

# BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 31, No. 23

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

July 2012

## Time & Change... Offensive Makeovers Not Unprecedented

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

Urban Meyer's spread offense has gained plenty of attention since the coach was hired in November, but he's just the latest coach to bring his own style of moving the football to the Ohio State football program.

Even the legendary Woody Hayes made changes when necessary during his 28-year run, and others since have added their own pieces to the Buckeye attack.

"Three yards and a cloud of dust" – the offensive identity most often associated with Ohio State for much of the past six decades or so – can be traced to 1951.

That season Hayes became the 19th head coach of the Buckeyes, bringing with him the T-formation offense from a successful stint as head coach at Miami (Ohio).

Though the formation was not entirely new to Ohio State, the focus on it was. Hayes' predecessor, Wes Fesler, ran a mixture of the T and the single-wing offense, a dual strategy that enjoyed increasing success through Fesler's four years at the helm at his alma mater.

Fesler, a three-time All-America selection as an end for the Buckeyes from 1928-30, saw his first Ohio State team stumble to a 2-6-1 record in 1947 while scoring only 60

points, but that output was more than tripled a year later as the Buckeyes improved to 6-3 while scoring 184 points.

In 1949, Ohio State scored 207 points as quarterback Pandel Savic led the school to a tie for the Big Ten championship and a berth in the Rose Bowl, which the Buckeyes won for the first time in school history with a 17-14 triumph over California.

Savic told BSB the method of attack – single-wing or T – varied from game to game, often depending on particular matchups with the opponent.

"We could get in the T, and if I saw something, we could shift into the single wing then," Savic said. "I would move over from underneath the center and I'd go two or three steps and then the ball could be snapped back directly to the tailback or the fullback. From there, we could run some plays we called the buck-lateral series where the fullback got the ball and he started to come up, and I could spin and he would hand me the ball and I could turn and throw from there. It varied, and it was a pretty good offense really overall."

Fesler's offense hit its peak a year later, piling up 286 points with Vic Janowicz, a junior from Elyria, Ohio, starring at halfback. A multitalented weapon, Janowicz led the Big Ten in total offense (703 yards)

and scoring (48 points) during conference play and went on to win the Heisman Trophy. He passed for 561 yards and ran for 314 in the Buckeyes' nine games, but he would not reprise that performance as a senior.

With Hayes installing his offense after Fesler resigned under pressure at the conclusion of the 1950 season, Janowicz became just another cog in the machine as a senior. He led the team in rushing (376 yards), but quarterback Tony Curcillo took over the passing lead with 912 yards. Janowicz touched the ball 138 times in '51, 54 fewer than the year before.

The switch proved to be a painful one for the team as a whole. The Buckeyes' offensive output slipped from 31.8 points per game to a meager 12.1.

There would be better days ahead, of course.

### Keeping Up With The West

Hayes' program did not need much time to get established.

He won his first national championship in 1954 with a team that averaged 24.9 points per game and added another three years later with a 9-1 squad that piled up 267 points. His third national title team averaged 24.5 points per game while going undefeated



JOSH WINSLOW

**DIFFERENT LOOK** – The Ohio State offense under Urban Meyer will not resemble recent versions.

(9-0-1) in 1961, but that season had a bitter ending as a vote of the university's Faculty Council denied the Buckeyes a trip to the Rose Bowl.

That sent Ohio State into a five-year Big Ten title drought, but Hayes rallied to bring in what would prove to be one of the best classes of all time for 1967.

When the "Super Sophomores" became eligible to play in '68, Hayes gave them a new weapon courtesy of newly hired assistant coach George Chaump, who suggested Hayes supplement his venerable T with the I-formation that was popping up around the country, notably at USC.

Continued On Page 12

## ...Has Surely Shown Smith Happy With Rebound From Previous Year's Issues

 By **JEFF SVOBODA**  
 Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

One year ago, it is safe to say the Ohio State athletic department was in a state of flux and uncertainty as it went through what were the dog days of summer in more ways than one.

Wildly popular and successful football head coach Jim Tressel, perhaps the best mentor the program had ever known, had resigned May 30 after admitting to NCAA violations. History-making quarterback Terrelle Pryor chose to move on a few days later, and the school was in the midst of preparing a response to college sports' ruling body while investigating seemingly endless claims of wrongdoing ranging from sweetheart car deals to rigged raffles.

Add all of it up and Ohio State's name was being battered across the country in media reports and

fan message board postings. As a result, many thought the seat occupied by athletic director Gene Smith was as hot as the summer temperatures.

One year later, then, it's fair to say the athletic program headed by Smith has made a major rebound. After a tough football season – one that featured more NCAA controversy and ended with a 6-7 record, the program's first below .500 since 1988 – the school quickly hired two-time national championship coach Urban Meyer, an Ohio native who brings a nearly spotless résumé and loads of enthusiasm to Columbus.

There was also the negativity of a one-year bowl ban levied in December, but that decision brought to a close an NCAA investigation that at times appeared to threaten the very fabric of the Ohio State athletic department.



MATTHEW HAGER

**BETTER TIMES** – Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith has more to smile about this summer, a year after the football scandal that ended the Jim Tressel era.

Continued On Page 18

## Postseason Change Does Not Solve All Problems

The four-team playoff system announced June 26 by college football really isn't a playoff at all. In reality, it should be called "The BCS Plus One."

In case you haven't been paying attention, beginning in 2014, the national championship at the Football Bowl Subdivision – or whatever level they're calling Division I-A these days – will be determined by a mini-tournament consisting of four teams. It replaces the Bowl Championship Series, which fans had come to hate, which was a micro-mini-tournament consisting of two teams. In other words, the new format simply expands the failed and much-maligned BCS model by only two teams.

Nevertheless, university presidents are sore from slapping themselves on the backs after announcing this brave new endeavor. "A four-team playoff doesn't go too far," Virginia Tech president Charles Steger told reporters. "It goes just the right amount. We are very pleased with this new arrangement."

Likewise, most of the fan sentiment seemed optimistic that anything would be preferable to the BCS. Unfortunately, this is almost exactly like the BCS. You still don't have to win your conference or division to qualify. Big-name, well-heeled conferences will continue to receive favorable treatment, and the selection process went from bad to worse.

When the university presidents had the chance to eliminate the human element from the selection process, they proceeded to implement a process that relies 100 percent on the human element. No computerized rankings, no scientific polling, just a bunch of conference commissioners, athletic directors, former coaches and/or media members coming self-equipped with whatever personal bias they might harbor.

For argument's sake, let's say that some season in the not too distant future, you have a final regular-season poll that shows undefeated LSU, USC, Ohio State and Boise State in the top four spots with a once-beaten (likely by LSU) Alabama in the No. 5 position. Does anyone truly believe a selection committee would vote Boise State into the four-team tournament over Alabama?

Perhaps you could make a strength-of-schedule argument against Boise State. Remember, though, that the Broncos are moving to the Big East in 2013.

If you don't like the aforementioned scenario, how about this one: Ohio State is the only undefeated team at the end of the regular season, but Alabama, LSU, USC, Oregon, Texas, Oklahoma and Clemson each have just one loss. Now what do you do? I guess that would depend upon how many selection committee members have ties to those schools.

