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"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.

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 Wachsmann



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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Appeal Doomed Tressel

A very simple question comes to mind: Why did Ohio State appeal the original suspension of the five players for five games?

If the appeal had succeeded, it is likely that no more than two games would have been knocked off the five-game suspensions. It was the information uncovered in the preparation of the appeal that incriminated Tressel. Did Tressel realize this at the time that the appeal decision was made? If he did, why did he not recommend against the appeal?

To its great credit Ohio State has complied with NCAA regulations that require each school to report itself when it becomes aware of violations by any of its athletic personnel. Ohio State informed the NCAA of Tressel's serious violations. But there is no NCAA rule that requires every school to go through the e-mails of its coaches each year to see if each coach is perfectly clean.

No fishing expeditions are required. It was such a fishing expedition that nailed Tressel.

In retrospect it was very poor judgment by Ohio State not to realize that there could be skeletons in Tressel's closet that would be better left there. Wouldn't it be great to have back that original decision?

Gib Gildea
Newport Beach, Calif.

Tressel Reaction Overblown

I believe that the transgressions made by Jim Tressel were blown out of proportion. Why the extreme negative reaction from so many, particularly those in the media? I think there are principally two reasons.

First, it was a response to perceived hypocrisy. Here I believe Tressel stands responsible. Obsessed with public rela-

tions, he regularly attempted to put forth a holier-than-thou image. People take great pleasure in castigating the pastor who preaches a sermon on marital fidelity on Sunday morning and is caught making a pass at the choir director Wednesday night.

There was also the remarkable success of the program. Winning creates envy in many people. Not only has the program been dramatically successful on Tressel's watch but it has been done within the framework of a sound educational program. The players succeeded in the classroom as well as on the football field.

Those who are envious have rejoiced that they finally have an opportunity to cut. They would have you believe that OSU football is corrupt with their "Tressel Lies" headlines. There are corrupt football programs in the college ranks with rogue coaches at the helm. Ohio State and Tressel are not even close to being on that list.

I fervently hoped that OSU fans and alumni would close ranks to support this coach and program.

Myron Cline
Findlay, Ohio

Tired Of Negativity

I cannot think of enough negative comments to make about Kirk Herbstreit and Chris Spielman.

Their words are negative. We know about Benedict Herbstreit, but we did not know about the Machiavellian Spielman, who covets the Ohio State coaching job. I think both critics should have their Varsity "O" letters revoked. How can we tolerate these two critics and still think of them as Buckeyes?

We have heard from a classy Buckeye, Jack Nicklaus, on the subject of Jim Tressel. I for one salute Mr. Nicklaus and give thumbs down to the negative two.

I was a teammate of Kirk's father, Jim Herbstreit, and I cannot imagine how embarrassed he must be of his son.

Casimir T. Adulewicz
Steubenville, Ohio

Harsh Words

I am a Buckeye. I was born and raised in Columbus. I graduated from Ohio State. I am also an avid sports fan and have followed the exploits of OSU teams and athletes and taken pride in their successes.

It goes without saying that I am very ticked off that the actions of a few individuals have tarnished the name and reputation of a great university. For those who are involved, from Jim Tressel and the individual ball players to the university officials complicit in this sordid mess, I have a few choice words. You are nitwits, nincompoops, imbeciles, idiots and morons.

Jeann Williams
Columbia, Md.

Memorial Day Cheapened

As a longtime Buckeye supporter I feel only one question above all others deserves an answer in reference to Tattogate. What possessed the powers that be at The Ohio State University to announce Jim Tressel's resignation on Memorial Day, detracting from a day which should be dedicated to remembering those who gave their lives in the defense of our country?

Randy Koch
Sandusky, Ohio

Shouldn't End Like This

It's no secret I have never been a fan of Jim Tressel, but I do not like the way he had to leave. I would rather have had it happen for on-field circumstances, not for the stupid acts of a handful of arrogant,

brain-dead, self-serving punks who thumb their nose at rules and regulations.

Tressel is a good man. The Ray Smalls and Terrelle Pryors are not, so it is a bittersweet feeling I have at the moment. I don't like his departure under these circumstances.

Rich Foust
Troy, Ohio

From Enemy Territory

This message is coming from the "belly of the beast," so to speak, because I live in Lion Country in Pennsylvania.

A friend and I were eating lunch at a restaurant. He and his family are diehard PSU fans. He did not want to talk about the OSU national title win in men's volleyball that occurred in State College days before.

Instead, he was focusing on our troubles with Tattogate and other situations. At one point, his wife strolled in with a T-shirt that had a picture of a pair of glasses and the word "Legend" on the front, representing Joe Paterno. On the back was the term "Liar" with a scarlet sweater vest below it.

This is apparently a hot item for sale up in State College. Boy, are they jealous of and hateful of the Buckeyes.

