

# BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 36, No. 22

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

June 2017

## Time For A Change

## OSU Freshman, 2018 Commit React To Matta's Departure



TIM MOODY

**COACHING CHANGE** – Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith (left) announced June 5 that Thad Matta (right) was no longer the Buckeyes' men's basketball coach.

### Matta Out As OSU Hoops Coach After 13 Years

By **TIM MOODY**  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

When the Ohio State men's basketball team opens the 2017-18 season, Thad Matta will not be the head coach.

Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith announced the decision to make a coaching change during a press conference June 5, just a matter of months after giving Matta a vote of confidence before the 2016-17 season ended. Matta's career in Columbus came to a finish with a school-record 337 wins and program-high 460 games coached.

"While this may be a surprise to many, I think it is the right thing for our program, at the right time and we will go about the business of going through a national search immediately," Smith said.

Smith explained that he and Matta came to a "mutual understanding" that the program needed to go in a different direction.

Matta, who coached the Buckeyes for 13 seasons, was visibly emotional during the press conference, but he stressed that he was thankful for his time at Ohio State.

"I'm thinking about where my emotions are, and there is a song that says, 'Sometimes the light shines brightly on me, other times I can barely see. Lately it has occurred to me what a long, strange trip this has been,'" Matta said, referring

to Grateful Dead lyrics. "Obviously, this has been probably the greatest 13 years of my life. Just looking around here and seeing all these things, it's been awesome.

"My wife, my two daughters, they have been with me at the top and at the bottom. I think from Gene to (President Michael) Drake to (former president Gordon) Gee to (former AD) Andy Geiger, Buckeye Nation, it has been an incredible run.

"Most importantly I want to thank the players. We have had some good ones. Those are the guys that get the job done for you, and I am grateful to them. Thank you."

Matta added that he understood Smith's decision but said that didn't make the conversation easy.

Matta, a Hoopston, Ill., native, originally came to Ohio State in July of 2004 after Geiger fired Jim O'Brien for giving money to a former OSU signee named Aleksandar Radojevic. Matta had previously spent the 2000-01 season as the head coach at Butler and the following three years at Xavier before being hired by the Buckeyes.

His Ohio State career included a pair of Final Four appearances in 2007 and 2012 and a loss to Florida in the national title game in '07. The Buckeyes also made three Elite Eights and five Sweet 16s under Matta's guidance in addition to

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By **RYAN MCGLADE**  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Kaleb Wesson's first day on campus as a member of the Ohio State men's basketball team was certainly a memorable one. It happened to be the same day that Thad Matta was let go as the head coach of the basketball program.

Though the center out of Westerville (Ohio) South was taken aback by Matta's dismissal, he noted that he must keep chugging along.

"It was definitely a surprise, but life goes on," Wesson told BSB shortly after Matta was let go. "Not to say that I don't care about him getting fired, but coaches get fired every day and you still have to be productive in whatever you do."

Wesson's older brother, Andre, was a freshman at Ohio State last season. Kaleb Wesson said he discussed with his older brother the news regarding Matta, and the siblings had a similar perspective on it.

"We just talked about how – like what I said – life goes on and you still have to go to work every day," Wesson said. "People don't quit their jobs because their boss gets fired."

Wesson added that he and his brother were not aware this was coming.

"This was news to us just like everybody else," he said. "I didn't know it was happening today."

The younger Wesson, who signed his letter of intent with Ohio State back in November, noted that he had not even started considering other college options.

"I didn't look at it that way yet," Kaleb Wesson said. "It's a family decision if anything. So I have to talk to my parents about it and they're at work. I haven't really thought about going anywhere else or even putting into thought that I'd go anywhere else. I'm still a Buckeye."

Coming out of high school, Wesson was rated by Scout.com, the parent network of BuckeyeSports.com, as the No. 80 overall prospect and 15th-best center in the 2017 class. His advice to prepsters of future recruiting classes who are committed to Ohio State is plain and simple.