The obvious way to have gone – obvious to everyone apparently except for those who have foisted this latest farce upon us – was to completely dismantle the BCS and go to an eight-team playoff. Personally, I would prefer at least a 16-team format – Division I-AA is expanding its playoff system from 20 to 24 teams in 2013 – but I could have lived with eight.

A major reason expanded formats are far superior is that you are virtually assured of getting the best teams into the playoff. With only four teams in the mix – as everyone found out with only two – there will be some team with a legitimate beef nearly every year that it has been left out of the mix. That wouldn't happen with an eight-team format. Very rarely are you going to have a No.

9-ranked team in any final regular-season poll that has a salient argument for why it should have a chance to play for the national championship.

Yet, BCS executive director Bill Hancock had the audacity to describe the new four-team format this way: "It's an awesome day. It's a historic day. It's a great day for college football."

### EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

It was so awesome and so historic that the university presidents stuck us with the new system through 2025. There will be no trial period to tweak any unforeseen problems or discover if this thing works at all. In essence, fans of college football received the most watered-down playoff format possible under the guidelines college football's hierarchy set for itself – namely the continuation of unequal access, the retention of the current bowl structure and total, tight-fisted control.

In the end, the BCS is history. But the BS remains.

#### No Happiness In Happy Valley

I have been thinking a lot lately about Penn State football as it pertains to the child sexual abuse scandal that put former assistant coach Jerry Sandusky in prison for the rest of his life.

Mostly, I can't get out of my mind the puzzled look on Sandusky's face as he was led away June 22 after being found guilty on 45 of 48 counts that ranged from child endangerment to involuntary deviate sexual intercourse.

It seemed Sandusky truly thought he had done nothing wrong. That is a sentiment seemingly shared by a vast cross-section of those inhabiting the tight-knit cocoon that is State College. Penn State football will continue, of course, with new head coach Bill O'Brien stepping into the shoes of the late Joe Paterno, and Beaver Stadium will routinely attract crowds of more than 100,000 fans this fall.

But the lid has been blown off the dirty little Sandusky secret, and with it has gone the previously spotless reputation of Penn State football.

Despite protestations from those either unwilling or unable to think otherwise, Paterno bore at least a modicum of responsibility for what happened. After all, Paterno helped recruit Sandusky to play at Penn State, kept him on as a graduate assistant on his first staff in 1966 and then lured him back to State College in 1969.

Now, emails have surfaced that appear to indicate Paterno knew much more than he admitted about the 2001 shower incident involving Sandusky and a young boy.

Exactly how much Paterno knew will always be a source of conjecture since the legendary coach is no longer around to confirm or deny his culpability. What remains, however, are Sandusky's victims, who will undoubtedly seek retribution from a university that apparently harbored a known child sexual predator.

Additionally, if Penn State president Graham Spanier and athletic director Tim Curley did not alert the proper authorities to the 2001 allegations against Sandusky – and the recently uncovered emails indicate

precisely that – how could the NCAA view their actions as anything less than lack of institutional control?

I realize the NCAA never again wants to implement the so-called death penalty that left the SMU football program in ruins from which it has never recovered. Yet, if the NCAA is ever to use its nuclear option again, now might be the time – for no other reason than to set a precedent that this type of behavior as well as attempting to cover it up will not be tolerated by a civilized society.

Finally, a word regarding the deplorable circuslike atmosphere outside the Centre County Courthouse in Bellefonte, Pa., after the Sandusky verdict was announced.

The case did not involve some game with an outcome to be cheered. Yes, there was some satisfaction that a serial child sex abuser got what was coming to him. But we should never lose sight of the fact that several young lives have been forever scarred and a once-noble institution will undoubtedly buckle under the weight of future litigation.

I don't believe any of that to be a source for celebration.

#### A Few Parting Shots

- I have never been a proponent of paying college athletes, but I'm beginning to change my mind at least where football players are concerned. No one would argue that football is the single largest moneymaker for any athletic department with football players among the most marketable faces on campus. That said, and in light of the increased revenue of the enlarged "playoff" format, not to mention the ongoing studies surrounding concussions, don't these young men deserve a little something extra?

- The NCAA said June 29 it would reconsider scholarship reductions imposed on the Boise State football program. The university appealed the sanctions, arguing that the NCAA's history of scholarship reduction penalties was inconsistent with penalties imposed in the Boise State case, and the appeals committee agreed. In light of that ruling, perhaps Ohio State should at least explore the possibility of appealing the football team's postseason ban since that penalty also seems inconsistent with penalties the NCAA has levied in similar cases.

- While we're on the subject of NCAA rules, how ludicrous is the one that allows athletes to graduate from one school and transfer to another with immediate eligibility? Wisconsin benefited from the rule last year with quarterback Russell Wilson, and the Badgers will do so again this year with Wilson's replacement, Danny O'Brien. The best news of all for Wisconsin is that O'Brien – formerly of Maryland and the ACC Rookie of the Year in 2010 – has two years of eligibility remaining.

- July 1 marked an important day on the college football calendar – the first day schools celebrated realignment and officially joined their new conferences. In case you need a reminder, TCU and West Virginia joined the Big 12, replacing Missouri and Texas A&M, which each jumped to the SEC. Temple will take West Virginia's place while returning to the Big East, TCU leaves the Mountain West to be replaced by Nevada, Fresno State and Hawaii, and Massachusetts fills the MAC slot vacated by Temple. Who fills the void created in the WAC by the mass exodus of Nevada, Fresno State and Hawaii? Texas State and Texas-San Antonio – as if you really cared.

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No. 1	Sept. 10	No. 13	December
No. 2	Sept. 17	No. 14	Jan. 14
No. 3	Sept. 24	No. 15	Jan. 28
No. 4	Oct. 1	No. 16	Feb. 11
No. 5	Oct. 8	No. 17	March 3
No. 6	Oct. 15	No. 18	March 17
No. 7	Oct. 29	No. 19	March 31
No. 8	Nov. 5	No. 20	April 14
No. 9	Nov. 12	No. 21	May
No. 10	Nov. 19	No. 22	June
No. 11	Nov. 26	No. 23	July
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## OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

# It's Coming: College Football Adopts Playoff

By **JEFF SVOBODA**  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

After years of debate and dissatisfaction over the way college football determined its national champion, a playoff is on the horizon for the sport.

College presidents met June 26 and agreed on a four-team, seeded playoff that will begin with the 2014 season. That came one week after conference commissioners and Notre Dame athletic director Jack Swarbrick recommended that setup be used to determine college football's national champion.

About one month after telling reporters that his conference preferred to stay with the status quo – in which the top two teams in the BCS standings, a matrix of human polls and computer rankings, regardless of league affiliation battled for the title – Big Ten commissioner Jim Delany trumpeted the new system.

"The Big Ten Conference is pleased with the decision made by the presidential oversight committee to implement a four-team playoff for college football," Delany said. "We feel that this system will protect the regular season, preserve the tradition of bowl games and further enhance the Big Ten's partnership with the Pac-12 and Rose Bowl while simultaneously allowing for great innovation."

"It was a great day for college football student-athletes, coaches, administrators and fans."

As for the reason for the Big Ten's change in tune, Delany admitted that public outcry – which has existed for years but reached a fever pitch after this past title game rematched SEC West foes Alabama and LSU – and lower television ratings signaled that change was in the offing.

