

Lachey Scores His Points In OSU's 'Three-Guard Offense'

By Dave Kelch

No, we're not talking about Eldon Miller's basketball team when we say that the Buckeyes are employing a three-guard offense.

That's been the case the past several years for Miller's wintertime Buckeyes, but this is a different season and a different sport we're talking of now — football.

Coach Earle Bruce, overseer of the largest offensive line in Buckeye football history, is three-deep at both the guard and tackle positions, thus the luxury of rotating players at those positions.

One of those players in Bruce's rotation scheme is 6-foot-6, 260-pound junior guard Jim Lachey, a native of tiny St. Henry in Mercer County, Ohio.

"Right now, we're basically using three guards," said Lachey, of the offensive line that helped OSU to two big wins in its first two

outings. "There's a lot of competition.

"The way they (the coaches) explained it to us was that we had three starters. Both Kirk (6-3, 250 junior Kirk Lowdermilk) and I can play both sides (right and left guard), and they are keeping Scott (6-3, 258 junior Scott Zalenski) on the right side."

Lachey, 20, saw 87 minutes of action in 1982 in a reserve role and has lettered twice, mostly for his work on special teams. The owner of 11 prep varsity letters in football, basketball and track, Lachey is the fastest Buckeye lineman with a time of 4.8 in the 40-yard dash.

Lachey earned first-team status with his performance in spring practice, but the OSU coaches made a commitment with Lowdermilk, who had jumped back and forth between offense and defense (middle guard) to keep him on offense. That move gave Lachey more competition heading into autumn camp.

"It (preseason camp) was just a

lot of competition, real competitive," said Lachey. "We understand that no matter what, who starts, we're all going to get the same amount of time. It's (the platooning) convenient for us because you can get a break and get your air, then when you're in the game you can go all out on every play."

Lachey came to OSU from Class A St. Henry as a two-time all-Ohio lineman and played center on the Redskins' 1979 state champion basketball team, but there were questions: (1) his mental toughness, and (2) his upper body strength.

"It has improved a lot," said Lachey of his upper body strength. "Steve Bliss (OSU's conditioning supervisor) has worked with me tremendously. There's no comparison.

"We never had any weight training program at St. Henry. Coming from a small school, (because of his size) I just had to go through the motions (to get the job done)."

On his mental conditioning in stepping to a major college program, Lachey said, "You can never be too aggressive; that's one thing you have to be." During the first quarter of the Oregon game, Lachey got into a brief shoving match with an Oregon defensive



Jim Lachey

lineman — an act of aggression you probably would not have seen in Lachey two years ago.

"It's hard to remember those things," Lachey, who owns a 2.9 grade average in business finance, said of the incident. "I don't even remember why it happened."

Lachey said that despite the competition between him, Lowdermilk and Zalenski for playing time, there is no animosity present.

"We're always helping each other out," he said. "We have one goal in mind — to have the best line possible. There are no hard feelings between us."

Lachey has learned to harness any "hard feelings" into aggressive energy to be used against the opposition on Saturdays.

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Lachey, Tomczak Share More Than Football Roommates Drawn By Similarities

By Dave Kelch

When Mike Tomczak first laid eyes upon Jim Lachey, it was an unsettling experience for the boyish prep quarterback, then in his senior year of high school.

There was Tomczak, barely 6-foot-1 and just maybe 180 pounds, whereas Lachey, an offensive guard, towered at 6-6 and was in the 255-260 weight range.

"I'd never seen anybody that big," said Tomczak, three years later the starting quarterback for Ohio State. "We had good athletes on our team (high school), but nobody with that kind of size."

"Mike was kind of afraid of me," Lachey acknowledged.

But the fright wore off quickly for Tomczak, as the two Buckeye juniors met and roomed together on their high school visitations to OSU, becoming instant friends.

"We got together in the spring

(when they visited OSU's spring practice) and talked about it (rooming together)," said Lachey.

"It (their friendship) just seemed to jell together," said Tomczak.

"We could talk and communicate together. When you (first) come down here, you try to find someone (to develop a friendship with)."

