

## OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

## New DBs Boss Always Wanted To Coach At OSU

By STEVE HELWAGEN  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Speaking before an overflow crowd of more than 1,000 high school and college coaches at the Ohio High School Football Coaches Association clinic Feb. 9, OSU head coach Jim Tressel gave the group an exclusive.

He introduced his new secondary coach in recent LSU assistant Mel Tucker. The 29-year-old Tucker, a native of Cleveland Heights, Ohio, appears to be a rising star in the coaching ranks.

"Mel is an excellent addition to our staff," Tressel said. "He is a bright young coach who really impressed me with his knowledge of the game. He is also an Ohio guy and a Big Ten guy who has quickly established a reputation as an excellent recruiter. I am really happy to have him on our staff."

Tucker moved from a graduate assistant position at Michigan State to being the full-time secondary coach at Miami (Ohio) in 1999 and on to the same job at LSU for former MSU coach Nick Saban last year.

"It was an extremely difficult decision I had to make, but I feel good about it," Tucker told BSB. "It's very exciting to have an opportunity to coach with some new people and get on the same page and have one vision,

set goals together and work hard every day to try and accomplish them. That's what I'm looking forward to doing.

"This is a place where I always wanted to coach. I had a great job where I was at LSU. This is a great opportunity for me and I'm just glad that whatever way we were able to get it done, that I was able to get down here."

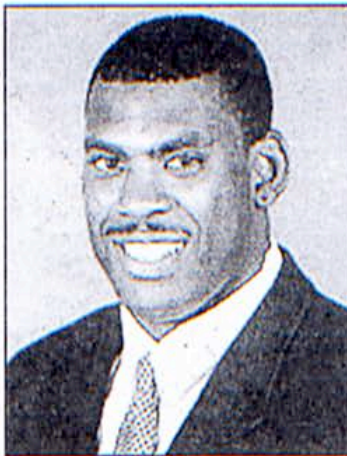
Tucker was an All-Ohio athlete at Cleveland Heights and played college football at Wisconsin.

"I was in Barry Alvarez's first recruiting class," Tucker said.

He graduated from Wisconsin in 1995 after playing four seasons in the UW secondary. He then played briefly with the Hamilton Tiger Cats of the Canadian Football League before latching on as a graduate assistant at MSU in 1997-98.

There he worked for Saban and alongside new OSU defensive coordinator Mark Dantonio. After his one year at Miami, Saban tapped him to join his staff at LSU. Now Tressel has invited him to become a member of the OSU staff.

"It's a great opportunity for me to come down here," Tucker said. "It is a great institution with a great tradition and a great coach. Coach Tressel is a great guy to work for and I'm looking forward to it."



Mel Tucker

"The expectations are very high and we're going to work hard to have a class program here. I'm happy to be a part of it."

Tucker's appointment means that Dantonio, originally introduced as the defensive coordinator and secondary coach, will not have to handle two jobs.

Tucker and his wife, Jo-Ellyn, were married in June 1992. He becomes the seventh of OSU's eight assistant

coaches who was born in Ohio. The eighth, Dantonio, was born in El Paso, Texas, but grew up in Zanesville, Ohio.

## One Spot Left

Tucker's hiring leaves one position to fill on Tressel's first OSU staff. That would be the quarterbacks/receivers job. Tressel was expected to fill that job as early as Feb. 13.

There have been reports that Tim Salem, who served as an assistant at OSU the last five years, had interviewed with Tressel to stay on the staff.

Other names bandied about for the job included former NFL quarterback Jim Zorn, former OSU and current NFL quarterback Mike Tomczak and Michigan State assistant Don Treadwell, a former Youngstown State assistant under Tressel.

Tomczak, of course, played for Tressel at OSU in 1983-84. It was unclear what ties Zorn, a Cal Poly-Pomona graduate and former Seattle Seahawks star, would have to Tressel.

"At one time, I was looking at a quarterback coach and a receiver coach," Tressel said prior to hiring Tucker. "But I think we'll put a guy (Tucker) on the defense and I'll hire a quarterback/receiver coach."

"Then, I will dabble a little bit in coaching the quarterbacks."

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## RECRUITING WRAP-UP: MEL TUCKER

# Tucker Helps Deliver Cleveland For OSU

By ERIC LOUGHRY

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Mel Tucker made a name for himself as a prep standout at Cleveland Heights High School in the late 1980s. The name of the Ohio State defensive backs coach still carries a lot of weight in high school circles of the Cleveland area as he recruits Cuyahoga County for top prospects.