"I'm not suggesting people can't criticize," he said. "I'm just saying the level, the drumbeat of criticism, was so significant over time that it forced the change."

The playoff will be the first ever in the history of Division I-A football, which dawned in 1869 and has used bowl games instead of a playoff for its postseason since the beginning of the 20th century. It replaces the BCS, a four-bowl rotation which will have lasted for 16 seasons when the current contract runs out after the Rose Bowl hosts the BCS National Championship Game to conclude the '13 campaign.

The presidential oversight committee agreed on a 12-year contract for the new system.

Though some items will still need to be ironed out, the framework has become clear. The two semifinal games each season will rotate year-by-year between six bowl sites and take place on either New Year's Eve or New Year's Day. The championship game will be bid out to a neutral site, and the contest will

take place on a Monday evening later in the month.

The Big Ten and Pac-12 will also be able to continue their tradition of having league champions that do not qualify for the playoff meet in the Rose Bowl. In addition, the SEC and Big 12 have agreed to a bowl that will match teams from their conferences, while the ACC and another league are expected to ink a deal with the Orange Bowl to continue that tie-in.

When it comes to determining who will take part in the four-team playoff, the BCS standings will no longer play a part. Instead, a selection committee – which the NCAA uses in most sports to determine postseason fields – will come together to pick those four teams. They will be seeded one through four, with the top team facing the No. 4 squad and Nos. 2 and 3 battling.

The selection committee's members still must be chosen, the bowls that will be part of the deal must be selected and the all-important monetary issues have to be sorted out, but Delany said the framework in place is solid and has broad-based support.

"We're very unified," Delany said. "There are issues that have yet to be finalized. There's always devil in the detail, from the model to the selection process, but clearly we've made a lot of progress."

The response from fans and media across the country has been generally positive, as the debate about which teams have deserved to be in the BCS championship game in past years has been strong. In 2004, an undefeated Auburn team did not make the title game, while such schools as TCU and Boise State have posted unblemished campaigns in recent years but not had access to a national title.

Some years have resulted in consensus matchups – such as in 2002 when Ohio State and Miami (Fla.) were both undefeated – but others have produced decisions that were questioned, such as in 2008 when Texas and Oklahoma each lost only one game but Oklahoma – which fell to Texas at a neutral site during the regular season – went on to the championship only to lose to Florida.

But while many see doubling the number of teams that will play for a title as a positive outcome, others see it as the first step toward a monster playoff – one that will eventually reach eight, 16 or perhaps even 24 teams like the newly approved Division I-AA format.

Some also expect similar controversy to the past decade and a half, as the committee that chooses the top four teams will certainly be left open to criticism should the public disagree with its choices.

No matter what, major change is on the way.

## Ohio State Reacts

For many years, those with the biggest

stake in things at Ohio State have been against changes to the postseason system.

President E. Gordon Gee was perhaps the most outspoken. The man known for his ability to turn a phrase – both good and bad – famously drew a line in the sand a few years ago putting Ohio State firmly on the non-playoff side of the debate.

"I'll say it again – over my dead body," Gee told The Lantern, the school newspaper, in 2009. "Mark that down – we will not have a playoff in this era – period."

More recently, new head coach Urban Meyer said he was against the possibility of a playoff upon being hired.

"I wouldn't change (the BCS)," he said in January. "I love what it is. I really do."

The former Florida coach pointed to his experience winning BCS titles in 2006 and '08 when discussing his stance. His Gators captured two titles under the modified BCS system, which began in 2006 with the creation of the BCS National Championship Game.

Before that, the title was determined in a 1 vs. 2 contest that happened as part of a bowl game, but the system adopted in '06 moved the matchup into the newly created title game staged at one of the bowl sites about a week after the rest of the BCS games. That left five games as part of the BCS, with the host site also staging its original bowl close to New Year's Day.

"We were the first school (in 2006) to be a week removed from all the other bowl games and that was awesome, that whole experience," he said. "You couldn't do any better."

Meyer also was against adding games through a playoff because of player welfare. Under the new system, a team that wins its conference title game and then makes the national title game will play 15 contests, while teams are limited to 14 now.

"We were on fumes in '08 when we beat Alabama (in the SEC title game)," Meyer said. "If we had to play the next week or the next two weeks or three weeks or four weeks, you're toast. I don't know how you'd do it. Those teams were completely spent."

Meyer has not released any statements since the playoff deal has been announced, but BSB did speak with athletic director Gene Smith about the situation. Smith also spoke of how he was against any changes but said Ohio State would adapt with the times.

"We kind of evolved, just like the final recommendations evolved," he said. "The status quo was fine with us. The regular season is the best it's ever been, so initially the status quo was fine with us. When we realized we had

no choice, we moved to review the plus-one (proposal, which would have added a post-bowl title contest). We've looked at it hard and it will work."

"Then we moved to the one-through-four model and started to look at it and began to embrace it."

Smith said the school is also in favor of some of the details that have been hashed out, such as the establishment of a selection committee that will weigh such factors as strength of schedule and a conference championship.

"We felt very strongly that if we were going to have it, it had to have a human element to it in some form or fashion," he said. "The polls are good, but there's weakness in the polls. We felt strength of schedule was important, otherwise everyone's nonconference schedule would be very interesting. And then we felt that there should be some credit to conference champions in some form or fashion."

Smith was also one of those in favor of on-campus sites hosting early playoff rounds, a Big Ten idea that was ditched early in the process.

"We realized we probably couldn't win the campus sites option, which was a great idea, but none of us at the end of the day after we went through it thought we could win enough votes to win that," he said. "I would have absolutely loved it. I think it would have been cool, but we realized we couldn't get the votes."

"As you go through this process, you're evaluating what is possible and what is not. I think that's why you saw all the conferences from the beginning, you heard a lot of stuff and you saw people shifting positions because the collaboration was going on. We were part of that. We shifted positions as the collaboration was going on. You hear pros and cons and what's realistic."

With on-campus sites out of the picture, the usage of bowl sites to stage the semifinals was important to Smith and Ohio State.

"We still feel that playing the semifinals in the bowl games is very important," he said. "The bowl system is good. It's solid. The bowl structure, the local organizing committees are organized to host these events. They know how to do it. They know what the kids need. It won't be like bowl games because let's say you play on Saturday, you'll go in on Thursday, play on Saturday and go home. You won't be going down on Sunday and staying the whole week. It's a whole new ballgame."

"So we feel in the Big Ten that the bowls know how to do this, and the semifinals are so important."

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# Offenses Have Evolved Throughout OSU History

Continued From Page 1

Rex Kern, who would take over at quarterback in '68, told BSB that Hayes initially resisted the move before relenting. That turned out to be the right move.

The Buckeyes doubled their scoring output (from 16.1 to 32.3 points per game), went undefeated and won the national championship in 1968.

Looking back decades later, Kern said he felt the I-formation enhanced what the Buckeyes could do by giving them more ways to use their weapons, including fullbacks Jim Otis and John Brockington and halfbacks Dave Brungard, Leo Hayden and Larry Zelina.

"The I-formation gave you the opportunity to get around the corner much quicker," he said. "The old-timers will remember the old button-shoe (his term for the 'full-house' T-formation) offense was from tackle to tackle. The I-formation was really from tackle to sideline, so it really just expanded the field and gave us more attack points. We could put our skill people against our opponents' skill people instead of us putting our interior line against the interior defense. We were good at either one, but this just gave us a better opportunity."

