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Vol. 30, No. 22

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

June 2011



JOSH WINSLOW PHOTO, ILLUSTRATION BY MATTHEW HAGER

**SAY GOODBYE** – Jim Tressel, Ohio State's head football coach since 2001, resigned from his position May 30 amid the NCAA violations controversy that has engulfed the football program in recent months.

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

With his program and legacy under scrutiny for major NCAA violations after 10 years of winning football, Ohio State football coach Jim Tressel delivered his letter of resignation to athletic director Gene Smith the morning of May 30.

"After meeting with university officials, we agreed that it is in the best interest of Ohio State that I resign as head football coach," Tressel said in the signed letter. "The appreciation that (wife) Ellen and I have for the Buckeye Nation is immeasurable. We have been blessed to work with the finest group of young men in America and we love them dearly.

"We know that God had a plan for us and we will be fine. We will be Buckeyes forever."

The announcement – accompanied by confirmation that assistant head coach Luke Fickell will replace Tressel on an interim basis for the 2011 season – came five months after scandal hit the program in the form of an investigation into the fact that six players including star quarterback Terrelle Pryor had broken NCAA rules by selling memorabilia and accepting discounted benefits.

The storm intensified in early March when the university announced a two-game suspension – which was later extended to five – and fine to the head coach for not reporting what he knew about the violations to athletics compliance or any of his bosses upon having been alerted to them in April 2010.

The NCAA was still to rule after an Aug. 12 meeting with Ohio State whether further sanctions were necessary, with the possibility that Tressel's job could have been on the line in the face of a possible show-cause penalty that would have forced the university's hand.

Tressel, 58, continued to coach Ohio State through spring football, but he alluded to the increasing negative publicity – some of which stemmed from a trickle of stories in the local and national media about other benefits illegally obtained by players – around the program in his resignation letter.

## The End Of The Jim Tressel Era

This edition of Buckeye Sports Bulletin has plenty of coverage of the resignation of Jim Tressel, including:

- Reactions from former Ohio State football players, 2011 signees and 2012 verbal commits, Buckeye fans and national media
- A profile on Luke Fickell, the man who will lead the Buckeyes this fall
- A timeline of the Jim Tressel era
- Columns by BSB managing editor Mark Rea, publisher Frank Moskowitz and columnists Rich Exner and Mike Wachsman



Jim Tressel

"The recent situation has been a distraction for our great university, and I make this decision for the greater good of our school," he wrote.

University president Dr. E. Gordon Gee and director of athletics Gene Smith publicly pledged their support to Tressel at the time his sanctions were announced March 8, pointing to his body of outstanding work both on and off the field at Ohio State, but it started to become clear Tressel's support had waned over time.

In the weeks before the resignation, Gee appointed a committee to "analyze and provide advice to me regarding issues attendant to our football program," he confirmed in a letter written to the board of trustees informing its members of Tressel's resignation.

Continued On Page 6

# PR Disaster Cost Ohio State, Tressel Dearly

According to the official Ohio State athletic department website, there are 12 different people whose sole responsibility is sports communications. That includes an associate athletic director in charge of communications, a director of communications, an associate director, six assistant directors, a communications assistant and two interns.

The glaring omission from that group is anyone with the words "public relations" attached to their title, and if you don't think there is a major difference between communications and public relations, look back at the past six months at OSU to witness what can only be described as an unmitigated disaster that has cost the university in terms of money and prestige as well as arguably the greatest football coach it has ever had.

For six months, you couldn't open a newspaper, turn on a television or log on to the Internet without being bombarded by story after story about wrongdoing within the Ohio State football program. Since December, when six players were suspended for violating NCAA regulations, it was basically one dumpster fire after another with no one at the athletic department answering the alarm bells.

Rather than getting out in front of the burgeoning PR problem, an athletic department that oversees 36 varsity sports with an annual operating budget north of \$115 million looked more and more inept with each passing day.

That ineptitude began with an ill-advised, poorly conceived news conference during which director of athletics Gene Smith, university president Dr. E. Gordon Gee and head coach Jim Tressel did more to harpoon their own message than any number of screeds from ESPN or Sports Illustrated ever could have.

The major problem was that there was never any compelling reason to stage that March 8 news conference.

As a member of the media, naturally I always want all the information I can gather, and under normal circumstances a chance to hear from the university's athletic director, president and head football coach would obviously make my job easier. But the university is not and should not be in the business of making my job easier.

The handful of hours after the original story broke that Tressel had prior knowledge of his players' transgressions gave the university no time to formulate a unified message. As a result, the principals rushed into a news conference situation virtually unprepared and the result was tantamount to tossing a lighted match into a barrel of gasoline.

Why the university didn't simply release a one-page statement and issue a department-wide gag order on the matter remains beyond my comprehension.

Instead, we received a steady drip, drip, drip of tortuous snippets that gave the story fresh legs every few days. It didn't really matter that many of the "new revelations" were regurgitated material gleaned from information that had already been made public. The day-after-day drumbeat continued to eat away at Ohio State's already eroded reputation – especially in the court of public opinion – and on the eve of what was supposed to be a particularly damning exposé by Sports Illustrated, university officials finally pushed the panic button and jettisoned Tressel.

Just how much of an albatross has that March 8 news conference become for Smith and Gee? Enough that both men come off as ineffectual, disingenuous or a little of both.

"With every fiber of his being, (Tressel) believes in the law of integrity and also has lived that way," Gee said that night. "You heard him say he made a mistake and he did. But he has learned from that mistake."

Smith went even further.

## EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

"I want to make sure you understand," the AD said, "that wherever we end up, at the end of the day Jim Tressel is our football coach. Obviously, we're disappointed here but I will tell you that as a coach of young men, we support him 100 percent. He's our coach and we trust him implicitly."

What happened between March 8 and May 30 to make support for Tressel go from 100 percent to zero?

In my humble opinion, university power-brokers (otherwise known as board members, large donors and influential boosters) got tired of being pilloried during their nightly cocktail parties and threatened to cut off their financial support until Tressel was ousted. Never mind that those were idle threats. No booster would ever end their financial support because doing so would mean giving up the influence they covet so much.

Perhaps Gee, Smith and the feckless board of trustees thought ridding themselves of their embattled coach would somehow stop the endless stream of bad press. If so, they have continued an impressive streak of misjudgments. In the days following the release of the SI story – another mishmash of questionable information supplied by less-than-credible sources – the focus shifted from Tressel to quarterback Terrelle Pryor as the bloodlust for anything scarlet and gray continued almost unabated.

The university's response? Scared silence. The floodwaters continued to rise and no one lifted a finger to fill a single public relations sandbag.

As a result, into the breach marched a sanctimonious national media who would have one believe Ohio State is the only university in America at which NCAA violations occur and Tressel was the dirtiest coach since Bobby Collins, whose Southern Methodist program got shut down in 1987 with the NCAA "death penalty."

The cold, hard truth – and the toughest pill still for me to swallow – is that none of this had to happen.

### No Support For Tressel

Unless something else is revealed – something with real meat on its bones – I will remain unconvinced Tressel had to go.

There has been speculation the NCAA will eventually slam the Buckeyes with similar penalties as the ones recently levied on the University of Southern California that include vacated seasons, forfeited championships, scholarship reductions and a postseason ban.

That might be true if USC-OSU was an apples-to-apples comparison. Unlike the Reggie Bush ordeal at USC, however, the university has not been charged with a lack of institutional control.

Yes, there are likely to be additional sanctions. Several games of the 2010 season – perhaps all of them – could be vacated because players who would have otherwise

been ruled ineligible participated in those games. Additionally, Tressel could have been in for a stiffer penalty than a five-game suspension and \$250,000 fine. Perhaps that fine would have been doubled and the coach sidelined for the entire 2011 season. I believe the OSU football program could have lived with that.

Unfortunately, it seems Tressel was the only one in this war ready to go to battle. Why else would he have hired an attorney who was a former chair of the NCAA Committee of Infractions? I have always believed that with any kind of support from his superiors – and I mean real support and not the vacuous lip service he was receiving – Tressel could have weathered the storm.

Instead, those at Ohio State who made the ultimate decision couldn't stand the heat.

Tressel made a mistake and there is no denying that. But let's pause for a moment, take a deep breath and perform a quick reality check. He did not pay his players, he did not commit recruiting violations and he did not run a rogue program. The majority of his players graduated on time, his program's academic standing was exemplary and his production on the field was superlative. Add to those successes the untold number of charitable donations of both money and time that Tressel made over the past decade and you have one of the giants of his profession.

And still his superiors could not muster the fortitude to stand behind him when the going got tough? I would never in a million years have believed that could happen at The Ohio State University.

### Some Final Thoughts

We can debate forever the merits of Tressel's decision to withhold information after he learned his players were involved in improper activities. What is not up for debate is that his May 30 resignation marked one of the darkest days in Ohio State football history.

Those who took victory laps for whatever reason after Tressel's downfall got their wish. When you have been a college head coach for nearly 30 years, it is certain you have made your share of enemies along the way.

But for those fans who are pleased because they didn't like the coach's conservative approach to offense, his unwavering loyalty to his sometimes-unpopular assistant coaches or the fact that they just haven't gotten over back-to-back losses in the 2006 and 2007 national championship games, I have a simple question. Do you realize just how far back Tressel's exit has set the Ohio State program? Then again, maybe you got tired of beating Michigan every year, stringing together a record number of the Big Ten championships and playing in meaningful bowl games.

I know what some of you are thinking. Oh, we'll just bring in Urban Meyer (or anyone else of your choosing) and everything will be fine. Really? There is a reason why only one other Big Ten team in history has won six championships in a row. It's the same reason why no Ohio State coach has ever beaten Michigan seven times in a row – because it's hard. Damned hard.

Whatever sanctions the NCAA levies will come and go, just as the national media will eventually move on to another witch hunt. Meanwhile, Ohio State has lost much more than a public relations battle. It has lost Jim Tressel – the right man in the right place at the right time for the right job, and he's been lost for all the wrong reasons.



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# Tressel Departs After 10 Seasons At OSU

Continued From Page 1

"In consultation with the senior leadership of the university and the senior leadership of the board, I have been actively reviewing the matter and have accepted Coach Tressel's resignation," he wrote to the board.

No formal press conference had been held as of press time, but Gee did briefly discuss the topic with reporters at an unrelated event June 1. When asked whether Tressel was encouraged to resign or forced out by university officials, he said simply, "I think it is very clear that the coach in the end understood the kind of scrutiny he was under."

Athletic director Gene Smith also has not spoken to the public, but he did release a three-minute video statement about the decision May 30 that shed at least a faint light on Tressel's final hours. In the video, Smith said he met with Tressel upon the coach's return from vacation May 29 and the two decided on a course of action at that time.

"We did meet with part of the team this morning and those who were not there, they were contacted by their position coaches, but Coach Tressel did what we all knew that he would do," Smith said. "He did an eloquent job of explaining to the young men what transition really means and what they need to focus on. We met with the team and exited."

"Prior to the team meeting we did meet with the coaching staff and the support staff around our football program and shared with them that Jim had decided to resign."

Previous to running afoul of NCAA rules, Tressel – who also has not spoken to reporters since the decision – posted a decorated career in Columbus.

He was hired away from Youngstown State after the 2000 season, replacing the fired John Cooper, after winning four Division I-AA national championships. Though many were skeptical of the largely unknown Mentor, Ohio, native, he quickly won over the fan base by doing two things Cooper could not – beating Michigan and winning it all.

Though Tressel's first team went only 7-5, it stayed in contention for the Big Ten crown until the final weeks and then shocked Michigan by a 26-20 score in Ann Arbor.

One year later, everything came together as Ohio State won its first national championship in more than three decades. The Buckeyes went 13-0 during the regular season, capping the campaign with a nerve-racking 14-9 win against Michigan in Ohio Stadium, before going to the Fiesta Bowl as two-touchdown underdogs to Miami (Fla.).

Many expected the Hurricanes to romp to victory, but Ohio State's dominating defense held its ground and the Buckeyes posted a 31-24 double-overtime win in a game many consider to be among the best ever played in college football.

The winning rarely stopped from that point forward. Ohio State again won the Fiesta Bowl in 2003 and '05 before playing for national championships in the 2006 and '07 seasons, dropping both to SEC schools Florida and LSU, respectively.

Still, the Buckeyes were a model of consistency, tying the Big Ten record for consecutive championships and qualifying for Bowl Championship Series bids six straight years from from 2005-10. Along the way, Tressel upped his record against Michigan to 9-1 while setting up a recruiting fence around Ohio that severely weakened the U-M program.

In all, Tressel went 106-22 in 10 seasons, winning seven conference titles and making eight appearances in BCS bowls, going 5-3.

Tressel was also known for his work in the community and with the military. He was a leader in raising money for the renovation of Ohio State's William Oxley Thompson library and donated a substantial amount of money to that cause himself, and he was known to visit hospitals and return even the smallest personal request for his time.

He actively welcomed military personnel to the Ohio State practice field and set up a display in the Woody Hayes Athletic Center to honor those who had military ties in the program as well as diehard fans who served in the armed forces. During the summer of 2009, he traveled to Iraq and Afghanistan to visit U.S. troops based overseas.

His players achieved in the classroom – OSU was recognized in May for being in the top 10 percent of Division I-A football in the NCAA's Academic Progress Rate – and many talked of the impact Tressel had in shaping them into successful young men both on and off the field.

"I do want to thank Coach Tressel for his long service to our university," Smith said in his video address. "There were a lot of people that he touched in a highly positive way. We were very thankful for his leadership during the years that we had great success on the field and off the field but more importantly in the classroom."

Controversy followed the coach, however.

Running back Maurice Clarett, who helped the 2002 team to the national title, was a walking firestorm. He was suspended for the 2003 season after accepting illegal benefits, and eyebrows were raised when he filed a police report alleging that nearly \$10,000 worth of merchandise had been stolen from the loaner car he was driving.

Later, quarterback Troy Smith was suspended for two games in late 2004 when it was found he had accepted money from a booster. Smith returned to Ohio State and won the Heisman Trophy in 2006.

Finally, the scandal that came to light in December was too much for Tressel to overcome.

### Tressel's Downfall

The first sign of trouble came Dec. 23 when Ohio State gathered the media amid swirling rumors to announce that six players had been suspended for games at the start of the 2011 season.

Pryor, offensive lineman Mike Adams, running back Dan "Boom" Herron, receiver DeVier Posey and defensive end Solomon Thomas were suspended five games for selling memorabilia including championship rings and equipment against NCAA rules, while linebacker Jordan Whiting

## Potential Ohio State Coaching Candidates

Ohio State has chosen to elevate assistant Luke Fickell to replace Jim Tressel as head coach for the 2011 season, but the university also announced that a search for Tressel's full-time replacement will take place at the conclusion of the campaign.

Already, a number of familiar names have been rumored as possible hires. BSB takes a look at the early speculation with profiles of the possible replacements. Those candidates are listed in alphabetical order.

**Mark Dantonio** – The Michigan State head coach spent 2001-03 as Tressel's defensive coordinator before moving on to Cincinnati. After three years with the Bearcats, he took over at Michigan State and has led the Spartans to a 33-19 record in four seasons as well as a share of the 2010 Big Ten championship. Dantonio is much like Tressel in that he stresses discipline and fundamental football, and the Zanesville, Ohio, native has plenty of recruiting ties in the Buckeye State. Health might be an issue; Dantonio suffered a mild heart attack during the 2010 season.

**Luke Fickell** – The interim coach is a rising star in the business. A former Ohio State defensive lineman, he joined Tressel's staff in 2002 as special teams coordinator. He was promoted to linebackers coach in 2004 and added the co-defensive coordinator title a year later. Young and energetic, Fickell relates well to his players and is known as an

excellent recruiter. He has reportedly been courted for some Mid-American Conference jobs, but would he be ready to take over at a place like Ohio State?

**Jon Gruden** – He has never been a head coach at the college level, but Gruden has been installed as a 3:1 choice to take over according to online sportsbook Bodog.com. Gruden spent 11 seasons as the head coach of the NFL's Oakland Raiders and Tampa Bay Buccaneers from 1998-2008, leading the Buccaneers to a Super Bowl win in 2002. A Sandusky native and Dayton grad, Gruden also has extensive Ohio ties and many figure he'd be an excellent recruiter. He currently is a color analyst on ESPN's "Monday Night Football."

**Darrell Hazell** – Hazell is a dark-horse choice, but he could be in the running after serving as OSU's assistant head coach the past six seasons. Also OSU's receivers coach from 2004-10, Hazell took over as the head man at Kent State during the offseason. He was known to be extremely well liked by players and was one of Tressel's most trusted deputies during his time in Columbus.

**Urban Meyer** – The favorite to take over at 3:2 according to Bodog, Meyer just can't seem to escape ties to Ohio State. An Ashtabula native

who has coached at Bowling Green, Utah and Florida – where he won two national championships – Meyer reached the top of the profession before retiring following last season because of stress-related health problems. It remains to be seen if he'd be ready to return to coaching after a year off, and his players had an extensive arrest record at Florida.

**Bo Pelini** – An Ohio State letter winner at safety from 1987-90 and a co-captain his senior year, Pelini has brought back the luster to the Nebraska program in his three years, posting a 30-12 record. Pelini is known as one of the most intense coaches in the game and his defenses remind many of Tressel's, as Pelini was a defensive coordinator at Nebraska, Oklahoma and LSU before taking over in Lincoln.

**Mark Stoops** – The Stoops family of Youngstown, Ohio, is well known in coaching circles, and it seems unlikely Ohio State could wrest Bob Stoops from his head coaching role at Oklahoma. As a result, Mark seems like the most viable candidate from the family. Currently the defensive coordinator at Florida State, Mark is known for producing fundamentally sound, physical defenses.

– Jeff Svoboda



Bo Pelini

fundamentally sound, physical defenses.

received a one-game suspension for receiving improper benefits.

At the time, both Smith and Tressel said they were unaware of the situation until alerted by the Department of Justice in early December, but Ohio State discovered Jan. 13 while searching Tressel's e-mails that he had been alerted by a local lawyer, former OSU player Christopher Cicero.

The first e-mail sent from Cicero to Tressel on April 2, 2010, alerted the coach that a recent federal raid as part of a drug trafficking investigation showed that local tattoo parlor owner Edward Rife was in possession of Ohio State memorabilia of current players and selling it for profit. In addition, the e-mail said that OSU players had been given free tattoos at Rife's Fine Line Ink parlor in Columbus.

Tressel replied, "I will get on it ASAP."

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

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

He later signed a compliance form in September 2010 that assured he was not aware of any rules violations inside of his program. Finally in December, he did not mention the e-mails to either Ohio State or the NCAA when the university received the Department of Justice letter or as part of the ensuing investigation even when questioned.

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

especially after Cicero requested confidentiality.

The result was that Tressel was handed a \$250,000 fine and suspension – as well as ordered to attend a compliance seminar – by the university on March 8, the same day the university announced the sanctions at an ill-fated press conference.

That day, both Smith and Gee pledged their e-mail sent to the coach as well.

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

Added Gee, "This university is very committed to this coach. This president is committed to this coach. He's had great success on the football field and we applaud that. He's had great success in working with young people, and we applaud that. But equally importantly, he's had great success in building the character and reputation of this university, for which I am entirely grateful."

However, the walls started to crumble in the coming weeks and months. The Columbus Dispatch reported that while Tressel had not alerted anyone at OSU, he had in fact forwarded the e-mails to Ted Sarniak, Pryor's mentor from his hometown of Jeannette, Pa.

Ohio State also received a Notice of Allegations from the NCAA on April 25, a document that levied a major violation against Tressel for the cover-up.

"It was reported that Jim Tressel, head football coach, failed to deport himself in accordance with the honesty and integrity normally associated with the conduct and administration of intercollegiate athletics as required by NCAA legislation and violated ethical-conduct legislation when he failed to report information concerning violations of NCAA legislation and permitted football student-athletes to participate in intercollegiate athletics competition while ineligible," the notice reads.

have been involved in selling memorabilia, receiving discounted tattoos and also taking money for autographs from both Fine Line Ink and Dudley's Tattoos & Body Piercing.

Of those players, nine – C.J. Barnett, Dorian Bell, Jaamal Berry, Bo DeLande, Zach Domicone, John Simon, Storm Klein, Etienne Sabino and Nathan Williams – are currently on the squad.

The SI story also said four unnamed players traded memorabilia for marijuana while hanging out at Fine Line Ink, and that former running back Jermil Martin had received cars from Rife.