Of the Buckeyes' 14 signees to the 2003 recruiting class, six hail from the Cleveland area.

Tucker will directly oversee the progression of three of the players he helped land — defensive back/wide receiver Tony Gonzalez of Cleveland St. Ignatius and defensive backs Darius Hiley and Donte Whitner, who were teammates at Cleveland Glenview.

Other signees from the Cleveland area include David Patterson, a defensive lineman from Warrensville Heights High School; Reggie Smith, a linebacker from East Cleveland Shaw; and Marcel Frost, a defensive end/outside linebacker/tight end from Lyndhurst Brush who originally committed to Iowa.

OSU coach Jim Tressel lauded Tucker for his efforts in the talent-rich area of northeast Ohio, where it is vital to have success, he said.

"Look at the history of Ohio State with guys from northeast Ohio," Tressel said. "Look at the history of some schools that aren't Ohio State that have done pretty good with some northeast Ohio guys."

"So we were fortunate that we did a good job there and we're fortunate to have a guy like Mel Tucker and a guy like (offensive coordinator/offensive line coach) Jim Bollman recruit up in those areas that have good familiarity."

That Tressel is a native of Berea, a suburb of Cleveland, also is a major plus when recruiting in that area.

"With Coach Tressel here, he's from Cleveland, west side," Tucker said. "I'm from the east side. He's got a good name behind him. He's done a great job."

"It kind of helps a little bit when you have all those things working for you and you're able to identify the players early. That gives you a chance to get the guys. Coach Tressel knows every person, pretty much, up there. If I don't know somebody, he makes sure that he introduces me to those people that he knows and tries to expand my base a little bit."

Tucker has a pretty broad base of his own, though. He still calls on relationships he forged as a high school athlete and during a brief stint as a high school coach.

"I grew up there," he said. "My dad played football there, and I've been there all my life. Some of those coaches up there I've coached with. I coached one year of high school ball. Some of the coaches that, when I played there, they were coaching, that type of thing. I played against them."

Tucker, who played defensive back at Wisconsin, is actually in his third tour of duty recruiting the Cleveland area. Prior to taking a job at OSU shortly after Tressel took over the program, he was a defensive backs coach first at Miami (Ohio) and then at LSU. At both stops, Tucker went home when he hit the recruiting trail.

His time at Miami, in particular, helped him expand his ties just because of the

sheer volume of recruits he looked at.

"When I was at Miami, I recruited that area heavily and when you recruit at Miami you can't afford to just recruit the best guys like we can do," Tucker said. "You have to recruit everybody — some guys that maybe they could play but maybe you weren't sure."

"Some guys that Ohio State was recruiting you might wait until they slip through the cracks down to you. Then the guys you know could play for you. So you had to recruit everybody."

"That period of time, I was able to still get around, meet those coaches, sit in with them, talk football with them, go to the clinics, spend time with them and recruit their players."

Tucker is not solely responsible for the players in the Cleveland area. He did a lot of the legwork there, but there is some cross-recruiting by position.

He had the best of both worlds, though, in recruiting Whitner, Hiley and Gonzalez, players he would potentially coach who were from the area he was responsible for.

As is the case with most in-state top prospects as they head into their senior seasons, all three attended OSU's camp, where Tucker had a chance to instruct them. The few days of camp helped the players and coach get a closer look at each other.

"I think it makes it a little easier in the recruiting process when you feel like you know them a little bit," Tucker said. "They're not strangers. You know the parents. You know the coaches. You know their brothers and sisters and all that and it becomes fun."

"Obviously, I can kill two birds with one stone. I'm recruiting a guy in my area who actually plays defensive back. So that kind of takes care of itself."

Frost was the last of the six to commit. He had originally stated he would attend Iowa, but just six days before signing day he opted for OSU.

A longstanding relationship with Tucker might have been a factor in that decision.

Tucker has been tracking Frost since recruiting his former Brush teammate Roy Hall, who signed with OSU in 2002.

"We recruited Roy Hall from that school a year ago, so we've actually been evaluating Frost for a year and a half," Tucker said. "I saw him play basketball three times as a junior. He was probably at half a dozen football games last season, so we knew about him and he knew about us."

Tucker was pleased but not surprised by Frost's late change of plans.