Hayes did not completely abandon the T. It remained his weapon of choice once the Buckeyes reached the red zone.

"Woody loved the straight T, and he wouldn't let anybody tell him any different," Kern said. "Always in short yardage or goal line we would go to straight T offense. As the season progressed, he would say, 'Do you know how many touchdowns we scored inside the 10-yard line?' And he would give the number then ask what offense they used and the answer was the T – but that was the only formation we ran then!"

"His point was this is my bread and butter and when I need it I'm going back to it."

Kern threw for 972 yards and ran for another 534, a rushing total second on the team to Otis' 985.

The 10-0 Buckeyes piled up 323 points, but they were just getting warmed up. They totaled 383 a season later despite playing one fewer game, though a late-season upset loss to Michigan kept the team from repeating as national champions.

"When you look at our sophomore year we were still refining our offense," Kern said. "We found more things to do our sophomore year as we got better and better and better at it, and then of course our junior year we did exceedingly well."

## From Ice Age To Stone Age

The end of the Hayes era gave way to the leadership of one of his former assistants, Earle Bruce. The men share many common traits when it comes to coaching football, but Bruce was more willing to open things up somewhat to take advantage of another sophomore quarterback who like Kern wore No. 10.

This time it was Art Schlichter, one of the most ballyhooed recruits in Ohio history and a freshman starter in '78, Hayes' last season.

Schlichter, who is currently serving a 10-year prison sentence for running a bogus ticket-selling business, told BSB during a 2009 interview that the offense was more complex his sophomore season.

"It was a whole different ballgame with Coach Bruce," Schlichter said. "We started throwing the ball on first down a little bit

more, and though we weren't racking up the yardage we did in the later years, we finally mixed the passing game in with the run and made the passing game effective enough that it helped the run. That's really what you want to do. You run to set up the pass and you pass to set up the run. We started doing that more and we had more success offensively."

After completing 87 of 175 passes for 1,250 yards in '78, Schlichter went 105 for 200 for 1,816 yards as a sophomore.

Whatever differences there were between the Bruce and Hayes offenses, they shared at least one significant trait – all of the passing was out of play-action, regardless of down and distance. Schlichter never dropped straight back after taking the snap.

"That was a result of our protection," said Schlichter, who described the offensive progression as moving from the Ice Age to the Stone Age. "Coach Bruce liked the turn-back protection. He thought it protected the quarterback as much as anything, so we used that protection to play-action pass. Third-and-long, we were throwing out of a play-action set. I had hoped that we would have gotten away from that, but we never really did."

Schlichter led the Buckeyes to within a point of the national championship in 1979 and ended up with just about every Ohio State passing record before he was finished. His single-season record of 2,551 yards in 1981 has since been broken three times, but his career marks of 7,547 yards and 951 pass attempts remain school records, as does his mark of 458 yards in a loss to Florida State in 1981.

Schlichter's wishes for more ways to deploy the passing game were eventually granted, but not until seven years after he had used up his eligibility.

Bruce was fired with one game left in the 1987 season, and successor John Cooper brought in offensive coordinator Jim Colletto to jazz up the aerial attack. Colletto's solution seems quaint by today's standards but was practically revolutionary in Columbus in 1988.

"All we're trying to do is give the offense a few more weapons to try and play the game with," Colletto said then. "The drop-back will open up the game and make it more difficult for defenses to gang up on us. We're trying to become a proficient drop-back passing team."

"And we will pass on first down. That is something we keep careful track of."

Among formations the Buckeyes would run were the I, the split-back, one-back and shotgun.

Colletto seemed to feel the need to explain the latter was not as revolutionary as it might seem to those not used to seeing it at Ohio State.

"That can be a very exciting part of an offense," he told reporters in April 1988. "It will be part of our everyday plan. We don't consider it unusual at all. Most quarterbacks welcome the chance to operate from the shotgun."

Although everyone left spring practice saying the right things that year, early results were not too promising.

The passing game actually lost some proficiency (from a 54.1 percent completion rate to 51.8) from 1987 to '88, and the offense managed only five more total points (224 to 229). The Buckeyes stumbled from 6-4-1 in Bruce's last campaign to 4-6-1 in '88 under Cooper, but the offense was hardly alone in taking blame for that.

Cooper shared openly his surprise at the lack of talent he found on the roster, and he was forced to break in a new quarterback that season.

That was Greg Frey, a highly touted signal caller who had run a wide-open offense at Cincinnati St. Xavier High School (where Meyer was a 21-year-old coaching intern) and who was happy to see the changes Colletto had in store.

He completed 152 of 293 passes for 2,028 yards as a sophomore in 1988 and finished his career second only to Schlichter in career passing yards (6,316) at Ohio State. He remains fourth on that list and is the only Buckeye to throw for more than 2,000 yards in three different seasons.

Frey is a private quarterbacks coach today and told BSB he still appreciates what Colletto brought to Columbus in the late '80s.

"Jim Colletto was a great strategist when it came to the passing game," Frey said.

"We did have a very modern passing game. Not the one-back, four-wide stuff you see now, but he understood the passing game quite well."

## Tressel's Tweaks

By the time Jim Tressel took over for Cooper in 2001, the landscape of college football had started to shift.

Oklahoma won the national championship the previous season with a combination of stifling defense and a pass-happy offense.

Closer to home, two of the three teams that tied for the Big Ten title in 2000 were running spread offenses as well. Michigan won a share of the title with its familiar pro-style attack, but Purdue and Northwestern crashed the party with unique versions of the spread.

That had folks in Columbus wondering if their new coach, a man who had operated largely below the radar as head coach at Division I-AA Youngstown State, might do the same.

"I've never been much of a revolutionary guy," Tressel said during spring practice in 2001. "There are certain fundamentals that are long-standing that have stood the test of time. Your offense has got to be in concert with your defense and special teams. It cannot be an entity in and of itself."

He went on to describe the importance of having an effective running game, citing a study the coaching staff did when it was hired that revealed the Buckeyes had won more than 90 percent of the time they ran for 200 yards or more in a game during the previous 10 seasons.

However, offensive coordinator Jim Bollman did not rule out an infusion of spread formations, and players such as two-year starting quarterback Steve Bellisari spoke excitedly of using more four-receiver sets both for running and passing.

Reporters allowed to attend practice noted the expanded use of the shotgun, and a pass-heavy spring game (57 pass attempts compared to just 32 runs) bolstered fans' hopes for a versatile attack come fall.

As it turned out, the change was not drastic. The percentage of run plays increased from 60.5 in 2000 to 65.7 in the first year under Tressel, and the team's scoring declined from 27.6 points per game to 26.0.

Tressel stressed the main differences involved the language used to call the plays rather than the actions themselves, something quarterback Craig Krenzel confirmed was the case in a recent interview with BSB.

"Styles weren't that drastically different, but nomenclature changes," said Krenzel, who was a third-year sophomore in 2001. "Understanding what you're trying to accomplish changes, and once you can get through all that you just have to be prepared. Life changes all the time, you have to be able to prepare, to grow and adapt."

That was particularly true for Krenzel, who began the season as the third-string quarterback behind Bellisari and classmate Scott McMullen but ended it in much difference circumstances.

