman. He was so good in the interview process that he made the decision easy for everyone."

• Fund-raising is still under way for renovation and upgrades to the Woody Hayes Athletic Center, including the weight room. Those upgrades will not begin until the funds have been raised; therefore, there is no target date for completion.

"We are about halfway toward raising the funds we need," Geiger said. "But I cannot in clear conscience start something when we don't have the necessary funds to pay for it. I'm confident we will get those funds. We're just not there yet."

• As for the best part of his job, Geiger said he enjoys the relationships he has with Ohio State athletes and coaches.

"I really enjoy positive interaction with coaches and athletes," he said. "I really like the sporting community. I have always enjoyed the opportunity to participate in that environment and continue to enjoy that. I always have and I'm sure that I always will."



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