"My message would be if you committed to this school just because of the head coach, you came for the wrong reason anyway," he said. "At Ohio State it's about the culture, and it's not just on-the-court stuff. The coaches are a major reason why you go to school but you don't see them 24/7 out of the day. You're around them a lot but you still live a regular life on campus and you still make connections on campus. If they committed to be Buckeyes, they shouldn't stop the commitment because of a coaching change."

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OPINION

# A Lot Went Into Matta's OSU Departure

A word of caution to the next high-profile coach at Ohio State: Beware of directors of athletics bearing votes of confidence.

During a March 2011 news conference OSU athletic director Gene Smith stated that he stood behind head football coach Jim Tressel as the so-called Tattoo-gate scandal began to take wing. Less than three months later, Smith asked for and received Tressel's resignation.

Apparently, three months is about the shelf life for a vote of confidence emanating from the Ohio State athletic department.

Smith announced June 5 that Thad Matta was out, bringing to an end the 13-year tenure of arguably the most successful head coach in the history of the university's men's basketball program. That announcement came less than three months after Smith had indicated that Matta would return for the 2017-18 season.

"I am confident in (Thad's) leadership to return the program to the winning ways that we have all enjoyed during his 13-year tenure," Smith said March 9, interestingly nearly five years to the day from when the AD told reporters, "I think everyone knows how I feel about Jim Tressel. There is no better coach at developing young people than Jim."

Before you argue that it's an apples-to-oranges comparison between Tressel and Matta, I get that. I understand why the university felt it had to fire Tressel, although one of the reasons given at the time was because it might help mitigate any NCAA sanctions the football program might have faced. Obviously, it did not.

I long ago came to grips with Tressel's ouster even though I continue to believe had the coach courted the fancy of certain well-heeled boosters, influential board of trustee members and a certain swath of the Columbus news media, he might have weathered that storm five years ago.

But Matta cut a much different figure. While Tressel was a micromanager in every way imaginable, Matta was more of a big-tent coach. He was exuberant and accessible, seemed equally at ease with a prospective recruit as he was with the president of the university, and cultivated a media savviness that helped him navigate around and through a number of rough patches during his tenure.

Many of the posts on social media the day of Matta's ouster were slightly different takes on the same meme: "Nice guy but it was time for him to go." In other words, 11 years of success was wiped out by the two most recent seasons of underachievement. Woody Hayes once famously said, "Fans are fickle," and one may presume the legendary coach wasn't just talking about football fans.

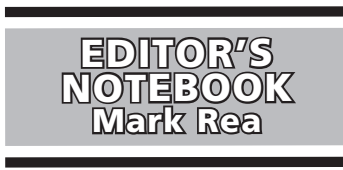
The simple fact is that Matta being a nice guy doesn't mean much in today's world of college and professional sports. You would be hard-pressed to find two bigger horses' asses than Nick Saban or Bill Belichick, yet you cannot argue with the success each has enjoyed.

Perhaps there is something to the old "nice guys finish last" adage.

### Unparalleled Level Of Success

I remember when Matta was introduced as head coach at Ohio State in July 2004. It was a news conference full of hope, and I remember the youthful face, the omnipresent chewing gum, the dark suit and the buckeye in his pocket. I also remember the raging tire fire of a program he inherited from Jim O'Brien and the NCAA infractions and postseason ban that were to come.

Yet Matta somehow managed to squeeze a 20-12 finish out of his team that first season, a campaign punctuated by the regular-season finale at Value City Arena when senior Matt Sylvester's three-point bomb with 5.1 seconds remaining gave the Buckeyes a 65-64 upset of top-ranked Illinois. That victory signaled that Ohio State was poised to return to center stage, both in the Big Ten as well as college basketball at large.



The next season, that statement became even more emphatic when the Buckeyes returned to the NCAA Tournament to begin a run of nine tournament appearances over the next 10 years. Before Matta arrived in Columbus, Ohio State had played in the tournament only nine of the previous 21 seasons.

Along the way, Matta's program strung together a four-year run during which it posted a 123-27 overall record that included three Big Ten regular-season championships, an equal number of conference tournament titles, two Elite Eight appearances and one trip to the Final Four.