Bellisari had an uneven beginning to the season but reeled off three consecutive 200-yard passing games from the last week of October into the middle of November.

He had the Buckeyes in contention for the Big Ten title until a DUI arrest sidelined him for the last two games of the regular season. McMullen started a 34-22 loss to Illinois that knocked Ohio State out of the Big Ten race, and Tressel went to Krenzel the following week for the traditional regular-season finale against Michigan.

The unranked Buckeyes traveled to Ann Arbor as underdogs but knocked off the 11th-ranked Wolverines with a stirring 26-20 victory.

They won at Michigan Stadium for the first time since Bruce's last game in 1987 with a formula that would become familiar to Buckeye fans during the following decade – a strong running game and dominant defense.

In the years to follow, Tressel adapted to his personnel and tweaked his schemes accordingly from year to year, including the infusion of some of the option game with quarterbacks Troy Smith and Terrelle Pryor that is a signature of Meyer's attack.

That figures to help bridge the gap from the previous era to this one.

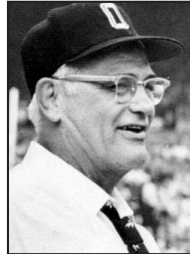
"I think it's not as big a change for them now as it would have been from maybe 2004 or 2003," said Krenzel, who led the Buckeyes to the 2002 national championship.

"The funny thing about offensive football is that coaches are all trying to do the same thing. They're all trying to create space and creating favorable matchups. They're going to do it in different ways and different formations and with different personnel, but you're constantly trying to get to the same endgame – that's creating space and creating favorable matchups."

And so as Hayes and Kern shared that common goal with Tressel and Smith, Meyer figures to do the same with Braxton Miller.

Time will tell how his tenure matches those who came before him.

BSB staff writer Ari Wasserman contributed to this story.



Woody Hayes



Earle Bruce



# Smith Speaks To BSB About Range Of Topics

Continued From Page 1

With the football program seemingly having returned to an upward track, Ohio State showed the strength of its overall athletic department during the 2011-12 academic and athletic seasons.

The school finished the campaign fourth in the standings for the Directors' Cup, the yearly trophy that tabulates the on-field success of a school across the breadth of its sports. Ohio State finished in the top four for the second consecutive year after posting a second-place finish in 2010-11.

The Buckeyes' fencing and synchronized swimming programs earned national championships, while the men's basketball squad captured the attention of not just Buckeye Nation but the entire country by reaching the Final Four for the second time under Thad Matta.

In addition, the wrestling and rowing teams finished fifth in the nation, men's tennis reached the NCAA quarterfinals, men's and women's gymnastics each placed seventh in the country and the field hockey, women's soccer and women's volleyball programs reached the final 16 of the NCAA tournament.

On the individual level, Ohio State saw Christina Manning capture a pair of national championships on the track on the way to being named the Big Ten's Suzy Favor Female Athlete of the Year. Wrestler Logan Stieber; synchronized swimmers Yuliya Maryanko, Alex Beckett and Paige Ramsey; fencers Katarzyna Dabrowa and Zain Shaito; the rowing First Varsity Four crew of Alex Sawatzki, Taylore Urban, Katie King, Stephanie Johnson and Emily Ralph; and men's tennis athletes Chase Buchanan and Blaz Rola also won national event titles.

Moreover, 10 current or former Ohio State athletes have qualified for the 2012 Summer Olympic Games that will begin in July in London, England, proving yet again that Buckeye athletes can and do succeed on the international scale.

Ohio State's athletes had a banner year in the classroom, as well. A record 548 finished winter quarter with cumulative grade-point averages of 3.0 or higher, allowing them to be honored at the annual Scholar-Athlete Dinner in May.

In all, 174 athletes graduated from Ohio State during the academic year, and the Buckeyes led the league again in Academic

All-Big Ten choices. Five athletes – led by men's basketball star Aaron Craft – were named Academic All-Americans, and five programs including football finished in the top 10 percent of their sports in the NCAA's Academic Progress Rate.

With all that in mind, Smith was in a good mood when he sat down to review the year with Buckeye Sports Bulletin on June 21. Speaking in a conference room at the Fawcett Center, just down the hall from his office, Smith was at ease when talking about both the hardships and accomplishments of the past 12 months.

What follows is a partial transcript of the interview with Smith.

**Buckeye Sports Bulletin:** A year ago at this time, you had just parted ways with a very popular and successful football coach. You still had NCAA issues on the horizon. Recently, you said you just had to get to "blue skies" at that time. Now do you feel like you have gotten through that rough patch and can feel pretty good about things?

**Gene Smith:** "Yes, it's behind us. It's obviously a teachable moment, a lot of things we've learned, some hard challenges throughout that process, but we are (past it). We have a new leader for our football program who is doing a marvelous job. Our kids have bought into his plan. We're moving forward, so we're to blue sky."

**BSB:** And even from a whole athletic department standpoint, not just football, you have to be encouraged by the success on the field and off the field.

**Smith:** "It's unbelievable. We've had such a great year. We're fourth in the Directors' Cup, which is four years in a row where we're in the top 10. That's the best run we've ever had. Academically, we had 174 graduates this year, which I'm proud of. We had 312 Academic All-Big Ten honorees, and our overall GPA was 3.07. It was a phenomenal year for us on a lot of fronts."

**BSB:** We'll get a little more in-depth with that in a second, but going back to saying you had to get to blue skies – was it hard going through it to know that you would eventually get there? Did you have to remind yourself every day that it wasn't going to be

a permanent thing, that you were going to eventually reach a point where it was going to be all right?

**Smith:** "We did. I had to come to work each day with that focus. We couldn't lose our primary responsibility, which was to focus on our student-athletes, help them have the experience that we promised them. Now that we've finished the year, we look back and we were able to do that."

"I had to be supportive of our staff. I wasn't the only one going through this. There are 350 employees – people who work in our business office, people who work in the camp office, and they all were stressed by that experience. I had to be sure that I was providing the shadow of a leader and making sure that they stayed focused and stayed positive and understood that we still have to serve our kids."

"It was hard every day, and then there was uncertainty. You watched – there was uncertainty what was ahead of us each week. But blue sky brought certainty, finality, and we moved on."

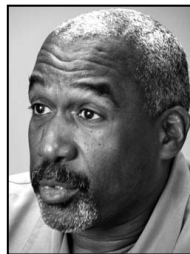
**BSB:** You told us in Boston when the men's basketball team made the Final Four that there's not a lot of universities like Ohio State that could have gone through what the school went through and gotten through it the way Ohio State did. What do you think it is about Ohio State that allows it to do that?

**Smith:** "I think first and foremost, Buckeye Nation is strong and deep. We have a great institution that is stronger and stronger every single year, a great, rich tradition and history. So we have a platform that allows us to recover, and we're in a great state. If you look at Ohio and look at what we're able to do, particularly in football, we're able to recruit talent in our state and then obviously go outside of it, but we have a great base. It allows us to recover faster."

**BSB:** It's been more than six months since you hired Urban Meyer. He hasn't coached a game yet ...

**Smith:** "(Laughs) I remind him that. He hasn't played a game yet, so enjoy the moment."

**BSB:** He is undefeated, but I think at the time you said you thought you'd hired the best coach in America. How has the working relationship been there?