The NCAA was quick to act, as sources told BSB that the current players were interviewed by Ohio State and the NCAA the week of May 30, though OSU spokesman Jim Lynch would not confirm.

"The university has an active investigation with the NCAA and we will continue to work jointly with them until the conclusion of the matter," Lynch told BSB.

Added Smith in a statement, "During the course of an investigation, the university and the NCAA work jointly to review any new allegations that come to light and will continue to do so until the conclusion of the investigation. You should rest assured that these new allegations will be evaluated in exactly this manner."

The parents of Simon and Klein both issued public statements to BSB and other media outlets that their sons had done nothing wrong.

Independent corroboration of SI's claims was necessary for the NCAA to move forward because the governing body must find proof of wrongdoing through its own interviews rather than media reports.

However, the SI informant, a one-time employee of the tattoo parlors in question, reportedly has said he will talk to the NCAA. If some of the claims are corroborated, Ohio State could face charges of failure to monitor its football program or the dreaded tag of lack of institutional control.

Lawyer and NCAA compliance expert Michael L. Buckner told BSB that could be more likely after the case involving the USC football program, in which such star players as Reggie Bush received illegal benefits. The NCAA decided the players were not as actively monitored by compliance and coaches as they should have been, and USC was hit with scholarship penalties, probation and a two-year bowl ban.

"If what they're reporting is true and the NCAA comes back through their own independent investigation and verifies some of it, then I think it will become more difficult for Ohio State to avoid an institutional-wide penalty," Buckner said. "Right or wrong, in terms of what the NCAA is now expecting, I think schools have to do a better job of meeting those expectations."

"Before the USC case, there was probably a gray line there, but the USC case definitely established that schools have an obligation to be proactive in their compliance efforts including their monitoring."

Buckner also said that Tressel's choice to leave Ohio State should help the university when it comes to facing the NCAA, especially if nothing new is confirmed.

"I think at this stage it will help Ohio State because the employee that was involved in the most serious of the allegations – which was the unethical conduct allegation – is no longer employed at the institution," he said. "Generally speaking, in the past, that has tended to somewhat help institutions."

No matter what, Tressel's decorated tenure has come to a close, and it appears it will be a long summer in Columbus.

OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

# Former Buckeyes Stand Behind Their Coach

By ADAM JARDY  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

As Jim Tressel went through the final days of his Ohio State career, a number of his former players had no idea big changes were looming on the horizon.

Ross Homan, a linebacker from 2006-10 and team captain during his senior season, is living and training in Columbus after being selected by the Minnesota Vikings in the sixth round of the NFL draft. Homan told BSB he has been working out at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center and would see Tressel going through his usual routine.

"I'd come in every morning and say hi to him," Homan said a few hours after Tressel's resignation was announced. "He has a routine. He comes in early in the morning and goes on the treadmill and talks to everyone in the weight room like always and then goes to work. It's going to be weird now."

Former linebacker Bobby Carpenter, who received the news while in Dallas for a wedding, said he saw Tressel four days before his resignation and saw no indications of what was to come.

"I talked to him in person before I left to come down here and he was really the same guy in May of 2011 as he was in 2001 when he was hired," said Carpenter, who lettered for the Buckeyes from 2002-05. "That's who he is. I asked him how he was doing and he was fine."

Said Jim Cordle, who was a senior during the 2009 season: "Everybody was in fairly good spirits around the Woody Hayes. There



FILE PHOTO

**STILL THEIR GUY** – Former Ohio State players such as Jim Cordle (left), a senior offensive lineman in 2009, have voiced their support for Jim Tressel (right).

wasn't any chink in (Tressel's) armor. It was carry on as usual. I walked by his office two weeks ago and he was talking to his secretary about what they're going to do when these recruits come in. There was definitely no sign that this was coming.

"My take was that they were going to settle in, they were going to fight this, and he

was going to take the punishment and move on and coach out his contract."

Defensive back Donald Washington, now a member of the NFL's Kansas City Chiefs who lettered from 2006-08, said he was awakened during the morning of May 30 by a phone call from his girlfriend telling him that Tressel had resigned. Like Homan,

Washington has been working out at the WHAC in recent weeks.

As such, it took a few more phone calls to convince him to get out of bed and flip on the television.

"I would have never guessed," he said. "I still can't really believe it."

However, both Homan and Carpenter pointed out that the recent weeks had them unsure of what might be down the road for their former coach. One week earlier, former wide receiver Ray Small told the student newspaper, The Lantern, that he had sold memorabilia while playing at Ohio State, adding that everyone was doing it and opening the program to a new round of scrutiny.

"I think this is the culmination of a lot of pressure," Carpenter said. "I feel like he probably is taking one more or less for the university and the team. He might have felt further sanctions were coming and with him not being the coach they felt this was the best way to proceed as far as the NCAA infractions committee. He's been there for a long time and he's a tremendous person. I think he stepped up and did what he thought was right and in the best interests of the university."

Added Homan: "No one really knew what was going on with all the allegations. No one knew what it was going to come down to."

Nader Abdallah, an OSU letter winner from 2007-08, said he was at his job working as a personal trainer when he heard the news. Although a familiar face will keep things warm for now in interim head coach Luke Fickell, there will be a different feeling within the weight room, Abdallah said.

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**OHIO STATE FOOTBALL**

**The Career Of Jim Tressel**

Jim Tressel earned 241 wins in his 25-year career at Ohio State and Youngstown State, the second most among active Division I-A coaches behind Penn State's Joe Paterno (401) at the time of his resignation. Tressel is the only coach in NCAA history to win 100 games at two schools.

| Year | School     | Overall | Conf. | Place | Postseason                            |
|------|------------|---------|-------|-------|---------------------------------------|
| 2001 | Ohio State | 7-5     | 5-3   | 3rd   | Outback Bowl (loss)                   |
| 2002 | Ohio State | 14-0    | 8-0   | T1st  | Fiesta Bowl (National Champions)      |
| 2003 | Ohio State | 11-2    | 6-2   | T2nd  | Fiesta Bowl (win)                     |
| 2004 | Ohio State | 8-4     | 4-4   | T5th  | Alamo Bowl (win)                      |
| 2005 | Ohio State | 10-2    | 7-1   | T1st  | Fiesta Bowl (win)                     |
| 2006 | Ohio State | 12-1    | 8-0   | 1st   | BCS National Championship Game (loss) |
| 2007 | Ohio State | 11-2    | 7-1   | 1st   | BCS National Championship Game (loss) |
| 2008 | Ohio State | 10-3    | 7-1   | T1st  | Fiesta Bowl (loss)                    |
| 2009 | Ohio State | 11-2    | 7-1   | 1st   | Rose Bowl (win)                       |
| 2010 | Ohio State | 12-1    | 7-1   | T1st  | Sugar Bowl (win)                      |

**Tressel at OSU: 106-22 (.828)**  
**Big Ten games: 66-14 (.825)**  
**Draft picks: 14 first round, 66 overall** • **Overall career record: 241-79-2 (.752)**  
**Record vs. Michigan: 9-1**  
**Home record: 64-7** • **Vs. Top 25: 37-15**

"My first reaction was more shock," he said. "Then it was extremely sad to me because when I go to the Woody Hayes I like to see Coach Tressel there and have a warm environment where it's a good environment. I don't know how it's going to be now when I go over there. It's extremely shocking to me – more sad than anything. I didn't see it coming."

Abdallah said he had spoken with Doug Worthington, a former team captain and fellow defensive lineman. Homan said he had heard from his brother Adam, a fullback on the roster, but no other players.

"I've talked to a couple of guys," Washington said. "A lot of guys are shocked and saddened by the news. I think it was shocking to everybody. It really hit a place in my heart that he resigned. It really touched me."

Each of Tressel's former players contacted by BSB mentioned how the coach had impacted their lives in a positive manner. A native of New Orleans who first arrived at Ohio State as part of the 2004 recruiting class, Abdallah and his family suffered through Hurricane Katrina in 2005 but were helped by Tressel.

"He was able to talk to the NCAA to put my family in a house for six months, which was covered by FEMA," he said. "Just having him be able to be supportive during that whole time with my family, he was there helping me."

"I remember him the most as somebody who actually, honestly cares and is genuine. He knew everything about you and your family, things that you forgot you knew about yourself. He did that much research in finding out who you are, what you know and what your family has been through."

Washington, who served a two-game suspension for apparent disciplinary reasons to start the 2008 season, said Tressel was there to help him through his personal struggles.

"I can speak for hours on what Coach Tressel meant to me," he said. "Regardless of my struggles here at Ohio State, Coach Tressel helped mold me into the man that I am today. This (current) image is not who he is. If you know Coach Tressel, he's a man of class. He's a class act, period."

In a Sports Illustrated cover story that went to press the same day Tressel resigned and several hours after BSB contacted him, Washington was alleged to have traded memorabilia for tattoos during his OSU career.

Before landing the head coaching position at Youngstown State, Tressel served as an assistant on Earle Bruce's staff from 1983-

85. Among the players he coached was quarterback Jim Karsatos, who said he was doing yard work when he received the news.

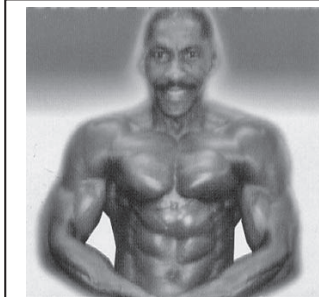
"I'm disappointed," he said. "I think this is Ohio State and everything is blown out of proportion because I think we're losing a great man. Everybody has the highest regard for him for the most part. He was my coach when I played so I am in that category as well. I think it's a shame that he had to take the brunt of the actions of others even though it's his dream job. It's just a shame."

**Players At Fault?**

The former Buckeye players contacted by BSB were split on how much blame to assign to OSU's suspended players for Tressel's situation.

Last December, the university announced five-game suspensions for five players while a sixth Buckeye will miss the season opener after it was learned they had sold memorabilia and received free or discounted tattoos. However, the players were still allowed to take part in the Sugar Bowl after the university and the Big Ten lobbied on OSU's behalf.

The fact that Tressel had been at least partially aware of the situation since last April and had not reported it to his superiors was the primary reason he ultimately left his position.



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"Obviously one of them preceded the other, and Coach Tressel obviously made a mistake in his handling of the situation," Carpenter said. "I think he knew that and acknowledged that. At the same time I challenge anybody – people think raising one or two kids is hard. Try raising 100 kids who maybe didn't have the parental involvement growing up, and he tried to help them the best way that he could."

"Sometimes parents make mistakes as well. Your first inclination much of the time is to protect your kids and that's what Coach Tress was trying to do. I think he realized after that fact that it was not the way to handle it."

Karsatos said that although he did not necessarily blame the players, he was disappointed in their actions.

"We all make dumb mistakes, but they should've known better, for one," he said. "You can't be so aloof to the situation."

During his time in the program while lettering from 1983-86, Karsatos said there were not compliance officers working with the team instructing them on what was permissible by NCAA rules. There was just Bruce.

"Earle would just point his finger at us and say, 'Here are the rules and live by them,'" Karsatos said. "Coach (Woody) Hayes was much the same way. He laid down the law and if you broke it, you're gone. They've got like five people now to manage these kids."

"They knew the rules. They've been told about that. We used to have a guy from the FBI come in once a year and tell us, 'Look out for these people.' They had to have known better."

Homan said the players put the situation

behind them by the time the bowl game against Arkansas came around.

"I think I got past that point when we took care of that last December," he said. "If those guys had known three years back that the actions that they did would have progressed to this, I know definitely those guys would have done something different. I can't show any hate toward those guys because I know they're my brothers. It's a weird situation. It's not like you can only like Coach Tressel or those players. We're one family all together. It's sad that everything is falling apart. Hopefully we can come back from this."

Added Washington, "I can't really sit here and try to put the blame on anybody. I know there were probably a bunch of things that factored into this situation. I just don't think this is the way it was supposed to happen. That's the only thing I could say about it."

Cordle said that in time Tressel will be remembered more for the good he accomplished during his OSU career than the way it ended.

"He'll be remembered for victories and the Michigan game, but more importantly I think for the players what he meant to them and the father figure he was and the great humanitarian he was," he said. "Going to Iraq, the way that he handled the military, the way he emphasized being grateful for the men and women in the service, the community outreach that he made a priority there, the graduation rate, the academic success of guys – I think he'll definitely be remembered for all the good and not this fall from grace."

"It's sad now but his legacy will last on and he'll be remembered for that."



**Jim Karsatos**

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# Fickell Pushed Into Spotlight

## Former NG Now Leads Buckeyes

By ADAM JARDY  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

As the 23rd head coach in Ohio State history, Luke Fickell faces a set of challenges unlike any of the other 22 who preceded him.

On May 30, the OSU linebackers coach and co-defensive coordinator was named the interim coach for the 2011 season when Jim Tressel resigned. With the former coach previously facing a five-game suspension to open the season, Fickell had been named his replacement for those Saturdays but went to great lengths during his lone spring press conference to reiterate that it remained Tressel's team.

Now Fickell has a full season to lead the team with an uncertain future to follow. The team's newest leader is only the second interim coach for the Buckeyes since 1913 and the first since World War II.

In 1913, John W. Wilce piloted the Buckeyes to a 4-2-1 record and earned the right to go on and coach for 15 more seasons. The university's student health center now bears his name after he gave stability to the position in need of some – the prior three head coaches each lasted just one season apiece.

But more recently, a reluctant man was thrust into the position in relief of one of the coaching profession's all-time greats.

Paul Brown coached the Buckeyes to the 1942 national championship and also led OSU in 1943 before World War II got in the way. Forced to leave the program to serve his country, the 35-year-old Brown spent two seasons coaching the Great Lakes Naval Station but departed Columbus with a promise from athletic director Lynn St. John

that when he returned, the job would once again be his.

In Brown's stead, Carroll C. Widdoes coached the 1944 Buckeyes to a 9-0 record and national runner-up finish behind Army thanks to the efforts of Les Horvath, who became the first player in program history to win the Heisman Trophy. Not only that, but Widdoes was named the national coach of the year for his efforts in 1944.

Widdoes, however, assumed the responsibility of head coach grudgingly.

"He never wanted to be the head coach," OSU historian Jack Park said of Widdoes. "He never had any intention. He never lobbied for it. He never applied for it. I think he was just doing it as a favor."

Brown never returned to OSU, instead landing the head coaching job for the Cleveland team in the upstart All-American Football Conference that would eventually take on his last name. After two seasons, Widdoes had seen enough and traded positions with offensive coordinator Paul Bixler. In his two seasons at the helm, Widdoes went 16-2 overall and 1-1 against Michigan, losing a 7-3 contest during his final season.

"When that (1945) season is over, (Widdoes) goes to St. John and asks for his old job back as an assistant because he never wanted to be the head coach," Park said. "It's one of the most unusual job changes there will probably ever be in college football."

"Widdoes didn't like the pressure of being the head coach," Park continued. "He didn't like all the media attention. He didn't like having to go out all the time and speak to the alumni groups and holding press conferences. He later on was a head coach at Ohio University but it was a much smaller



JOSH WINSLOW

**NEW BOSS** – Columbus native and former Ohio State nose guard Luke Fickell (foreground) will lead the Buckeyes this fall on an interim basis.

profile." Fickell will now have to wear the caps of both interim coach and replacement to one of the program's most revered names.

The Columbus native and former OSU defensive lineman may not have to look far for advice. After Tressel spent three years as one of Earle Bruce's assistants in the mid-1980s, Bruce has been a fixture around the program during Tressel's tenure and could offer some guidance. Bruce was thrust into a similar situation as Fickell, when he took over from the legendary Woody Hayes in 1979.

After spending 28 years as OSU's head coach and amassing a program-record 205 victories, Hayes left the school after throwing an infamous punch at Clemson nose guard Charlie Bauman at the tail end of the 1978 Gator Bowl. Bruce, who had been an assistant under Hayes, took over and compiled an 81-26-1 record before being dismissed with one game remaining in the 1987 season.

Although Fickell will have to replace a coach who led the Buckeyes to three national championship games, seven Big Ten championships and nine victories against

rival Michigan in 10 seasons, Park said his challenge might not be on par with what Bruce had to experience in one respect.

"(Bruce) was replacing a legend, and maybe even more so (than Fickell is) because Woody had been here 28 years," he said. "There were young people who had graduated from Ohio State that were still in their 20s. Woody was there before they were born. There were so many people who couldn't remember Ohio State without Woody Hayes and this was a tough thing for Earle, no question about it."

Bruce declined to comment for the story.

Fickell will likely share one benefit with Bruce. Like the former coach, OSU's new head man figures to be able to call on his predecessor for guidance when needed.

Jim Karsatos, who led the Buckeyes in passing as the quarterback in 1985 and 1986, recalled seeing Hayes as a fixture at practice.

"Oh yeah, he was around," Karsatos said with a laugh. "He'd sit in on meetings and be out on the field just watching and scolding. He wasn't nearly as vocal as he was when he was the head coach because he

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## OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

wanted to leave that to Earle and Earle did enough of his own yelling.

"Coach Hayes was around a lot and still very much involved in not only the football aspect but the other things we did. He was always invited to come join us."

Tressel's level of involvement going forward remains to be seen. In the conclusion to his resignation letter, Tressel wrote that he and his wife "will be Buckeyes forever."

However, the NCAA could limit Tressel's ability to be around the team for the near future. Plus, the coach will have to balance being a presence without becoming a distraction for the team should he be allowed at practice.

Park said he foresees Tressel having a similar role as Hayes regarding this year's coaching staff.

"I think Luke Fickell has the advantage that Earle had and that is that as Earle got into the job, Woody Hayes was a tremendous mentor to him, and I'm sure that Coach Tressel will do the same thing for Luke," he said. "I think if Luke had some questions on what he should be doing or how he should be handling something, I don't think he'd hesitate to pick up the phone and call him.

"I can't imagine Jim Tressel wouldn't do everything to help Luke now in his role and maybe try to help him become the permanent coach. They seem to have a very close relationship."

### Tressel's Influence

When Ohio State said goodbye to the 2008 season, it also waved farewell to a celebrated class of seniors. With James Laurinaitis, Marcus Freeman, Malcolm Jenkins and others all having exhausted their eligibility, Fickell had the chance to follow them out the door and nab another high-profile job.

Viewed as a rising star in the coaching profession, Fickell was fielding a number of serious overtures for open positions. Pre-eminent among them was the defensive coordinator job at Notre Dame, where the former OSU lineman was widely pegged as the front-runner.

However, as the Buckeyes welcomed in the nation's top recruiting class on National Signing Day a little more than one month after the season ended, Fickell was standing outside the team meeting room in the hallway of the Woody Hayes Athletic Center telling a few reporters why he had opted to turn down the Fighting Irish and remain at his current position under Tressel.

"It is what it is, and I'm excited," he said Feb. 4, 2009. "If you ever do make a change in your life, I think the hardest thing is walking away from the people that you've got to know so well and the guys that you've counted on, and hopefully they count on you. Someday if it ever happens it won't be easy, especially when you've got the kind of relationships that you do have."

Earlier, during the regular season, Tressel was asked about Fickell's prospects of becoming a head coach in the future.

"We talk about those things in the off-season a lot with all the guys," he said Oct. 2, 2008. "I think Luke's got a lot of ability and a lot of passion. He does a good job in every facet of the game – the X and O phase, the recruiting phase, the player relationship phase."

After his playing career came to a close, Fickell moved into coaching with a one-year stint as a graduate assistant for head coach John Cooper in 1999 before spending two seasons as the defensive line coach at Akron. He returned to Columbus for the 2002 season and served as Tressel's special teams coach for two years.

Upon his return, Fickell said he was impressed with how Tressel directed a large staff.

"Under Coach Coop, basically it was nine assistant coaches, two graduate assistants and that's just what it was," Fickell said in 2007. "Our staff now is just so huge. I think that's his way of making so many people be a part."

"From the GAs to the student coaches to the academic people, everybody is an integral part. At staff meetings, there are 45 seats in there. It is unbelievable the way that (Tressel) makes everybody seem like they are as big of a part in the whole picture as the offensive coordinator, the defensive coordinator. It's an uncanny ability that he has, and that's why there are so many people."

As a lineman from 1993-96, Fickell recorded 212 career tackles including 26 for loss and six sacks. During his senior season, Fickell landed a new position coach, Jim Heacock, who was named the defensive line coach after spending eight seasons as the head coach at Illinois State.

The two have gone on to work closely since that season. Heacock was promoted to defensive coordinator for the 2005 season, the same year that Fickell was named co-defensive coordinator. In addition, Heacock continued to oversee the defensive line while Fickell continued as the linebackers coach after taking the role in 2004.