Denis J. Navarro
Altoona, Pa.

If you would like to express an opinion concerning Ohio State University sports, please send your letter to BSB Letters, P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, OH 43212, or e-mail it to bsb@buckeyesports.com for use in BSB. Letters must be signed and include the writer's hometown and a daytime telephone number for verification. Publication priority will be given to those letters that are brief, and we reserve the right to edit letters for publication.

From The Pages Of BSB

25 Years Ago - 1986

The biggest news to come out of the Big Ten's annual meetings was a plan to have Ohio State president Edward Jennings ask the NCAA to make freshmen ineligible in football and men's basketball.

Indiana president John Ryan said the Big Ten would consider making the move on its own if the NCAA opted not to, but Ohio State representatives seemed cool to that idea.

"I don't think the Big Ten can do it unilaterally," director of athletics Rick Bay said. "It would be suicide for us to do so from the standpoint of recruiting or being able to compete nationally. If everyone else wants to do it across the board, then fine."

Head football coach Earle Bruce had mixed emotions on the topic.

"I think that would hurt our recruiting if freshmen were not eligible in the Big Ten and they were eligible other places," Bruce said. "We'd have to work around that. I guess we'd have to go to an all-Big Ten schedule. We need at least 10 of those freshmen to be able to play and participate."

He liked the idea of freshmen having a year to get acclimated to campus and proposed an addition of 10 scholarships to increase the pool of available players.

20 Years Ago - 1991

Baseball head coach Bob Todd never lost sight of how important six seniors were to his team winning its first Big Ten championship since 1967 by capturing the league tournament in Columbus.

"These guys battled hard all year," Todd said of a group including fifth-year players Tom Schwarber, Matt Ban and Keith Klodnick along with Dean Mueller, Matt Wajda and Greg Frey. "They had character, and sometimes they proved that it's a team that wants to win more, not necessarily the team that plays the best."

The Buckeyes qualified for the NCAA tournament for the first time since 1982. They were eliminated from the postseason with a pair of losses to California to finish the season 52-13. They beat Rider in the tournament opener and downed East Carolina in a losers bracket contest.

15 Years Ago - 1996

The men's basketball program received another blow to its reputation when head coach Randy Ayers kicked freshmen Jamil Bosley and Scott Gradney off the team for their alleged roles in a series of automobile break-ins in the Arps Hall parking garage.

According to reports, Gradney was caught removing a wallet from one car and "The Club" antitheft device from another. Bosley allegedly attempted to remove the stereo system from a third car and aided the effort by driving his brother's Pontiac Firebird.

Director of athletics Andy Geiger made news by announcing a plan to renovate Ohio Stadium for \$80 million.

"I think the urgency to do this was about 1990," said the AD entering his third year on the job at OSU. "I think we haven't invested in that facility in a long, long time. This will be the 75th football season we have played in that stadium, and there is very much an attitude of taking it for granted."

10 Years Ago - 2001

The baseball team saw its season come to an end with losses to Delaware and Kent State in NCAA regional play, bringing to an end a season that saw Todd forced to rely on 12 freshmen and sophomores for significant playing time.

Dave Kennedy, a fixture with the Ohio State football program as the strength and conditioning coach for the previous 12 seasons, abruptly turned in his resignation. He walked away from a lucrative long-term contract to pursue other career opportunities, according to a news release from the university.

The men's basketball team received good news when Lilburn (Ga.) Berkmar forward Clark Williams signed a letter of intent to join a well-received Ohio State recruiting class of point guard Brandon Fuss-Cheatham, forward Matt Sylvester and center Terence Dialis.

The only potential catch was grade-related as Williams was rumored to lack a high enough GPA to make his 850 SAT score enough to qualify on the NCAA's sliding scale.

Five Years Ago - 2006

Jim Tressel and Ohio State agreed on a contract extension to keep the coach with the Buckeyes at least through 2012, including a windfall of \$2.7 million in the final year.

Shortly before BSB went to press, track and field head coach Russ Rogers announced his retirement after 18 years at Ohio State.

"I need this time to spend with my mother," Rogers said. "She is 87 and in need of assisted living."

The men's cage team lost some depth with the departure of guard Sylvester Mayes, who opted to take his one remaining year of eligibility elsewhere. The decision left Thad Matta's crew with 10 scholarship players for the upcoming season.

The door swung both ways, however, as Matta secured commitments from two Ohioans from the class of 2007: centers Kosta Koufos of Canton GlenOak and Dallas Lauderdale of Solon.

Former Buckeyes Jerry Lucas, John Havlicek, Jim Jackson and Jay Burson were among the members of the inaugural class to enter the Ohio Basketball Hall of Fame & Museum.

One Year Ago - 2010

Interviews with multiple decision-makers at Ohio State seemed to indicate venerable St. John Arena had an expiration date of 10 to 15 years.