Gene Smith

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**Smith:** "It's been great. He's done everything the right way. He's very communicative, so we're always texting or calling one another. He's just on top of things. I really meant what I said when I introduced him, and I still introduce him this way."

"We are all the sum of our experiences, and for him to have that experience at Bowling Green and then go to a Utah, which is culturally a totally different place, and then go to Florida – culturally a different place – as the CEO, what a growth opportunity to go through that."

"But the greatest unique thing that we'd all love to have in life is a chance to step away from our jobs for a year and evaluate, to pause and say, 'OK, what did I learn? What could I have done better?' And then to have a chance in a role (as an ESPN commentator) to evaluate other people who do our job and then go back in it – I think anybody that has that opportunity has a chance to be better, so he was ready on all levels."

"We're in a great situation because of timing and place and everything that we're able to get him here, but he's done a great job – his staff, recruiting, current kids, community work, work around the state. He's in Cincinnati and Cleveland throwing out the first pitch (at Reds and Indians games in June). He's been everywhere, and that's what we needed him to do to help us move forward and continue to move toward our goals. It's been great."

**BSB:** I have to ask about current events. His contract was released the other day, and there was strong compliance-related language in that. I think the answer is obvious, but what prompted you to make that clear when you approached that?

**Smith:** "Well, we already had a pretty strong contract with compliance things in it, but the learning experience over this past year afforded us (a chance) to look at it differently and put some more things in it that made it stronger. We were more definitive (in terms of) communication, so it was important to do. We beefed it up a little bit."

**BSB:** And he's a guy that hasn't had any troubles where he's been before.

**Smith:** "No, no, a clean background from that perspective, so we were fortunate. I know he probably peeked at it, but it's not something that we have to say, 'How are you doing relative to your contract?' We don't live that way, but we felt it was important to protect one another, not just us but him as well."

**BSB:** Speaking of compliance, there was talk last summer and into the fall that there was going to be a university-wide look at the way compliance things were done. Has that resulted in any changes in the way you do things or any changes since things have happened in the past year?

**Smith:** "We've made a number of procedural changes in how we manage our compliance and how we do certain things. The university is looking at a vice president for compliance that would collapse athletics with other units on campus like the medical center, research and some other areas. Texas does it, and the greatest thing about that is it takes people who do the same job and it brings them together, the intellectual properties in the same room, the regulatory mind-set, so to speak. They can share ideas and experiences and best practices, and we can do better things because of what we might learn from research."

"It's actually happened in our academic area. We moved our academic support in 2006 into our provost's office, and we found that our athletic academic counselors working with the college counselors on a closer basis day to day, we got better."

## COVER STORY

"Then as far as inside, it's just procedures on how we track our cars, how we track housing, things of that nature – procedural things, paperwork-type of things. Education, there was a huge change in the way we educate. More small groups as opposed to big groups, a little bit more focus that way."

**BSB:** Finishing up the football aspect of this, I have to ask this, as you look back over the past year and everything that happened starting from March 8 when we had that press conference (to announce Tressel's NCAA violations), is there anything that you wish you or the department had done differently through the whole thing?

**Smith:** "Obviously, we wish we weren't there, first and foremost, but of course. You're always looking in the rearview mirror for a short period of time to make sure you learned everything from the experience, and then you move on. The things that we felt we needed to improve upon, we've done that. We've looked in the rearview mirror, evaluated, shut it down, move on. So that's where we are."

**BSB:** Anything you care to elaborate on?

**Smith:** "No, just more compliance things. We had those accusations about the cars, so we strengthened our registration program. There were no findings there, but we looked at it and said, 'You know what? We probably could strengthen this part and this part.' So we have a little bit better checks and balances on that, things of that nature. But obviously the biggest thing is we wish we weren't there."

**BSB:** I wanted to switch gears and talk about academic success. When I talked to Coach Meyer at the Scholar-Athlete Dinner, he mentioned talking to you about how he was stunned by how many people were there. He had never heard of an athletic department that was succeeding that way academically. What leads to that, in your eyes?

**Smith:** "It was huge. We had 548 Scholar-Athletes, and the main thing for us, when I came here in 2005 and looked at our academic support program, we did not have an individualized focus. My whole mantra was, 'Guys, we have to shift gears. We have to take this athlete and figure out, what are their strengths and what are they deficient at?'"

"So we were able to develop individualized academic game plans for each athlete that comes in here. Obviously, a lot of them are very strong, but for even the strong ones, how do we help them get postgraduate scholarships? This past year we had \$64,000 that was won by student-athletes and postgraduate scholarships. We focus on both ends."

"If you're deficient, how do we strengthen that? How do we encourage you to be as competitive in the classroom as you are on the field or in the gym? That's our mantra – and in the first six weeks. How do we strengthen that deficiency? If it's math or English composition, whatever it is, how do we help you overcome that and give you the confidence to be competitive in the classroom?"

"I'm pretty passionate about that because I'm a product of that. That was what I grew up with in the public school system in Cleveland. When I went to school, I had deficiencies, and I know I was able to overcome them because of that focus. We have a great focus. We have a great academic support team, and our coaches recruit great kids. The numbers are working for us."

**BSB:** Where did the idea for individualized academic plans come from?

**Smith:** "It was groupthink. I led the discussion with our people. The institution had already started looking at whether we should change the location of athletic academic services, so in 2006, we actually made it happen."

"We had apprehension because anytime you take a big unit and give it to somebody else, there's a loss of control – 'Will it really work

the way we theoretically think it will?' And it worked marvelously. In fact, the benefits that were derived, we didn't even project some of them. So the collaboration and the communication, the access to faculty, are so much better because it's in the provost's office and not in our office. Our student-athletes are better served."

"A lot of this is personal because I went to a public school all the way to ninth grade, and I struggled when I made the transition into private school for my last three years. I know that some of our young people come to us and they are deficient in some areas, so I don't want it to be a group thing. I don't want 15 guys sitting in a room for two hours at study table with the books open and we're praying that they're reading."

"I want a check-in system and a check-out system. I want an interview with them when they walk out of the room and ask, 'Tell me, what did you learn in those five chapters that you read?' Then you let them go."

"So that's something that we really focused on that a lot of people don't see. It's really one of the coolest things that we do. And we hired math learning specialists and writing learning specialists in 2007. Those are people who actually focus strictly on strengthening those tools and helping you overcome that deficiency so that you can rock and roll in the classroom."

"It all comes together. It's happening, and our numbers are showing it. Football is huge, and then it's the culture of the coaches. Our coaches bought in. They want to recruit talented kids, but they also make sure that our kids take the time to study and get it done the right way. They'll pull you off the field or pull you out of the pool or whatever."

"Now that Scholar-Athlete Dinner, everybody wants to be there. It's just grown. I think it was 434 (student-athletes) in 2006 and now it's 548. It's a huge jump. Next year, it's got to be bigger. This year we had 900-some athletes – close to 1,000, so we should be (getting bigger). We have a big number so we should grow every year. I love that part."

**BSB:** And then in a similar vein of things people don't talk about as much is the Olympic sports. It's two consecutive top-five Directors' Cup finishes. Does that speak to the overall plan that you have in place and the overall health of the athletic department?

