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Vol. 30, No. 18

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

March 19, 2011

# Tressel Takes Hit

## Head Coach Suspended, Fined By OSU; Will Keep His Job

 By JEFF SVOBODA  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Despite coming to the conclusion that head football coach Jim Tressel violated his contract, athletic department protocol and NCAA bylaw 10.1 by failing to report information that some of his players were potentially involved in NCAA rules violations, Ohio State plans to stand by its man.

The university concluded a nearly two-month internal investigation March 8 by announcing self-imposed sanctions against the 11th-year head coach after it concluded Tressel had been informed in April of the possibility his players were selling memorabilia and accepting discounted services.

Among the penalties, Tressel has been handed a two-game suspension for the opening contests of the 2011 season and fined \$250,000. In addition, he must attend a compliance seminar in the coming months.

However, the head coach's bosses – director of athletics Gene Smith and university president Dr. E. Gordon Gee – made it clear they have no plans to relieve Tressel of his duties despite mounting criticism from across the country that the punishment is too light given the severe nature of the transgression.

"I want to make sure everyone understands, wherever we end up at the end of the day, Jim Tressel is our football coach," Smith said during a heavily attended evening press conference March 8. "All the speculation about him being terminated is pure speculation. This case, in my view, does not warrant it."

Gee was even more adamant, exclaiming, "Are you kidding me?" when asked if he considered dismissing Tressel. Drawing



SONNY BROCKWAY

**PUNISHED** – Ohio State head football coach Jim Tressel was fined and suspended by Ohio State following a nearly two-month investigation that concluded the 11th-year head coach had been informed last April of the possibility that his players were selling memorabilia and accepting discounted tattoos in violation of NCAA rules.

ire from national commentators (for more on them, see a compendium of reaction on page 8). Gee then joked, "Let me just be very clear: I'm just hopeful the coach doesn't dismiss me."

All joking aside, the president went to great lengths to make it clear the school is 100 percent behind Tressel.

"This university is very committed to this coach," Gee said. "This president is committed to this coach. He's had great success on the football field and we applaud that. He's had great success in working with young people and we applaud that. But equally importantly, he's had great suc-

## Matta's Road To OSU Began In Hometown

 By ADAM JARDY  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The town of Hoopeston, Ill., is not the kind of place one stumbles upon by accident. A dot on the map nestled just inside the state's eastern border, it is first mentioned as you drive from the east by a sign 16 miles out on Indiana State Route 26.

As you cross the Indiana-Illinois state line headed westbound, the road surface changes as the destination approaches.

Finally, a two-paneled green road sign greets visitors who reach the city limit. The top panel notes the name of the town and the population, but it is the bottom half that proclaims the name of Hoopeston's most famous native son.

In three lines, the sign reads, "Home of Big 10 Coach Thad Matta."

In the mid-1980s, Hoopeston was more than just a location on a map. It was a thriving, passionate city that found itself rallying around a common cause – high school basketball. During a period from 1984-86, the boys basketball team put together a string of seasons still vividly recalled by the town's remaining citizens.

It was the glory days for the Cornjerkers – the only school in the country to have such a trademarked name – and Matta was a driving force in the run. In his

final three seasons at Hoopeston, the Cornjerkers compiled an 89-11 record during which they lost just one road game.

The culmination came during Matta's senior year of 1984-85 when the Jerkers reached the state's Final Four. The year before, the Cornjerkers

reached the state's Elite Eight and advanced to play at the University of Illinois' Assembly Hall before losing to the eventual state champion. Despite the loss, the team received a police escort home.

Matta does not make it home much these days. His parents, Jim and Ellanat, now reside in Hilton Head, S.C., and the region is not one Matta finds himself frequently crisscrossing on recruiting trips.

But while the coach might have left Hoopeston, his imprint is as large as ever.



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## OPINION

# Trying To Find Black, White Answers In Gray World

The senatorial demeanor? Apparently just a façade. That book, "The Winners Manual For The Game of Life," that was on the bestseller list? Probably ghostwritten. Countless signed cards and letters of encouragement as well as hospital trips to visit sick and dying children? Simply a charade.

To listen to his critics, you might believe Jim Tressel has spent most of a 25-year college coaching career living one lie after another and his two-game suspension and \$250,000 fine announced March 8 was when NCAA law finally caught up to his long pattern of dishonesty and deceit.

Most of those foisting that opinion were the usual suspects, of course. If you are going to win 75 percent of your games over a quarter-century and do so in a rather unorthodox style unbefitting today's look-at-me society, you are bound to pick up some enemies along the way – disgruntled ex-players who didn't believe they got enough of the spotlight, the ESPN types who rank only slightly better than the yellow journalists of the late 19th century, those who cover the team on a regular basis who long ago tired of Tressel's tight control over the availability of his team.

You would naturally have expected those camps to come out with guns blazing when Tressel was cited for violating NCAA bylaw 10.1, a statute otherwise known as the "Unethical Conduct Bylaw." What was rather unexpected was the venom spewed by those who describe themselves as diehard Ohio State football fans. Listening to some of them vent during the days and hours following Tressel's suspension, you might have thought the coach broke into their houses on Christmas Eve and made off with all the presents under the tree.

Consensus among the never-satisfied crowd was that a two-game suspension against the likes of Akron and Toledo was not nearly harsh enough. Many felt Tressel should have to pay the same five-game penalty that five of his players received in December. Others felt the entire 2010 season should have been vacated. And there was the most virulent group of all – the one that demanded Tressel's immediate termination.

"He should definitely be fired," one caller said during my appearance on a sports radio call-in show. When I asked why, he replied, "Look at the Sugar Bowl. A big lead and then he gets conservative. I've never liked the way he coaches. We need to get Urban Meyer in here."

Never mind that Tressel will never be fired for his win-loss record – which happens to stand at 106-22 (a school-record .828 winning percentage) with seven Big Ten championships and one national title in 10 seasons.

Never mind, either, that for all of the success Meyer enjoyed at Florida, including national championships in 2007 and 2009, more than two dozen UF football players were arrested during his six seasons in Gainesville. And we're not talking about speeding tickets or jaywalking. Meyer gave second and third chances to players charged with robbery and assault, looked the other way when a star player failed a drug test and successfully recruited multitalented receiver Percy Harvin even though most teams backed off following Harvin's ban from participating in any high school sport in his native Virginia after he punched a referee.

But it's not just Meyer. With the huge sums of money that are now driving the college game, you see coaches making all kinds of questionable – and sometimes life-altering – decisions. From Michigan and its extra practice time to USC supposedly unaware of houses being awarded to a player's family to Notre Dame sending a student up in a hydraulic lift

during a windstorm, even major programs are not immune to blurring the line of what could be considered unethical conduct.

## EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Naturally, pointing out the flaws of one program does not absolve another of its missteps. But I do have a question for everyone claiming to have a corner on the integrity market: What exactly would you have done had you been in Tressel's shoes last April? What would your course of action have been when e-mails began crossing your desk regarding two of your players and a federal drug trafficking investigation?

Would you have chosen to try and protect those players – as well as yourself and your program – or would you have immediately informed your athletic director and compliance office knowing full well that by doing so you would be exposing those players and that federal investigation to becoming public? (Before you answer, think back to the last time you called into work sick when you weren't really sick. Now you can spout off about how anyone who lies to their boss should be fired immediately.)

Maybe you would have marched yourself into Gene Smith's office and let the chips fall where they may. At least maybe that was what you would have done in a black and white world. Trouble is, this is a nuanced world filled with shades of gray.