"Recruiting is a thing that is liquid and it changes hourly," Tucker said. "We only have 85 scholarships available. We try to fill a need and it became apparent that we needed a guy in the big speed position. And he was a guy that we felt could be that guy, that could fill that need for us."



Mel Tucker

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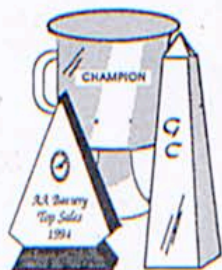
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## OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

## Tucker Will Stay The Same After Promotion

By ERIC LOUGHRY

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

After three years as Ohio State's secondary coach, Mel Tucker was promoted to the position of co-defensive coordinator Jan. 9. He will work alongside Mark Snyder, who had served as linebackers coach since joining Jim Tressel's staff in 2001, working as sort of Snyder's co-pilot for the OSU defense.

Prior to coming to Ohio State and working with former defensive coordinator Mark Dantonio, who left to take the head position at the University of Cincinnati following the Fiesta Bowl, Tucker coached under Nick Saban at LSU for one season in 2000.

A four-year letter winner as a defensive back at Wisconsin, Tucker began his coaching career under Saban in 1997 as a graduate assistant on Saban's staff at Michigan State.

Following two years at MSU, Tucker took a full-time job at Miami (Ohio) before rejoining Saban the following year at LSU.

"Obviously I've been around some pretty good coaches — Nick Saban and Mark Dantonio and guys like that — that I've learned a great deal from and had a chance to coach some pretty good players," Tucker said. "And we've had some success from a past defense standpoint. I understand that very well.

"Also, from a recruiting standpoint, I feel like I bring a lot of energy to the table there. I think a combination of those things and interpersonal skills, an ability to build relationships, I think that can be positive for us."

A native of Cleveland, where he was all-state at Cleveland Heights High School, Tucker is responsible for recruiting that area for OSU. One of his most notable recent commitments is Ted Ginn Jr., a defensive back/wide receiver from Cleveland Glenville.

Tucker said his main focus will remain recruiting until national signing day on Feb. 4, and then he will continue



SUSAN ZEIER

**NEW DEFENSIVE CO-PILOT** — Mel Tucker, pictured with linebacker A.J. Hawk (right), was recently named co-defensive coordinator for the Buckeyes. Tucker also will continue to coach OSU's defensive backs.

to coach the defensive secondary. He was unclear about just what additional responsibilities he would have as co-defensive coordinator. With the loss of Dantonio, Tucker said responsibilities would be split between him, Snyder, defensive line coach Jim Heacock and Luke Fickell, who was elevated from special teams coordinator to linebackers coach.

"We just briefly talked about some things," Tucker said of his preliminary talks with Snyder. "It's always been a collaborative effort with our defensive

staff, about our game plan and how we handle players and those types of things. We've had five guys that have done it, and now we have four.

"It's going to be very exciting to see how we come together. I think it's a great opportunity for all of us, and we have a tremendous challenge because we graduate some very good players. And I think the main thing is whenever you're in a team environment, whether you're a player or a coach, you have to drop your ego at the door, roll up your sleeves and go to work. If you do those things, you have a chance to be successful. And I think we're committed to doing that."

#### Minor Changes On The Way

Tucker did allow that he expected some minor changes would be made to a defense largely responsible for a national championship in 2002 and a 25-2 mark the past two seasons.

"You always have to, in a competitive environment, look for ways to get better," he said. "There's also a point in time where you have to be innovative and you may have to change some things.

"Do I anticipate wholesale changes in our philosophy and the way we do things? No. Do I anticipate some changes in certain areas of ways we do some things? Yes. I think change is inevitable."

Tucker explained what changes are made will depend on personnel and how they react to the new setup.

"In all honesty, it remains to be seen how differently our players are going to react to the different dynamics of the leadership that they're going to be presented with," he said. "And that will have more of a difference on what types of changes we're going to see than anything else."

Regardless of his title, Tucker made it clear he had no intentions of changing the way he goes about his coaching duties.

"I am very team-oriented and never want to draw attention to myself," he said. "I try to coach my players to be the same way. And so, really, the best way I can describe what I'm going to do is what I've done, and that's to work extremely hard to help us be the best defense we can be. I also want to work extremely hard in recruiting to bring in the best football players and the best people that I can find in my area.