**Smith:** "It really does. We talk about it a lot. Sometimes we create posters and put up Directors' Cup posters, and we have it on our webpage. Our coaches know where their team stands. Everybody watches that thing because that's where we want to be. One day, we want to knock Stanford off the perch. Since its inception in 1994, I think North Carolina is the only other school that's ever won it. We want to knock Stanford off. We have to figure it out. Maybe if we add a sport like archery or something, or bowling would be cool (laughs)."

**BSB:** If only you still had the bowling alley from the old Ohio Union from back in the day.

**Smith:** "That's right! But our coaches buy into (the Directors' Cup standings), our athletes buy into it. They know about it, they track it. It's a standard that you're measured by, and even to be in the top five is phenomenal when you look at the schools. We're four straight years in the top 10. That's huge."

**BSB:** One thing I've wanted to ask is something I've noticed recently. When you got here, you had a lot of coaches who were very successful who had been entrenched for a while. You had a lot of facilities that were built up by Andy Geiger, and he left things in good hands for you.

**Smith:** "He did, oh my goodness."

**BSB:** But recently, you've had some long-term coaches who have left. You've had the whole thing that happened with football. Does this maybe feel more like your athletic department than it ever has before?

**Smith:** "It's funny, I've never operated that way."

**BSB:** I figured you would say that, but it's struck me recently.

**Smith:** "That's not my mantra."

**BSB:** There is change happening, though.

**Smith:** "There is change, no question. But I've never thought of it as mine. It's ours, the institution. I've just never thought of it that way, but my predecessor Andy did a marvelous job doing the heavy lifting. The stadium was huge, that renovation. Building The Schott was significant. Bill Davis Stadium is phenomenal. Jesse Owens Memorial Stadium is an unbelievable facility."

"My thing when I came from a facilities point of view was to continue to focus on the Olympic sport facilities, so we dealt with the softball facility, we dealt with indoor tennis, we moved field hockey out of the football practice area so we could have a football complex."

"People don't see all those moves, but the football piece was very important to us, to build that football practice complex with lights and towers so football has its place, everything contiguous. You talk to Urban about that and he'll tell you there's no better place in the country where your offices are in there in the indoor facility next to the outdoor fields. Everything is there in that space."

"We added some practice fields and some grass fields because you can't have enough grass fields with all the sports we have, not just for the individual sports but for camps. We have 9,500 campers here in less than five weeks this summer, so they're all over the place. So I had to focus on those facilities and we have others down the road we'll be focused on."

"And then with the coaches, there's a leadership time for the right people, and sometimes change is necessary because of the time. We've had some changes, and we've been blessed to hire some good coaches. I think Mark Osiecki in ice hockey is going to do a great job. (Baseball coach) Greg Beals is going to be phenomenal. We just hired Ed Beathea in track. We're coming off one of the top five recruiting classes in track, so it's a huge part of that. Change occurs, and we just have to make sure we find good leaders so that we can stay on this trajectory that we're on."

**BSB:** The news came out recently about the possibility of playing the 2013 spring game in Cincinnati. You're a Cleveland guy, so I'm sure you've heard from people in Cleveland who have had their say.

**Smith:** "I got a couple of texts (laughs)."

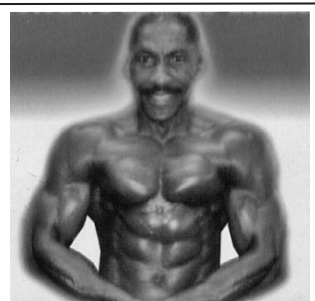
**BSB:** But is it good to take the spring game somewhere else to draw interest, or would you rather it be here?

**Smith:** "Of course we prefer to have it at home in the 'Shoe. We're renovating the 'Shoe next year, which is critical. We'll start as soon as the season is over, and we'll phase it to a point where we can hold commencement because we couldn't get in the way of commencement. We have to do that."

"Urban and I have discussed it. We've been to Cleveland – with intent. I talked to Thad about playing in Cleveland and we played Cleveland State there. We did the two-for-one deal (in football) with Toledo and played in Cleveland (at Cleveland Browns Stadium in 2009)."

"As we talked about it, we just felt like it's Cincinnati's turn. We need to have a presence in Cincinnati. We hadn't been there in a couple of years, so we decided that it made sense. We looked at Columbus Crew Stadium, we looked at Massillon, Ohio, but Cincinnati has a large stadium and we just haven't been down there in a while, so it seemed like the right thing to do."

To read Smith's thoughts on the recently agreed upon college football playoff, see page 11.



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# Not Everyone Is Happy Playoff Is Coming

Somewhere along the way, I missed the memo about how all of us are supposed to be for a playoff in college football. For whatever reason, it has never really bothered me that there was no playoff, which appears to put me in a distinct minority.

Every year that I can remember in my now almost 60 years, a champion was crowned by one process or another and, while I might have quibbled with that champion from time to time, I generally recognized that team. Some years Ohio State was in the equation, even winning it on occasion, and some years it wasn't. But I felt no void in my life without a playoff.

In fact, if the college football powers that be hadn't announced their decision to go to a four-team playoff, I was going to use this space to outline my vision of how a champion should be named.

It was going to be a mock column of sorts, as I was going to outline the way the college landscape was before first the Bowl Alliance and then the Bowl Championship Series, with my "innovative" idea that a limited number of bowl games be played, the most important of them all on New Year's Day, with the champion ultimately being decided by two polls, one made up of college coaches and the other consisting of media members. While the two polls would generally come to a consensus, on rare occasions there might be two national champions.

The centerpiece of my proposal would have been the Rose Bowl, which would have pitted the champions of the Big Ten and Pac-12 in Pasadena and would have been played in the premier time slot of that college football celebration held on Jan. 1. Teams from those like-minded conferences would aspire to earn the berth in Pasadena. The national championship would be a secondary thought and would come, if deserved, only after prevailing in the Rose Bowl.

In the tradition of true satire, I would have speculated that my proposal would have the potential to last for decades, which of course the old system (the basis for my new system), despite any of its flaws, did.

As I think about all of this, I realize that my indifference to the national obsession with a playoff is based in my growing up as part of the Rose Bowl generation. For Buckeye fans of that generation, the national championship was third in the successful season progression. The first goal for an Ohio State team was to beat Michigan, and frequently that critical victory led to a trip to the Mecca for fans of Big Ten teams and those of the Pac-12 and its predecessors – the Rose Bowl.

The beauty of that priority system was that you could lose a couple of games, especially in a year when the Big Ten was competitive, and still achieve the ultimate goal of going to Pasadena.

Ohio State's 1984 season always comes to mind for me. At one point that season, the Buckeyes were 6-2 after a loss to Wisconsin and seemingly out of the race for anything, let alone the national championship. Yet they won out in the regular season, defeating Michigan in the process, and earned the trip to the Rose Bowl. Most fans considered that a successful season – even though it still bothers me that Ohio State went on to lose to a so-so USC team in Pasadena – in a year when even if there were a four-team playoff, Ohio State would not have gotten a sniff.

And the quest for the Rose Bowl was not limited to Ohio State. It was that way all across the conference. I'll never forget when Wisconsin earned the trip following the 1993

## THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH

Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

season, the Badgers' first Rose berth in 31 years. Ticket demand was so great that many who were promised tickets as part of bowl packages were shut out and tickets could not be had at any price.