As incoming Buckeye freshmen in summer camp, Lachey roomed with frosh linebacker Larry Kolic while Tomczak bunked with frosh defensive tackle Dave Crecelius. But that was only temporary.

"We decided at an early stage to be roommates," said Lachey. Lachey and Tomczak spent their freshman and sophomore years in Steeb Hall on South Campus and now share an off-campus apartment some four miles to the northwest.

People talk of opposites attracting, but there are few

dissimilarities between the two.

"Jim comes from a large family and so do I," said Tomczak. "We're both from Catholic families, we both played the same sports (in high school — football, basketball and track) and his dad is a high school teacher and so is my dad. Both mothers also work in businesses."

There's more to it than just that.

Tomczak has two brothers and three sisters while Lachey has two of each. Both fathers, Ron (Tomczak) and Ken (Lachey) are physical education teachers and while Ron coached Mike in high school (football), Ken does have some coaching background on the youth level.

The mothers share the name Jo Ann.

While Tomczak's home of Calumet City, Ill., is a southeastern Chicago suburb with a population of 39,697 (1980 census), Lachey comes from tiny St. Henry, a rural farming community of 1,596 in northwestern Ohio.

One might assume that is where the similarity ends, but as Tomczak pointed out, "Both families live on the border of Indiana."

"They have visited each other's homes many times in the past 2½ years."

"It's funny," Tomczak said. "The first time we went to St. Henry, we were driving down this small country road and Jim kind of slowed down near this farm house and turned on his turn signal. Jim said 'Here it is,' and I said 'You're kidding.'"

Lachey was only kidding, for the family home was in town, but Tomczak did say that first trip "was an experience."

Being from the Chicago suburbs, Tomczak wasn't used to crossroads intersecting in the middle of nowhere.

"I think our families are close," said Tomczak. "They do things together — it's kind of a family within itself when we get together."

Of a comparison between Calumet City and St. Henry, Tomczak explained, "I don't think the people are as friendly (in Calumet City) as in St. Henry. There are a lot more people to deal with. You go to St. Henry and everybody knows Jim Lachey. I think everybody (in Calumet City) knows who I am, but maybe wouldn't know me (in person)."

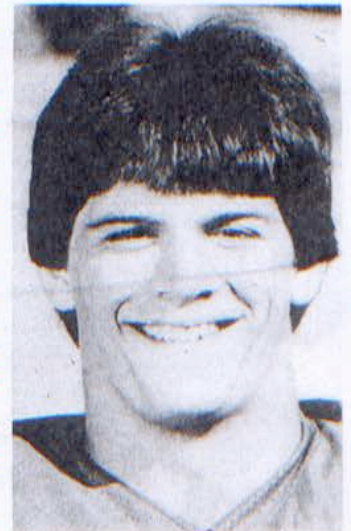
Tomczak, 21, and Lachey, 20, entered their junior seasons at Ohio State with another responsibility added upon football and school — sharing an apartment, with its responsibilities.

"Sometimes, Mike doesn't clean up," taunted Lachey.

"Oh, come on, it's the other way around," Tomczak said.



Mike Tomczak



Jim Lachey

Who cooks?

"We'll find that out winter quarter," said Tomczak. "We've been on training table (and winter quarter won't offer that luxury). We both have a good hold on life and can cope — instead of going to McDonalds every night."

The only prerequisites of the coaching staff for players living off campus are junior academic status, and a certain grade point average.

"They basically trust you," said Tomczak. "You're 20-21 years old. You should know what's right or wrong."

Tomczak and Lachey said the biggest advantage to living off campus is the privacy.

"I think the one big advantage you have is more freedom from phone calls (being pestered) and having people just walking in on you," Tomczak said.

"Yeah, but you're always on the phone," Lachey quipped.

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'Lachey Right' Just Did Not Work Out

By Mike Pramik

For excitement, it's hard to top an OSU-Michigan football game. But for surprises, future Buckeye-Wolverine meetings will be hard pressed to top the surprise of "Lachey Right."

It happened with 11 minutes to go in the game and the Wolverines sticking to a precarious 17-14 lead. OSU had the ball on the Michigan 38.