Although the two have admitted to butting heads occasionally, Heacock said he sees some of the same traits in Fickell as a coach that he displayed as a player.

"He didn't get very flowery and he didn't get a lot of praise," Heacock said prior to the 2007 national championship game. "He just got down in the trenches and dug it out there. You could always count on him to take on the double team. As you go through his senior year, he never got much credit but he got in there and he battled.

"You could always count on him, and that's how he is as a coach. He's going to get in there and battle. He's going to coach those linebackers and he's going to work hard at it and he's going to be down there at 5 o'clock in the morning studying film. That's why when I talk about our defensive team on our staff, Luke does every bit as much as I do or anyone else does."

### Cut From A Different Vest

Bobby Carpenter, a second-team All-Big Ten linebacker during his senior season at OSU in 2005, said his former position coach paints a different portrait than the man he is replacing in at least one area.

"Luke's a defensive guy and Tress is an offensive guy," he told BSE. "Defensive guys are a little more intense and in your face. Tress is a little more cerebral and always looks at the big picture. He's very calculated with his approach. Luke might be a little more no-nonsense, and it's 'my way or the highway' a little bit."

Former OSU offensive lineman Jim Cordle said that difference will likely be noticeable on the sidelines this fall in Ohio Stadium.

"They called him Senator (Tressel) for a reason," Cordle said. "They're definitely almost opposites in the way that they show their personality."

Asked if Fickell is more intense than Tressel, former OSU cornerback Donald Washington said, "No doubt. That's why he's the linebackers coach. (Ross Homan) could tell you – Coach Fickell is a very aggressive coach. He just knows how to get the most out of his players. It will be good for the team."

Said Homan: "He's so competitive. I can't

think of a better guy for that program. Coach Fick is going to be great, great for Ohio State, especially for this year with everything they're going through. Everyone knows Coach Fick is a competitive guy, a hard worker and he'll get you there."

During the 2007 season, Fickell jokingly told reporters that he had not heard Tressel yell at a player since Carpenter left after the 2005 season. The linebackers coach said a coach needs only to be steady when it comes to his demeanor.

"It's consistency," he said. "It's who you are. If you are who you are all the time I think kids will believe in you and everybody will know who you are. But sometimes you've got the Jekylls and the Hydes and there are ups and there are downs. That's hard for kids especially to understand."

However, the differences between Tressel and Fickell might only be skin deep. A number of former Buckeyes contacted for this story pointed out that the two share similar internal values regarding faith, family and community.

Those attributes recently helped the Buckeyes land Curtis Grant, the nation's top outside linebacker prospect according to Scout.com, on National Signing Day in February.

"He was one of those guys that cared about you more as a person instead of just a football player," Grant said of Fickell after his commitment. "Every week, we would rarely talk about football. It was always about getting to know each other and how he was going to improve our relationship as far as two human beings if he was going to be my coach."

When the season is over, the university is planning to launch a coaching search

expected to include both internal and external candidates. Many have talked about the possibility of former national championship coach Urban Meyer taking over, but Cordle said Fickell has a golden opportunity to lay final claim to the position.

"I'm sure personally he'll absolutely take it and say, 'This is my chance to be the next permanent head coach at Ohio State,'" the lineman said. "Right now it's hard to be excited, obviously, but Luke Fickell is a guy that Buckeye Nation is going to be excited about."

"Obviously people would get excited if they brought in Urban Meyer, but now that Fickell is in the spotlight I think you'll see that and a lot of players will tell you that he's a guy you can be excited about."

Park said the Meyer situation could prove to be the biggest hurdle for Fickell to overcome as he tries to pilot the team this season.

"The one thing that might not help Luke is there will be a lot in the press about, 'Who would you like to see? What about this guy? Urban Meyer just bought a house in Upper Arlington,' and all that from the rumor mill," he said.

Carpenter pointed out that landing the job on a permanent basis will not be easy. The Buckeyes will be without four key offensive starters for the first five games because of suspension, and one of those players – quarterback Terrelle Pryor – is reportedly being investigated by the NCAA and OSU.

"He's been put in probably one of the most difficult situations, so if he shows that he can handle it I definitely will back him until the end," Carpenter said. "He's a great guy and he knows exactly what to do with this program."

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# Local, National Columnists Not Very Forgiving

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

National reaction to Jim Tressel's resignation May 30 was predictably fast, furious and generally unforgiving.

Tressel was the focus of most of the spilled ink, but he was not alone in the crosshairs. Many took University president Dr. E. Gordon Gee and director of athletics Gene Smith to task as well for their handling of the situation beginning in December and continuing with an ill-fated press conference March 8.

A sampling of what the nation's commentators had to say follows.

• **Paul Daugherty, Cincinnati Enquirer:** "Some of us rooted for Monday to come. Not because Tressel is inherently evil or ran a crooked program but because he posed himself as anti-evil and anti-crooked. And we believed him. ...

"Here in hybrid-Ohio, ambivalence rules. Our sports loyalties are as divided as Mason and Dixon. The rest of the state caught pneumonia Monday when Ohio State announced Tressel's resignation. Around here, we sneezed. The message wasn't lost on us, though. We've seen an iconic college coach be forced to resign. The difference was, Bob Huggins didn't sell us on his righteousness. What you saw was what you got. Huggins was good that way. Far better than the man in Columbus, who today looks as sincere as the sleeves on his vest."

• **Pat Forde, ESPN.com:** "The fans rejoicing around the Big Ten on Monday makes clear how thoroughly Tressel had dominated the league. His tenure was a spectacular success on the field. But there will be an enduring and justifiable taint to Tressel. This is a guy who has always talked skillfully about doing all the right things, but hasn't walked it very well. He won big and was dogged by NCAA violations at Youngstown State in the 1990s. Now the same is true at Ohio State."

"And now Tressel has been forced out of his dream job, one of the top five in America. If he's honest with himself, Tressel must wonder today how much easier life would have been if he'd just done the right thing when he got that first e-mail warning him that his players were breaking the rules. But this has been a lie-and-denial operation from the beginning, and now it ends with Jim Tressel's meticulously polished reputation in tatters."

• **Teddy Greenstein, Chicago Tribune:** "Tressel became a powerful and curious force at Ohio State. I often wondered: Was he truly the straitlaced and mild-mannered man he appeared to be amid a profession of frothing lunatics? Or was it an act? Tressel was the master of letting damaging charges slide off his back. ... The man had a knack for avoiding pressure like his prized and troublesome quarterback, Terrelle Pryor, shakes the blitz. But this time, there was no escape. Like Woody Hayes, Tressel leaves Ohio State with his reputation in tatters."

• **Matt Hayes, Sporting News:** "What we have here is a disturbing, debilitating systemic problem. This isn't just bad kids making bad decisions; that happens at every university in America. It's how

you deal with those bad decisions; how you show who you are when no one is looking. When you're sitting at your desk during a mundane offseason and receive an e-mail explaining key players have sold irreplaceable mementos and memorabilia for cash and tattoos. Instead of simply forwarding the e-mail to his superiors, instead of forging ahead in the 2010 season without the star players and doing what's right, Tressel's spotless career is now some Shakespearean tragedy."

• **Bob Hunter, Columbus Dispatch:** "In the court of public opinion, the six offending players (including quarterback Terrelle Pryor) have pretty much been given a free pass since the news broke last December. They were given their suspensions, and it was done. It's not, though. Because of their actions, the program these players say they love is under serious scrutiny. It could be facing stiff sanctions, maybe the loss of scholarships and bowl eligibility, sanctions that could set it back for two or three years, if not more. Because of their actions, the coach they have continually lauded made some missteps of his own and was given a shove out the door."

• **Adam Jacobi, CBSSports.com:** "The situation's not quite over yet, but what amount of punishment would make Tressel's 10-year tenure not worth it to Ohio State? After all, the entire point of college football is to play for national championships and to beat the living daylight out of your rivals, and Jim Tressel did that in spades. Even if the NCAA hands down a postseason ban of a couple years – and there's not a whole lot about this situation right now that appears to warrant such a ban – is that really enough to put a cloud of shame over the Tressel Era forever? Would no college football fan endure two years' probation for 106-22 in the 10 years prior?"

• **Doug Lesmerises, The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer:** "Tressel's resignation on Monday is not Pryor's fault. But the Tressel-Pryor relationship is one of its root causes. Though Tressel is done, Pryor's Ohio State career continues, his senior season to be filled not with a Heisman Trophy run but a perhaps awkward return after his current five-game suspension. He'll return under interim coach Luke Fickell, whom some suspect may provide more across-the-board discipline, and to an OSU fan base that may be uncertain of how to greet him. While Pryor has led the Buckeyes to three Big Ten titles, three wins over Michigan, a 31-4 record as a starter and wins in the Rose Bowl and Sugar Bowl, some fans will remember him most for this day. ... Pryor made his mistakes, that we know. But Pryor didn't make Tressel keep them a secret. Tressel chose that course. And for that, Terrelle Pryor will always be part of the end of Jim Tressel."

• **Bill Livingston, The Plain Dealer:** "The greatest football coach at Ohio State since Woody Hayes, Jim Tressel leaves under the cloud of scandal, just as Hayes did in 1978. The difference between the two is that Hayes was fired after he lost his temper and threw a punch in the Gator Bowl on national television at a Clemson player named Charlie Bauman. Tressel's wrongdoing was private until Ohio State

officials unearthed incriminating e-mails and phone records in the coach's cover-up of the memorabilia sale scandal. It was deliberate. It was a calculated attempt to evade the rules by playing ineligible players. Woody Hayes was a genuine educator who was brought down by his emotions. His fall was almost preordained by highly public tantrums in the past. ...

"Of course Tressel, like Hayes, was not without flaws. Neither angel nor demon, Tressel is only a human being. Still, on the question of his active involvement in a major ethics scandal, he is really, most sincerely guilty. Many coaches in the past probably handled player violations in the same way. But the times have changed, and the mania to say 'Gotcha!' in the media has intensified. The time for Tressel's own accountability arrived today. That such grubby, small violations by his players led to Tressel's resignation saddens those of us who liked and admired him. A good man in many ways, Tressel had to pay with the things he valued most, outside his family and his faith – his job and his reputation."

• **Rob Oller, Columbus Dispatch:** "Ancient Greek literature dubbed it the tragic flaw, a personality trait that leads to a person's downfall. Ultimately, Tressel's tendency to micro-manage may have been his undoing. In contrast to the man he replaced – (John) Cooper was brought down in part by a hands-off approach that allowed his detractors to accuse him of losing control of his players – Tressel tried to do it all himself. So when e-mails hit his inbox with troubling reports that should have been shared with his superiors, Tressel instead kept the information mainly to himself, forwarding it to the hometown mentor of Pryor. When Tressel denied knowledge of the incriminating e-mail contents – OSU players were trading memorabilia for money and tattoo discounts – the road to ruin was freshly paved."

• **Marla Ridenour, Akron Beacon Journal:** "Unfortunately, Tressel's stunning denouement will obscure all the good he has done. Recently he had his players write postcards to Ryan Anderson, the Kent Roosevelt offensive lineman who is battling cancer. There are hundreds of stories like that from fans and players Tressel inspired. ...

"In his final hour, Smith chose to remember Tressel as an educator as much as a humanitarian and a winner. Better than as a hypocrite or cheater, I guess. Most of his players will still view Tressel as a father figure who taught them how to be men and what was important in life. But somewhere along the way, Tressel lost the crux of his own message. In his book, 'The Winners Manual,' the first quote under the chapter titled 'Responsibility' came from Mark Twain: 'When in doubt, tell the truth.'"

• **Andy Staples, Sports Illustrated:** "Why, after Tressel admitted in March that he played ineligible players and lied to the NCAA about it, did people still rush to his defense, claiming him an otherwise perfect coach who made one little mistake? Because Tressel, Ohio State and a compliant media – yes, I'm just as guilty as the other two parties – sold that narrative so well.

"He was The Senator. The light in the darkness. The one who didn't have to stoop as low as his peers. Even Tressel's choice of signature garment screamed piety. A sweater vest says, 'I'll have your daughter home by nine, sir.' A sweater vest says, 'I'll be in the first pew in church on Sunday.' A sweater vest says, 'I'll abide by my contract and the rules that govern my profession.'"

"By accepting Tressel's resignation Monday, it's clear Ohio State will try to spin a narrative that turns the new revelations into a Jim Tressel problem and stops the bleeding at the August hearing. So months after his employer revealed the lies that shattered a reputation that didn't quite fit the facts, Tressel proved just how much he loves Ohio State. Monday, Tressel made the ultimate declaration of loyalty to the school he served so well by making all of Ohio State's problems his own."

• **Dan Wetzel, Yahoo! Sports:** "Tressel made a grave mistake by not nipping this entire story in the bud in April 2010. Violations happen on every campus, it's how you respond that counts. In this case, the players would've missed some games and Ohio State would've churned on. Gee and Smith made a similar error by not getting serious about this first in December and then again in March. Ohio State has done some self-reporting, including Tressel's e-mails. It hasn't nearly been serious enough. Gee is the highest-paid university president in the country. Smith is the highest-paid athletic director. Crisis management isn't easy, but that's what they're each paid around \$1.5 million to do. The NCAA's original investigation centered exclusively on Tressel's mistake. As more and more dirt comes out, it can – and likely will – begin a second investigation. It's a snowball effect and there is no reason to think the media is going to stop looking now."

"This is what will be most painful for Ohio State. This is the willful turning of a simple case (the original tip) into a major one (Tressel's cover-up) into potentially a monster (any ensuing violations). It's a series of self-inflicted wounds."

• **Jason Whitlock, FoxSports.com:** "According to Sports Illustrated's narrative, Tressel is the Jimmy Swaggart of football coaches, a willfully ignorant, pious hypocrite. Tressel pretended to have virtue when all he really cared about was winning football games. I naively thought that act was a requirement for all college coaches. But Tressel's critics are outraged because he pulled off the act better than Bob Stoops, Urban Meyer, Mike Krzyzewski, Roy Williams, Bill Self, Pat Summitt, Vivian Stringer, Bo Pelini ... I could go on and on."

"I like coaches. I respect coaches. They taught me several life lessons that remain with me to this day. But I'm not stupid about what motivates them. They want to win. They want to earn. And they hope they help more kids than they hurt while they're winning and earning. Jim Tressel is not special. He's not particularly sinister or fraudulent. He's an executive in a major industry who is taking the fall so the lie can continue long enough for the major players to come up with a new batch of lies. Tressel, Bruce Pearl and probably a few coaches I can't remember right now lied to the NCAA about NCAA rules. Oh, the horror. A prostitute lied to her pimp."

## OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

# Fans Disappointed, Not Surprised By Resignation

By CRAIG MERZ  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Imagine not only being an Ohio State graduate living in Michigan but having one brother who went to the University of Michigan and another to Michigan State.

That's the case for Irvin Meram, OSU class of 2003. And, yes, he has received some grief from his siblings in light of football coach Jim Tressel's resignation May 30 and the continuing investigation into the program for NCAA violations.

But Meram, who returned to his hometown of Shelby Township, Mich., recently after living in Arizona for three years, said the ribbing is not too bad because, "At the same time, I've been digging at them for the last eight years. They were never able to really talk."

Tressel's domination in the Big Ten, particularly a 9-1 mark against Michigan, has been a sore point among Meram's buddies for years, and now that the Buckeyes have admitted to numerous infractions he's vulnerable to their criticism.

"It's a tough thing to swallow, especially being a Michigan kid who went to Ohio State," he said. "All my friends are Michigan alumni or Michigan State fans so I take a lot of heat for everything that happens at Ohio State."

"It's nothing new. Part of being an alumnus of Ohio State or being associated with the university is they love to hate us. As soon as one thing goes wrong it's blown out all over the place."

He and other OSU fans interviewed in the wake of Tressel's departure expressed admiration for the coach but said it was time for him to go and that athletic director Gene Smith and president E. Gordon Gee likely gave him an ultimatum.

"It had to be done," said Michael Mayo, a 1980 graduate living in Bexley, Ohio. "Evidently the president and athletic director, with the information they got, they felt having Tressel around was hurting their image. They tried to distance themselves. They probably said if you don't resign we'll fire you. That would be my guess."

"You can blame everybody. It's amazing to me that the athletic department acts like they didn't know anything was going on. When I was in college I saw what was going on. Everybody knows these guys are getting stuff. It's not only Ohio State. It's every university in the country."

Meram felt the same way, adding, "You knew the program had its flaws pretty much for years. Even when I was going there, there were players driving nice cars. My friends who are alumni of Ohio State aren't shocked by what's happening now."

Jason Vestfals, who graduated 10 years ago and lives in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, said the resignation "regrettably was necessary. Tressel had to fall on his sword, even if there really was little to no active part he played in all of this. There was no way he could have hung on, and the athletic department likely forced his hand."

He went on to say that Tressel is among many at fault.

"I know a lot of people will say that it's all on Tressel and Smith and (former AD Andy) Geiger, and to some extent that might be true," Vestfals said. "But none of this happens if the NCAA doesn't put every big school in an impossible situation with their pretense of amateurism. The rules at the NCAA regarding student-athletes who

make their schools millions of dollars are draconian and naive and serve only to make certain that there will be major infractions every few years."

Ohio State fan Mike Flickinger of Dublin, Ohio, wondered what took so long for Tressel to leave.

"In the end I think Tressel had to go, and I think OSU did him a solid by letting him resign rather than sacking him," he said. "I honestly can't believe the school let it go as long as they did. If I were an OSU grad - I'm really a proud Dayton Flyer - I would have been complaining to someone at the school, asking why they continued to employ someone who lied to the administration and caused an entire school to become a national sports punch line."

"I think there is plenty of blame to go around. It starts, in my opinion, with the players. I know that coaches are supposed to 'control' their programs, but it's an impossible task to ask coaches and their staffs to have a firm grasp of what 100-plus players are doing, all of them supposedly adults and many of them legally old enough to get themselves into actual trouble. Everyone wants to label these guys as 'kids,' but if they didn't know any better, then I don't know what to say."

Brian Ahnmark did not go to Ohio State but is immersed in the school through his parents, both OSU graduates. He lives not far from campus in Upper Arlington after having moved back to the area from Arizona.

He understands the temptations facing the athletes to receive illegal perks or get money for selling memorabilia, but said that doesn't make it right.

"It's laid out very clear what you are and are not allowed to do," he said. "I have family members who played Division I sports. When the whole thing broke and (the football players) were allowed to play in the (Sugar Bowl) because they said they weren't properly educated, that rang really hollow."

"Those couple of cousins of mine who played Division I sports, they literally couldn't hammer it home enough to them that it's not OK to do this stuff. The thing that really makes me sad now is the way Tressel told these kids they could play in the bowl game only if they came back for their senior season."

"I'm thinking, 'Wow, what a stand-up guy. What a father figure and leader he is.' I feel duped."

Flickinger agreed, saying, "I find the whole situation, frankly, disappointing and off-putting. I was disappointed in how OSU handled the initial blowup - the players being suspended prior to the Sugar Bowl."

"As an OSU fan I obviously wanted them to win the Sugar Bowl and also beat an SEC school, but I thought that the school - and the program - missed a fantastic opportunity to show they didn't stand for such actions and suspend the players for the bowl game. I know that OSU wasn't solely responsible for the start of the suspensions, but I think they could have made a bold statement."

While Tressel is taking a lot of heat from the fans, he found an unlikely ally in Irvin Meram's brother, Justin, who has a unique perspective.

He played soccer for two seasons at Michigan before being drafted by the Columbus Crew of Major League Soccer in January.

Ever since, the Wolverine in the heart of Buckeye country has been good-naturedly jabbing Ohio State followers through Twitter. Some view his jokes as fun, others not so much, but he still admires Tressel.

"He was a great coach," Justin Meram said. "His record speaks for itself. Obviously they were 7-1 against us the past eight years. Some foolish acts happened. I feel it shouldn't all be blamed on the coach."

"I'm not an Ohio State fan but I still respect the man and what he did for the program. I'm sure he is going to coach somewhere else and have great success."

While former Florida coach Urban Meyer heads the list of potential candidates to be the next permanent head coach after Luke Fickell coaches the Buckeyes this fall, the fans interviewed were divided.

"Urban Meyer is a bad idea, I think," Ahnmark said. "We don't need anybody with health issues and the constant parade whether he is retiring or not. The tough thing is in my outrage I'm thinking they need to bring in somebody who is strict and a disciplinarian who's really tough, really pure."