Maybe you would have informed your athletic director and the compliance office, perhaps even making contact with university attorneys. Then again maybe you wouldn't have. Maybe, just maybe, you would have met with the players in question and held an investigation of your own. Maybe the answers you received would have been satisfactory and maybe they wouldn't have been. Maybe you would have meted out some form of punishment of your own at that time. Maybe you wouldn't have.

Obviously, we now know Tressel's decision on how best to handle the situation and we also know that decision will forever blemish an otherwise impressive coaching career.

### Another Possible Theory

Did things really happen exactly the way we were told?

There was an instance during the March 8 news conference with Smith, Tressel and university president Dr. E. Gordon Gee when a reporter asked the coach if he forwarded the e-mails to anyone. Tressel began to nod his head before Smith quickly interrupted to say the coach couldn't answer that question due to the ongoing NCAA investigation.

Tressel could have simply been acknowledging the question or he could have been nodding in affirmation to the question. This is total conjecture on my part but doesn't it at least seem plausible the coach could have taken the initial e-mail he received in April and walked it up the chain of command?

Whether that was to Smith's office, compliance or university counsel, it just doesn't seem right that Tressel didn't know what to do with the e-mails. If he did forward them, and someone else dropped the ball, a two-game suspension and \$250,000 fine levied against the head coach would be the least of Ohio State's worries. The university would have been looking at charges of "lack of institutional control"

– the dreaded four words no NCAA member institution wants to hear.

Lack of institutional control to the NCAA is like running away from a cop. No matter what else you may have done, they *really* don't like that. Whenever a school is penalized for lack of institutional control, it is looking at loss of scholarships, vacated seasons, postseason bans and jobs lost.

If your coach simply takes the fall, he gets the sanctions, the scrutiny and the criticism – but your program moves on.

Maybe that is just a wacko conspiracy theory. But I would contend it's no more wacko than the overheated cacophony from the sanctimonious crowd that believes Tressel should be fired and the entire 2010 season vacated.

Why do you think Smith – a former chair of the NCAA Committee on Infractions who knows that committee inside and out – immediately contacted the NCAA for consultation? Isn't it entirely possible those consultants signed off on the severity of Tressel's sanctions? You may think a two-game suspension and being forced to write a check for a quarter of a million dollars is a light tap on the wrist, but piled on top of five-game bans for five starters to begin the 2011 season, the penalty seems to have quite a bit of teeth.

Look, defending the indefensible is pointless. Even before this episode came to light, we all knew Jim Tressel didn't run a perfect program. There was the Troy Smith suspension, the Maurice Claret fiasco, the NCAA violations the coach purportedly committed when he was at Youngstown State, and now this. There is no use trying to defend those incidents although they do seem rather minor – even in their totality – to any number of others committed elsewhere by other programs and other coaches who did not receive similar penalties.

Nevertheless, whether Tressel withheld information, failed to tell the whole truth or out-and-out lied – and for whatever reason, noble or otherwise – he is the one who will have to live the consequences. He is the one whose legacy will be forever changed, and I'm guessing that will be the toughest sanction of all for him to bear.

### And Finally

• The day after Tressel's suspension and fine were announced, ESPN conducted another of its totally unscientific online polls to determine whether readers thought the punishment was too hard, too lenient or just right. Sixty-seven percent of the more than 118,000 respondents said the punishment was too lenient with just right polling 26 percent. Somewhat predictably, Sugar Bowl foe Arkansas and longtime archrival Michigan each led the way with 81 percent voting in the too lenient category. Ohio went 43 percent for too lenient, 39 percent for just right and 18 percent for too harsh.

• Don't you feel a little sorry for Thad Matta's basketball team? No. 1 in the country, Big Ten regular-season and tournament champions, and the top seed in the NCAA Tournament and their achievements play second fiddle to the Tressel story. This is March – the one month of the year when it is their turn in the spotlight and they don't even get that this year.

• If you are a BSB subscriber and have already signed up to read our issues online, you got a jump on our coverage of the Tressel suspension March 9 when we published our first Scarlet & Gray Paper. If you haven't already signed up for this free service to all subscribers, why not? Send your e-mail address to subscriptions@BuckeyeSports.com and we will send you easy-to-follow instructions on how to read your BSB print online as well as our electronic issues and any future Scarlet & Gray Papers.



# Gee, Smith Stand Behind Embattled Tressel

Continued From Page 1

cess in building the character and reputation of this university, for which I am entirely grateful."

Ohio State discovered e-mails in mid-January that showed a Columbus attorney – whose name was redacted in official documents released by OSU but was later confirmed to be former Buckeye walk-on football player Christopher Cicero – had warned Tressel of his players' actions in April 2010.

In December, the university found out from the U.S. Department of Justice that five players had sold their own memorabilia including championship rings and equipment – in violation of NCAA rules – and that three of those players as well as another teammate had received discounted or free tattoos.

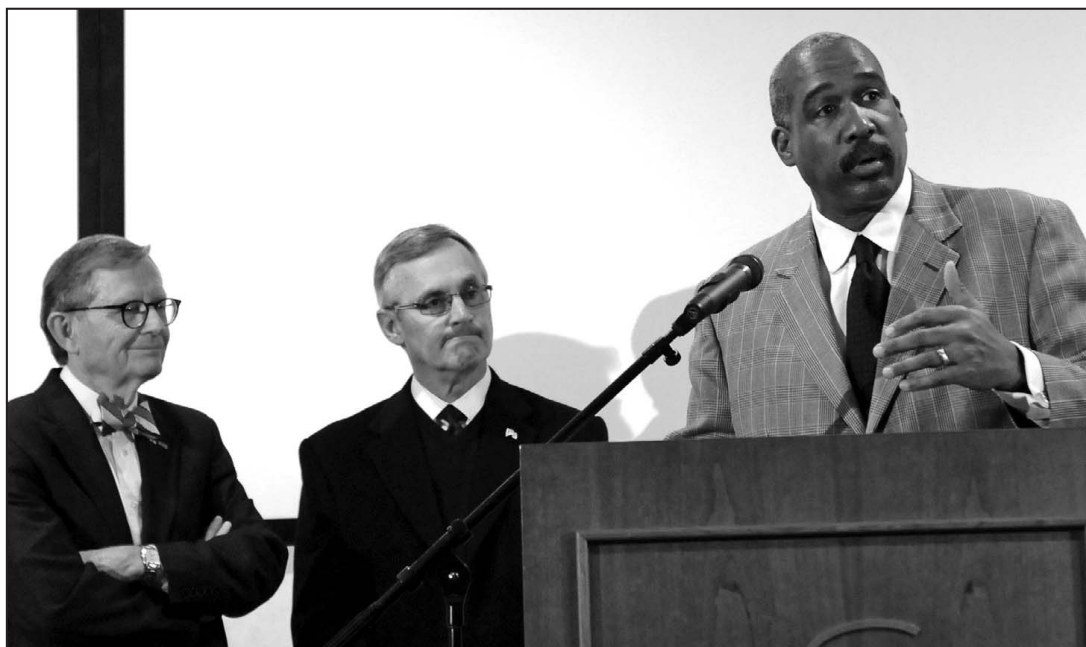
However, Tressel did not at any point alert university officials to the e-mails from Cicero, leaving him in breach of NCAA bylaw 10.1 and OSU protocol that state he must report any possible or potential violations to the athletic department's compliance office.

Ohio State's official letter to the NCAA director of enforcement services Julie Roe Lach, dated March 8, noted that while the school was "surprised" and "disappointed" by Tressel's actions, his program's history of compliance – including seeking interpretation of rules and self-reporting secondary violations – was a positive in his behalf.