Matta won more games than any other coach in program history and earned five Big Ten championships, but more than that, he went about his business the right way. In an era when some fans are happy with NCAA infractions every few years so long as there are a couple of national championship trophies hoisted along the way, Matta ran a program that never had the slightest hint of impropriety. Additionally, he raised the graduation rate of the program from 20 percent when he took over to 88 percent.

In other words, everything being fair, Matta earned the right to go out on his own terms. But make no mistake. He was not afforded that luxury. No matter what it was called, or how it was spun, it was not a retirement. I can't conceive that it was Matta's plan to ride off into the sunset at this particular time. It was purely a business decision based upon the perception that the coach could no longer recruit at a five-star level.

The recent news of the departure from the program by JaQuan Lyle wiped out the only player remaining from the five-man recruiting class of 2015, and when Cincinnati Princeton wing Darius Bazley - acknowledged as Ohio's top prospect for 2018 - withdrew in April his commitment to Ohio State, it appeared that Matta had indeed lost the magic that lured such stars as Mike Conley, Greg Oden, Evan Turner and D'Angelo Russell as well as Daequan Cook, David Lighty, Jared Sullinger, Jon Diebler, Kosta Koufos, William Buford and Aaron Craft to Columbus.

In Smith's own words, the recent failures on the recruiting trail facilitated a change in his thinking from three months ago.

"We had a good plan going into the summer (and) recruiting is a major part of that plan," the AD told reporters. "We weren't winning the battles in recruiting that I thought we might have a chance to win, as (Thad) did. And so, as we started talking about that (during a meeting three days before the announcement), the flow of

the conversation took me to the reality. ... And I said, 'Thad, maybe it's time to make a change,' and he agreed."

Maybe the coach agreed, but his frayed emotions were clearly on display as was a rounded face bearing the lines of a man who has battled excruciating pain in his back, leg and foot for the past 10 years.

Matta tried several times to interject a bit of lightheartedness into the proceedings, joking with several media members as well as borrowing the "what a long strange trip it's been" lyric from the Grateful Dead song "Truckin'" to help describe his tenure.

Appearing in a blue blazer and open-collared white shirt - no scarlet or gray, whether intentional or not - Matta clearly wanted to portray a man comfortable with what had happened. Except he didn't look completely comfortable - especially when his voice repeatedly cracked while talking about his wife and daughters.

Matta conceded that "we've dealt with some major negativity in recruitment ... and we were battling some things we couldn't overcome," alluding to the fact that opposing coaches were using his health and tenuous coaching future against him.

Still, while Matta volunteered that he "completely understands" the decision Smith made, I got the sense that, despite what was said by his boss, he didn't necessarily agree with it.

At one point, when asked if he thought he would still be head coach if not for his health problems, Matta replied, "Yeah," before pausing briefly to add, "Probably."

### Who Will Be The Successor?

Before Matta got in his car to leave Value City Arena following his "retirement" announcement, pundits had already put together a list of potential successors, a list that included everything from the sublime (Sean Miller of Arizona) to the practical (Chris Mack of Xavier and Mick Cronin of Cincinnati) to the ridiculous (former Indiana head coach Tom Crean).

The reality of the situation is that Ohio State might not be able to attract a so-called big name to replace Matta. While the perception of the program might be that Matta elevated it back to elite status, the cold truth of the matter is that the Buckeyes are six years removed from their last Big Ten championship and feature a roster chock full of underachieving or less talented players.

Not that those facts would deter any up-and-coming coach, of course. But whatever enterprising young man decides to become Matta's successor should understand where his new program stands. Matta knew basketball always ran a distant second to Ohio State football, but that never seemed to bother him the way it did some of his predecessors.

Likewise, Matta never complained that the attendance figures for his program were mainly due to the building in which his team plays its home games. It wasn't his fault the university built the Schottenstein Center in an out-of-the-way corner of the campus that wasn't close to anything when it was built, and nearly 20 years later, still isn't close to much of anything.

Before he signs on the dotted line of any multiyear contract, the next coach of the Ohio State men's basketball team should be mindful of those things - that and insist upon a clause prohibiting votes of confidence.