"Then I remember that's what Tressel was supposed to be. He was the guy who was supposed to be the Boy Scout. He was the one who was going to teach them right from wrong. He was the one with the book."

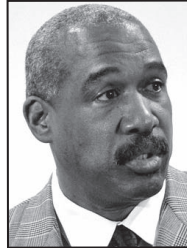
Said Vestfals, "Honestly, I'm still a bit numb about it all. I'd like to see if Fickell can do a good enough job with a damaged program to earn a long-term contract. Outside of that, I don't really know. I do not want Meyer."

Irvin Meram disagreed. "Urban Meyer would do wonderful for them," he said. "I think he definitely would fit in the Big Ten being an Ohio guy."

"It would be great to see him there because you know what he did in Florida. He's a coach who would draw recruits. I know he had issues in the past, as all coaches do, but with everything that happened with Tressel he would try to clean the program up and meet the standards and he has the ability to do that."

Others would like to see how Fickell fares.

"I think that Luke Fickell has one of the greatest opportunities ever," Flickinger said. "He's taking over a program that's



Gene Smith



E. Gordon Gee

been dragged through the mud. He has a huge chunk of offensive starters suspended, so it feels like if he gets the team to a bowl game he'll have done a tremendous job."

Mayo said nothing can be decided until the NCAA investigation is over and possible further sanctions are delivered.

"If they give Ohio State two or three years (probation) who's going to want to come here?" he said. "I don't think anyone would want to come here if they can't recruit, can't play in bowl games."

Whatever happens, support for the school and the football program won't wane.

"You love Ohio State," Irvin Meram said. "You live, die, breathe scarlet and gray. It's never going to change regardless of the scandal."

Vestfals said, "It's still my alma mater and they're still in my blood."

Ahnmark also remains a loyal fan, but he has a wish.

"It makes me long for the days when about the worst anything ever said about Ohio State was that they couldn't win big games," he said. "That looks real good right now. To sit here knowing we got that huge win against the SEC (Arkansas) in the Sugar Bowl and it was done with ineligible players and a coach who shouldn't have been there - that nullifies that game."

"It's meaningless, but I don't know who the heck else I'd root for in college football."



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# Tressel's Departure May Lead To Dimmer Times

Cross your fingers, Buckeye fans.

History too often says dynasties such as what you've become accustomed to – or spoiled with – during the last 10 seasons do not carry on from coach to coach.

The most notable exception would be Miami (Fla.), which won national championships with three different coaches – Howard Schnellenberger, Jimmy Johnson and Dennis Erickson – from 1983 through 1989, then added a second title under Erickson in 1991.

## THE EXNER POINT

Rich Exner

However, in many other cases over the last few decades, such success did not follow coaching changes.

Consider Alabama after Bear Bryant. He left the job in 1982, having won the SEC title nine times in his final 12 seasons. Alabama didn't win another conference crown until 1989 – the third year into the second coach after Bryant. The coach who followed Bryant – Ray Perkins – was 32-15-1 in four seasons.

How about Nebraska after Tom Osborne, who wrapped up his career in 1997 after 13 league titles in 25 years? He was an incredible 60-3 over his final five seasons that included three national titles.

Frank Solich followed Osborne at Nebraska and was 58-19 in six seasons. Bill Callahan was next, going 27-22 in four seasons. Combined, the two coaches were a very un-Osborne-like 85-41.

At Oklahoma, Barry Switzer had quite a run. Taking over in 1973, he got off to a great start, despite the school being placed on probation soon after he was promoted to head coach. He went 73-7-2 during the 1970s. During 17 seasons, Switzer won 12 Big Eight titles. He won his third national title in 1985, starting a three-year run in which his teams were 33-3.

But Oklahoma was placed on probation in 1988, and things didn't go so well on the field for his successors. The Sooners stumbled to 68-55-3 under four coaches before Bob Stoops led Oklahoma to a 13-0 record and the national title in 2000, his second season.

More recently, USC began going through what Ohio State is about to encounter.

USC's Pete Carroll and Ohio State's Jim Tressel led the most dominant college football programs over the last decade.

Carroll left after the 2009 season, and soon thereafter, USC ended up on probation. We don't know yet whether OSU will end up on probation but there certainly is a similar cloud over the program.

Under Carroll, USC was an amazing 82-9 over a seven-season span until slipping to 9-4 his final year. Last year, without Carroll, the Trojans dropped to 8-5. Things don't look good for the immediate future. The Trojans are banned from postseason play for the upcoming season.

By hiring from within, at least for the 2011 season, Ohio State fans can hope for the kind of continuity Michigan enjoyed in the immediate aftermath of Bo Schembechler.

Schembechler's Michigan program, while going strong, was not at the level of the schools mentioned above – Miami, Nebraska, Oklahoma, USC and Ohio State – when they lost their coaches.

But Michigan wasn't bad either and, at least initially, continued the success near the rate of its departed coach. Schembechler closed out his career in 1989 with Big Ten titles and Rose Bowl trips in his final two seasons, and he went 48-11-2 over his final five seasons. Over 21 seasons, he posted a winning percentage of .796.

Michigan promoted assistant Gary Moeller to head coach, and he led Michigan to Big Ten titles his first three seasons (1990-92). He was a near Schembechler-like 44-13-3 before being replaced by Lloyd Carr in 1995. Carr in 1997 delivered Michigan its first national title in 49 years. In 13 seasons, Carr's winning percentage was nearly identical to that of Moeller. He was 122-40, and each coach won about 75 percent of his games.

Can Luke Fickell – or Fickell's successor – do what Jimmy Johnson did in Miami and continue making runs at national titles?

Or will the next permanent Buckeye coach be more like Earle Bruce, a solid coach for sure, but one who was not able to deliver national domination?

When Bruce wasn't deemed good enough to keep – a controversial 1987 firing made worse by the clumsy way Ohio State handled it – there was a lot of hope with the hiring of

John Cooper. The hope in large part was there because Cooper had done something that Ohio State had not done in a while. At Arizona State, Cooper won a Rose Bowl – and over Michigan, no less.

In his first season at Ohio State, Cooper did deliver something Buckeye fans had not seen in a long time – a losing season. Cooper was 4-6-1 with the Buckeyes in 1988, and his next three teams lost four games each year. Suddenly Old 9-3 Earle – as Bruce had become known because of a string of 9-3 seasons – didn't look so bad.

Cooper later did have seasons of 10-1-1 (1993), 11-2 (1995), 11-1 (1996) and 11-1 (1998), but the bad start combined with his inability to beat Michigan were too much to overcome.

Enter Jim Tressel in 2001.

Now what's next?

### Strange Timing

Why now? That was my question after hearing the news on Memorial Day that Tressel had either resigned or been told to resign.

At that point, the solid case against Tressel was not worse than it was back in March, when Ohio State told the world his misdeeds should be punished with a two-game suspension – later increased reasonably to five games to match the penalty for the players involved.

Since then, there have been allegations about cars and perhaps other players profiting with a few bucks off their status as OSU football players or by selling their OSU belongings.

But OSU has not told the world of finding anything new against Tressel, and the NCAA is yet to rule.

The only explanations I can come up with for the timing of the resignation are that OSU

panicked into making an unwise decision or school officials know more than they are saying.

If the case against Tressel was bad enough for him to be removed on Memorial Day, it was bad enough to do so back in March. That is, unless OSU and/or the NCAA has discovered more solid allegations against the now ex-coach.

### Jobs On The Line

If Tressel is gone, why are the jobs of athletic director Gene Smith and school president Gordon Gee considered so safe? It's premature to call for their jobs based on what is known publicly, but it is fair to raise a question about their job security.

The role of a school president includes representing the school, presenting it in a positive manner and making good judgments. Instead, Gee brought ridicule to the university with his unwise attempt at humor during the initial news conference back in the spring, saying "I hope (Tressel) doesn't fire me."

There is no indication at this time that Smith, as athletic director, is to blame for Tressel's actions. But, as AD, he is in charge of the program. He is paid big money to make sure a system is in place to guard against such problems. It would only be fair to examine Smith's work to determine whether he did what should be expected of an athletic director.

Either Gee and Smith were hopeful that things wouldn't get so bad, or they simply misjudged the situation before going public in March. Gee, as president, was involved beyond just the news conference. The news conference came after Gee and Tressel discussed the matter at Gee's house.


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# Timing Was Main Surprise Of Tressel Resignation

To say there was a bit of surprise in the way the Jim Tressel saga ended is an understatement – but not for the reasons you might think.

There was no doubt in my mind Tressel would not be the Ohio State football coach in 2012. In fact, it was looking more and more like he might not coach any games in 2011.

The resolution would not be swift and would take place only after the 2011 season was completed. And it would be Ohio State showing Tressel the door, not the coach walking through it voluntarily.

## THE FACTS MAN Mike Wachsman

So the fact Tressel offered up his resignation – with a little assist from the OSU administration, which no doubt saw the speeding train that was the NCAA coming down the track – on Memorial Day was a bit of shocker, but only because of the timing.

The line of thinking that Tressel didn't do anything major, that he was just protecting his players, won't fly. He flat-out lied to his superiors and, worse, lied to the NCAA. That's grounds for termination no matter how you slice it – the fact it didn't happen immediately was a bit perplexing.

Whether you think what the players did was wrong – and I've gone on record as saying it wasn't since the items they traded were theirs – it does not justify Tressel covering up information he knew could hurt the team by not telling the proper people about it.

Do I think Tressel has been a complete fraud, spouting his moralistic platitudes about living a better life and helping people and serving your community? No. Do I think he is an out-and-out dirty coach? No. Do I think the culture of college sports says that you need to win games first and foremost, and that if you don't you lose your job? Probably.

Since Tressel knew sitting Terrelle Pryor and the others would directly impact his ability to win football games, I could see how he might want to sweep the whole mess under the rug and hope that it went away. That doesn't make it right, but it at least seems possible. No matter how you draw it up, it was cheating. Cheating requires knowledge, and Tressel knew what his players did was wrong. Had he not known about it at all he would actually have a leg to stand on and probably would have more sympathy.

While not guilty of direct corruption, Tressel does appear guilty of being too trusting and taking an "I don't want to know" approach. Stories have come out that he was very hands-off at Youngstown State when it came to players' off-field comportment – which got him into a bit of trouble there, too.

Tressel treats all of his players like his children, which makes you wonder what kind of discipline he had at home. If I had a kid who repeatedly got into trouble, would I continue to coddle him? No. I wouldn't toss him out on his ear, but I would make him feel repercussions for his actions.

Tressel hasn't done that very much in his time at OSU, which seems to have fostered an attitude of "we can do whatever we want" because nothing will happen. Kids need to earn freedom, not have it given from the start.

It's a sad chapter in OSU football history but one that shouldn't be overlooked. The school and future coaches can learn from this, and

learn how not to deal with this kind of problem again.

The press conference announcing Tressel's initial wrongdoing has to go into the top-five all-time worst, from the coach never apologizing to Gene Smith saying that he was confident this wasn't a far-reaching issue to Gordon Gee flippantly saying, "I just hope the coach doesn't fire me," when asked about Tressel's job security. OSU was the laughingstock nationwide, and now it must take stock in what happens next.

For Tressel, what happens next is probably not coaching related. He's an Ohio guy, he's nearing 60 years old and he had even hinted that he wasn't going to be at OSU forever.

It seems difficult to believe that he would want to take on the grind of going somewhere new, not to mention the fact that any big-time school would be very leery about hiring him – and might not be able to if Tressel is given sanctions that follow him.

He could end up like Jim O'Brien, coaching at a small school for a few years. In fact, it would be fitting if he went to Baldwin-Wallace (where he played and where his dad coached) before calling it a career. He could write more books and he could become involved in charity work or serving his community, something he was always big on.

He'll still have a legacy at Ohio State – seven Big Ten titles and a national championship ensure that. But it won't quite be the legacy many OSU fans thought it would, and it's certainly not the one Tressel hoped for.

### The Lightning Rod

Pryor has been at the center of this mess from the beginning, so he's gotten most of the blame for the Buckeyes' situation. Fair or unfair, that's what happens when you're a high-profile quarterback at a major school.

When you come into a program with the stature of Ohio State, you're naturally going to be under the microscope. Knowing this, don't you think it would be wise to stay out of the spotlight as much as possible?

Pryor has been a magnet for controversy, from his, "everyone kills people, murders people," quote while defending his fandom of Michael Vick to his calling Kirk Herbstreit a "fake Buckeye" to getting on some fans for criticizing him to his litany of cars to ... well, you get the picture.

Focusing on the cars for a moment – nothing untoward has been proven, and until or unless it is I don't have a problem with the situation. Folks were up in arms to hear that he was allowed to take a car home to Pennsylvania for the family to look at (which he ultimately decided not to buy), like that never happens. Well guess what – it does happen.

One of the first cars I ever had I was allowed to have for the weekend before deciding whether to buy it. Now, I don't know if this is standard practice with all dealerships, but I have friends who have done the same thing. So I didn't raise an eyebrow when that was revealed.

My biggest problem with Pryor is this – he professes to care a ton, yet his actions show just the opposite. If you're embroiled in an investigation about the cars you drive, wouldn't it be best to not show up at the football offices in a new ride? And with a suspended license? Ride over with one of your buddies if you have to, but don't bring more attention to yourself.

Unfortunately – and this is part of the world we live in today – young people crave attention and adulation, and Pryor seems to fit that category.

Part of it may not be his fault. He's been held up and congratulated and told he was a star from the time he was in high school,

and he certainly has the air of someone who believes the hype. So when he gets to a place as high profile as OSU, how does he know any different?

He's been the star, and now he's the star again, quarterbacking a tradition-rich program. Tressel was his biggest backer, brushing a senior quarterback (Todd Boeckman) aside for the shiny newcomer. So what was Pryor to think? I will say Pryor has been more of a headache than a truly bad guy. He's been compared to Maurice Claret as far as OSU infamy goes, but Claret did far worse than Pryor ever did – and has the jail time to prove it.

Pryor and his fellow suspended mates have let down the team, the hardworking guys who have been able to keep their heads on straight. It wouldn't be any kind of surprise if there's some animosity between some of the players, who see Pryor as being a favorite and getting away with things that other players wouldn't.

Folks who dealt with Pryor knew he was high maintenance, but that didn't stop them from wanting him. Michigan wanted him. Oregon wanted him. Penn State wanted him. Tressel and Ohio State wanted him, and ultimately got him.

Though he's not the only culprit in this whole sordid mess, he is the most visible. He's also a nice example of the old adage "be careful what you wish for."

Think OSU fans wish they could get a muligan on Pryor?

### Where To From Here?

With probation – and a pretty severe one – a near certainty, how Ohio State navigates the coaching search will be paramount in how it comes out of this mess. Luke Fickell may end up being a fine coach, and he's certainly a great individual with the passion and desire needed to succeed. But he should not be OSU's next coach, for a couple of reasons.

First, your first head coaching job should not be at an elite school like OSU. I know a few big-time programs have hired first-timers – Florida State with Jimbo Fisher and Florida with Will Muschamp – but both had been long-time coordinators or, in Muschamp's case, a hand-picked successor to a head coach (Texas' Mack Brown) after serving as basically a right-hand man.

Fickell is a co-defensive coordinator, which counts for something, and there's no debating that defense has been the Buckeyes' strong suit the last few years. He's getting the job done as far as production is concerned.

But history is against Fickell – every OSU coach since World War II has had some sort of head coaching experience, so it might be best if Fickell does what he can this year, moves on to a Mid-American Conference position for a few years and then, when the time is right, comes back to assume his place as the Buckeyes' top man.

The other reason is based more on recruiting – which by all accounts Fickell is good at. However, when a school goes on probation and has a limited number of scholarships (which the Buckeyes will likely face), big-time kids want to feel like there's light at the end of the tunnel when the probation is over. They need to be swayed by the brand name, and right now OSU's is pretty low in light of what's happened.

The way to be swayed is by making a big splash in hiring a head coach – which is why it wouldn't be any kind of shock to see the school chase Urban Meyer (who appears to be the popular pick).

I also see changes in the compliance department, especially in light of the allegations that more than just the original five named players

received discounted tattoos for trading memorabilia.

And why is Gene Smith getting a free pass here? He has not handled this situation well at all, from staunchly backing Tressel to saying this was an isolated occurrence and that the school does not have a systemic problem. You do not back yourself into a corner that way unless you are 100 percent sure that it's true.

Getting back to this season – it will be interesting to see just how the players respond to all that has taken place. The upperclassmen especially will need to be great leaders as there could be some fracturing in the locker room at the moment. There appear to be a few players who have their own agendas and who haven't seemed nearly as bothered by this stuff as you might think they would be, and everyone needs to be pulling in the same direction when the curtain rises on the season.

It is the view from here that Pryor has played his last game at Ohio State. OSU should move on and let the Braxton Miller (or Taylor Graham) era begin, and if it means taking some lumps this year, so be it.

There is still enough talent on hand for the Buckeyes to win double-digit games, so while Pryor is definitely a game-changer on the field he certainly hasn't taken ownership of the team. By now you'd think a senior – especially one with his profile – would have done just that.

If Pryor is not given further sanctions by the NCAA or OSU, then he should have to fight for his job once the five-game suspension is over. For him to be able to walk in and take over the starting job would be a slap in the face to the guys who were playing. I don't think Fickell will be swayed by experience, so if someone is playing well they'll likely stay in the lineup. That goes for DeVier Posey and Dan Herron and Mike Adams as well.

The saddest part about all of this is that it could have been avoided had Tressel simply taken a short walk down the hall, told Smith and the compliance people about the original e-mails he received and been done with it. Yeah, there would have been player suspensions during the season and there probably wouldn't have been another BCS game to talk about.

But ethics would have trumped winning as Tressel would have shown that no one is above the team. That's the mantra he's always been fond of, talking about what's good for the group not the individual. It would have been best for the group to have the offenders sit down for some games, come back to the team and get back to business. Things would have passed without much fanfare, OSU's reputation would actually be better given the coach's actions – and Tressel would still be employed.

It's a shame that he was undone by going against his own thought processes. He did what was best for him as Ohio State football coach and not what was best for the school. Winning is the name of the game in big-time athletics, which is why Ohio State is an elite program. Fans demand excellence – every hour of every day – so maybe Tressel figured that making a stand against the players would jeopardize his ability to win games. I don't profess to know what was going through his head, and frankly I don't care.

Just because Ohio State is elite doesn't mean it's bigger than the game – and Tressel isn't bigger than Ohio State, which is why he's out. The apologists will say he was looking out for his kids, and I don't doubt that he does care about them. But you cannot lie to the NCAA and expect to keep your job – it's right up there with paying players as one of the top taboos in the profession.

It will be an interesting summer in Columbus. Let's hope there are no more surprises.

# Digesting The End Of The Jim Tressel Era

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

It would be easy for me to deny this now.

Instead, I'm going to admit to all of you that I thought Jim Tressel would survive this ugly mess that the Ohio State football program finds itself in. Not only did I think he would survive, I thought he would somehow use the whole experience as something to build on – in a way that, it seems, only he can do – and his Buckeyes would just keep rolling.

I wonder now if I really thought this was going to happen or if Tressel's survival was what I *wished* would happen.

First, some disclosure.

This column may prove to be more Frank Moskowitz, Ohio State M.A., 1981 and admitted Buckeye fan talking and not Frank Moskowitz, BSB publisher and unbiased reporter.

And let me acknowledge again, as I have before in this space, that I had my beefs with Tressel. Most notable among those complaints would be his lack of creativity on offense and his complete control of media access to his team – players, coaches and personnel all included.

I still believe that Tresselball – strong defense, solid special teams, lack of turnovers and an emphasis on field position – and an innovative offense are not mutually exclusive. You can be creative and still be high percentage. As good as things were on the field during the Tressel era, might they have been even better if the head coach had injected some new blood into the offensive scheming?

As for the media, while it may not seem so after the relentless beating that the coach and OSU have taken over the last several months, many of us who earn our living reporting the news have no hidden agenda and are just people trying to do their jobs. Making that job difficult by limiting access, especially in this day when the Internet demands constant news flow, and giving non-answers to pointed questions is no way to endear yourself to those responsible for disseminating the news.

I have no doubt that this scorn toward the media for so many years has played a large part in the seeming glee that many are taking in reporting Tressel's downfall.

All that said, I truly believe that I have just witnessed a golden age in Ohio State football. Perhaps the golden age. It was certainly the best time to be a Buckeye fan in our 30 years of publication.