"His behavior in this situation is out of character for him and is contrary to his proven history of promoting an atmosphere of NCAA compliance within the football program," read the letter.

"Nevertheless, we recognize that he should have forwarded this information in some manner to appropriate institutional officials. With the exception of this mistake, he is a man of integrity and high moral standards."

The letter was signed by Gee, Smith and university faculty athletics representative John Bruno.



SONNY BROCKWAY

**STANDING TOGETHER** – Ohio State director of athletics Gene Smith (right) and president Dr. E. Gordon Gee (left) came out in support of football head coach Jim Tressel (center) at a March 8 press conference during which the university announced sanctions against Tressel.

Tressel's strong reputation off the field is abetted by an excellent record on it. In his 10 seasons in Columbus, the coach has one national championship, seven Big Ten titles and eight BCS bowl appearances – winning five. He is also the program's third-winningest coach with 106 victories.

"When you think of the body of work that this gentleman has put into this program and this profession, and you think about who he is, there's no question in my mind that his

decision (to not report the information) was from the heart," Smith said. "We're obviously disappointed that we're here, but I will tell you Jim Tressel is a coach of young men and we support him 100 percent."

"I've worked with a lot of coaches. There's no intent in what he did. He is our coach and we trust him implicitly."

Despite punishments that include a public reprimand and apology, Tressel said he hopes to move on from the situation.

"Obviously, I'm disappointed that this happened at all," the coach said. "I take responsibility for what we do at Ohio State tremendously seriously. Obviously, I plan to grow from this, and I'm sincerely saddened by the fact that I let some people down and didn't do things as well as I could possibly do."

Moving forward, the NCAA will review the case and decide if any more punishment – either to the program or the coach – is necessary. Smith said that he believes OSU's

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## COVER STORY

self-imposed punishments hit a "sweet spot" of penalties imposed for similar infractions.

In addition, the athletic director said the university had worked with the NCAA throughout the process and hopes to have a quick answer because of that collaboration.

"We decided early on to work with them, to ask them to be a part of the process," Smith said. "We talked long and hard about our practice of being expeditious, swift and responsive to the NCAA and not acting like other institutions across this country that take forever to investigate."

### Inside The Investigation

The university said it first became aware of the situation Jan. 13 while searching Tressel's e-mails in regard to an unrelated issue.

The first e-mail sent from Cicero to Tressel on April 2 alerted the coach to a situation involving two football student-athletes. Though the names were redacted when OSU released the e-mails, Cicero revealed during an interview with ESPN that the two players were quarterback Terrelle Pryor and wideout DeVier Posey.

The initial e-mail noted that a recent federal raid as part of a drug trafficking investigation showed that Columbus resident Edward Rife was in possession of Ohio State memorabilia of current players and selling it for profit. In addition, the e-mail said that OSU players had been given free tattoos at Rife's Fine Line Ink parlor in Columbus.

The e-mail also noted Rife had a history in crime, including his role as the state's chief witness in a homicide case he once witnessed.

Tressel's e-mail reply was, "I will get on it ASAP."

On April 16, Cicero sent another e-mail with more detailed information after he had a personal conversation with Rife, and for the first time Cicero requested confidentiality in the matter. The last correspondence in early June was initiated by Tressel and asked the attorney if he knew of any other student-athletes involved in the case, to which Cicero replied he did not.

The coach stated he did not alert anyone at Ohio State about the e-mails because he was worried about the student-athletes' safety and well-being because of their association with Rife. In addition, he said he did not want to interrupt the federal investigation, especially after Cicero requested confidentiality.

"I've had a player murdered," Tressel said, appearing to fight back tears as his voice wavered. "I've had a player incarcerated. I've had a player taken into the drug culture and lose his opportunity for a productive life. So it was obviously tremendously concerning."

"Quite honestly, I was scared especially (because of) the fact that two of our current players were mentioned in the e-mails and that as we sit in homes (during the recruiting process) we talk about most especially we're going to take care of these young people and we're going to treat them like our own."

"Admittedly, I probably did not give quite as much thought to the potential NCAA part of things as I read it. My focus was on the well-being of the young people. Also, in those e-mails, it was very, very emphatic with the nature of a federal investigation that there be confidentiality."

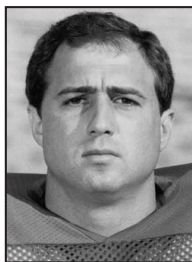
Tressel added that he has since been given advice as to what he should have done, including going to the school's top legal counsel with the matter.

While no players eventually faced charges or were caught up in the drug trafficking aspect of the situation, six players were found to have sold memorabilia to or received discounted services from Rife.

Running back Dan "Boom" Herron, offensive lineman Mike Adams, defensive end Solomon Thomas, Pryor and Posey are suspended for the first five games of the 2011 season as a result of that December investigation, while linebacker Jordan Whiting must sit for one game.

During that investigation, Tressel did not alert anyone to the presence of the e-mails from Cicero. Ohio State's March 8 letter to the NCAA noted he did not report the information on Dec. 9 when university officials first alerted the coach that the Department of Justice had information about the memorabilia and discounted services.

In addition, when Tressel was "informally questioned" by institutional officials on Dec. 16, he replied "that while he had received a tip about general rumors pertaining to (a) certain (number) of his players, that information had not been specific and it pertained to their off-field choices."



Christopher Cicero

After finding the e-mails, Ohio State quickly interviewed Tressel on Jan. 16. The coach said it was at that point that he realized he had committed a major mistake.

"I suppose (I first realized I had done something wrong) in January as we sat down and we talked about it," he said. "I had a commitment to confidentiality of a federal situation, and as we sat down and got a little bit of guidance as to how we could have done it better, that was probably the point in time."

Ohio State enlisted the services of a consulting firm known as The Compliance Group on Jan. 21 and alerted the NCAA about the matter on Feb. 3. The NCAA then sent investigators to campus for a Feb. 8 interview with Tressel. After that, the university and the NCAA conducted additional interviews as OSU worked to complete its investigation.

Smith, the chair of the NCAA Tournament selection committee, said the university hoped to conclude the investigation by the time he left to fulfill those duties in early March. When that did not happen, the goal was to have it completed by the end of the March 7-11 week.

That timetable was pushed up when a Yahoo! Sports article, co-authored by Dan

Wetzel and Charles Robinson, broke the news the evening of March 7.

"There's no doubt we had a leak and we wanted to be as responsive as we could," Smith said. "I asked staff to speed up the process of completing the self-report. We did that and were able to get it done and submitted (March 8)."

The NCAA could push for further sanctions against the program and Tressel, including vacating wins from OSU's 2010 season because the coach put players on the field while aware they had broken rules.

Tressel said he continued to play the players in question because he did not want to draw attention to the situation.

"As I mentioned, a focus of mine was to not interfere with the federal investigation," he said. "If you all of a sudden sit down some players that have earned the opportunity to play, there's a whole new set of questions that arise."

### Support From OSU

When asked if he was worried how the public at large would view him because of the case, Tressel said he was focused only on his internal image.

"I think that your No. 1 critic is yourself, and so you spend time thinking about how you can do things better," he said. "I don't think less of myself at this moment. I felt at the time as if I was doing the right thing for the safety of the young people and the overall situation, so I haven't really given much thought to people outside of here."

Gee, who said he believes the integrity possessed by Tressel is "superb," added that he believed Tressel was repentant after the two had a three-hour conversation at the president's house.