"That's what I'm going to do, and that's not going to change now or 10 years from now in coaching football and being a part of any type of team. That's just the way I approach it. Any title or any accolades that I may receive as a result of what I do is just going to come with the territory. But the way I operate is not going to change."

#### On The Fast Track

Tucker, a 1995 graduate of Wisconsin with a degree in business management, has made a quick and steady ascent through the coaching ranks. He said he never set a timetable for himself, though.

"My philosophy when I got into coaching was to just do a good job in whatever my role would be and to try and go from there," Tucker said. "I never try to look ahead or get ahead of myself. There's always so much to be done when you're coaching on a day-to-day basis. And when you're around good people and you're winning and you're having success, good things are going to happen. Whatever point in time that comes is fine with me.

"I think everybody has a different timetable or time frame when they catch a break here or there or things happen. I think you just have to roll your sleeves up, go to work every day and just see what happens. But I really enjoy working with players and I really enjoy recruiting. That's where my focus is on a day-to-day basis. And as the dynamics of my career change, I just try to roll with it the best I can."

With Ohio State playing its fair share of spread offenses the past couple of years, Tucker has mixed up coverages, using as many as six or seven players in the defensive backfield.

"I think you have to have an awareness of the entire scheme and package when you're coaching the secondary," he said. "You have to know how your defensive backs are going to be coordinated with the front. And that's something that just comes with the territory. Obviously, getting five or six guys (in the secondary) ready to play every week is a challenge, but that's the same challenge with the linebackers and the defensive line.

"I think everybody has a role to do and my role is going to be very, very similar."

Tucker didn't foresee a problem with handling more responsibilities that could arise with the defensive coaching staff being reduced from five to four.

"We're going to do whatever we have to do workload-wise to get the job done," he said. "I think we all enjoy coming into work every day, and when you're coaching football, in my opinion, it doesn't seem like work. It's all fun when you have good players to work with and good coaches to be around. So as much time as I can spend in the office, that's good for me."

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## OHIO STATE INSIDER


**Report: O'Brien Linked To Salyers By Tickets**

According to a report published in the Feb. 19 issue of *The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer*, the woman whose lawsuit triggered the dismissal of former Ohio State basketball coach Jim O'Brien received free tickets from the coach's personal allotment to at least three OSU games during the 1999-2000 season.

The report stated that the link deepens the tie between Salyers and O'Brien's coaching staff and increases the likelihood that OSU will face lack of institutional control sanctions when the NCAA concludes its investigation into the men's basketball program later this year.

Salyers has filed a \$300,000 suit against former employers Dan and Kim Roslovic alleging they joined with former OSU assistant coach Paul Biancardi to enlist her help in housing and providing money, clothing and other items for ex-Buckeye Slobadan "Boban" Savovic.

James Zeszutek, O'Brien's attorney at the time of his firing, originally said that O'Brien had never met Salyers and did not know her. The attorney later amended that statement, saying there was a possibility the two had met but that O'Brien never knew of the arrangement between Salyers and Savovic.

Zeszutek no longer represents

## OSU Assistant Tucker Leaves For Browns

By MARK REA

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Managing Editor

For the second year in a row, Jim Tressel's coaching staff has been raided by the NFL.

Co-defensive coordinator and secondary coach Mel Tucker joined the Cleveland Browns on Feb. 18 as defensive backs coach, taking advantage of a lifelong ambition to coach for his hometown professional team.

But Tucker's departure robs the Buckeyes of one of their best young defensive minds and one of their most ardent, aggressive recruiters.

"These last four years, coaching at Ohio State, have been great — a tremendous experience," Tucker told BSB. "But having the chance to work with (new Browns head coach) Romeo Crennel was an opportunity I just couldn't pass up."

Crennel was named Browns head coach shortly after he won a third Super Bowl championship in four years with the New England Patriots. He served as defensive coordinator on Bill

Belichick's staff in New England.

"(Crennel) has created a defensive atmosphere that I'm anxious to be part of," Tucker said. "I'm also very enthused about the direction the Browns are taking. I'm going to miss Ohio State and these coaches, but I'm looking forward to the opportunity to go home, be closer to my family and get a chance to work in the NFL."

Tucker is a native of Cleveland and prepped at Cleveland Heights High School, earning All-Ohio honors as a senior, before becoming a four-year letter winner at defensive back for Wisconsin. After a brief professional career in the Canadian Football League, he began his coaching career at Michigan State as a graduate assistant under Nick Saban.

New Browns defensive coordinator Todd Grantham was also on that staff in East Lansing.