Vol. 36, No. 22  
June 2017

www.BuckeyeSports.com

Buckeye Sports Bulletin (USPS 705-690, ISSN 0883-6833.) is published 24 times a year (weekly September through November, biweekly mid-March through May and January through early March and monthly June through August and December) by:

Columbus Sports Publications  
1350 W. Fifth Ave., Suite 30  
P.O. Box 12453  
Columbus, Ohio 43212  
(614) 486-2202  
bsb@buckeyesports.com

Periodical class postage paid at Columbus, Ohio, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: Buckeye Sports Bulletin, P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio 43212. Subscription rates: \$89.95/year.

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2016-17 PUBLICATION SCHEDULE (VOL. 36)			
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The next issue (July cover date) will be mailed on July 3.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin is a privately owned newspaper and is not affiliated directly or indirectly with The Ohio State University.



Charter Member



# Recruiting Played A Role In Matta's Departure

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winning five Big Ten regular-season crowns and four more league-tournament titles.

Over the past few years, the program took a step backward in terms of on-court product. In 2014-15, Ohio State finished the year with a 24-11 overall record but struggled to an 11-7 mark in league play. The Buckeyes made it to the second round of the NCAA Tournament that year before losing to Arizona, 73-58. That proved to be Matta's final appearance in the Big Dance as Ohio State's head coach.

The following year, Ohio State went 21-14 and lost to Florida in the second round of the National Invitation Tournament. After the season, three members of Ohio State's five-man recruiting class from 2015 opted to transfer from the school and a fourth – Austin Grandstaff – had already left for Oklahoma during the regular season. The fifth member of that 2015 class, guard JaQuan Lyle, quit the team following the 2016-17 season.

Matta's final season in Columbus was his worst, record wise, as the Buckeyes finished 17-15 overall and 7-11 in the Big Ten last season, missing out on non-Big Ten tournament postseason play entirely.

Matta's success at Ohio State was largely based on recruiting. The Buckeyes made the 2007 title game with a freshman class that included one-and-done stars such as Greg Oden, Mike Conley and Daequan Cook. In recent years, though, recruiting had fallen off, and that wasn't ignored by Smith.

The athletic director said his conversation with Matta about making a change had taken place June 2 during a meeting about recruiting.

"We had that touch-base meeting last Friday, and it is kind of hard for me to articulate to you how those meetings go where we sit and talk about, where are we?" Smith said. "It was primarily, obviously about recruiting."

Smith noted that he felt confident about Ohio State's plan for the summer, especially where recruiting was concerned. When it came down to it, some of those plans fell through.

"Recruiting is a major part of it," Smith said. "We weren't winning the battles in recruiting that I thought we might have a chance to win, as (Thad) did. As we started talking about that ... which was three months or so after our (planning) meeting, the flow of the conversation took me to the reality that, 'You know what? Thad, maybe it's time for us to make a leadership change.'"

Ohio State locked in a two-man class this year, with four-star center Kaleb Wesson and three-star guard Braxton Beverly signing with the Buckeyes.

Ohio State had three commits for the 2018 class before four-star forward Darius Bazley opted to decommit, leaving just four-star guard Dane Goodwin and three-star forward Justin Ahrens in the class.

Part of the downward trend for Ohio State in recent years could also be attributed to Matta's health. The coach has had long-term problems with his back, and on June 16, 2007, he underwent a surgery that was supposed to help. The procedure went wrong, though, and left him with what doctors call "drop foot," meaning he would need to wear a brace on his right leg the rest of his life. In total, Matta has undergone four back surgeries, with the first coming when he was 15 years old.



TIM MOODY

**SUCCESSFUL CAREER – Thad Matta leaves Ohio State as the winningest coach in program history.**

With his Ohio State career over, Matta admitted that he would probably still be with the Buckeyes if he were 100 percent healthy.

"There's had to be a lot of adjustments," Matta said. "We had our heyday when I was in this situation. By no stretch am I using that as an excuse. Do I wish it was better? Yes, I do. Gene probably wishes it was better. It is just one of those things. But I would never make that as an excuse. It is what it is, and I have had to deal with it."