"I can tell you that there is a great deal of

grief in this man," Gee said. "He feels very sorry about this, and it has been very difficult for him because this is a man who by every fiber and by every action believes in the law of integrity and has lived that way."

A number of players who completed their eligibility in 2010 also came to Tressel's defense when questioned March 10 at Ohio State's Pro Day workouts.

"He's definitely still my guy, that's for sure," defensive tackle Dexter Larimore said. "Honestly, when I heard the allegations and all that stuff, I went into defense mode and said I know at the time he did what was right in his mind. Maybe it was the wrong thing in the NCAA's eyes or whatever, but I still respect the man a million times over because I don't think there are too many guys who can do what he does with the kids that we have and teaching them life lessons."

"You can't get any better than Coach Tressel, to be honest with you."

Added linebacker Ross Homan, "He has all of our support. I think every player, past or present, wouldn't take one bullet, they would take two bullets for that man for everything he's done for us."

Testimonials such as those are among the reasons Tressel has built such a sterling reputation within his own athletic department.

While his stock in the opinion of the public at large might take a hit after this scenario, the head coach said his only hope is to move on from the situation and get back to work.

"I understand that we'll have sanctions - I will have sanctions," Tressel said. "At no point in time in this moment or in moments ahead with my team or with anyone else am I looking for anything other than doing what needs to be done, growing from the experience that we've had and continuing to serve the greatest university in America."

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# Many In Media Feel Tressel Not Truthful

By **MARCUS HARTMAN**  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Writers across the country weighed in on the troubles that hit Ohio State after a March 7 report published by Yahoo! Sports accused head coach Jim Tressel of withholding information from the school and the NCAA regarding his knowledge of illicit actions of some of his players.

The university held a press conference the following day to acknowledge Tressel had made missteps and announce self-imposed sanctions, a move that produced plenty of reactions.

We have collected some of them here for your perusal.

• **Grant Freking, The (Ohio State) Lantern:** "The NCAA shouldn't suspend Jim Tressel for more than two games. It shouldn't fine him more than \$250,000 dollars. It shouldn't bar him from spring practice and summer workouts. After it finishes its investigation, the NCAA should recommend Jim Tressel's termination as head football coach at The Ohio State University."

"This incident is further proof that college athletics is spinning out of control, and a message needs to be sent to university presidents and athletic directors who let rule-breaking coaches keep their jobs because they win games and sell tickets. And that's exactly why Tressel, who said he never considered resigning, didn't tell the athletic department that he had received an e-mail from an attorney indicating OSU football players were selling memorabilia to Edward Rife."

"Rife, the owner of Fine Line Ink tattoo parlor, is one of the focal points of a federal drug investigation. Tressel's contract states that he is bound to report any possible violation immediately. He didn't."

"When Regular Joe with a normal job breaches his contract, he gets the boot. So should The Vest."

• **Jeff Gordon, St. Louis Post-Dispatch:** "So The Ohio State University cheats at football, just like so many other major college programs trying to get ahead in the game. Welcome to the club, coach Jim Tressel. It turns out that even Mister Rogers ignores NCAA rules."

• **Spencer Hall, EveryDayShould BeSaturday.com:** "Jesus jumping jiminy jumprat, you could not have a worse press conference than Tressel had, nor a worse presenter for what was already a nuanced argument for why he did what he did. Tressel's elliptical manner of speech is bad for clarity at any time, but Don Sweatervest stumbled all over the place last night, haphazardly throwing out the words 'drug trafficking' in the first few minutes without really doing a whole lot to clarify the matter and thus killing any PR professionals in the room."

"By action, Tressel has accepted the punishment handed to him and will likely take a bit more from the NCAA quietly, but for (expletive)'s sake don't put the man in front of a camera when it's time to admit fault for what he says is a misunderstanding. You're supposed to sound contrite, not like you're spinning, and the blunt truth is that given Tressel's oratorical style a simple Wendy's order can sound like a Senatorial press conference dodge."

• **Matt Hinton, Yahoo! Sports:** "A multigame suspension and \$250,000 fine is

hardly a slap on the wrist. But the NCAA didn't enjoy the bullet it took for allowing the offending Buckeyes to play in the Sugar Bowl, and if its recent verdicts against USC, Bruce Pearl and Dez Bryant have taught us anything about the way the association operates, it's that the perceived cover-up is always worse than the crime. And cover-ups don't come much clearer than this."

• **Bob Hunter, The Columbus Dispatch:** "Ohio State officials called a news conference to announce a two-game suspension for football coach Jim Tressel for committing a major NCAA infraction and, apparently, to reaffirm what a terrific guy he is, not necessarily in that order. In that regard, this was a curious affair, to say the least.... OK, he's a good man. I get it. But sometimes this seemed like an NBA game where the screaming PA announcer, loud music and gaudy pyrotechnics seem designed to distract us from the drab product that is the real purpose of our visit."

• **Doug Lesmerises, The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer:** "Tressel said he worried for the safety of his players because they were involved in a potentially dangerous situation, and he wanted to protect the confidentiality of a federal investigation. He now realizes he should have spoken with a university attorney. There's no excuse for not realizing it then. Hiding from bad news is what teenagers do – the OSU players involved realized they'd committed NCAA violations and stayed quiet. A future Hall of Fame coach can't do the same."

• **Bill Livingston, The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer:** "Loyalty to five players who clearly violated rules against profiting from their position as athletes, because they could play, has cost Tressel much of his persistent reputation for spotless integrity. Actually, failure to monitor or mentor players like Maurice Clarett and Troy Smith had already stained him in some eyes, but the 'can't be everywhere' theory saved him with the true believers."

"But this time, Tressel knew what was going on. OSU fans will try to say this is much ado about nothing. They should think about how they would react if the story was about Michigan's Brady Hoke, however. ...

"A stronger stand from the start, given how offended many fans were by the players' sale of such prized possessions as game jersey and gold pants trinkets, might have earned him more fans than his inaction has lost. Ohio State is the flagship athletic program of the Big Ten, and Tressel is, beyond any reasonable doubt, the face of the league in its most popular sport. It is some solace that Tressel didn't alibi and blame anyone else. But while he said he didn't think any less of himself after this, a lot of people will."

• **Jason Lloyd, Akron Beacon Journal:** "He can't stop lying. Even when he was trying to explain (March 8) why he lied in the first place, Jim Tressel was still lying. He lied and deceived his bosses – all of them – for months. Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith, university President E. Gordon Gee and NCAA investigators who came to town in December looking for the answers he refused to supply. ...

"For Smith and Gee to suspend Tressel for two games (against Akron and Toledo) and fine him \$250,000 (14 percent of his sal-

ary for next season) is a snub of arrogance at the rest of college sports. ... Tressel could've sat the two players he knew were involved for a nonconference game early in the season, but his arrogance and ability to slide out of so many previous scandals infused in him a sense of entitlement to do it again. This time, he finally got caught."

• **Stewart Mandel, SportsIllustrated.com:** "Jim Tressel's Ohio State teams annually field one of the best defenses in the nation, but Tressel's personal defense for why he withheld knowledge of potential NCAA violations would be fortunate to give up 50 points per game. Let's be honest: No one but the most scarlet-and-gray blinded diehard could possibly buy the explanation being given by the coach and his employer for an inexplicable lack of judgment that will cost Tressel at least two games and \$250,000. It's thinner than the Buckeyes' depth chart for their first five games next season. ...

"But lest we forget, the sanctions in December were egg on the NCAA's face. Rarely has the NCAA caught more flak for a decision than it did for allowing Terrelle Pryor and his cohorts to play in the Sugar Bowl. In fact, the NCAA gave off the perception of having brokered some sort of plea bargain with the Buckeyes. It will certainly want to avoid that appearance again, which could ultimately mean a harsher penalty for Tressel."