The play was designed this way: Center Joe Dooley would snap the ball to quarterback Mike Tomczak, then quickly return it to the ground. Guard Jim Lachey would then scoop up the ball and head for the great green field that would lay in front of him.

But something got lost in the shuffle. Let Tomczak explain:

"The center, of course, touched

my hands with the ball to make the ball live. He did that, and I guess the nose guard just stuck our center pretty good — he came off the ball pretty good — and the ball was trapped under our center and the defensive lineman. Jim never had a chance to pick it up because there was too much congestion inside there."

After the game, a somber Lachey didn't have much to say about the play.

"I don't know," he said. "It just didn't work out."

What was meant to happen did not. Thus, what should have happened afterwards — Michigan capitalizing on the turnover — did. The Wolverines' Mike Hammerstein recovered the loose ball and Michigan drove 60 yards to the clinching score — an eight-yard

touchdown pass from Steve Smith to tight end Eric Kattus.

Michigan's final two touchdowns were set up by Buckeye turnovers. The Wolverines took a 17-14 lead late in the third quarter on a one-yard run by Smith that was set up by Brad Cochran's 23-yard interception return to the OSU 28.

But the Buckeyes took the kickoff following the Smith run and moved it successfully. Tomczak completed two passes to Thad Jemison covering 30 yards. In between, Keith Byars ran a pitch 12 yards.

That put the ball at the Michigan 38. Tomczak threw an incomplete pass to Byars in the left flat.

Then came the play.

"It was a bad call," said OSU coach Earle Bruce. "When things

don't end up with results, it's a bad call.

"If it wouldn't have been executed well in practice, I wouldn't have called it. It looked like a million dollars in practice all the time. I guess that's one of the problems. It looked good in practice, but it didn't look good in the game."

It did indeed come as a complete surprise, considering the Ohio State-Michigan game is usually reserved for calls of a conservative ilk. It may have seemed more surprising that Bruce should call "Lachey Right" when he did — when the Buckeyes were driving the football.

OSU had battled back from a 10-0 deficit to take a 14-10 lead, only to fall behind 17-14. Certainly it was no time for panic, or time to try to get the lead back at once. Nor was it late in the game.

Nevertheless, it was a well thought out call — one that the coaches felt comfortable with.

"You never want to look back and second guess," said quarterbacks and wide receivers coach Jim Tressel. "You've got to do what you think is right at the moment and then handle the consequences."

"It's one of those things that if it works, we look like geniuses, and we might put the game away."

One thing is for certain — the game was indeed put away after "Lachey Right."

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L & L Boys Will Make Up Heart Of Line

By Dave Kelch

They came here together as freshmen in 1981 and have played across the line of scrimmage butting heads, competed for the same position and finally, in their senior years, are lining up side-by-side.

Call them the L&L Connection or just call them what they are: two very good offensive linemen. Jim Lachey and Kirk Lowdermilk are owners of six varsity football letters and 540 pounds of brawn, brain, and in Ohio State coach Earle Bruce's thinking, power and skill.

Lachey, a 6-6, 278-pound guard, who has been at that position the past three years after a frosh season at tackle, and Lowdermilk, a 6-3, 262-pound center, make up two-fifths of the Buckeyes' veteran (12 total letters) front five.

Heading into 1984 and the Sept. 8 home season opener against Oregon State, Lachey and Lowdermilk will be joined by junior one-year letterman Rory Graves (6-6, 265) at left tackle, senior three-time letter winner Scott Zalenski (6-5, 257) at right guard and senior two-year letterman Mark Krerowicz (6-4, 282) at right tackle.

The 1983 offensive line at the outset of the season boasted 11 letters won between the interior five and drew the raves of the media during the pre-season. The 1984 edition hasn't quite drawn the attention the 1983 group received, but just ask Lachey or Lowdermilk about the line's prospects and they reply as if a point is to be proved.

"We really have four or five starters back," said Lowdermilk of the '84 line, when you take into account that he, Lachey and Zalenski shared the two guard spots last year while Krerowicz was at right tackle after bumping senior Jim Carson from the starting lineup early in the season. "The only real new person is Rory Graves."