Matta's health has been a hindrance on the recruiting trail as well. In 2017, he admitted that an opposing school had told a recruit he was dying – which wasn't true – but negative recruiting for health-related reasons still played a part for Ohio State under Matta.

With his Ohio State career over, Matta wasn't ready to say he was done coaching for good, but another job wasn't his first priority.

"Never say never," Matta said. "Honestly, my whole focus right now is trying to get healthy. That is all I am concerned about. If I were to go back into coaching, it would probably be track. When the parents want to cuss me out after a game, I can say, 'This is the time your son ran. I can't help you on that. There were no shots or touches or anything like that.' I don't know. My whole focus is on getting my body where I can continue to be serviceable."

"I don't think anyone can truly comprehend what this job does to you. I went through a year where I couldn't walk. I couldn't take my shoes off after a game, I couldn't take my pants off after a game."

Although he wasn't sure what the future holds, Matta had a firm idea of what he'd like to be remembered for in Columbus, and it doesn't necessarily have anything to do with wins and losses.

"I hope No. 1 I am remembered as a really good person," he said, "a guy who cared about the university and cared about his players. I think from that perspective, that is probably what is most important to me."

Before the press conference, reports surfaced that Matta would coach one more season before retiring. Smith made it clear that that option was not on the table.

"We did not talk about, I did not say to him, 'Can you stay one more year?'" Smith said. "That was never a part of our conversa-

tion. I felt where he was. I also quantifiably looked at where we were from my responsibility point of view. I just felt like it was time."

## Moving Forward

After announcing that Matta's time at Ohio State had come to an end, Smith said there wasn't an exact timetable for the Buckeyes to make a new hire.

"No time is optimal, but obviously this time is not the best," he said. "I need to be sensitive to what I am dealing with in this window of time. I do not have a timeline, but I am going to do my best to search and find the right person that fits the Ohio State University."

"Besides wins and losses, Thad has set a standard of culture and how we do things the right way. In basketball, you need to take your time and find the right person that you know is always going to do it the right way when you're not looking. I am going to take my time and do it right."

Smith added that Matta agreed to stay on to help with the transition process.

"He will help me as I talk to candidates," Smith said of Matta. "As soon as I call a candidate, they are going to call him next. We have to be aligned with our conversations. He will help me."

For the time being, Smith said all Ohio State assistant coaches and staff members were still employed at the university. Matta, who has three years remaining on his contract, will receive all of the remaining compensation as well.

Smith did say that he doesn't anticipate a current member of Ohio State's staff being the next head coach, "but anything could happen."

Matta stressed that he wants to do what he can to help the program going forward where other coaches might choose to distance themselves from a similar situation.

"I want this basketball program to win a national championship," he said. "I have spent 13 years here, and this place is home to my family and (Smith) knows that. I think that is why we were able to have the type of conversation because of the man that he is."

Because Matta's departure was unexpected, there had been limited speculation as of press time on who Ohio State's next head coach could be. Some potential options included Xavier coach Chris Mack, Arizona head coach Sean Miller, Butler coach Chris Holtmann or even Oklahoma City Thunder coach Billy Donovan.

## Goodwin Says He's Still Committed To Ohio State

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One recruit who is a Buckeye pledge is Dane Goodwin, a four-star product out of Upper Arlington, Ohio, from the 2018 cycle. Goodwin (6-4, 175) committed to Ohio State in December of 2014, before even playing his first game of high school basketball.

"I would say that it's kind of hard to tell just because I've been with Ohio State for that long," Goodwin told BSB when asked if he would consider looking at other schools. "I feel obligated and I still do want to go to Ohio State. That's still a very reasonable and doable option for me. I'm still looking forward to that. But like I said, as of now, I'm still committed and that's really all I can say."

Goodwin, Scout's No. 63 overall recruit and 14th-ranked shooting guard in 2018, added that Matta's presence was certainly a critical reason he committed to the Buckeyes so early.

"Being the head coach, one of the main reasons you commit to a school would be because of the coach, and that was definitely a big aspect of my decision," Goodwin explained. "Thad is the type of guy you look forward to being coached by and to be around. To see it go down like that is definitely heartbreaking."