• **Paul Newberry, The Associated Press:** "There was absolutely NO chance that Ohio State might actually do the very thing it had a right to do under Tressel's contract: Fire him for failing to report any information related to violations of NCAA, Big Ten or Ohio State bylaws and rules. Heck, according to athletic director Gene Smith, that step wasn't even seriously considered. Why? Have you not been listening? Remember, this is college athletics, where the overriding consideration is nearly always the bottom line. Tressel's program has made tens of millions of dollars for Ohio State. Might as well ride that gravy train a little longer, especially if it means beating Michigan every year and contending for Big Ten championships."

• **Rob Oller, The Columbus Dispatch:** "For all the baggage over the past decade, Tressel sidestepped most of the controversy because his sins were more connected to omission than commission. Tressel did not actively break rules. It was (Maurice) Clarett mouthing off, (Troy) Smith taking money, (Terrelle) Pryor trading gold pants for tattoos. And before that, it was Youngstown State quarterback Ray Isaac receiving improper benefits during Tressel's time at YSU."

"But this is different. Tressel is taking the full fall, solo for the first time, for something he did. There is no one to share the blame. Despite his apologies and insistence that he did not want to compromise the integrity of confidential e-mails or of a government investigation involving two of his players, Tressel at (the) news conference appeared more broken and confused than is typical."

• **Drew Sharp, Detroit Free Press:** "Finally, there's a loose strand on the Sweatervest. Keep pulling at it and it will unravel. But the NCAA doesn't have the stomach to expose Tressel's football

evangelism for the hypocritical sham it is. If the NCAA doesn't demand a full and thorough examination of every fiber of the Buckeyes' program in the aftermath of March 8's half-hearted mea culpa, it should forever remove the term 'compliance' from its rules code. ...

"Tressel has long positioned himself as a conservative, strait-laced manager. There's nothing flashy about him. That's by design. He has authored motivational tomes predicated on his deep faith and commitment to conducting himself in an honorable fashion. And we're supposed to believe that a person of such strong convictions suddenly didn't know which direction to turn when he received an e-mail from a lawyer notifying him of a federal criminal probe that might involve some of his players?"

"The man's a fraud. But as long as he keeps winning, nobody will care."

• **Mark Schlachach, ESPN.com:** "In 10 years as the Buckeyes' coach, Tressel has often showed us his teams can't win big games. On March 8, Tressel showed us he can't win the big news conferences, either. Tressel, who has guided the Buckeyes to seven Big Ten titles and the 2002 BCS national championship, wanted us to believe that he was different from other successful head coaches. From his character-based books to his conservative sweater vests, Tressel wanted us to believe that he's a straight shooter who follows the rules. On March 8, we learned Tressel isn't any different from a lot of coaches in college football. He's apparently more concerned about winning games and championships than following rules and doing things the right way."

"In fact, Tressel might be even worse than other coaches who are corrupting college athletics. He won't admit he's wrong even after he has been caught."



SONNY BROCKWAY

**NOT BUYING IT – Many college football pundits did not believe Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel's explanation as to why he did not tell anyone about the e-mails he received from Columbus attorney Christopher Cicero in April and June of last year.**

# Matta Showed Leadership Long Before Coaching

Continued From Page 1

## Son Of A Coach

Now in his seventh season with the Buckeyes, Matta has his team poised for a run at greatness. Ohio State took over the nation's top spot in the polls in the 11th week of the season and now holds that position heading into the NCAA Tournament.

The fact that he has turned the OSU program into one that consistently wins comes as no surprise to the folks back home.

"If there was ever a kid that was born to be a coach, man, it was Thad," said Jerry Trombley, a 59-year-old Hoopeston resident who grew up on the opposite corner to the Matta household. "It would be 1 o'clock (a.m.) in the summertime and he and his brother (Greg) would be out shooting baskets in the driveway."

The hoop still stands at the split-level house on the southeast corner of Euclid and Sprague with a backboard Jim Matta, a former coach and athletic director, "borrowed" from the school. In the corner of the yard sits a DirecTV dish, one that used to be accented by a University of Illinois cover.

Trombley is not the only Cornjerker with memories of Matta out in the driveway until late at night.

The neighbors across the street said they could recall countless nights like that one. Wayne Bandy, who was the assistant coach during Thad's high school years in addition to a middle school teacher, said they were fine with it except for one occasion.

"I had just got home from having a baby ... and I wasn't feeling good," Bandy's wife, Gwen, said. "The noise of the guys out front was hard."

Thad's father even has a story about waking up one night to the familiar sounds of a basketball thumping in the driveway at around 1 in the morning. Stumbling to the yard, a bleary-eyed father asked his son what he was doing shooting so late. Thad's response was that he simply wanted to shoot for a few minutes after getting home. Thad had been shooting for two hours and had lost track of the time.

The driveway was accented by a makeshift net fashioned by the elder Matta that allowed his sons to shoot by themselves and have the ball come right back to them.

When it came to playing for Hoopeston, Matta grew into the team's top scorer as a senior without becoming a player who demanded the ball.

"He was a shooter, but he was a team player," Bandy said. "He was a leader."

The high-water mark came when he put up 45 points one night in an era played before the three-point line. That broke the school record of 41 set by future Indiana player Scott Eells. With 1:54 remaining in the game, Matta missed a free throw that could have set the record but later connected from the field to set the mark.

"I was a little tight," he told the local newspaper after the game about missing the free throw, "but I knew it wasn't the end of the world if I didn't break it."

The headline in the Hoopeston Chronicle proclaimed, "Matta Unstoppable As Jerkers Thump Wolverines, 94-57."

What helped make Matta so dangerous was his knowledge of the game.

"In the seventh grade, I'd call timeout and he'd be trying to draw up plays with me," said Bandy, who was his head coach that year. "He was always thinking about the game."

Trombley said Thad had a calmer demean-



COURTESY OF KEVIN ROOT

**MAKING HIS FATHER PROUD – Thad Matta (above, center) was a star player on his high school team in Hoopeston, Ill., where his father, Jim (right), was the athletic director.**

or than his older brother, Greg, who is current head boys' basketball coach at Kennesaw (Ga.) North Cobb Christian.

"Greg was the one with the hot temper," he said. "Thad was more even-keel. Thad was coaching them on the floor. When he wasn't on the floor, he was a towel-waver. You could tell it was his love of the game."

"He was the driving force on the team, the on-field commander."

For that, Matta had his father to thank. A coach with 39 years of experience under his belt, Jim Matta served as the school's athletic director as well as the first coach for his children.

"He was more laid-back, kind of like his dad," said Randy Lawson, a Hoopeston alumnus who ran track with Thad. "(Jim) was just a real mellow kind of guy, and Thad was the same way. He wasn't flashy. He'd talk to you."

It all added up to a winning product on the court and a bright future for Thad. On Nov. 14, 1984, he signed a national letter of intent to play for Southern Illinois. In a photo published in the local newspaper the day after signing day, he is flanked by his parents along with sister, Karah, and head coach Randy Feller. Accompanying the photo is an Associated Press story which ironically leads off by detailing Ohio State's signing of Jay Burson, then-Ohio's all-time leading prep scorer.

After one season with the Salukis, Matta would transfer to Butler, where he finished his collegiate career.