And I'm not just talking about the results on the field, although that was obviously a big part of it. Ohio State football under Jim Tressel was so much more than that – or at least so it seemed.

Ohio State president Dr. E. Gordon Gee was quite eloquent about it at the ill-fated press conference initially acknowledging Tressel's failure to report knowledge of NCAA violations committed by members of his team.

"He's had great success on the football field and we applaud that," Gee said. "He's had great success in working with young people, and we applaud that. But equally importantly, he's had great success in building the character and reputation of this university, for which I am entirely grateful."

I truly believed that to be the case, as do many, many of the Buckeye fans whom I have spoken to in the past few weeks. That's what leaves all of us so stunned, confused and hurt. While many in the media will cast Tressel as a fake, many of us believe that the pride and joy the coach has given us during

the past 10 years stem from the person he really is.

While corny, all that stuff about family, leadership, succeeding for the seniors, the return to Ohio State football traditions, the outreach to past players, the singing of "Carmen Ohio" after each game – I admit it, I bought into most of it.

Beating Michigan nine out of 10 times was more to me than just wins over a bitter archrival following a 13-year stretch of futility. Those wins were symbolic of the return to prominence of the traditions that are the very foundation of Ohio State football.

Much of my opinion about Tressel is based on the many times I saw him at banquets where I was frequently the only media member present. There, with no cameras or tape recorders running, you saw the ease with which he interacted with his players, the playful banter that indicated a genuine relationship between the head coach, players and the assistant coaches, as well. Most media members probably have little knowledge of just how personable and funny Tressel can be when he loosens up.

In a football world in which some coaches are accused of not even knowing the names of their players, it always amazed me that Tressel was able to retain intimate details about players and even their families. It was this familiarity that often led to some of his best humor. I always figured that this knack for remembering things about people was a real boon on the recruiting trail.

It was at one of these banquets that I learned Tressel required each of his players to learn the hometown and high school of each of his teammates. That struck me as such a team builder and as a great way to make all of the players feel an equal part of the team.

At each of these banquets, the fans seemed to love Tressel and were impressed with the character of the players he brought with him.

As the criticism of Tressel continued to mount in recent weeks, many claimed that it was the coach's stellar won-lost record that allowed him to hang on, that Ohio State officials were putting success on the field over the integrity of the institution.

I believe, on the contrary, it was the integrity that officials such as Gee and athletic director Gene Smith felt Tressel brought to the program over the last 10 years that they were trying to recognize and acknowledge, though obviously the unparalleled success was a huge factor.

I think that Gee and Smith were ready to back their man. That much seemed obvious on March 8, when they gave such unequivocal support to Tressel at their press conference.

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

If it was Gee and Smith's intention to force Tressel out, they would have done it then. There was no percentage in waiting if they were going to dismiss the coach. Do the distasteful deed and move forward.

I just don't think the Ohio State officials fully anticipated the relentless criticism in the national media and the constant digging into the athletic department affairs.

Our own Jeff Svoboda made an interesting boxing analogy when trying to sum up what happened.

When the whole mess broke, it was if the athletic department was on the receiving end of a huge haymaker. When the Buckeye brain trust found itself wobbling but still standing, it thought the crisis could be survived. But the news reports kept coming like relentless jabs, weakening the Ohio State resolve – perhaps among members of the board of trustees – and eventually Gee, Smith and others in the Tressel corner forced the coach to throw in the towel.

### Why Did He Do It?

So why did the seemingly squeaky-clean Tressel cover up his players' wrongdoing? We will probably never know, as the former coach is not a big one on sharing controversial information. I'm still waiting for an explanation on what happened in the national championship game against Florida after the 2006 season.

Those critical of the program will continue to maintain that Tressel hid his knowledge because he wanted to keep his players eligible so he could take another run at a national championship.

As an observer of the program for these past 10 years, and knowing what a micromanager Tressel is, I figure he initially felt he could handle the situation himself. Why he didn't come forward and admit his knowledge once his players' transgressions were revealed, I don't know.

The one lesson that any public figure should have learned from Richard Nixon and Watergate is that the cover-up is usually more damaging than the crime itself. The other thing to remember is that if you e-mail it, it is out there.

If Tressel had notified proper authorities when he first received the incriminating e-mails from former Buckeye Chris Cicero, Ohio State football would have taken a hit, but the coach and the team would have survived. While I understand how difficult it would have been for the coach to admit his knowledge after the fact when Tattoo-gate came to light in December, if he had done so the program would have taken an even bigger hit, but Tressel and his team would still have survived.

Instead, as lies will do, the fabrication took on a life of its own, spiraling out of control until Tressel's stellar career as Ohio State head coach was over and his stellar reputation was forever tarnished.

Remember, it was not the actions of the players that caused Tressel to lose his job, nor was it their actions that have the Buckeye football program looking at more serious NCAA sanctions. The case of the players was resolved with their suspensions. It was Tressel's cover-up that has left him without a job and the program in such shambles.

True, the players' actions put the coach in a position where he elected to sweep their transgressions under the rug. But any way

you cut it, Tressel committed a grievous violation of NCAA rules.

While many maintain that the rules that prohibit players from selling their property are unjust, they are still the rules. And regardless, Tressel lied about his knowledge, which is a separate issue.

Do I think that if outlets such as Sports Illustrated or even The Columbus Dispatch started digging at other schools they would find similar tales of preferential treatment for football players? Probably. But those outlets didn't dig at other schools. They dug at Ohio State. The defense of "it happens everywhere" is a weak one, and again, it has nothing to do with whether Tressel lied to the NCAA about his knowledge.

With the previously mentioned penchant by Tressel to micromanage, you do have to wonder if he didn't put his head in the sand about some of what was going on around him. Sometimes, it's better not to know, or at least act as if you don't know.

One group that has no justification for putting its collective heads in the sand is the OSU compliance office. Whether it was their fault or not, I would be stunned if there weren't changes there. Somebody, besides Tressel, has to take the fall. Wasn't it their job to keep the coach out of the situation he found himself lying about?

### What About Pryor?

As for quarterback Terrelle Pryor, who remains at the center of the Buckeye controversy, what a star-crossed career at Ohio State.

I remain amazed at the many Buckeye fans who tell me that they knew Pryor was bad news from the day he was recruited by Ohio State. Many of these are the same Buckeye fans who would have lamented that Tressel was a poor closer as a recruiter if the star quarterback had gone elsewhere.

They are the same fans who basked in the glory of Pryor's successes, such as leading the Buckeyes to victory at Wisconsin as a freshman, saving the day against Iowa last season, and his impressive performances on the big stage in the Rose Bowl and Sugar Bowl.

There were five other players involved in Tattoo-gate and there may have been more players receiving similar benefits if you believe Sports Illustrated. To single out Pryor is unfair but probably to be expected when you consider he is the most visible of the Buckeyes and not always the most prudent in his words or actions. He is also a player, because of his obvious gifts, for whom some Buckeye fans have had unrealistic expectations.

He is also just the type of player on whom Tressel would think he could be a positive influence, just as the coach probably thought he could be a positive influence on Maurice Clarett. It may take time to tell whether he was successful in either case.

As I have stated before, the fact that Pryor and the others, several of whom could have moved on to the NFL, came back in 2011 despite their suspensions is a testament to Tressel and the environment he created.

Many say Pryor has played his last down at Ohio State.

I, for one, hope he comes back and, along with the other offenders, helps lead the Buckeyes to a great 2011 season despite all the adversity.

That would be the best way for those who started this mess to honor Jim Tressel's legacy.

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"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

August 2018

# Back In A Bit

## *Meyer Retained By Ohio State, But Suspended 3 Games*

By **TIM MOODY**  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

When Ohio State opens the season against Oregon State on Sept. 1, Urban Meyer won't be on the Ohio Stadium sidelines. He won't be there a week later when the Buckeyes take on Rutgers in the Big Ten opener, either. And a week after that, Meyer won't be making the trip to Arlington, Texas, with his team for a prime-time showdown with TCU.

Three games – that's the main point of the punishment Meyer received from the university for mishandling the employment of former wide receivers coach Zach Smith, who was fired July 23.

Though Meyer is held from his position as head coach for the first three games, he'll otherwise be able to return to his regular coaching duties starting Sept. 2 – the day after the Buckeyes kick off their 2018 slate against the Beavers.

Meyer will also forgo six weeks of pay in addition to his suspension, while athletic director Gene Smith will be suspended without pay from Aug. 31 through Sept. 16 – dates that include each of those first three games.

The two most prominent figures in the Ohio State athletic department – and two of the most prominent figures in the sport overall – were found to be at fault for mishandling a string of incidents involving Zach Smith, most notably their handling of a 2015 allegation of domestic abuse leveled against the former assistant coach by his ex-wife, Courtney Smith.

The punishment was handed down after a 14-day investigation that was sparked over questions about Meyer's knowledge of the 2015 allegations – notably because he denied knowledge of those events while speaking at Big Ten Media Days in Chicago on July 24, the day after he fired Zach Smith. As the result of a media report suggesting that Meyer had, in fact, known about the allegations, he was placed on paid administrative leave by the university on Aug. 1 through the resolution of the investigation, which is when his suspension began.



TIM MOODY

**SIDELINED** – Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer was suspended by the university Aug. 22 through Sept. 2 in addition to gameday suspensions for Sept. 8 and Sept. 15.

That move sparked a media frenzy that lasted up to, and through, Ohio State's final decision Aug. 22 – a span of three weeks and a day that encompassed Ohio State's entire fall camp and the beginning of the fall semester at the university.

After an exhaustive meeting between university president Michael Drake, the board of trustees, the independent working group that oversaw the investigation and the investigators themselves – a meeting that stretched past the 10-hour mark while a throng of media members and fans waited inside and outside the Longaberger Alumni House – the school finally came to its decision, and Drake, Meyer, Gene Smith and Mary Jo White, the chair of the investigative team, all had their say in a press conference.

"We wanted to be fair. We wanted to be equitable," Drake said in regard to the length, depth and scope of the Aug. 22 meeting. "We wanted to be just. We wanted to be appropriate. We worked to refine our decisions and our actions to be able to do the best that we could to achieve those goals.

"This is a very difficult and complicated situation. Many things to consider over a long period of time, and the reason

it took 10 hours of this is to try to make sure that we were being thoughtful and considerate in every case.

"We know this is one of those circumstances where there is no right answer. It's very difficult to not – not possible to do something that makes everyone happy. And so in that circumstance, we are trying not to seek the sole perfect answer for everyone but to be fair, to be just, to be equitable and to be appropriate and to do what we can to help us make our program stronger."

Drake, Gene Smith and Meyer each read prepared statements, with the latter two expressing their apologies for the role they played in mishandling the allegations against Zach Smith, and opting to keep him on staff up until July 23. They also addressed questions from media members during the press conference.

"I know the impact that the events (of the) last three weeks have had on this institution, an institution that I love, and how challenging this has been for our community, our president, a man who I have great respect for, and for that



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OPINION

# We Never Should Have Gotten To This Point

It should never have been this way. We should never have been privy to the salacious details of a marriage that had long since disintegrated. We should never have had been put in the position of siding against the victim of alleged domestic abuse.

It should have never come down to contract clauses, Title IX liabilities, unexplained OVI charges, extramarital affairs being carried on inside the Woody Hayes Athletic Center, lewd pictures taken in White House restrooms and an investigation that might ultimately wind up costing taxpayers somewhere in the neighborhood of a half-million dollars.

Yet, here we are, all because Urban Meyer risked his reputation and career to hire and retain insanely immature wide receivers coach Zach Smith despite a litany of incidents that should have reduced Smith to the dustpan of history long ago.

Following a marathon session Aug. 22 of the university's board of trustees, Meyer was slapped with a three-game suspension stemming from the way he handled allegations of domestic abuse and myriad other boorish behavior levied against Smith during his six-plus years on Meyer's staff at Ohio State.

That came after more than three weeks of paid administrative leave for Meyer as the university wrapped up an investigation into why the ultrasuccessful head coach suddenly took leave of his senses in late July at Big Ten Media Days in Chicago. That was when he denied being aware of domestic violence allegations made against Smith in 2015.

Why Meyer issued a denial so easily disproved was subject enough for conjecture. The coach blamed his quote-unquote "misstatement" at least in part on how the media reported the allegations against Smith – an increasingly-convenient excuse these days when public officials are caught doing something they shouldn't.

Additionally, the investigative committee stated that it "learned during the investigation that Coach Meyer has sometimes had significant memory issues in other situations where he has prior extensive knowledge of events" and that he has also "periodically taken medicine that can negatively impair his memory, concentration and focus."

Impaired memory, concentration and focus? That's the defense for someone who has won 94 percent of his conference games in six seasons at Ohio State? Really?

Even if you concede the explanations why the coach was not forthcoming in Chicago, the bigger question for me remains why Meyer hired Smith at Ohio State in the first place and then kept him on staff through a litany of incidents that included more allegations of spousal abuse, an extramarital affair, an expensive trip to a Florida strip club, the purchase of sex toys that were sent to Smith at his office at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center and a number of lewd photographs, including one Smith allegedly took of his own genitalia while inside a White House restroom as the Buckeyes were being honored for their 2014 national championship.

It is painfully apparent – both by his words and actions – that Meyer did not totally believe Courtney Smith when she repeatedly accused her now ex-husband of abusive behavior. Even so, Meyer apparently followed proper protocols and informed his superiors in a timely manner when he learned of allegations against Smith. If he hadn't, he would likely have been fired with cause rather than face a three-game suspension – not wholly insignificant in that it represents one-quarter of the 2018 regular season.

I just can't seem to get my head around

the reason why Meyer ever risked his career on a dime-a-dozen assistant coach whose role could have been filled – and probably filled much better – by any number of other young men eager to work at Ohio State.

from outside sources who believe the investigation was a sham and Meyer's suspension akin to a slap on the wrist.

The worst thing? It all seemed so avoidable.

## Truth Will Set You Free

There are those who will contend that Meyer did nothing wrong, that he was the victim of some ill-advised investigation – a "witch hunt," if you will – that was fueled by a vindictive media that felt it had been wronged when the coach denied knowing about the 2015 allegations against Smith.

I would argue just the opposite. Meyer earns an annual salary of \$7.6 million, and there is much more to his job than simply winning football games. In addition to being charged with the coaching, mentoring and protection of more than 100 young men in his program, he is paid to keep track of his assistant coaches and staff members and ensure they are honorable people worthy of wearing scarlet and gray.

Additionally, Meyer is paid to interact with the media. I'm sure it is one of his least favorite things to do, and that often shows. But the media covering the Ohio State football team – most of it anyway – is anything but contentious toward Meyer and his Buckeyes.

Meyer didn't have to say what he said in Chicago, and I'll continue to scratch my head about that until I've scratched myself into baldness. But the cold, hard truth is that he did say what he said, triggering an investigation that focused the white-hot national spotlight on his program for all the wrong reasons.

Universities do not typically spend \$500,000 on so-called "witch hunts," so it remains immaterial whether or not you or I believe the investigation was warranted. Ohio State president Michael Drake and the university's board of trustees felt it was warranted, and perhaps something good will come of it.

Maybe Meyer will become a little more media-friendly, although that seems doubtful in the wake of the fall camp lockdown that accompanied his stint on paid administrative leave. The media's interactions with OSU players and coaches are so tightly controlled nowadays anyway that one wonders why a lockdown was necessary, especially with so much interest in how the 2018 team will look with a new quarterback under center.

I can understand a coach's distaste for the media. There are too many times when I have sat in a press conference and groaned at one of the dull-headed questions asked by one of my colleagues. And, yes, we can be a prickly bunch sometimes, especially when we use our forums to second-guess such decisions as giving Ezekiel Elliott only two second-half carries in the 2015 Michigan State game or wondering what went so spectacularly wrong in the 2016 Fiesta Bowl.

But the media covering Ohio State football are not in the business of second-guessing Meyer or disparaging his program. That "fake news" and "enemy of the people" stuff might be useful taglines in the political arena, but it has no basis in fact with regard to Ohio State football and the media that cover it.

I discovered at an early age the consequences of playing fast and loose with the truth. Despite that, I persisted until my father persuaded me with a different kind of enlightenment – that is to say he lit up my backside and I saw that enlightenment in a whole new way.

Maybe this whole affair will have the same effect on all parties concerned.

Then again ...

## EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

The argument that Meyer isn't paid to babysit his assistant coaches is a hollow one. Likewise with the one that the head coach simply didn't know what Smith was doing after hours at the team's practice facility or on the road during recruiting trips. I would contend that if Meyer is paid to know what each and every one of his student-athletes is doing at all times, the same applies to his assistant coaches, especially one Meyer knew had problems dating back nearly a decade.

For any coach to enjoy the success that Meyer has enjoyed throughout his career, he must be hands-on. Yes, I remember this is supposed to be a warmer, fuzzier Meyer than the one with the jangled mess of nerves who had a physical meltdown during his final years at Florida. Yet it remains difficult to believe Meyer was completely oblivious to many of Smith's issues.

Perhaps, as some have conjectured and the coach has admitted himself, Meyer kept Smith around as some sort of homage to the late Earle Bruce, the former Ohio State head coach who was Smith's grandfather. It was Meyer, who has often described Bruce as one of the most influential figures in his life, who welcomed Smith as a walk-on player at Bowling Green. It was also Meyer who gave Smith his first coaching job as a graduate assistant at Florida.

But if Meyer hired Smith at Ohio State as a favor to Bruce, and then kept him on his staff despite a grand scale of less-than-appropriate behavior, then Meyer is guilty of a misplaced allegiance – not only to what was best for himself and his livelihood but for the Ohio State football program as well.

Maybe loyalty to a former mentor had nothing to do with Meyer's motivation for keeping Smith around. Maybe he thought Smith had learned from his earlier transgressions. Maybe Meyer didn't want to embarrass one of his assistant coaches. Maybe he didn't want to embarrass his program. And maybe he thought he could compartmentalize the situation much the way Jim Tressel thought he could eight years ago when he discovered some of his players were exchanging memorabilia for free tattoos.

Whatever the reason, there must be a better explanation than blaming the media or some mind-altering medication. Unfortunately, I doubt we'll ever get one. The investigative committee has offered its findings, Meyer has accepted his suspension (albeit somewhat begrudgingly) and that will be the end of it. Oregon State is still going to bring its football team to Columbus on Sept. 1, and the 2018 football season will proceed on schedule.

But for most of the month of August, instead of charting the progress of new starting quarterback Dwayne Haskins, debating the best replacement for Damon Webb at field safety and wondering who will start at middle linebacker, we have been subjected to another self-inflicted, largely-manufactured scandal and the accompanying sanctimony



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The next issue (Sept. 8 cover date) will be mailed Sept. 4.

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Charter Member

COVER STORY

# Meyer Admits Loyalty To Bruce Impacted Judgment

Continued From Page 1

I am deeply sorry," Meyer said in his statement. "I am fully aware that I'm ultimately responsible for the situation that has harmed the university as a whole and our department of athletics and our football program."

Meyer admitted that he followed his heart, rather than his head, when it came to the plethora of questionable actions by Zach Smith – actions that ranged from alleged abuse and visits to strip clubs during recruiting trips to delinquency in regard to coaching duties.

Zach Smith is the grandson of the late Earle Bruce, the former Ohio State head

coach who in 1986 gave Meyer his first collegiate coaching job as a graduate assistant with the Buckeyes. Meyer went on to coach under Bruce at Colorado State as well, and the two had a close relationship – bordering on a father-son relationship – until Bruce's death earlier this year.

Meyer noted that he did not know many of the details about Zach Smith that emerged during the investigation (a full breakdown of the findings can be found on page 12 of this issue), but he expressed more than once that he should have known more. Meyer also made it clear that, if he had known more, he would have removed Zach Smith from the staff much sooner.

"The biggest regret, I wish I would have known more and if I had known more, I would have taken action much quicker," Meyer said.

"There were red flags and I wish I had known and I wish I did a better job of finding things out," he added later in the press conference. "I wish I was told more things. Ultimately, that is part of the job – you're ultimately responsible to represent this incredible university, and I wish I had done more. I wish I had known more."

Meyer noted that in the week before Big Ten Media Days, it was brought to his attention that Zach Smith had a criminal trespassing charge leveled against him earlier in the year. Meyer, until then, had been unaware of the charge, and he expressed frustration that he hadn't been notified sooner. After that, a protective order was requested by Courtney Smith, which Meyer viewed as the first real

proof of domestic abuse, according to the findings of the investigation. That's when Meyer made the decision to fire Zach Smith.