"I think just like everyone else, it kind of took me by surprise too. I was seeing on Twitter that he was going to have one more year, and then 20 minutes later getting a call that he was fired definitely took me by surprise. It kind of hits you hard. Still to this point, it really hasn't sunk in yet."

Goodwin is good friends with fellow 2018 Ohio State commit Justin Ahrens (6-5, 180), a three-star small forward out of Versailles, Ohio. The two talked shortly after the Matta news broke, Goodwin said.

"Right after it happened we texted back and forth making sure we both knew what was going on and then go from there," Goodwin said. "Nothing has changed as of right now."

Upper Arlington head coach Tim Casey told BSB he believes Matta's exit would bring some level of pause to Goodwin in regard to his future.

"I think a lot of where you decide to go to school is your relationship with the coach," Casey explained. "So I'm sure now that that relationship is no longer, I can't imagine that (Dane's) not going to rethink his decision and at least explore other opportunities and things like that."

When asked for his reaction concerning Matta no longer being the head coach at OSU, Casey could say nothing but positive things about the former Buckeye coach.

"My initial thoughts are that's a really good coach who has done a really good job," Casey said of Matta. "Anytime you're in the coaching profession it's a tough profession, but I think Coach Matta has been nothing but nice, open, always willing to work with the high school coaches in the state."

"It saddens me that this happened. I think very highly of Coach. I think he's a great guy, he's a great person. I think he's a good coach and I'm sure whatever is in his future – if he wants to continue to coach – he's going to land on his feet and get a great job and build a great program again like he did at Ohio State."

# Matta's Time At OSU Ended In Unexpected Manner

Hal Leiner, sometimes ad salesman and longtime friend to BSB, has been asking me for quite some time now, "Why is it that it always ends badly for an Ohio State basketball coach?"

Dating back to the legendary Fred Taylor, it has pretty much been that way. An Ohio State basketball coach starts off with a bang but ends up struggling and finally is shown the door. It was true with Taylor, Eldon Miller, Randy Ayers, Jim O'Brien and now Thad Matta. Gary Williams, who was never comfortable as the second-fiddle coach in Columbus and had one foot out the door from the time he arrived, was the lone exception, leaving on his own for his alma mater Maryland after just two seasons.

In the case of Matta, I didn't think it was going to happen the way it did. I assumed that he was going to, whether under pressure from AD Gene Smith or not, announce his retirement due to health concerns. Instead, it turned out to be a firing, regardless of what "mutual agreement" spin they may have put on it.

I guess I am a little surprised that if Smith was going to fire Matta, they didn't do it immediately after the season. It would have helped in finding a new coach and certainly helped in recruiting.

And directly or indirectly, this is really all about recruiting. Sure it's about wins and losses, but wins and losses are directly related to recruiting and both the team's recruiting and wins and losses have been on a downward spiral. More importantly, there did not appear to be any improvement – in recruiting or success on the court – on the horizon.

In fact, as was implied in the press conference announcing Matta's departure, the reason that the coach's termination may have come after it seemed that he was going to survive for at least one more season was that the recruiting was not showing signs of getting any better.

In fact things were going in the wrong direction with the defection of Cincinnati Princeton small forward Darius Bazley, a 2018 recruit who decommitted from the Buckeyes via Twitter on April 26. Not only did Bazley decommit, but he had some negative comments about the Buckeyes on his way out the door, noting the team's failure to make the NCAA Tournament the last two years, questioning the quality of the other incoming recruits and wondering if Ohio State was still a good avenue to the NBA.

As I have said in this space previously, good coaches don't suddenly become bad coaches. But they can lose their enthusiasm or ability to be effective as coaches. Matta's well-documented health issues are in one way or another related to his ouster.

His struggles had to have limited his ability to really hit the recruiting trail hard. I look to a quote from elsewhere in this paper concerning football recruiting.

"Show me a coach who is a prolific golfer and I'll show you a lousy recruiter because recruiting has got to be their hobby," longtime grid recruiting expert Tom Lemming says. "And really guys like Urban Meyer and Nick Saban and (Clemson coach Dabo Swinney), their hobby is recruiting and it shows."