"I have a great deal of respect for Todd," Tucker said. "I'm very happy and look forward to working with him again."

After leaving Michigan State, Tucker spent two years at Miami (Ohio) and one at LSU, rejoining Saban, now head coach of the Miami Dolphins. In 2000, he joined the Buckeyes to coach defensive backs and was given the additional duties of co-defensive coordinator last spring.

Tucker and his wife, Jo-Elyn, have two sons — Joseph, 3, and Christian, 1. Ironically, both children celebrated birthdays the same day their father joined the Browns.

Tucker is the second Tressel assistant in as many years to accept an NFL job. Last year, running backs coach Tim Spencer left the Buckeyes after 10 years to coach the running backs for the Chicago Bears.

The Buckeyes also lost another defensive tie to their 2002 national championship season. Defensive coordinator Mark Dantonio left the Buckeyes after the 2003 season for the head coaching job at the University of Cincinnati.

Tressel has not speculated on possible replacements for Tucker although there are several former Ohio State defensive backs currently in the college coaching profession including Tim Walton at Miami (Fla.) and Richard McNutt at Division III Washington & Jefferson.

There had been a possibility that Ohio State could lose another coach to the NFL. Receivers coach Darrell Hazell was interviewed for a similar position on Mike Sherman's staff at Green Bay.

Hazell was in the running along with James Franklin of Maryland, Darrell Wyatt of Oklahoma and Dwayne Dixon of Florida for the vacant spot left by Ray Sherman's departure Jan. 28 to the Tennessee Titans.

But the Packers announced Feb. 21 that Franklin had been hired, meaning Hazell will stay with the Buckeyes for now.



**HEADING UP I-71** — On Feb. 18, the Buckeye football team lost assistant coach Mel Tucker (left) when he left to take the defensive backs job with the Cleveland Browns.

O'Brien. The former coach is being represented by Columbus attorney Joseph Murray in his lawsuit against Ohio State for wrongful termination. O'Brien seeks between \$3.4 million and \$6 million in lost earnings.

Meanwhile, Salyers has started a website to help tell her side of the story. The site, [www.KathleenSalyers.com](http://www.KathleenSalyers.com), displays a variety of items including cell phone records from Biancardi to the Roslovics, photos of Savovic and former Ohio State recruit Aleksandar Radojevic at Salyers' home, two Mother's Day cards from Savovic and photos of sports agents Spomenko Pajovic and Marc Cornstein.

The site also contains answers to questions regarding her lawsuit and an e-mail address where she can be contacted.

"I wanted to be able to present my side of the story fairly and truthfully," Salyers said. "I want people to be able to see the facts. I want to give them an opportunity to get involved anonymously, to view the website in the hopes that somebody might come forward with additional information."

Salyers' suit against the Roslovics is scheduled to go to trial in August but

could be delayed. Biancardi has yet to submit to a deposition in the case.

### New Names Emerge As Committee Continues Search For New AD

More than six weeks after Ohio State athletic director Andy Geiger announced his retirement, the search committee charged with finding his successor is doing so with a minimum of publicity.

"And that's the way we prefer it to be," Curt Steiner, senior vice president of external university relations, told BSB. "Our search is progressing, but I don't believe any of us feels the need to rush."

It is a search in sharp contrast to the one held last summer by Geiger to find O'Brien's successor. Thad Matta was eventually lured away from Xavier University but not before several weeks of contentiousness had passed between Geiger and several members of the Columbus media who criticized the speed at which the search was conducted.

It has been more than a month since Ohio State president Karen A. Holbrook announced the appointment of the 15-member committee that will conduct

the search to replace Geiger, whose retirement is effective June 30.

Although early speculation centered around candidates thought to be in the mix, recent names that have surfaced include current athletic directors Eric Hyman of Texas Christian and Gary Walters of Princeton.

Hyman has been mentioned prominently for several open athletic directorships in the past few years. A former football and women's basketball coach, he began his administrative career as associate athletic director at Furman before taking over as AD at Virginia Military Institute.

He later moved to North Carolina State as executive associate athletic director then was athletic director at Miami (Ohio) before moving to TCU in February 1998.

Coincidentally, Hyman and Geiger were two of four Division I-A athletic directors honored last summer by the National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics as regional winners of athletic director of the year awards.

Walters has been at Princeton since June 1994 and serves on the NCAA Division I men's basketball committee.

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