Gene Smith, for his part, admitted that, as athletic director, he had obligations that weren't met. The investigation found that, when notified of the 2015 allegations against Zach Smith, Meyer and Gene Smith both opted to allow the legal proceedings to play out. The investigators found that Zach Smith was told by Meyer that, if Zach Smith was in fact guilty of domestic abuse, he would be fired. Gene Smith told the then-assistant that he would be let go if charges were ever filed.

Charges weren't filed, though, and Meyer – according to the investigation – was never given proof of abuse beyond a he-said-she-said situation between Zach Smith and Courtney Smith.

Meyer and Gene Smith, though, both had an obligation to report the allegations to



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COVER STORY

Ohio State's compliance office, which they didn't do. The investigators found that their decision not to report was an oversight related to a misunderstanding of their reporting obligations, though.

"I have ultimate authority and responsibility and oversight and accountability for our athletic department and particularly the football program," Gene Smith said. "And I understand that I could have done a better job in this particular instance."

Early on in the investigation, there was speculation that Meyer had violated the Title IX clause in his contract by failing to report the allegations. The investigation learned, however, that Michelle Willis – Ohio State's designated Title IX coordinator for athletics – was the first individual at the university to learn of the 2015 allegations. She was notified of the investigation by law enforcement and in turn notified Gene Smith, who passed the information to Meyer.

The reporting issues, therefore, had nothing to do with Title IX obligations, but a separate obligation to report to the compliance office.

"Coach Meyer and AD Gene Smith, although acting in good faith, did not report the investigation of Zach Smith for domestic violence in 2015 to compliance as we believe they should have," White said in her prepared statement. "Although law enforcement had not brought charges at the time that Coach Meyer and AD Smith became aware of the investigation, the compliance function could have been in the best position to assess whether to conduct an internal investigation into the allegations had they known about them.

"In the domestic violence context especially, there are many cases in which abuse takes place but there is no arrest or criminal prosecution. And so simply relying on law enforcement to take action in the face of such allegations is not, in our view, an adequate response."

Beyond the mishandling of the 2015 allegations, and failure to follow adequate reporting protocols, the investigation found that there were numerous instances involving Zach Smith that could have or should have led to termination before July 23.

"The investigation identified multiple other examples of inappropriate conduct by Zach Smith while employed as an assistant football coach, some known by Coach

Meyer and/or Gene Smith and others on the football staff," read a summary of the findings handed out before the press conference. "Coach Meyer and athletic director Smith's efforts to help Zach Smith overcome his personal issues went too far in allowing him to remain as an employee in the face of repeated misconduct."

During the press conference, questions were raised as to whether Zach Smith should ever have been hired by the university. He had previously been arrested, but not charged, after an allegation of domestic violence in 2009 while he was on Meyer's staff at Florida. Meyer was aware of the incident at the time, although he did not tell Ohio State about it when he opted to hire Zach Smith in 2011 to join his staff in Columbus.

The investigation found that, while Meyer should have disclosed the 2009 incident to Ohio State, he was not obligated to by any law, rule or regulation. The regular background check that all prospective employees are subjected to did not turn up any indication of the 2009 arrest, either.

Gene Smith, when asked about the deci-

sion to hire Zach Smith in the first place, admitted that the process should likely take more into account going forward.

"I had a conversation with our new vice president for human resources today around our hiring practices and how we might be able to expand on our effort relative to our background checks," Gene Smith said. "Obviously, all of our employees go through a standard background check. But the reality is we can probably go deeper with some positions, and that is one that we can go deeper on."

At the end of the day, though, while policies will likely be changed going forward, they weren't in place back in 2011 when Zach Smith was hired. He was kept on staff up until July 23 this year which, the investigation proved, was a mistake by Meyer and Gene Smith. For that, they will serve their respective suspensions, but questions will continue – especially after nobody in the press conference chose to directly address Courtney Smith, the alleged victim of Zach Smith's abuse.

One question that has a firm answer, though, after weeks of speculation, is in

regard to who will coach the Buckeyes on Sept. 1. That will be acting head coach Ryan Day, who has served in place of Meyer since he was placed on leave. Day, Ohio State's offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach, will lead the team through the remainder of preseason practices, then he will be the man in charge for the first three games.

After that, Meyer will return to the sidelines – barring further developments – giving him nearly a month to reflect on the investigation, his role in the mistakes that were made and his punishment for those mistakes.

Then it will be back to football for Meyer as the Buckeyes pursue another Big Ten title and a return to the College Football Playoff.

"The suspensions are tough but I fully accept them," Meyer said. "I wished I could go back and make different decisions but I can't. These difficult lessons are a constant reminder of the duties and obligations that I have as a member of this universities and this community.

"I take full responsibility – I take this responsibility very seriously, and I will do better."



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## URBAN MEYER INVESTIGATION

## 23-Page Report Details Meyer Investigation

By **TIM MOODY**  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Ohio State announced suspensions for head football coach Urban Meyer and athletic director Gene Smith on Aug. 22, capping a weeks-long process that included a 14-day independent investigation into the athletic department's handling of former assistant coach Zach Smith's employment, which lasted from late 2011 until he was fired July 23.

Meyer will serve an unpaid suspension through Sept. 2, the day after the Buckeyes open their season against Oregon State at Ohio Stadium. He will also be suspended on Sept. 8 for the home game against Rutgers and on Sept. 15 for a matchup with TCU in Arlington, Texas. Gene Smith will serve his unpaid suspension from Aug. 31 to Sept. 16 – spanning the first three football games as well.

The punishments were handed down by university president Michael Drake after a board of trustees executive session to discuss the matter, a meeting which lasted past the 10-hour mark at the Longaberger Alumni House. After the suspensions were announced, and after a press conference concluded, the university released the full summary of the findings from the investigation. A breakdown of those findings can be found below.

#### The Questions

The investigation focused on three main questions:

1. Did Meyer violate any university policies or rules, Title IX, NCAA rules, Big Ten rules, Ohio State ethics laws, federal or state laws or any part of his contractual obligations with the university related to his handling of domestic violence allegations made against Zach Smith by his ex-wife, Courtney Smith?

2. While speaking at Big Ten Media Days in Chicago on July 24, did Meyer “misrepresent his knowledge of a law enforcement investigation” regarding 2015 domestic violence allegations against Zach Smith. If he did, was it on purpose?

3. What role did Gene Smith play in the events related to Zach Smith's employment, and did he violate any of the rules or laws stated above?

#### The Working Group

On Aug. 2, Ohio State formed an independent board working group to “oversee the independence and work” of the investigation in addition to being available for consultation and advice to the investigators. The group also received the final report from the investigative team and assisted with communication to the board of trustees.

The working group was chaired by former Ohio House speaker Jo Ann Davidson and also included Ohio State trustees Alex Fischer, Janet Porter and Alex Shumate. Non-trustees in the group were former acting U.S. deputy attorney general Craig Morford and former U.S. attorney for the Southern District of Ohio Carter Stewart.

The independent investigators engaged by the working group were led by Mary Jo

White, who is the senior chair of New York law firm Debevoise & Plimpton LLP, and partner David Sarraff.

#### The Evidence & Witnesses

Over the course of the investigation, which met its original 14-day timeline when it concluded Aug. 19, Meyer, Gene Smith, Zach Smith and Courtney Smith were the key witnesses, while a total of more than 40 witnesses were interviewed, “many more than once.”

The scope of the investigation included “more than 60,000 electronic documents and 10,000 pages of Coach Meyer's text messages from the past year,” the final report stated. Investigators also looked at media reports, police reports, court filings, contracts and various other documents relevant to the investigation, as well as text messages and photos from Courtney Smith. The group “attempted to, but were unable to retrieve” text messages from Gene Smith, Zach Smith and chief of football operations Brian Voltolini.

#### The Findings

The final report released by Ohio State spanned 23 pages, with the sectioned titled “Key Factual Findings” beginning on page 3. What follows is a summary of the main points of the findings, while the full report can be accessed at <https://news.osu.edu/public-records-related-to-the-investigation-in-to-allegations-involving-urban-meyer/>.

**2009 Incident** – The factual findings in the final report began with the events regarding a 2009 allegation of domestic abuse by Courtney Smith against Zach Smith. Meyer, who was the head coach at Florida at the time and had Zach Smith on his staff there, acknowledged in July that he was aware of the 2009 incident, which took place after a party at Meyer's house, the report said.

Meyer, his wife, Shelley, and special assistant to the coach Hiram deFries were all aware of the incident, for which Zach Smith was arrested but never charged.

During the investigation, Meyer claimed that he met with both Zach and Courtney Smith after the incident, but both claimed that only Zach Smith met with Urban Meyer, while Courtney Smith met only with Shelley Meyer at the time. The investigation concluded that it was more likely that Urban Meyer never met with Courtney Smith after the incident, and she decided not to pursue charges after speaking with members of Zach Smith's family, including former Ohio State head coach Earle Bruce.

In December 2011 when Meyer decided to hire Zach Smith in Columbus, he did not inform Ohio State of the 2009 incident, and the arrest did not appear on the background check performed by the university. Gene Smith did not find out about the incident until July 2018 when it first appeared in media reports, the investigation found.

**No DV Arrests/Charges From 2010-2018** – From there, the investigative report turned to incidents that occurred between 2010 and July 22, 2018 – the day before Zach Smith was fired by Meyer. In that time period, there was no evidence of any arrests or charges against Zach Smith for domestic violence, but a domestic violence civil protection order was issued against him – pending a formal hearing – on July 20 this year. Zach Smith is contesting that order.

While there was a lack of arrests or charges related to domestic abuse in that time frame, the investigation found “exten-

sive evidence during this period of misconduct and other problematic, or at least questionable, behavior by Zach Smith while he was employed at OSU.” The report noted that Meyer and Gene Smith were aware of some but not all of the issues.

**2013 Arrest** – In 2013, Zach Smith was arrested for operating a vehicle while impaired, but there is no evidence that Meyer or Gene Smith was aware of the incident.

**2014 Strip Club Visit** – Zach Smith “ran up a significant bill” at a strip club in Florida in May of 2014 while he was on a recruiting trip. The report stated that one other Ohio State coach and at least one high school football coach were also present.

The report stated that Zach Smith spent around \$600 of his own money at the strip club in Miami. Voltolini knew about the visit.

Meyer said he was made aware of the incident – but not the amount spent – and warned Zach Smith that he would be fired if it happened again. He also “revised the 2014 Coaches' Manual to include a ‘morality clause’ instructing staff to [a]void strip clubs or venues that would embarrass The Ohio State University.” The revision also prohibited porn on any school-issued electronics.

The investigators didn't find any evidence that Gene Smith was aware of the strip club visit, and Meyer did not report it to the athletic compliance office.

**2015-16 Police Investigation** – Michelle Willis, who in October 2015 was the deputy Title IX coordinator for athletics at Ohio State, was the first employee at the university to be notified by the Powell police of a domestic violence investigation into Zach Smith regarding the allegations made by Courtney Smith. Willis passed the information along to Gene Smith, who notified Meyer during practice that Zach Smith was “under investigation for domestic violence and could be arrested at any time.”

According to the report, Gene Smith remembers Meyer having a “strong negative reaction to the news.”

Zach Smith was ordered to return from a recruiting trip, and he denied any wrongdoing. Meyer told him, if “you hit her, you are fired,” according to the report, while Gene Smith said termination would occur if charges were filed. Meyer and Gene Smith monitored the investigation but did not notify OSU compliance.

In late fall 2015, Courtney Smith shared her allegations of abuse with Shelley Meyer, including photographs. Both Urban and Shelley Meyer maintain that her text conversations with Courtney Smith were never shared with her husband, but the investigators found it likely that some conversation likely occurred between the Meyers in regard to the allegations.

According to the report, both Urban and Shelley Meyer had doubts about Courtney Smith's allegations in both 2009 and 2015.

**The Divorce** – Courtney Smith filed for divorce on Nov. 12, 2015, after she had been separated from Zach Smith since June of that year. The divorce was finalized Sept. 2, 2016.

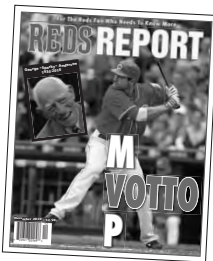
The investigators found that Zach Smith's “job performance suffered” during the divorce proceedings, including multiple instances of him being late to practice or workouts as well as skipping recruiting visits and reporting back to Meyer that he had been present as scheduled. At the time, Meyer warned him that if the issues continued, he would be fired, according to Zach Smith. Gene Smith suggested that Meyer make a change, but the coach chose not to.

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## URBAN MEYER INVESTIGATION



TIM MOODY

**LEARNING HIS FATE** – Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith received a suspension Aug. 22 that will last from Aug. 31 through Sept. 16.

**Zach Smith's Affair** – During the same time period as the divorce and domestic violence investigation, Zach Smith had an ongoing sexual relationship with a secretary on the football staff who was not his subordinate, the investigators confirmed. He also "took sexually explicit photographs of himself in the OSU football facilities and at other locations," including the White House when Ohio State visited after winning the national title in 2014. Zach Smith also had sex toys delivered to the athletics offices at Ohio State.

According to the findings of the investigators, some members of the football staff were aware of the issues, but Urban Meyer and Gene Smith were not.

**Drug Treatment** – Meyer directed Zach Smith to enter a drug treatment facility for an addiction to a prescription medication used to treat ADHD in June 2016. Gene Smith did not know about the rehab stint.

**Big Ten Media Days** – Zach Smith was fired July 23 after Meyer consulted with Gene Smith. Meyer told investigators that the firing was due to Zach Smith's failure to notify him of the protection order against him, in addition to his failure to disclose a criminal trespassing charge from earlier in the year. According to the report, Meyer believed the protection order was the first evidence that Zach Smith had, in fact, committed domestic violence.

After making the decision to fire the assistant, Meyer notified other staff members that the move was due to "core value violation and cumulative issues." The same day, Shelley Meyer texted Urban Meyer to say she was "worried about Zach's response. He drinks a lot and I am just not sure how stable he will be afraid he will do something dangerous. It's obvious he has anger/rage issues already." Meyer did not respond to the text.

That evening, Meyer also saw a media report stating that Zach Smith had a felony arrest related to the 2015 incident, which was false. He instructed members of his staff to find out more information, and they informed him that no such arrest occurred.

While preparing for his press conference in Chicago, Meyer had a group text chat that

included Gene Smith and football SID Jerry Emig. Gene Smith said, "I would be careful. Do not get too detailed." He suggested that Meyer acknowledge Zach Smith's firing in his opening statement and refrain from taking any more questions on the matter in addition to acknowledging that he was aware of the 2009 and the 2015 allegations. Emig agreed with that idea and also suggested that Meyer say "there were no charges in 2015 and I really don't even recall any details," but Meyer did not respond to that text.

In a text conversation with his agent on July 24, Meyer referred to Zach Smith's dismissal as the "right thing to do." He also said it was for "cumulative stuff" and noted that he would "not tell media."

Despite the recommendations from others, Meyer, in his comments in Chicago, denied knowledge of the 2015 incident. According to the report, Gene Smith and Voltolini were both surprised by Meyer's statements and informed him afterward that he was aware of the investigation. Meyer told the investigative group that he had not recalled the 2015 investigation until being reminded about it. Other witnesses told investigators that they believed Meyer's remarks in Chicago were focused on the false report of a felony arrest.

**Possible Deleted Texts** – On Aug. 1, a new report surfaced suggesting that both Urban and Shelley Meyer had been aware of the 2015 allegations – which was true. When that report emerged, Voltolini – during practice – informed Urban Meyer and called it "a bad article."

According to the investigative findings, Meyer and Voltolini talked about whether the media could access Meyer's phone, and "specifically discussed how to adjust the settings on Meyer's phone so that text messages older than one year would be deleted."

Investigators received Meyer's phone Aug. 2, and it had no text messages older than a year. There was no evidence as to whether or not the settings were changed as a response to the media report or at another earlier time.

"It is nonetheless concerning that his first reaction to a negative media piece exposing his knowledge of the 2015-2016 law enforce-

ment investigation was to worry about the media getting access to information and discussing how to delete messages older than a year," the report read.

The Ohio State student paper, The Lantern, had filed a July 25 public records request for emails and text messages between Meyer and Zach Smith and between Meyer and Gene Smith for various dates in 2015 and 2018, but the request did not receive a prompt response and was never brought to Meyer.

"Had Coach Meyer's phone been examined and processed promptly at that time, we would know definitively that the August 1 article's revelations had no impact on the evidence we received from July 23rd and dates in 2015," the report read. "While the absence of prompt and effective follow-up is problematic and frustrating, we want to be clear that we have found no evidence that Coach Meyer was aware of the records request before we brought it to his attention during the Independent Investigation."

**Paid Administrative Leave** – Meyer was placed on paid administrative leave by the university Aug. 1, the day the beginning of the investigation was announced.

Two days later, Meyer made a statement via Twitter admitting that he had been aware of the 2015 investigation and apologizing for misleading statements in Chicago. He also said he had followed the proper protocol in 2015.

### Possible Violations

**Failure To Report 2009 Incident** – Meyer did not report his knowledge of the 2009 allegations when Zach Smith was hired at Ohio State, but he was not obligated to by any law or contract. The report stated, though, that it "would have been better" for Meyer to disclose that knowledge at the time.

**2015 Obligations** – The investigators found that both Meyer and Gene Smith had an obligation to report the 2015 investigation regarding Zach Smith to university compliance. Neither individual believed they were in violation of any obligation, though, because they believed Zach Smith's denials and because no charges or arrests occurred. Meyer was also under the impression that he had no further obligation for reporting because it was his superior who first notified him of the allegations.

While Meyer and Gene Smith should have reported to the compliance office, there was no Title IX violation discovered.

"We have found no other facts giving rise to violations of policy, rules, law, or contractual obligations by Coach Meyer or AD Smith in connection with alleged domestic violence by Zach Smith," the investigative report read.

**Obligations Regarding Honesty** – According to Meyer's contract, he is required to "represent Ohio State positively in public and private forums." With that in mind, the investigators found that Meyer spoke untruthfully in Chicago but also accepted that Meyer was "deeply absorbed in football season and wanted to focus on football" at the time.

The investigation also discovered that Meyer has, at times, suffered from "significant memory issues in other situations where he had prior extensive knowledge of events." Investigators also found that he has at times taken medicine that can "negatively impair his memory, concentration, and focus."

In regard to his comments at Big Ten Media Days, the investigators concluded that Meyer was determined to disclose as little personal information regarding Zach

Smith as possible, and that he was focused on the false reports of a felony arrest, but he still made statements that were not true.

### Conclusions Regarding Meyer

**Meyer Would Have Fired Zach Smith** – The investigators concluded that they believed "that if (Meyer) ever came to learn or believe that Zach Smith had physically abused his wife, Coach Meyer would have fired Zach Smith or any other coach on the spot."

**Respect For Women** – One of the core values of Ohio State's football program is a respect for women, and investigators found that Meyer had a "sincere commitment" to that value. Gene Smith does as well, but Zach Smith "did not live up to" that core value in addition to other core values.

### Reliance On Law

The investigators found that Meyer, Gene Smith and other athletic personnel seemed to emphasize the importance of an arrest or filed charges when determining whether or not a violation that could go against the law or university sexual misconduct policy had occurred, which would necessitate a report to the compliance office. The report stated that, especially in instances of domestic violence and sexual abuse, victims often choose not to come forward and allegations often do not lead to charges. They suggested that "a stronger program to combat sexual abuse and domestic violence" might be warranted.

### In Conclusion

To cap the 23-page report, the investigators included the following conclusion:

"We have worked hard in a short period of time to investigate this matter and have arrived at our findings independently. While we know that not everyone will agree with our conclusions, we hope that our work will shed some light and be of some benefit to those who are charged with the weighty responsibility of making the important decisions that will follow this report. We especially want to thank the special, independent Board working group for its invaluable guidance and expertise, as well as the entire OSU community for its cooperation in the Independent Investigation and for its commitment to the integrity and independence of this process."

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# Local, National Columnists Chime In On Meyer

By GARRETT STEPIEN  
 Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Despite the drag of a nearly 12-hour deliberation, capped by an 8:50 p.m. press conference Aug. 22 at Longaberger Alumni House, it didn't take long for local and national columnists to fire off their takes on Ohio State's decision regarding Urban Meyer.

Meyer, who received a three-game suspension without pay, wasn't the only one taking the heat. Athletic director Gene Smith, who was also suspended without pay from Aug. 31 to Sept. 16, faced additional criticism. University president Michael Drake caught criticism, too, along with general remarks questioning the decision-making of the board of trustees.