I doubt that Matta, given that he can't take his own shoes or pants off, is out playing golf all the time.

But unless you are the basketball coach at the likes of Duke or Kentucky, you've got to be relentless in your recruiting. It's hard to believe that if you have trouble getting dressed, that you can aggressively crisscross the country in a car or plane looking for talent.

The problem was compounded by the fact that rival coaches were using his health

## THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

issues against him on the recruiting trail, some going as far as to tell prospects that Matta was going to die.

It was telling that when Matta was asked at his departure press conference if he did not have his health issues, would he still be coach? His answer was, "Yes, probably."

Not that I am making excuses for Matta. There's no need to make excuses.

He took over a dysfunctional program from O'Brien and led the Buckeyes to heights not seen since the Taylor era. He took the Buckeyes to a pair of Final Fours in a six-year span. His Buckeye teams won five regular-season Big Ten titles and another four Big Ten tourney crowns to boot in his 13 years at the helm.

The thing that I will remember most of his tenure was the heated rivalry the Buckeyes had with Michigan State and coach Tom Izzo, among the most highly-respected programs and coaches in the country. It was a rivalry based on good talent, good coaching and a tremendous amount of respect between the coaches and the programs. And Matta very much held his own against Izzo and his Spartans.

In fact, Izzo came to Matta's defense this season when it was clear that the Buckeye coach was on the hot seat. After Matta beat Michigan State for what proved to be the last time on Jan. 15 at the Schottenstein Center, Izzo said of his rival, "I shouldn't say this but hell, I'm happy for him."

"From a standpoint of the way people treat him around here, I'm happy for him. He's won a lot of games here, and him and I have played in a lot of championships here.

"He doesn't have to answer to anybody," Izzo continued. "He doesn't need my support. But I'll probably need his."

As it turned out, Izzo proved the last man standing.

By the way, Matta was quick to point out that when his Buckeyes were riding high, he was dealing with the same health constraints that he is now.

"We had our heyday when I was in this situation," Matta said at the press conference. "By no stretch am I using that as an excuse. Do I wish it was better? Yes, I do. Gene probably wishes it was better. It is just one of those things. But I would never make that as an excuse. It is what it is and I have had to deal with it."

And now he will have to deal with the fact that he is no longer the coach of the Buckeyes. It was a good run. Taylor will continue to debate whether he or Fred Taylor was the best coach in Ohio State history. It's always a lively debate.

But as Hal Leiner says, regardless of how great a career they have in Columbus, it always seems to end up badly for the Ohio State basketball coach.

### Taylor And Knight

Totally coincidental to the Matta dismissal, I recently came across a note in BSB chronicling the renaming of part of Fyffe Road near the then-newly constructed Schottenstein Center to Fred Taylor Drive in November of 1998.

Former Buckeye player Bob Knight, who went on to become a legendary coach in his own right at Indiana, was one of the speakers as his Ohio State coach was honored. The street-naming program was fairly straightfor-

ward until it was Knight's turn to speak. Taylor had received plaudits from former players and OSU administrators, including then-athletic director Andy Geiger.

"As far as Andy making the comment that Coach Taylor's players always conduct themselves as gentlemen, I kind of take exception to that," the cantankerous Knight said. "He didn't turn out a real gentleman in me.

"I'm not real big on this building," he added of Ohio State's new basketball venue, "because I had two things that I think nobody else has in St. John Arena. I coached there actually longer than anybody has been over there, which is 28 years. And there's probably been no single person that's ever been booed more in St. John Arena. I'd hate to see you have 6,000 more people to get on my ass."

Knight also gave an indication as to where he might have gotten his penchant for foul language.

"Coach," he said toward Taylor, "there were a lot of guys that played for you that played better for you than I did. But nobody paid more attention to you than I did. That's usually evident in the language that I use."

Knight had more serious praise for his mentor, however.

"For 36 years I've walked in and out of gyms and on and off floors all over the world, and at no time have I ever walked off the basketball floor without thinking of something that he taught me, something we've talked about, a question that I've asked him or an answer that he gave me. Hopefully what Fred Taylor taught and what he stands for will be evident on basketball floors across the country."