"Seriously, what do you reuse it for?" senior associate athletic director for finance and operations Ben Jay said. "We're not moving basketball back to St. John Arena. Do you keep the arena open for the sports that are here (wrestling, volleyball and gymnastics)? We plan to do that right now until there is an alternate place that we can build for them to be a new home. But we're still going to be dealing with the issues."

Sources told BSB that sophomore running back Jermil Martin was considering a transfer, but an OSU spokesperson said Martin had not finalized anything with the coaches before press time.

Ohio State director of athletics Gene Smith was named Sports Business Journal Athletic Director of the Year. He was nominated for the second time in three years.



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No. 2	Sept. 18	No. 14	Jan. 15
No. 3	Sept. 25	No. 15	Jan. 29
No. 4	Oct. 2	No. 16	Feb. 12
No. 5	Oct. 9	No. 17	March 5
No. 6	Oct. 16	No. 18	March 19
No. 7	Oct. 23	No. 19	April 2
No. 8	Oct. 30	No. 20	April 16
No. 9	Nov. 13	No. 21	May
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Charter Member

OPINION

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 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

COVER STORY

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.



Bo Pelini

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

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 support 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.

Ohio State was requested to send a response to those allegations by July 5 and to appear before the NCAA Committee on Infractions on Aug. 12, after which the committee would decide on any harsher penalties for the coach and school.

In the meantime, a torrent of stories were published that could lead to further NCAA violations – and helped push the head coach out the door.

Investigation Continues

In early May, the Dispatch published a report that OSU compliance office head Doug Archie was looking into the car purchases of numerous high-profile athletes after seeming irregularities were found in some cases.

The story noted that athletes had purchased cars from two Columbus-area dealerships that employed Aaron Kniffin, who had been put on the player pass lists for seven football games including bowl contests.

Kniffin quibbled publicly with Archie over how much contact there was between his dealerships and the compliance office during those purchases but maintained in numerous interviews that he had not given any OSU athletes deals he would not have given to the general public.

The Lantern, OSU's student newspaper, published a story May 26 in which former player Ray Small admitted to selling memorabilia while playing at OSU and that "everybody was doing it" while also confirming that players were receiving deals on cars. Small, who was publicly criticized by numerous current and former players, later tried to recant his story and has said he will not talk to the NCAA.

Finally, it was rumored that Sports Illustrated was working on a piece, set for release June 1, that would delve deeper into violations committed under Tressel's watch.

When the story was published the evening of Tressel's resignation, it alleged that almost 30 players reaching back to 2002

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 spokesperson 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.

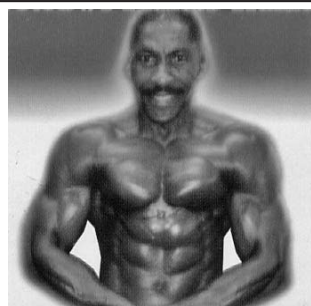
"I'm disappointed," he said. "I think this is Ohio State and everything is blown out of proportion because I think we're losing a great man. Everybody has the highest regard for him for the most part. He was my coach when I played so I am in that category as well. I think it's a shame that he had to 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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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

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



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.

at Ohio University but it was a much smaller 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 wanted to

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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 BSB. "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 posited 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 alums 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

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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Coaching Change Has Not Cost OSU Commits

By ADAM JARDY
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

When Luke Fickell was named the interim coach for the 2011 football season, he inherited a seven-person recruiting class headlined by a pair of five-star recruits from Ohio. It took some serious work on his part, but both had publicly declared their plans to remain on board within 36 hours of former head coach Jim Tressel's resignation.

Offensive tackle Kyle Kalis from Lakewood St. Edward and running back Br'onte Dunn from Canton GlenOak are still planning on becoming Buckeyes when they can sign with the program in February.

At least, that is the plan for now concerning Dunn. The 6-1, 215-pound athlete is rated the nation's No. 5 running back prospect and the No. 29 player overall in the class by Scout.com. He issued a verbal commitment to the Buckeyes on Sept. 27, 2010, but has somewhat opened his recruitment in recent weeks as the program has faced NCAA sanctions and an uncertain future.

Rising on the list of potential suitors is Michigan, which has issued Dunn a scholarship offer and landed an on-campus unofficial visit. The trip was part of Dunn's

effort to keep his options open should the NCAA levy heavy penalties on Ohio State.

"I'm just waiting for more information," he told BSB a few hours after word of Tressel's resignation went public. "I'm going to wait until August and see where they will be at as far as coaching-wise and see if they're going to miss any bowl games."

Asked what needs to happen to keep him committed to the Buckeyes, the running back said, "(They need to get) a real good coach and no bowl games missing."