Below is a collection of opinions from columnists, in Ohio and beyond, on how everything went down in Columbus.

• **Bill Bender, Sporting News:** "Pay attention instead to a series of missed opportunities, where the university's most powerful voices could have shifted the attention back to the seriousness of the domestic violence allegations at the center of the investigation."

"When asked about what message he has for Courtney Smith – one of the key figures in this scandal – Meyer declined to speak out on that issue. He didn't even mention her by name. Neither did Drake or Gene Smith."

**David Briggs, The (Toledo) Blade:** "If the national narrative will cast Ohio State as the win-at-all-cost bad guys – a cheerleader,

not a leader – know this: no school in America would have fired a three-time national champion coach under these circumstances.

"Hell, some schools would have bowed to fan pressure, reinstated Meyer immediately, and had the band perform Script Urban before the opener. Judging by Meyer's spaced-out gaze in the press conference, he strongly resisted any punishment."

"In that context, credit Ohio State."

• **Paul Daugherty, The Cincinnati Enquirer:** "Indignancy doesn't wear well when it's used too often. It should be pulled out only for the really special occasions, lest it lose its power to convince. I was indignant over Jerry Sandusky and Larry Nassar. I was mildly indignant over Rick Pitino."

"That's a lot of indignance, dispensed over a short period of time, on a group of people belonging to a fraternity known for conniving and charming in equal measure, whose egos, God complexes and fat senses of self worth have existed for a century or two."

"Urban Meyer is a good football coach who did a bad thing, then tried to cover it up. He has faced consequences. That's not enough to get me outraged these days. The suit's back in the closet."

• **Heather Dinich, ESPN.com:** "Ohio State coach Urban Meyer is now 0-2 in news conferences, and that might be the only record that counts."

"The first time, at Big Ten media days, he lied."

"The second time?"

"Meyer stood in front of a room full of reporters and television cameras Wednesday

night, taking center stage in what was the biggest story in sports, and apologized more to 'Buckeye Nation' than he did to Courtney Smith."

• **Dennis Dodd, CBSSports.com:** "In its worst times, Ohio State has constantly proven that its football is bigger than any coach."

"I wish I had done more," the current coach said.

"Meyer – and the university that employs him – should have."

• **Pat Forde, Yahoo Sports:** "Compare the power that comes with a .901 winning percentage and a recent national championship ring with that of a less successful coach at the same institution. Say, the college basketball coach, who had a .733 winning percentage and no national championship rings. That coach was abruptly pushed out 14 months ago. He had some health issues, but no known scandal befouling his program."

"The largely successful basketball coach had to go. The wildly successful football coach had to stay."

"That's the reality at Ohio State, which retained Urban Meyer but relinquished its reputation in the process. Moving on from this entire tawdry spectacle won't be easy."

• **Teddy Greenstein, Chicago Tribune:** "I actually believe the university chose the right punishment – a suspension of three games and six weeks without pay. Hopefully that money goes to causes that help the victims of domestic violence."

"Meyer is sidelined through Sept. 2, including the season-opener against Oregon State. He cannot coach the team for its Week 2 (Rutgers) or Week 3 (TCU) games but will be permitted to lead practice."

"I do not believe that Meyer's negligence and lies amounted to a fireable offense."

"I do believe that a coach savvy enough to win three national titles and go 47-3 in Big Ten games still somehow doesn't understand the breadth of his screw-ups."

"And that makes what transpired Wednesday night feel empty."

• **Matt Hayes, Bleacher Report:** "Look, if you're paying a coach \$8 million a year to

run a business – because that's what Ohio State football is – you expect him to know every last thing about that business, and everything that could potentially harm that business."

"You don't allow him the excuse of 'I followed proper reporting protocols and procedures.' You don't allow him to lie, intentionally or not, to nine different questions at Big Ten media days about his knowledge of something that could stain the university for years, and later admit that 'I was not adequately prepared' to speak to the media."

"Hey, Urb: Your job is to be adequately prepared for anything."

• **Doug Lesmerises, Cleveland.com:** "Drake addressed the obvious, that no solution would please everyone, and that the two-week investigation and 10-hour consideration by Drake and the OSU board of trustees on Wednesday dealt with some complicated issues."

"The end result, in my opinion, was reasonable. It could have been more severe."

"Smith's failures as an AD in not more systematically dealing with the allegations in 2015 are a problem. Meyer's continued employment of an unqualified relative of a friend put personal relationships ahead of the football program, and he ignored several chances to cut ties with Zach Smith, outside of the fact that Smith was never charged with a domestic-violence crime."

• **Dan Wolken, USA TODAY:** "This whole incident, going back three weeks, is going to leave a mark on Urban Meyer's legacy. And the truth is, for somebody like Urban Meyer who's built so much of his brand on being about more than football, I don't see how anybody can take that seriously anymore. This is a football-driven decision. Understand that Urban Meyer can no longer occupy that moral high ground that he likes to claim so religiously. This was all about winning."

"I think, frankly, America would have respected what Ohio State did today more if they had just come out and said this was about wins and losses. Instead, they're trying to sort of satisfy all parties. And that doesn't really work very well."

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# Troubling Report Showed Wrongdoing By Meyer

Well, that was odd.

One of the strangest days in recent Ohio State football history capped one of the strangest months in Ohio State football history, ending with a three-game suspension for Buckeye coach Urban Meyer.

Depending on whom you talk to, it was either a slap on the wrist or completely undeserved.

## THE FACTS MAN Mike Wachsman

As with most things, the truth lies somewhere in the middle.

By now everyone knows all of the sordid details of this saga, the back-and-forth social media journalism rivalries that uncovered nugget after nugget – most having nothing to do with anything, but lapped up just the same.

The investigative committee charged with sorting out this mess was about as thorough as could be expected, especially given the fact they worked under the confines of a self-imposed 14-day deadline. They talked to numerous people – including Meyer, athletic director Gene Smith, former receivers coach Zach Smith and his ex-wife, Courtney Smith – as well as examined text messages and emails. Their conclusions were that Meyer did not violate any contractual policies but did mismanage his handling of Zach Smith, allowing him to stay on staff despite numerous red flags.

The result determined by Ohio State was a three-game suspension without pay, which means Meyer won't be around the team at all until after Sept. 2, won't coach a game until after TCU and won't receive any money until Sept. 16. He's forgoing six weeks of salary in total, or well over half a million dollars. I don't care how much you make, that's not pocket change.

There were definitely some troubling things uncovered by the committee, including the fact that Meyer's phone appeared to be devoid of text messages older than a year, not coincidentally around the same time a staffer told him that the phone's settings could be adjusted to get rid of messages older than one year. The committee could not prove that Meyer did anything shady in that aspect, but it does seem odd that it was talked about prior and then shown to have retained only messages a year old or newer.

Also troubling was the committee's determination that "We learned that coach Meyer sometimes had significant memory issues in other situations where he had prior extensive knowledge of events." The issues were attributed to medication Meyer takes, which sometimes impairs his memory and focus. Even taking the committee at its word, this one seems a bit hard to swallow.

And then there's Zach Smith.

Where to start? There were spending issues, an OVI (which he never informed Meyer about), an affair with a staffer, sex toys ordered and delivered to the offices at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center. In short, a ton of reasons why Smith could have been fired and no one would have batted an eye. There were also the domestic violence claims, though only an incident in 2009 while Smith was an assistant at Florida under Meyer has been confirmed by all parties. Meyer repeatedly talked to Smith about his behavior, warning him that if it happened again he would be fired. But he never did, and that's concerning. Did he

keep him on because he was a top recruiter? Because the receivers seemed to play hard for him? Because he was Earle Bruce's grandson, and Bruce was the man who helped Meyer break into the coaching profession?

Probably all of the above.

Although loyalty is to be commended, at some point you have to take a step back and ask yourself if it's worth it. Is the stain on your reputation and that of your university worth keeping such a troubled guy on staff? Meyer apparently thought so, at least until Smith got slapped with a protection order. At that point he was fired. That was July 23. The same day, a story by Brett McMurphy ran alleging that Smith had been arrested for domestic violence (which was untrue), and Meyer was asked at the Big Ten Media Days, "the 2015 reported incident ... are you saying you don't know anything about that, or do you believe that didn't happen?" Meyer said, "I can't say it didn't happen because I wasn't there. I was never told about anything, never anything came to light, I've never had a conversation about it. So I know nothing about that."

He then doubled down – a crucial mistake – and uttered the infamous "There's nothing, I don't know who creates a story like that."

The committee said it accepted that Meyer was "deeply absorbed" in football season and wanted to focus on football on that day. They kind of gave him a pass, saying he misspoke, but that the reasons were complex and that, in their view, Meyer did not deliberately lie. He definitely came off looking bad and should have said something to the effect of "we have let Zach Smith go due to an accumulation of things." If asked to expand upon that, about the domestic violence incident specifically, he could have said he was aware of it, did what he was obligated to do and didn't want to talk any further about it as it was a personnel matter. But he didn't.

He had a second chance, a chance to make it right, at the end of the Aug. 22 press conference. He was asked what he would say to Courtney Smith. His response was that he was "sorry we are in this situation." It seemed obvious he did not believe her, and maybe he had reason not to. There were never charges, and the committee even hinted that no incident could be confirmed in 2015, referring to it throughout the report as "allegations." The facts at hand can be debated, but his statement cannot be. In a situation like that one, even if you're skeptical, be a bigger man and show some compassion for the victim. Don't come off like a petulant kid, because that's what you looked like.

All of those things can be examined up, down and sideways, and different people will have different feelings.

What cannot be disputed is that Meyer acted properly in reporting his concerns about Zach Smith to his superiors. The committee said as much, though added he should have done more and gone to Compliance. That seems odd, considering Compliance has no jurisdiction over these kinds of matters. Compliance deals with Title IX and NCAA violations, and this was neither.

The committee concluded the following:

*"Although neither Urban Meyer nor Gene Smith condoned or covered up the alleged domestic abuse by Zach Smith, they failed to take sufficient management action relating to Zach Smith's misconduct and retained an Assistant Coach who was not performing as an appropriate role model for OSU student-athletes. Permitting such misconduct to continue is not consistent with the values of the University and reflects poorly on Coach Meyer, Athletic Director Smith, and the University."*

So if Meyer did not violate his contract, he could not be fired – at least not with cause. OSU could have terminated him without cause but would have owed him \$38 million in the process. That's a hefty price to pay someone to go away. The committee did chide him for his handling of Smith, of keeping him on staff despite repeated missteps, which is more than fair. Thus, the suspension.

If naysayers want to cast aspersions on the committee or on Ohio State, that's a "they" problem, not an Urban Meyer problem. People don't get to choose their version of reality, though they often do. Quick rushes to judgment, even if the facts prove otherwise. They will stick to their original ideas and blast the process, or ignore them altogether. If people want to throw shade at Meyer, that's fine – as long as they have something to back their argument.

We've seen this recently – the misguided Tennessee fans who torpedoed Greg Schiano's hire because they believed that he was tied to the Jerry Sandusky pedophile scandal at Penn State, even if no tangible evidence of that exists. They got vocal and UT backed away, ultimately hiring Jeremy Pruitt away from Alabama.

The fact that this whole thing has devolved into a soap opera, a fencing match of dodge-and-parry statements, is sad. Prurient reports about things that have nothing to do with the investigation are released just so a reporter can stay relevant. That's where journalism has gone.

Even though Meyer was retained, there are no winners here, at least not in the short term.

OSU will take a PR hit nationally, though that doesn't bother me too much because local approval matters much more than anything the outsiders say. The only way it becomes an issue is if recruiting suffers, and at the moment that does not appear to be the case.

Journalism hasn't won because it has sunk to the lowest common denominator, with a few exceptions.

Fans haven't won because they've been painted with a broad brush.

The sport hasn't won because too many people have been talking about off-field issues instead of battles for the starting quarterback job.

All of that said, at least the situation is no longer a distraction. The Buckeyes and Meyer know where they stand and can begin planning for the season.

It will be interesting to see not only how the Buckeyes play in week four vs Tulane but how Meyer comports himself going forward. While the press conference was botched – in fact both press conferences – there is a real chance to shape a new legacy, to make people forget about this blip in time.

Meyer has remade himself once before. Can he do it again?

For the sake of his career, he will have to.

## Big Ten Breakdown

Fans of the Big Ten will be as thrilled and as mystified in 2018 as they would be by a great detective novel. There is a ton of intrigue and a mountain of uncertainty before settling for a somewhat expected ending.

- **Ohio State** won't cede its throne easily, though there is a bit of concern about a rebuilt secondary and a new man under center. Dwayne Haskins has the keys to the Buckeyes' ride now, and the coaches are optimistic that he will give the passing game a dynamic addition. But look for OSU to ride its talented 1-2 tailback punch of J.K. Dobbins and Mike Weber to success. The defensive line is

one of the best anywhere, and the schedule is mostly manageable.

- **Penn State** coach James Franklin has been a tireless recruiter in his time in State College, and that could finally pay off as he has his most talented team – but a demanding schedule. With Trace McSorley, the league's best quarterback, showing the way, and an aggressive, athletic defense – not to mention getting OSU, Michigan State and Wisconsin at home – Penn State could be an outside threat for the College Football Playoff.

- **Michigan** needs to make hay now, and fortunately for Jim Harbaugh it's his most talented team. There may finally be a quarterback who can put pressure on a defense in Ole Miss transfer Shea Patterson. The defense will once again be lethal, with elite players at each level.

- **Michigan State** needs to become a bit more offensive-minded if it really wants to challenge for East Division supremacy. Quarterback Brian Lewerke is an excellent field general but isn't asked to win games. That may change this year if the defense doesn't live up to expectations.

- It's still **Wisconsin** and all of the others in the West, but the gap is closing thanks to the infusion of new coaching blood at Nebraska (Scott Frost) and second-year bosses at Purdue (Jeff Brohm) and Minnesota (PJ Fleck). The Badgers feature, as usual, a mammoth offensive line and ground game led by Heisman candidate Jonathan Taylor. Wisconsin will grind foes into the ground and may be more deliberate this season as a typically stout defense returns just four starters.

- One of the old guard coaches – Pat Fitzgerald – has **Northwestern** primed as Wisconsin's biggest divisional threat. If quarterback Clayton Thorson is healthy after an ACL injury suffered in last year's bowl game, the Wildcats should be fast out of the gate. They open on the road with Purdue so will need to be focused from the get-go.

- **Iowa** has its typical blue-collar team, though the combo of quarterback Nathan Stanley to tight end Noah Fant will be heard more than a few times this fall. The defense may drop just a notch as only six starters return.

- **Purdue** could be a better team this year, but it might not be reflected in the record as it tackles Ohio State, Michigan State and Wisconsin, as well as a non-league test with Missouri. The offense returns nine, but the defense has only four returnees, though linebacker Markus Bailey is an all-league talent.

- Frost's homecoming to Lincoln could be bumpy, but expect **Nebraska** to win a game it shouldn't – and lose one it shouldn't. A quarterback battle that will extend into fall camp isn't the best thing, but the defense should be good with eight starters back and a new, more aggressive coordinator in Erik Chinander, Frost's DC at UCF.

**Big Ten Championship Game:** Ohio State over Wisconsin.

**Postseason:** Cotton Bowl – Ohio State vs. Alabama (College Football Playoff semifinal); Rose Bowl – Penn State; Citrus Bowl – Wisconsin; Outback Bowl – Michigan; Holiday Bowl – Michigan State; Music City Bowl – Northwestern; Pinstripe Bowl – Iowa; Quick Lane Bowl – Nebraska; First Responder Bowl – Purdue.

**Offensive Player Of The Year:** Trace McSorley, Penn State; **Defensive Player Of The Year:** Nick Bosa, Ohio State; **Coach Of The Year:** Pat Fitzgerald, Northwestern; **Freshman Of The Year:** Micah Parsons, Penn State.

# Ohio State's Football Reputation Still Among The Best

Stepping back for a moment before the 2018 football season begins, it really is amazing to see how Ohio State's football reputation has risen over the last few years under Urban Meyer, or even going back to Jim Tressel's national championship in 2002.

This could not have been imagined in 2001.

## EXNER POINT Rich Exner

Ohio State has a new quarterback. As usual, a number of last year's key players are gone, beginning NFL careers. Yet, as a matter of routine, Ohio State is right in the middle of the conversation for a national championship.

That reminder showed up recently in my email inbox from the online betting service Bovada, which promotes its service to the media with regular emails sharing odds on any number of interesting sports topics.

Ohio State, at least as of Aug. 9 and with Meyer still on paid administrative leave from the team, had the third-lowest odds in the country to win the national championship.

At 8-to-1, the Buckeyes were behind only Alabama at 7-to-4 and Clemson at 11-to-2.

This has become a matter of routine in recent years, and not just because of the expectations of football experts looking at the season ahead. The odds are set to balance the betting money. So what the odds say is that not only do a lot of people think Ohio State is a good bet to contend for the title, the combination of experts and fans are willing to put their money down on the Buckeyes.

That goes back to the reputation factor. Ohio State has not only been very good, but the football program is looked upon that way nationally.

### Odds Changes Since January

In comparison to the odds put out by Bovada back in January, the Buckeyes are a slightly longer bet now, dropping from 15-2 to 8-1. But that change is very small. (Doing the math for you, 8-to-1 equates to 16-2, or offering a slightly larger payout than 15-to-2.)

Betting must be moving Alabama's way, as the Crimson Tide was 11-to-4 in January but 7-to-4 now.

Here's how other Big Ten teams showed up on the odds board:

- Michigan – 9-to-1 in January and 18-to-1 now.
- Wisconsin – 22-to-1 in January and 28-to-1 now.
- Penn State – 11-to-1 in January and 35-to-1 now.
- Michigan State – 25-to-1 in January and 45-to-1 now.
- Nebraska – 150-to-1 in January and 175-to-1 now.
- Iowa – 150-to-1 in January and 450-to-1 now.
- Maryland – 500-to-1 in January and unchanged at 500-to-1 now.
- Purdue – 250-to-1 in January and 500-to-1 now.
- Northwestern – 150-to-1 in January and 700-to-1 now.
- Minnesota – 250-to-1 in January and 900-to-1 now.
- Illinois – 500-to-1 in January and 1,000-to-1 now.

- Indiana – 500-to-1 in January and 1,000-to-1 now.

- Rutgers – 500-to-1 in January and 1,000-to-1 now.

### Way-Too-Early Heisman Odds

Speaking of reputation, this one speaks to Meyer's reputation as an offensive coach more than what little we've seen so far of Dwayne Haskins. Haskins, who has not yet started a single game in college football, is rated fourth in the Heisman race, according to Bovada.

Bets on only three players would pay out less than a winning wager on Haskins.

Stanford running back Bryce Love and Alabama quarterback Tua Tagovailoa are both listed at 7-to-1. (Like Haskins, Tagovailoa looked great in relief as he rallied Alabama to the national title, but he has yet to start a game.)

Wisconsin running back Jonathan Taylor is 8-to-1. And Haskins is 11-to-1.

Back on Jan. 24, there were no odds listed for Haskins.

Taylor and Buckeye running back J.K. Dobbins were the co-favorites in late January, each at 6-to-1. Love and Tagovailoa were both listed at 7-to-1.

Since then, Dobbins' odds have fallen to 18-to-1.

Other Big Ten players on the current Heisman board for Bovada:

- Penn State quarterback Trace McSorley – 20-to-1 in January and 15-to-1 now.
- Michigan quarterback Shea Patterson – off the board in January and 20-to-1 now.
- Ohio State defensive end Nick Bosa – 75-to-1 in January and 100-to-1 now.

### Stats Odds

Dobbins also showed up in Bovada's most recent listing for odds on individual stats. The so-called over-under bets are essentially a prediction. They are designed to get equal money bet above or below the threshold.

Dobbins is listed at 1,375.5 yards on the over-under board for rushing, and 12.5 for rushing touchdowns.

These numbers for regular-season bets are higher expectations for Dobbins. Including postseason games last year, he finished with 1,403 yards rushing and seven rushing touchdowns.

### A Vote For Fewer Yards

I wouldn't mind Dobbins getting fewer rushing yards this season, because Ohio State could be an even more potent offense with both Dobbins and Mike Weber topping the 1,000-yard mark this season.

Weber, you will recall, rushed for 1,096 yards as a redshirt freshman in 2016. Injuries last year opened the door for Dobbins to take the spotlight, finishing with the 1,403 yards in his freshman season in 2017, while Weber had 626.