I know who Bob Knight would vote for in the debate over the greatest basketball coach in Ohio State history.

### Beating The Odds

I was in Las Vegas for the College Sports Publishers Association convention recently. Interestingly, the topic of postal delivery, the leading point of discussion at the gatherings for more than two decades, barely came up this year. Not that timely delivery of the publications is not a concern. It is a more prevalent problem than ever.

It just seems the talk centers more on the Internet these days. Much of the talk this time was about online sports networks, as there has been consolidation in that regard recently with the purchase of the Scout Network, parent of our own BuckeyeSports.com, by CBS, owner of the 247 Network. The ramifications of the consolidation have yet to be determined. We will certainly keep you posted as developments arise.

When I am out in Vegas I always like to pick up the sheets featuring the odds for college football or basketball teams to win their respective national championships. The guys out in Vegas are pretty sharp about these things. Their livelihood depends on it.

So if you are looking for some encouragement as far as the Ohio State basketball team and its prospects for the upcoming season, don't look to the guys in Sin City.

The sheet at the Golden Nugget lists the odds for the Buckeyes to win the national championship at 300/1, behind such schools as Xavier and Northwestern (80/1), Cincinnati,

Illinois, Maryland, Minnesota, Nevada and San Diego State (100/1). Schools with the same odds as the Buckeyes include Dayton, Illinois State, Nebraska and Penn State.

These numbers, of course, were posted before Matta's ouster. I would be curious to see if the 300/1 mark changes, up or down. It probably will depend on who is named coach, but I can't see them getting much better.

Interestingly, OSU rival Michigan State has the best odds on this sheet at 7/1. Bluebloods Kentucky and Duke are at 10/1 and Louisville and Kansas at 12/1.

Fortunately, the guys in Vegas like the Ohio State football team's chances a lot better than those of the basketball Buckeyes. Treasure Island gives the grid Buckeyes 4/1 odds, bettered only by Alabama at 3/1. Buckeye opponent Oklahoma comes in at 9/2, while rival Michigan, Florida State, and USC all check in at 6/1. Defending champion Clemson, which put such a licking on the Buckeyes last season, is only at 15/1.

### Summer Schedule

Just a reminder about our print and electronic schedule for the summer months. The next print issue of BSB will be mailed July 3. That is followed by what is traditionally our longest gap between print issues of the year. After the July issue, we will not publish a print issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin until our big Football Preview issue, to be mailed on a yet-to-be-determined date in late August. We should have a firm publication date for you in the July issue.

However, we will be putting plenty of Buckeye news out there between these print issues. Electronic issues of BSB Quickly will be posted on June 20, July 18, and Aug. 1 and 8, loaded with football recruiting information and much, much more. These electronic issues, free to all BSB print subscribers, will have all the current OSU sports news, plus columns and features. They will include any news from the annual Big Ten Media Days set for July 24-25 in Chicago, as well as all the news as the Buckeyes return to the field for fall camp.

If you are not already enjoying BSB's 36 additional electronic issues, be sure to see the simple instructions of page 5 of this issue. Or feel free to give us a call at (614) 486-2202 and we will be glad to walk you through the process.

### The Perfect Kickoff

In our Fan Forum on page 2, readers check in with their thoughts on what is the best time for an Ohio State football game to start. I was pleased to see that many of you agree with me that there are too many night games. While the days of all home games starting at 1:30 are long gone, I do miss the days when there was just one night game a year and it was a really big deal, usually played against a top-notch opponent. When half your games are played under the lights, it takes away from the excitement of the event.

I know Meyer loves these games because of the recruiting value, but I worry about those who live outside the central Ohio area driving home so late, especially after what can be a full day of tailgating when the kick doesn't come until the evening. I must also selfishly add that it is much harder to produce Buckeye Sports Bulletin in a timely fashion after a night game, especially if it is on the road.

Of the choices out there right now, I probably prefer the noon start – and that's noon on Saturday!! Thursday games are for conferences and teams that need the exposure.

At least the Michigan game is still going to be played at noon on Saturday this year.