In 31 games that senior season, Matta went 319 for 613 (52.0 percent) from the field and 57 for 76 (75.0 percent) from the free-throw line while adding 229 rebounds, 204 assists and 85 steals. He was named all-state by the Chicago Tribune – which spelled his last name "Motta" in one article – as well as by the Chicago Sun-Times and the Illinois Basketball Coaches Association.

"When Thad was on the floor, he was in control," said Russell Leigh, a Hoopeston alumnus and CPA who also has done radio broadcasts of local basketball games for many years. "He was relaxed. Nobody got rattled. Thad would make a play or he'd make a pass and somebody would make a play and that's what it was."



The Cornjerkers reached the state semifinals for the first time in school history before falling to eventual champion Providence-St. Mel, which was led by future Illinois standout Richard Hamilton. Matta put up 23 points and 10 rebounds in the losing effort.

The next time the team took the court, for the consolation game, Hoopeston – which at the time also contained nearby East Lynn and was designated "Hoopelyn" on the scoreboard in Assembly Hall – rebounded to earn an 84-70 victory against Harvard.

In his final prep game, Matta scored 34 points. The lead to the game story in the Chronicle read, "Like the Madness of March, Thad Matta went out like a lion."

If there was any disappointment in not finishing as state champions, it never showed. The Cornjerkers returned as the toast of the town and were feted in a pep rally. In a news report on an area CBS station, reporter Wynn Smiley stands in a field as the fire trucks and police cars drive behind him with their sirens blaring.

"To say that Hoopeston-East Lynn residents are proud of their Cornjerkers would be the statement of the week," Smiley tells the camera. "Today the Jerkers were welcomed home by almost everybody and everything in Hoopeston."

A highlight video from the experience set to Glenn Frey's "The Heat Is On" exists, and not surprisingly Matta features prominently. You can see the future OSU coach wearing No. 11 scoring, dishing and diving on the home court of the Fighting Illini in his white uniform.

Immediately after the highlights from the loss to Providence-St. Mel, the video – featuring the theme from the movie "Beverly Hills Cop" – features a smiling Matta being hugged

by children from the community while wearing a black Member's Only jacket.

Asked what the mood was like on the bus rolling into town with the police escort, Matta grinned and replied, "Exciting. Everybody was really pumped and just really happy with third place."

After saying that having the third-place medal draped around his neck was the highlight of his prep career, Matta was introduced to loud applause after teammate Kevin Root took his turn at the microphone. During the assembly, the town mayor presented the key to the city to the players – the first time such an honor had ever been bestowed in Hoopeston history.

The team was on the rise. The following year, when the Cornjerkers again finished third in the state without Matta, the buzz was considerably less because the expectations were for a state title.

In those years, however, the gymnasium was always packed to the rafters in Hoopeston. Extra bleachers were brought in for the second level of the gymnasium, helping the "Blue Rush" student section stretch to the rafters. If that was not enough, extra seats were installed behind the baskets as close to the court as safety would allow.

"The whole town got behind them," said Leigh, who has been the "Voice of the Cornjerkers" for 15 years. "We'd sit here and do people's taxes and talk about the ballgame. After the game, you'd go to the restaurant or the coffee shop and everyone was talking basketball. Everyone had signs in their windows and signs in their cars."

"That was it. That was the whole focal point of the community."

Leigh said that as a result, the Cornjerkers became known across the state for basketball.

"I'd go to seminars in Springfield or other places, and when I'd tell people I was from Hoopeston they'd say, 'Oh, you're the home of the Cornjerkers,'" he said. "Instantly, you had name recognition. It was like in (the movie) 'Hoosiers.'"

A 1977 graduate from Hoopeston, Leigh pointed out that there was already a culture of basketball success before Matta and his teammates arrived on campus. The program had been knocking on the door of an appearance at Assembly Hall for more than half a decade before the breakthrough.

Since Matta took the head coaching job at OSU, he has made only a handful of trips home. During one visit, the coach was invited to speak at the Civic Center, unaware that while there the town was also planning to unveil the sign that greets visitors from the east.

His most recent trip home, however, carried a bit less levity. It was during the spring of 2010 when he decided to make a detour while on a recruiting trip and visit Root, his former teammate and still a close friend who will crash on Matta's couch when he makes the trip to Columbus.

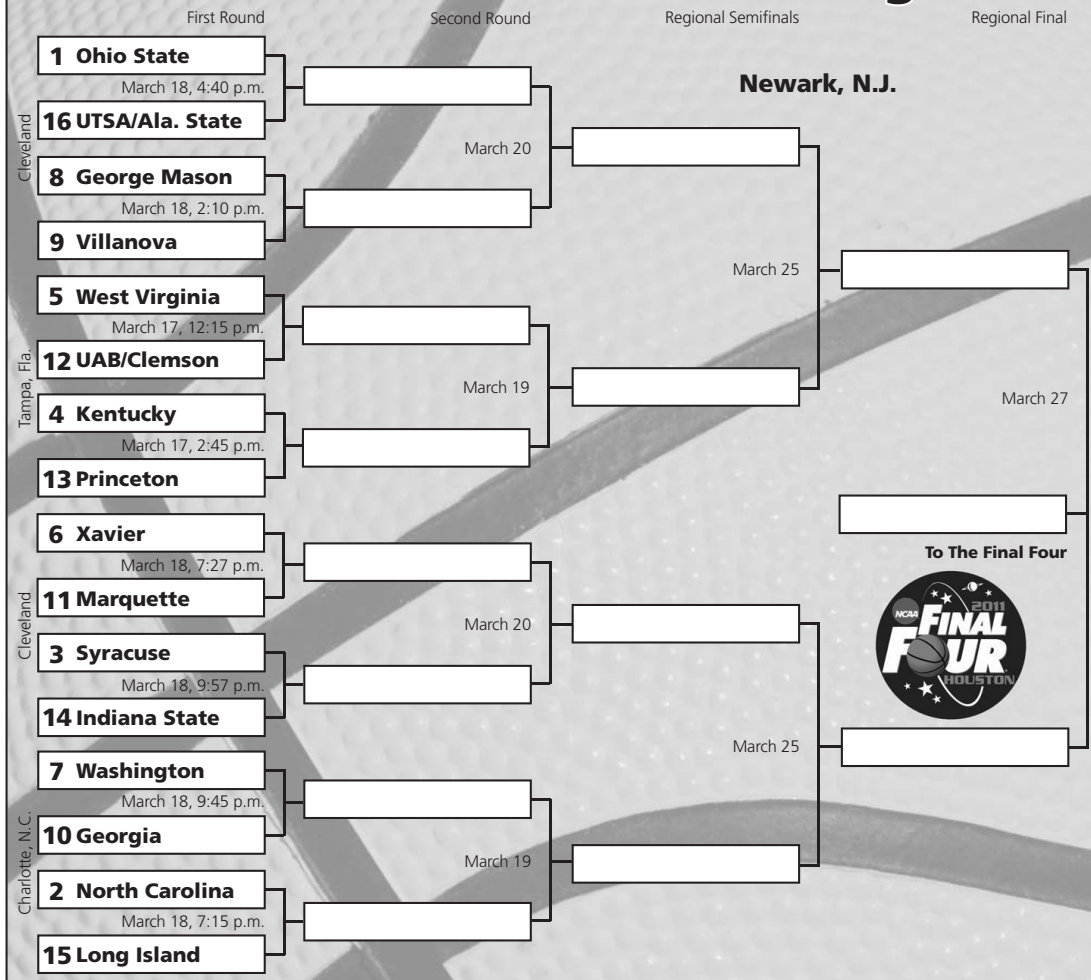
Root, who is now the athletic director at the high school after spending a decade coaching the basketball team, had reached out to Matta earlier in the year when tragedy struck the basketball team. While driving to an early-morning practice, one player fell asleep at the wheel and crashed his car, killing his cousin.