But I have to remember that it has now been 14 years since the Rose Bowl, recognizing the changing times, joined the BCS, sadly starting a steady decline in the significance of this once special bowl game. With each passing year, the game's greatness fades farther in college football's rearview mirror. For many younger college football fans, the Rose Bowl is of no greater significance than the Fiesta Bowl, for example – one of my favorite bowl games, but a Johnny-come-lately to the major bowl scene.

I felt a little less isolated in my feelings about all of this when Bob Hunter, the longtime columnist for The Columbus Dispatch, addressed the topic in his July 1 column.

"As the scene of some of Ohio State's most important games, the Rose Bowl has always drawn moon-eyed looks from the state's sports fans," wrote Hunter, who acknowledged that he has been a longtime proponent of a playoff. "It held a special fascination for most Midwesterners, a place many had on their bucket list before they even knew what a bucket list was."

Hunter went on to say, "The ill-fated Bowl Championship Series title game sucked up some of the Rose Bowl's magic, giving the game secondary status when the title game wasn't in Pasadena. But the four-team playoff will deal a near-lethal blow to a game that has been such a critical part of the sport's heritage."

Hunter spoke with legendary Buckeye John Hicks, a Rose Bowl Hall of Famer who was philosophical about the game and its demise.

"It is what it is," Hicks, who started three straight games in Pasadena from 1972-74, told Hunter. "I mean the Rose Bowl is outstanding. I had the greatest experience there that a young person can have. My mother adored it. My mother and father loved going to the Rose Bowl, and after my father died, my mother went in '97 when the Buckeyes did. But we've got to grow up. Times change."

Under the old system, the national championship was all about taking care of business. If you won your games, you would most likely be national champion, or at least in the discussion – and discussion is what it was all about back then, with no playoff.

A four-team playoff would have aided a team like the Buckeyes' 1998 squad, which was arguably the best team in college football that year. If there had been a playoff back then, perhaps Ohio State would have qualified despite losing to Michigan State in Ohio Stadium. But did the Buckeyes really deserve a mulligan after losing to the Spartans?

With the addition of so many conference championship games – a development designed to generate money and television programming (read: generate money) – I acknowledge that it will be more and more difficult to navigate an entire season undefeated or with one loss, especially if a team wants to schedule exciting and challenging nonconference contests.

So, true, a four-team playoff will still give teams with nominal losses a chance to play for the crown. If you expand again and start dipping into teams with more losses, however, I'm not certain those teams took care of business and earned the right to play for the championship, regardless of how strong their schedule.

Under the new system, it would seem that one team and its fan base will end the season truly happy and three teams will finish the season sort of happy. It would seem. I can't help but remember that after Ohio State played for the BCS championship following the 2006 and 2007 seasons, Buckeye fans were disgruntled with the team and head coach Jim Tressell after consecutive losses in those games.

So maybe only one team and its fans will be happy. That just doesn't seem like a lot of fun to me.

One suggestion that I do have, which will never be implemented because all-powerful ESPN needs the programming, is the return to a more limited bowl schedule. If bowl games go back to being a reward for a good season instead of rewarding mediocrity, maybe the bowl experience for those not part of the playoffs would regain some of its luster.

In closing, I'll make all of you a wager. It was more than 50 years between the time Illinois defeated UCLA following the 1946 season to start the historic Rose Bowl arrangement between the Big Ten and its West Coast brethren and the time the game joined the BCS.

I bet the new playoff system doesn't last half that long.

### Spielman Classic Dinner

I attended the recent Spielman Gridiron Classic Kickoff Dinner, held June 26 in Columbus.

The event honored former Ohio State football coach Earle Bruce, who received the 2012 SGC Inspiration Award.

It became apparent as the evening progressed that Spielman, who was recruited by Bruce to play at Ohio State, and the former Buckeye coach have a tremendous amount of mutual admiration.

"I've won a lot of great awards through the years, one of which is on my finger, my (college) Hall of Fame ring," Bruce told the crowd. "But this is the greatest award I've ever received."

Spielman told of how Bruce's behavior during the ill-fated Michigan week in November 1987, in which the coach was fired but still led the Buckeyes to victory over the Wolverines, had a major impact on his life. The way Bruce remained focused and kept the Michigan game of the utmost importance that week rather than his personal predicament stayed with Spielman.

When his late wife, Stefanie, was first diagnosed with breast cancer, Spielman told the audience that he drew on that inspiration to help make the decision to step away from football for a year and be at the side of his wife and family as Stefanie battled the disease.

"Family came first," Spielman explained, "just as the team came first for Coach Bruce."

Bruce also recounted how that 23-20 victory over Michigan led to another important moment in his life.

After the game, Bruce met with his Michigan counterpart and longtime Buckeye nemesis, Bo Schembechler.

"You know how I hate to lose," Schembechler told Bruce. "You know how I hate to lose. But today I didn't mind losing."

Those words really moved Bruce. "That was the greatest thing anyone has ever said to me," Bruce said.

Spielman, who played for Bruce at OSU from 1984-87 and had 16 tackles, including 14 solos, in that Buckeye career-ending victory over the Wolverines, almost didn't become a Buckeye thanks to a culinary faux pas by Bruce.

The coach hosted Spielman at the Bruce household as part of the prep star's recruiting process. Bruce acknowledged to the crowd his lack of cooking prowess but said that he does pride himself in the making of a special dessert – Bananas Foster. After dinner with Spielman, Bruce excused himself to the kitchen to prepare his signature item.

Bruce served the dessert to Spielman with much fanfare, and the future great's response was simple.

"I don't like bananas!" he said. "I'm thinking, 'That's strike one,'" Bruce recalled.

Spielman not only ended up coming to Ohio State and starring, he also had a highly successful career in the NFL. Along with Stefanie, who died in 2009, he has raised more than \$10 million to support breast cancer research.

The Spielman Gridiron Classic, which benefits the Stefanie Spielman Fund for Breast Cancer Research as well as the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, started out as a single game in 2008. It reached 17 games in 2011 and is now open to any school in the state that would like to designate a regular-season game as a Classic contest, and the participating schools can also share in the proceeds. For more information, go to [sgcfootball.com](http://sgcfootball.com).

Previous winners of the Inspiration Award were Cleveland Glenville High School coach Ted Ginn Sr. in 2010 and Yvette McGee Brown, justice of the Ohio Supreme Court, in 2011.

### Recruiting Scoop

If you did not access our June 19 electronic issue, you missed an interesting story by our Ari Wasserman from the June 10 advanced football camp at Ohio State. Wasserman chronicled the play of the relatively unheralded Darron Lee, a two-way prospect from nearby New Albany, Ohio.

Lee went head-to-head with safety Vonn Bell out of Rossville, Ga., arguably the top prospect participating, for much of the camp, earning praise for his play against the five-star player. Not long after the camp, Lee received an offer from Ohio State, which he quickly accepted.

This is just one more example of the type of stories you are missing if you are not enjoying all 60 issues of Buckeye Sports Bulletin. The 36 electronic issues are available for free to all current paid print subscribers. While the next print edition of BSB is not scheduled until late in August, there will be electronic issues posted on July 17 and 31 and Aug. 7, 14 and 31.

If you have not already signed up to enjoy these issues, simply email us your name, address and phone number to [subscriptions@buckeyesports.com](mailto:subscriptions@buckeyesports.com) and we will send easy instructions on how to access the electronic issues. For more information, see page 5 of this issue.