Two, healthy 1,000-yard backs is a scary proposition for Big Ten opponents.

I could find only two other times when Ohio State had multiple 1,000-yard rushers. Carlos Hyde (1,521 yards) and Braxton Miller (1,271) did it in 2013. And back in 1975, Heisman winner Archie Griffin (1,450) and touchdown machine Pete Johnson (1,059) did it.

There are good reasons to believe it could happen this year. It's easier to do these days, with the longer seasons vs. the 1990s and earlier. Plus OSU won't be running the quar-

terback as much this season (J.T. Barrett ran for 798 yards last season).

I expect both Weber and Dobbins will top the 1,000-yard mark in rushing in 2018; 1,200 yards each would be nice.

### 2,000 Yards Passing, Too?

I also expect Haskins to top 2,000 yards passing. This is less of a bold prediction.

Just 22 times in OSU's long football history has a quarterback gone over 2,000 yards passing, but it has become routine in recent years. This season should be no different with the talent Haskins already has displayed.

The only time in the Meyer era OSU has failed to have a 2,000-yard passer was in 2015, when the QB duties were shared by Cardale Jones (1,460 yards) and Barrett (992 yards).

Before then, you have to go back to Terrelle Pryor's freshman season in 2008, when he led the team in passing with 1,311 yards after splitting some time with Todd Boeckman (620 yards). They had a combined 1,931 yards passing.

In Barrett's four seasons, he passed for 2,834 yards, 992 yards, 2,555 yards and 3,053 yards.

Based on this, at least 2,500 yards passing would be a fair expectation for Haskins this year.

For a comparison of how the game has changed, consider that Art Schlichter topped 2,000 yards just once from 1978 through 1981, with seasons of 1,250, 1,816, 1,930 and 2,551 yards passing.

### Lots Of Eyeballs

Many, many eyes will be on Haskins, Dobbins, Weber and the other Buckeyes when the season gets under way against Oregon State on Sept. 1.

Here's a reminder of just how unusual the size of the crowds are at Ohio State and some other places in the Big Ten.

Ohio State was involved in three of the 10 most-attended college football games last season – at Michigan ranked second at 112,028, home against Penn State ranked ninth at 109,302 and home against Oklahoma

was 10th at 109,088, according to the NCAA record book.

Six Michigan games in Ann Arbor were the six most-attended games last season, topped by the crowd of 112,432 for Michigan's loss to Michigan State.

Penn State home games ranked seventh and eighth, and then the two OSU games listed above were ninth and 10th.

By school, the Big Ten again dominated the top of the attendance rankings for home games.

Michigan (111,589), Ohio State (107,495) and Penn State (106,707) ranked one, two, three in attendance nationally last year. The only other school to top 100,000 on average was Alabama (101,722).

Other Big Ten schools in the top 25 were No. 10 Nebraska (89,798), No. 15 Wisconsin (78,824), No. 19 Michigan State (72,485) and No. 22 Iowa (66,337).

### Coaching Numbers

Meyer enters the season ranked seventh all-time for winning percentage at any NCAA level, according to the NCAA record book. His 177-31 record works out to a winning percentage of .851.

First is former Mount Union coach Larry Kehres (332-24-3, .929), followed by Knute Rockne at 105-12-5, .881.

For wins, however, more than 50 coaches have 200-plus wins, including Woody Hayes with 238. The record of 489 wins is held by John Gagliardi, primarily over six decades at Saint John's (Minn.).

### Best In The B1G, All-Time

Undisputed, Ohio State has the best record all-time in Big Ten games, I found in tabulating the league standings over the years.

The Buckeyes are 511-174-24 (.738). Michigan is 503-206-18 (.704).

In modern times, the gap is wider. Since Penn State joined the league in 1993, the battle is for second, not first.

Ohio State leads with a 164-38-1 (.810) record.

Next are Michigan (133-69, .658) and Wisconsin (131-68-3, .656).

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# Ohio State Got Punishments For Meyer, Smith Right

First things first – Urban Meyer made glaring mistakes, and he deserved to be handed some sort of punishment by Ohio State. He certainly didn't deserve to lose his job, just as much as he didn't deserve to skate.

## MOODY MUSINGS Tim Moody, Editor

In the end, he got a punishment that fell short of drastic but still surpassed a slap on the wrist (don't tell any national columnists, or really anyone outside Columbus, that I said that, though). That punishment fits the crime.

Three games is a significant portion of the season – a quarter of the regular-season slate, to be exact – and it includes that visit to Texas to take on TCU. Meyer won't miss the biggest games of the year, but he's not missing a meaningless chunk of the season either.

What Meyer did in regard to his handling of Zach Smith was wrong – he never should have hired Smith in 2011 and, even if he did, he should have fired him long before July 23 this year. You can debate me on those points, but I won't back off them no matter what you say.

Meyer didn't respond properly when he found out about the 2015 domestic abuse allegations against Smith. While his

superior was already aware of the incident, Meyer – the investigators made clear – was supposed to report to OSU compliance as well. But his obligation in this case reasonably goes beyond what was written in his contract.

This was a second domestic abuse allegation against the same coach, a coach who had various other known ... well, let's call them "issues." Those issues included things like a strip club visit while on a recruiting trip that could end up as an NCAA violation for Ohio State to documented delinquency of his duties as an Ohio State assistant coach. He had an addiction to prescription drugs, at least for a period of time, and numerous people who spoke to investigators seemed to believe he had a drinking problem.

Looked at individually, I'm not sure any of those issues would be a fireable offense. Looked at as a group, it should have taken only a couple of problems to make a move. In fact, athletic director Gene Smith suggested that Meyer fire Zach Smith when the assistant coach's job performance suffered. Meyer chose not to – at least not until it was too late.

The investigation also uncovered details involving what seemed to be an attempt by Meyer to hide certain, old text messages from discovery. It also noted that Meyer apparently suffers from memory loss from time to time, referencing a medication he sometimes takes that can cause that. On the surface, that all sounds fishy, for lack of a better word. But at the end of the day,

the investigators found no real proof that Meyer deleted anything incriminating, and they stated as fact that those memory issues exist.

When I read through the 23-page summary report, I took everything as fact. Why wouldn't I? The investigation was undertaken by an outside law firm, and the report was presented to the full board of trustees only after it was completed. Everything was by the book, and the report made it clear when a piece of information was factual vs. when it was considered speculation.

I don't know about everyone else, but I'm pretty tired of speculation. You can speculate all you want that Meyer knew more than he's let on, that he lied and lied again (he did lie in Chicago, to be fair, and he admitted as much while using a softer word than that). Many around the nation have speculated about pretty much every detail of this case, and that didn't change after the final punishment was handed down and the report was released to the public. It won't change going forward, either.

So it goes.

Many people will continue to claim that Meyer did nothing wrong, that he should have received no punishment. Some might still be claiming that Zach Smith should have kept his job. They're wrong.

Others will say he should have been fired. That Ohio State is valuing winning on the field over a victim of abuse. They're wrong, too.

But it wasn't Ohio State's job to please everyone. Michael Drake admitted during the Aug. 22 press conference that it would be impossible to do just that. It was the job of Drake and the trustees to determine what happened, why it happened and what the consequences need to be. That's exactly what they did, and apart from a poorly planned press conference, they got it right.

They got it right with Gene Smith, too. He and Meyer are equally responsible for basically the same mistakes, and they received essentially the same punishments for it. Gene Smith will be suspended from Aug. 31 through Sept. 16 – those dates, of course,

include each of the three games that Meyer will be missing.

That's a win for Ohio State because they made the right decision. It's a loss for the school because the entire thing never should have happened, and it likely never would have come to this if Meyer had been honest in Chicago. He wasn't, and here we are.

I will say that Drake should have announced the punishments for Meyer and Gene Smith in a solo press conference Aug. 22 before holding a press conference with the coach and AD the following day. Meyer and Gene Smith were nowhere near ready for a press conference after the day they had just had, and that was reflected in ill-advised answers to a few questions, including Meyer's lack of a direct response when asked what he would say to Courtney Smith, the ex-wife of Zach Smith.

I will say, though, that a press conference being broadcast nationally would not be an appropriate place for Meyer to address Courtney Smith directly. That's a conversation that should happen, but it needs to take place face to face and behind closed doors.

## On Ryan Day

With Meyer suspended for the first three games, Ryan Day will be the Buckeyes' head coach for at least a few big moments. Many were surprised when he was named acting head coach in Meyer's place, but it's a move that makes sense.

Day might very well be the most talented coach on Ohio State's staff, and he's certainly the best offensive mind. I've long thought that he was a likely successor for Meyer at Ohio State, and he's going to get a three-game audition this season.

I fully expect that audition to end with three resounding wins and Day setting himself up for a stellar career in the head coaching ranks, whether that be at Ohio State or elsewhere – maybe as soon as next season.

## Quarterback Ballot

I really enjoyed reading the responses from subscribers to our quarterback ballot over the past few months, and it was fun to tally up the final votes. I'm not at all surprised that Troy Smith came out on top, and Rex Kern seemed like a sure bet to finish second.

I've thought about my personal top 10 for a long time, and it was tough to come to a final conclusion. I won't go into much detail about my rankings, but I wanted to note that I have Braxton Miller very highly rated, and I seriously considered putting him No. 1.

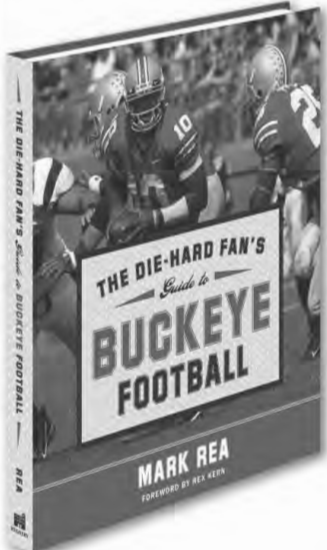
Had Miller not been hurt ahead of his senior season, I believe he would have blown away the OSU record books. But you can't rank someone highly based on what they could have done if an injury had been avoided. I rate Miller near the top of my list because I believe he is the most dynamic athlete to ever play the position at Ohio State, and he would have thrived in any era of the game. Not many players can say that.

Here's my full top 10:

1. Troy Smith
2. Braxton Miller
3. Rex Kern
4. Joe Germaine
5. J.T. Barrett
6. Art Schlichter
7. Cornelius Greene
8. Craig Krenzel
9. Terrelle Pryor
10. Bobby Hoying

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# Meyer Deservedly Still The Buckeyes' Coach

Let me say right off that I am happy Urban Meyer is still at Ohio State.

Obviously, his record as a coach speaks for itself. And maybe I'm naive, but I think the environment that he has created in the program is a good one. Academics seem to be a priority, and it shows in the graduate list and the number of football players honored as scholar-athletes each spring. The players generally seem to be good representatives of the university. And respect for women truly does seem to be a core value of the program.

The situation with Zach Smith was a complicated one. Loyalty to Earle Bruce, Meyer's mentor, clearly played a factor in the coach's – we'll call it patience – with Smith. There's also the question of how much an employer, which Meyer was to Smith, should get involved in the personal lives of his employees.

There seems little question that Smith and wife, Courtney, were involved in a toxic relationship. That they should have separated long ago is probably a given. But in my mind, all of the accusations, the "he said, she said" that have come out in the past few weeks, were just background noise, irrelevant to the question of whether Meyer would stay or go. My belief was that the decision would come down to whether the coach had met his obligations in his contract and under Title IX and whether Smith's actions were even subject to Title IX.

In the end, it seems that Meyer and his boss, AD Gene Smith, didn't violate any rules per se, at least in their interpretation of the rules. But they should have informed more people of the Zach Smith situation. The compliance office was not notified, and it should have been. Whether this was a Title IX violation should have been investigated, whether it ended up being one or not, and this was an office more able to determine that than Meyer or Gene Smith. In that regard I agree that some sort of punishment was warranted.

And I strongly believed that if Meyer was punished, then Gene Smith had to pay a price as well. Many felt that Smith should have been held more responsible when Jim Tressel was ousted back in 2011. This time the athletic director was punished along with his coach. In any organization, the head man is ultimately responsible for all actions of his or her group, and Smith did not deny his culpability.

I always felt that even if Meyer were completely cleared of any wrongdoing, he would be hit with some sort of suspension. We sometimes forget that Meyer and Ohio State are hated by much of the world outside of Buckeye Nation. That's the price of success. People want to brand Meyer and the Buckeyes as a program run amok, a program that will win at all costs. Whether violations were found or not, the optics of the whole thing were terrible. So there was going to be some playing to ESPN and the rest of the world in Ohio State's ultimate decision.

I figured two games. But after hearing what the investigating committee had to say about what Meyer did or did not do, three games is not surprising. The significance of that third game – Ohio State's marquee non-league game of the season with TCU – is great. It makes the penalty far stiffer, even though it is just one game more, than if the suspension had been only for the games against hapless Oregon State and Rutgers. The extra game might mitigate some of the national outrage that is sure to come because Meyer was not fired outright.

As for Zach and Courtney Smith, I try to make it a rule to not pass judgment on other people's relationships. Relationships are difficult even in the best of situations.

I was struck, however, by something that

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

Courtney said in her widely viewed interview with Stadium.

"When we got (to Columbus for the Ohio State job) everything went completely out of control," she said. "That is because I believe his life was out of control. He was under a lot of pressure. I don't think he was really ready to take on the job."

I think she was right. This was a 28-year-old guy with two years of full-time coaching experience at Marshall and Temple, hardly the résumé for a coach at one of the most high-profile football programs in the country. And on top of that he had the added pressure of being the grandson of Bruce, a beloved coach in Columbus who provided a tough legacy to which to live up.

Zach obviously failed. Hopefully time will allow him to rebuild his life and his career, as he comes from a good family and everyone deserves a second chance.

I find it unfortunate that many Buckeye fans have chosen to make Courtney the villain in all of this. The situation is much more complicated than one person, and domestic abuse is not something to take lightly. None of us were in the Smith home, so it is not for us to pass judgment on who is or isn't at fault.

And let me reiterate that in the end, Meyer's penalty has less to do with Zach or Courtney and more to do with how he and Gene Smith handled their situation. If either Meyer or Gene Smith had a chance to do it again, I suspect they would do it differently.

And by the way, while it may be the reason that the whole situation blew up nationally, lying to the press is not against the law. It happens in Washington every day, and coaches do it all the time. You know, "He's out with a sprained ankle," when really he failed a drug test. A lie is a lie.

When the lie involves domestic violence and involves Ohio State and Urban Meyer, however, that rises to the level of national scandal.

### Looking Ahead

So now that we finally know Meyer's status, where does that leave the 2018 Ohio State football team? In pretty good shape, I believe.

Not only is the team loaded with talent, but more importantly, it has an extremely talented and experienced coaching staff to prepare the team and guide it through the first three games. Two of the coaches – Greg Schiano and Kevin Wilson – have major-college coaching experience, and a guy like Larry Johnson is one of the most tenured and respected coaches in the business. And Ryan Day must be very highly-regarded if he got the nod as interim coach on this veteran staff. There are no inexperienced 28-year-olds among this group.

The eyes of most Buckeye fans will be on the offense. These fans are looking to a new era for Ohio State on that side of the ball after the ascension of Dwayne Haskins to the starting quarterback role. They have been clamoring for a strong-armed quarterback since Cardale Jones took the Buckeye on their magical three-game run to the national championship back in 2014.

I have to caution here that Haskins' strong arm is a given – his game-turning pass to Austin Mack in last year's Michigan game is

now a permanent part of Buckeye lore – but he has yet to prove himself as a full-time starter at the most important position on the field. The coaches will play a large part in whether he succeeds or fails as a starter. If they continue to run J.T. Barrett's offense with Haskins, running the QB often especially in critical situations, Haskins may be doomed to fail – or at least not reach his or the team's potential.

You have two 1,000-yard running backs on the team in J.K. Dobbins and Mike Weber. Let them do their thing. That will only open up the passing game – or is it vice versa? In the previously mentioned magical run, Jones had great success downfield, but Ezekiel Elliott was running wild at the same time. Which caused the other? What difference does it make? If you can pass and run, defenses can't cheat either way.

This is an instance when not having Meyer around for camp and the first three games might be helpful, as the more open-minded Day and Wilson might give the passing game a better shot than the suspended – and successful I admit – head coach. If the offense is humming when Meyer gets back, I doubt he will tinker with it.

Haskins, Dobbins and Weber can't excel in a vacuum, however. There are a couple of areas that Buckeye fans need to monitor.

First of all, it is time for the receivers to step up. There are a bunch of good ones there, veterans to boot. But none of the returning receivers have ever been consistently dominant. They are speedy, great athletes – just the type of players Meyer loves to recruit – and they have all had their moments, but none has been an All-American or even All-Big Ten caliber player. Is it because of Barrett's inabilities as a passer or is it on the receivers?

Let me point out that even on Haskins' signature pass to Mack, the Buckeye receiver was extremely well covered. It's time for some or all of these guys to not only make the tough catch like Mack's – something that has been lacking – but also get open consistently – something that has also been lacking.

And either before or after Meyer's return, how about better using one of the coach's signature positions – the H-back? Last year the fleet Parris Campbell carried the ball just 10 times to go along with his 40 receptions for the H, but he averaged 13.2 yards a carry. This is in contrast to the 91 carries for 771 yards Curtis Samuel had the year before, with 74 receptions for 865 yards. Samuel totaled 15 TDs that season, compared to Campbell's four in 2017.

The other thing to watch for on offense is the line.

The Buckeye offensive line has been anchored the last two seasons by the center – Pat Elflein in 2016 and Billy Price last season. Both of them won the Rimington Trophy as the best center in the nation. Hardworking veteran Brady Taylor won the spot coming out of spring ball. But it is clear by the fact that the coaches keep pushing redshirt freshman Josh Myers and now junior Michael Jordan at the position that they are not necessarily comfortable with the senior from Columbus. If the Buckeyes do end up moving Jordan, it leaves a vacancy at his guard position, still leaving the line in flux.

Make no mistake, football is still a game that is won in the trenches, so finding a cohesive starting five up front will be critical to the success of the Buckeyes.

And speaking of winning in the trenches, Ohio State's defensive line is probably the best unit on the team and maybe the best line in the nation. The group, led by Nick Bosa, is talented and, more importantly, deep. Injuries or in-game fatigue are not going to slow this group down.

While a defense is made up of 11 players, all of whom must do their job consistently for the unit to excel, a defensive line that both stops the run and puts intense pressure on an opposing quarterback can make the job of the other two units that much easier.

I have some concerns with the linebackers – probably the defense's weakest link last season – and the secondary as both squads must plug some holes, especially with last year's pleasant surprise, linebacker Tuf Borland, on the mend from an Achilles injury. But the one thing I've learned in six years of following Meyer-coached teams is that the Buckeyes have stockpiled all sorts of athletes, many of whom we have forgotten about since they were recruited. There's always a batch of players waiting to fill in the holes and surprise us with their ability.

Who is this year's Tuf Borland or Malik Hooker from the year before? That's the fun of watching the Ohio State defense each year.

One thing to watch is whether the combination of Taver Johnson and Alex Grinch as coaches in the backfield can make up for the loss of the fiery Kerry Coombs to the NFL and Greg Schiano to more of a coach-at-large on the defensive side of the ball.

The final factor to consider is whether the absence of Meyer and, more significantly, the turmoil surrounding the recently concluded investigation will have an effect on the team. We assume it won't because of the talent present among players and coaches.

But these are a bunch of 18- to 22-year-olds. You never know.

### Some Housekeeping

I had hoped to list my picks for our poll to determine the greatest quarterback in Ohio State history in this issue, but the Meyer situation took up that space. Hopefully I will get to that in the next issue and also share my thoughts on the poll results.

We have declared this the "Year of the Quarterback," and we will be running features on Ohio State quarterbacks from the past, delving into what the position was like when they played, how it has changed, which quarterbacks they looked up to and more. Watch for the features in coming issues.

We are also encouraging our readers to participate on the Forum at our new 24/7 website, BuckeyeSports.com. As you can imagine, there were plenty of opinions being expressed by readers and staff members as the Meyer investigation unfolded. We thank the many new posters and also remind readers that subscribers frequently post news tidbits that they have found on their own. Remember, if you see something, say something.

And finally, just a reminder to our readers, especially those out of state. You can upgrade your existing subscription to speedy first-class mail in an envelope for football season for just \$28 or \$38 through football recruiting season. Send your check or money order to P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio 43212, or call (614) 486-2202. Mention the "Football" or "Recruiting" upgrade.