Matta responded by writing the player a letter, and while he was in town the coach made a point to spend time with him to offer advice. Root said the coach's impact on the kid was immeasurable.



## COVER STORY

## 2011 NCAA Tournament East Region



In his home, Root keeps a box full of memorabilia from his playing days, including his years with Matta. He also remains close with Brian Hodge, who graduated one year later after serving as a trainer for the basketball team.

Hodge, who now teaches in the Hoopston district, remembers Matta as more than just an athlete. Describing himself as overweight for most of his life, Hodge recalled an experience where he was being picked on for his weight in the hallways when Matta intervened, sticking up for the younger student.

"I'll never forget that," Hodge said more than 25 years later.

There are still occasional shared moments with Matta, however fleeting they might be. Most of them come after Big Ten road games for the Buckeyes.

When OSU went to Purdue two seasons ago, the Bandys managed to get seats behind the team bench. Although they did not get to speak with Matta, Gwen said the coach looked up after a timeout, made eye contact with the pair and grinned. He also offered an apparently off-color comment to her husband not suitable for publication.

"We don't ever hear from him," she said with a smile and a shrug. "He's too busy, but just that smile and that thumbs up, you knew."

#### Faded Glory

While the former resident has become one of the most recognizable coaches in America, the town itself has fallen on hard times. Although the sign on the outskirts of town boasts a population of 6,000, that number has

dipped to around 5,200 in the last 10 years – a decrease of more than 10 percent.

The primary industry in town – canning – has all but dried up. The chief employer is Silgon Business Corp., whose massive building on the northern part of town is flanked by the abandoned shells of such former factories as Stokley's, Pillsbury and Illinois Canning.

Ask any resident in the town and they will gladly offer up their opinion that the town is dying, but they will point out just as quickly that it is a great place to raise a family and there is nowhere else they would rather do so. One resident guessed that 90 percent of the town's residents do not lock their doors when they leave the house.

Those wishing to go out to eat in Hoopston have five options – three pizza places, one McDonald's and a newly opened Mexican restaurant that is the current "in" place.

For breakfast, however, the best place to soak in the local flavor is Mr. B's Café, located next to a used clothing store called Global Fashions on a primarily deserted East Main Street. Pull open the torn screen door, push your way through a heavier wooden door and the diner looks straight out of a Norman Rockwell painting.

A long, narrow restaurant with only a handful of tables located immediately near the door, the café has around two dozen red-and-white checkered stools running along the bar. The hot wings have some kick but are not overwhelmingly spicy, a side of French fries costs \$1.50 and the milkshakes are personally made by Blake – Mr. B himself. And you had better bring cash. Credit cards are not accepted.

Seated there, it is almost impossible not to find someone with a connection to Matta. At the request of the hostess behind the counter, Robin Lawson, who engages all the customers in conversation, her brother-in-law Randy is summoned to discuss his connection with the coach. Trombley is already there.

Lawson lives between Hoopston and Chicago and said he often makes the trek to Welsh-Ryan Arena when the Buckeyes are in town to play Northwestern in an effort to see the fellow Cornjerker.

"He's still down to earth and the same as he was when he was here," Lawson said of Matta. "He makes a point after the game to come over and spend half an hour, 45 minutes with us just catching up and going over old stories. He hasn't changed a bit."

Matta also remains a source of inspiration for the town, a sign that Cornjerkers can make it in the world. Root said Matta has served as an example he has taught to students in classes.

"How did he achieve?" Root asks his students. "How did he make it? How did he get out of here?"

On the court, Root was one of the primary complements to Matta's talents. A left-handed shooter, the affable Root no longer outwardly shows the chip on his shoulder he played with. After scoring, he would point at his opponent while running back down the court to play defense.

Twenty-six years after Matta's senior season, the contrast between the former teammates is striking. Root went on to play at nearby Eureka College and is a member of the Eureka's athletics hall of fame after setting the career mark for assists. He now has the keys to the gym and is the one who locks up when a game is complete.

Root remains close with Hodge, whose collection of memorabilia from those seasons of Hoopston basketball is extensive. Included among the artifacts is a metal can template made by The American Can Co., which is now known as Silgon. On the metal sheet is a complete 1984-85 roster including coaches, cheerleaders and trainers featuring an ear of corn – although it's not mascot Jerky the Cornjerker – dribbling a basketball while holding a football.

The school's trophy case boasts an autographed, framed photo of Matta in his OSU gear with the phrase "Go Bucks!" written in black ink. It hangs next to a high school photo of him getting a shot off at Assembly Hall accompanied by a list of his accomplishments.

One day in late February, there was some optimism in town. On Friday night, the Cornjerkers closed out the regular season with a lopsided victory on Senior Night in front of a packed house. Admission was \$3 for adults and \$2 for children, and patrons were granted passage with a blue dot on their hands rather than a tangible ticket.

Adding to the festivities, Fathead was on hand to present a \$2,000 check to the school's athletic department for winning a national logo contest, the result of which is the inclusion of Jerky to the list of products that can be ordered on the company's website.

Sales of merchandise with the Cornjerker mascot bring in nearly \$30,000 a year, in large part thanks to online sales at Cornjerkers.com

An elderly couple sitting toward the end of the counter at Mr. B's remarked that everyone seemed happier after the victory, while Robin insisted, "Our time will come."

If the Buckeyes do wind up cutting down the nets in Houston and celebrating their first NCAA Tournament title since 1960, it is not likely that Matta's first thoughts will be of his hometown. Joe Walder, one of his former teammates, said he has heard the coach say he does not often think of his success on the hardwood in Hoopston.

But that does not mean that Hoopston will not be thinking of him.

As Gwen Bandy said, "Once a Cornjerker, always a Cornjerker."



**Fueling the American Spirit.**

# Right Call Is To Stand By Tressel Despite Controversy

Before I can try to address the issue of Jim Tressel and the recent revelations concerning NCAA infractions committed by the Ohio State football coach, I think it's important to state how I feel about him and his program.

Do I wish Tressel would throw to the tight end more? Yes.

Do I wish he was more accommodating to the media? Absolutely.

You have no idea how difficult and frustrating it is to try to put out an Ohio State sports publication when information concerning the school's flagship sport is completely controlled by a coach who limits access to players and staff as well as himself while being a master of the non-answer to media queries.

Do I think he is a good representative of the university? Yes.

I am frequently an invited guest to banquets where no other media are present, and Tressel is an engaging, caring, entertaining and very humorous guy when he lets his guard down. I always find him sincere in those situations and well-received by the audience.

Are his teams successful? Of course.

I know there are some Buckeye fans who are disappointed that Ohio State doesn't win the national championship every year, but Tressel has overseen an unprecedented run of success during his time in Columbus. That includes a national championship, seven Big Ten titles and an incredible 9-1 record against archrival Michigan.

Does he build better men? I believe so.

His emphasis on character, team as family and doing things the right way is apparent – much to the annoyance it seems of many non-Buckeye fans. In fact, I find his ability to build team chemistry one of the keys to his success, something that helps overcome some of that lack of imagination on offense.

Does he run a clean program? This is the most important question of all, given the recent controversy, and I believe the answer is still yes.

I may be proven entirely wrong on this, and if so I will admit as much in this space, but I have seen no evidence there is any pattern of rules violations or underhanded recruiting practices. There have been some bumps in the road along the way, including issues with Maurice Clarett, Troy Smith and the recent memorabilia sales scandal. But at no point did I ever believe there was a pattern indicating a program out of control.

Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith and school president Dr. E. Gordon Gee appear to agree with me, and I think that played a big role in their decision – a decision they seemed to maintain was a no-brainer – to stick with their suddenly embattled coach.

To use a phrase that is popular today, I think you have to look at Tressel's overall body of work. On that 10-year résumé, I see a coach who has done far more good – both on and off the field – than bad.

But I think the coach has suddenly put himself on a much shorter leash. Obviously, if there are future revelations or incidents, it will be much harder to justify sticking by Tressel.

I can't help but recall former OSU receiver Ray Small's father complaining that it seemed his son's punishments for various offenses always seemed worse

than those for other players. That may have been true, but the fact Small was a repeat offender probably made his situation worse. The fact that Tressel's slate is pretty clean certainly was a factor in what some would deem a mild punishment.

The violations by Tressel may restore some order to the athletic department. There are those who say the coach's influence in the department, based on his success with the school's most important team, had perhaps gotten out of control. This unpleasant experience has certainly knocked him down a notch.

For Tressel, I believe the two-game suspension and a \$250,000 fine pale in comparison to the humiliation of the revelations and having to face the public ramifications of his actions. This is a man who likes to be in complete control of his public persona at all times, and the days following the announcement of the sanctions have to have been devastating.

Why Tressel knowingly violated NCAA rules and terms of his contract is beyond me. I have to admit his public explanation that he was trying to protect his players and the confidentiality of a federal investigation seems kind of lame, especially given the fact he had a chance to come clean when the issue became public in December and even then chose not to.

I doubt we will ever know the real story. Tressel tends to remain pretty tight-lipped about such things. I'm still waiting for an explanation about what happened in that national championship game with Florida.

If Tressel ever elects to write his memoirs, it will be an interesting book. I think to the coach, however, whatever happens in the program stays in the program.

The public outcry about the supposed leniency Tressel was shown is not surprising to me.

I grew up out of state and did not come to Columbus until I started attending Ohio State grad school in 1976. I always try to tell diehard Buckeye fans that those from outside of Ohio thought the beloved Woody Hayes was a lunatic. He and his Buckeyes were hated – both because of the coach's sideline antics and because of his team's winning ways.

The attitude toward Tressel around the nation is much the same. They hate him for his strait-laced persona and they still hate Ohio State for its winning ways. The chance to see Tressel come off as some sort of hypocrite has to be greatly satisfying to many fans across the country.

And don't think for one minute the previously mentioned lack of cooperation the coach has given media members doesn't play a part in some of the intense criticism he has been receiving in print, online and over the airwaves. The press will almost always go easier on players and coaches they like while being more harsh with those who make doing their job more difficult. It's only human nature.

Speaking of Hayes, I have always maintained if the old coach hadn't lost three straight games to Michigan – back when losing three straight games to Michigan meant losing your job – he would have

survived throwing a punch at that Clemson player, just as he had survived so many other outbursts when he was on top of his game. People were whispering that the game had passed Hayes by well before that fateful night at the 1978 Gator Bowl.

Similarly, former Ohio State basketball coach Jim O'Brien might have been treated differently in light of his NCAA indiscretions if he had been coming off his Final Four season rather than a 14-16 season with the program on a decided downward trend.

It's naive to think Tressel might not have been treated differently by Smith and Gee had his program not been at such heights. People from around the country can point fingers and say Ohio State is placing winning above integrity, but the importance of winning is an inescapable reality in major-college sports and not just at Ohio State. Still, I believe – and I hope not foolishly – the university has an athletic department defined by integrity.

The issue of winning brings up a question I am sure is on the minds of many Ohio State fans. How will the uproar affect the program?

That's the uncanny thing about Tressel. If anyone can guide his team through this type of mess, it's him. From the commotion caused by Clarett before the 2002 national championship game to the distraction of the memorabilia scandal before the recent Sugar Bowl, the coach has been able to rally the troops in these types of situations. That's his gift. He's probably already devising ways to make this a teachable moment.

There will be negative recruiting out there by some schools – the ones with so much integrity – but I just don't see a program that has had such consistent success suddenly going into a tailspin. The job will be more difficult in 2011, but I see the team circling the wagons and I look for the Buckeyes to have plenty of fight in the upcoming season.

The players need to acknowledge it was the actions of some of their own that put their coach in this situation whether he dealt with that situation correctly or not. They owe him one.

"Maybe it was the wrong thing in the NCAA's eyes or whatever, but I still respect the man a million times over because I don't think there are too many guys who can do what he does with the kids that we have and teaching them life lessons," said departing defensive lineman Dexter Larimore. "You can't get any better than Coach Tressel, to be honest with you."

Added linebacker Ross Homan, "He has all of our support. I think every player, past or present, wouldn't take one bullet, they would take two bullets for that man for everything he's done for us."

I apologize to any readers who turned to this page looking for me to bash Tressel. I have my gripes, but all in all it's been a pretty good last 10 years here in Columbus. If the past record warrants it, sometimes people deserve at least one free pass.

But if this proves to be a pattern or there is more out there about this situation

we don't know about, I'll be the first one to admit I was wrong and I will be right there with all those who are critical of Tressel.

## Cagers Churn On

Basketball will probably always be the second sport at Ohio State. Still, it's kind of amazing how even in their time of glory the Buckeyes got pushed out of the headlines by the Tressel scandal.

Congratulations to Thad Matta's Buckeyes for winning both the Big Ten regular-season and tournament crowns and earning the overall No. 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament. It has been a fun and exciting season.

And let me say that Matta's basketball Buckeyes win with class and integrity – sorry to all of you Buckeye bashers around the country who think there's a win-at-all-costs mentality at Ohio State.

Unfortunately, in today's college basketball, what you do in the regular season is irrelevant if you don't do well in the NCAA Tournament, where anything can happen.

Obviously, there are some concerns about the Buckeyes' depth. If freshman phenom Jared Sullinger gets into foul trouble, Ohio State could have its problems. But the talent is there and I really like the chemistry of this team. They have proved they can deal with adversity, such as in the Big Ten tourney overtime win over Northwestern, and as indicated by their lofty seed, the Buckeyes have as good a chance of winning the whole thing as anyone.

Let March Madness begin.

## Key Documents Posted

For the past few months we have been touting the benefits of our new electronic offerings, and something unique came up in our coverage of the Tressel violations.

We were able to post Ohio State's letter to the NCAA, outlining its self-reported offenses and the self-imposed sanctions on its coach. In addition, we posted copies of the e-mails that started the whole controversy. That was all part of our special Scarlet & Gray Paper, which was posted March 9 to give BSB readers timely access to information about the breaking story almost a week before Buckeye Sports Bulletin went to press.

There is no way that we would have had space to publish those documents in Buckeye Sports Bulletin, yet they were made available – free of charge to all subscribers – as part of our electronic supplements to your print BSB.

If you have not already signed up for this free service, simply e-mail your name, address, phone number and preferred e-mail address to [subscriptions@BuckeyeSports.com](mailto:subscriptions@BuckeyeSports.com) and we will send back simple instructions on how to access all that BSB has to offer, including 36 additional electronic issues, instant online access to the print issue of BSB and special reports as needed, such as when news of Tressel's violations broke.

If you missed the NCAA letter and the controversial e-mails, there is no reason to worry. The complete Scarlet & Gray Paper, as well as all print or electronic issues of BSB dating back to August 2009, appears online and is archived for your information and enjoyment.

If you have any questions, do not hesitate to call us at (614) 486-2202.