Lowdermilk, whose Buckeye history reads like a "Who's Who" of football positions, began his career as an offensive guard. As a sophomore he was moved to defense at middle guard. Heading into his junior season, Lowdermilk was listed in the OSU media guide at three positions: middle guard, defensive tackle and offensive guard. He then grabbed Lachey's starting job out from under him before they and Zalenski began their "guard-exchange" from one game to the next.

With Joe Dooley departing after '83, a center replacement was sought and the coaching staff once again approached the adaptable Lowdermilk and the switch was on again.

"It's going pretty well," said Lowdermilk of the adjustment to the center position. "At first I had trouble with the snaps. Finesse is a big part of playing center. At guard, it's more just straight-on



Jim Lachey

power that counts. Center is more of a finesse position."

The Salem, Ohio native has also had to adjust to snapping the ball and moving off the line in the same motion. Also, with Mike Tomczak recovering from his broken leg, Lowdermilk has had to reach perfection on his snaps with Tomczak, sophomore Jim Karsatos and freshman Tom Tupa. What makes that particularly difficult is that Tomczak is 6-1, Karsatos 6-3 and Tupa is 6-5.

"For awhile, I was having trouble with Jim (Karsatos, who is the number one man in Tomczak's absence)," said Lowdermilk. "Jim was putting his hands too deep and we weren't making a good connection. But a 30-minute drill after practice one day with Coach Bruce took care of that."

Lowdermilk feels confident and comfortable with bookends Lachey and Zalenski on either side of him. "You know what the guy next to you is going to do after you've been through it so many times," he said.

Lachey has been something of an enigma the past three years. He came to OSU out of tiny St. Henry High School as the Class A Lineman of the Year and a *Parade* magazine All-American.

He has lettered all three years and has been a regular feature on the specialty teams because of his combination of size, strength and speed (he's OSU's fastest lineman). Yet Lachey stands firm when he says the best is yet to come.

"If I stay healthy," Lachey said as though it were a private thought. "You're a senior and you know it's the last time. It's your last two-a-days (etc.) and you have a lot of extra incentive."

Buckeye center and guard coach Steve Devine feels fortunate to have players with attitudes like Lachey's and Lowdermilk's under his wings.

"I think the thing that is interesting (about Lachey) is that I first saw him walking the halls of St. Henry High School as a tall, underdeveloped kid with



Kirk Lowdermilk

potential," said Devine. "I think Jim, in the four years he's been here, has had to develop the mental (toughness) thing which is just as important as the physical (aspect)."

"He came from a great situation... where else would you want to raise a kid? But he was at a big disadvantage as far as who he was playing against (the competition — mostly small Class A schools)."

Devine has not been surprised by Lachey's show of determination.

Lachey answers his own critics:

"It's my goal (to have a great year)," he said. "I want to prove to some people what I can do. I don't want to end up saying 'Why didn't I?' or 'Why couldn't I?'"

He spoke of the disappointment of '83 and losing his starting job to the guard rotation.

"Some things last year were discouraging," said Lachey. "I came in as a starter and Kirk and I were battling it out and then we were rotating. I have to make the best of it. You still have to go out there every day and prove it."

Like Lowdermilk, Lachey has high praise for his linemates.

"I feel that there's greater opportunity for the line to be great because the coaches have more to work with," he said, making a comparison to the '83 group.

Lachey and Lowdermilk have an added incentive to do their best and help shape the offensive line into a unit thinking and moving as one — junior tailback Keith Byars.

"I would definitely like to think we have a definite Heisman (Trophy) prospect," said Lowdermilk of Byars. "How many people get to block for a Heisman candidate? Not many."

How many tailbacks get the opportunity to run behind linemen like Lowdermilk and Lachey?

Not many.

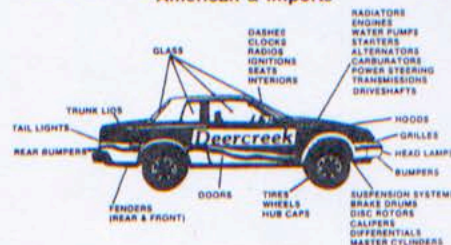
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