Dunn said he has never met Fickell. As for his thoughts on Tressel stepping down, Dunn said, "It's hard. I really liked him. It's hard to see him leave."

The running back said he was asleep when the news broke. He was awakened by his grandmother, who told him to turn on the television.

As a junior, Dunn earned all-state honors after picking up 2,030 yards and 22 touchdowns on 358 carries.

About one hour north of Dunn's hometown, Kalis had made up his mind. He was ready to decommit from the program and look elsewhere for a college home.

Around 3 p.m. that day, he placed a call to Fickell to give him the news.



Kyle Kalis

Forty-five minutes later, the team's new coach had convinced the 6-5, 305-pound tackle to stick with the program.

"The only way I'd go to Ohio State is if Coach Fick is the coach," he told The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer. "I know him pretty well. He knows the way I'm a fighter and I don't give up on things. He said he went through the same thing in college and ended up going to Ohio State, and he said if I go to Ohio State, it will be the best decision of my life."

"He knew what I knew, that I wanted to be a Buckeye."

A product of Columbus DeSales, Fickell joined the Buckeyes and redshirted during the 1992 season before spending four years as a nose guard.

"I see myself as a very loyal guy," Kalis said. "The person I committed to was Coach Tressel, and with Coach Tressel gone, I felt like I had no other option than to decommit."

As the news of Tressel's resignation began to circulate, Kalis decided to call the former coach.

"We talked for about 15 minutes," the lineman said. "His spirits were pretty high. He didn't want me to worry about him. He said, 'Now that I'm gone, I'm just one of those old guys.' He said that he only lives 12 miles away (from the OSU campus) and I should stop and see him anytime."

Meanwhile, Kalis' phone was constantly ringing.

"My first thought was shock," he said. "My heart sank and my stomach started hurting. I turned my phone off and went back to bed. I had 87 missed calls from all over, the New York Times, ESPN. I didn't return one of them. I thought it would be disrespectful, like I was talking behind Coach Tressel's back."

"I'm not sure how this happened, but it happened."

Class Holding Steady

Fickell added another commitment two days later when Bedford, Ohio, defensive back Tyvis Powell issued his pledge.

"They need some positivity to come through there and I'm only a positive person," Powell told BuckeyeSports.com recruiting analyst Bill Greene after he committed. "Football will still be football without Jim (Tressel). Yes, he did do some great things for the university. Yes, he did do some great things for Ohio football. He's a great man and a great character guy."

"It's going to be tough without him, but I think Ohio State football will still be Ohio State football."

After landing a scholarship offer from the Buckeyes on May 24, Powell quickly set plans to announce his commitment and settled on June 1. A few hours after Tressel's resignation, he told BSB that nothing had changed and that the announcement was still on.

Powell was working out on the football field with his head coach, Sean Williams, when the coach's wife sent a text message delivering the Tressel news. The duo then looked it up on Twitter and Powell

immediately placed a phone call to OSU cornerbacks coach Taver Johnson.

"He sounded like he still thinks they will have a good season," Powell said. "He didn't want it to bother anybody. It didn't sound like it really bothered him – he was still really focused on the season."

Given the fact that they did not offer a scholarship until May, the Buckeyes have not been heavily recruiting Powell for long. Although his conversations with Tressel had mostly been short, Powell said the coach hinted that something could be in the offing.

"I was shocked (at first)," he said. "Then I remembered he said he would leave if he felt that he was hurting the kids. I guess he's looking out for the kids and he's doing what he feels is right for the kids so I don't really fault him."

"We had a good relationship from the times I saw him. We always had a couple of laughs."

Although his phone had mostly been silent since the news broke, Powell said all was not quiet in his world.

"A couple of coaches hit me up on Facebook from other schools," he said.

Asked if he was surprised, Powell said, "Not at all. I was expecting it."

Blake Thomas, the final player to issue a verbal commitment to Tressel, told Greene that the news had not affected his thoughts on the Buckeyes.

"I was really shocked by the news this morning," Thomas said May 30. "I thought this might be coming with everything that has been in the media lately, but I certainly never expected it to happen at this time. It does not bother me in terms of my commitment to Ohio State."

"People need to realize that Ohio State is a lot bigger than the football coach. I know I will be surrounded by great people there, and Tressel's decision has no bearing on my decision to go there. I know they will continue to play great football, and I'm going to get a great education."

Three-star wide receiver Frank Epitropoulos from Upper Arlington, Ohio, landed an offer from the Buckeyes in early March and committed to the program following the spring game.

"This has no affect on my recruitment whatsoever," he said. "I'm sorry for Coach Tressel, but I remain committed."

The 6-3, 195-pound Epitropoulos also held scholarship offers from Michigan State, Wisconsin, Stanford and West Virginia, among others.

Shortly after he heard the news, four-star running back prospect and OSU verbal commitment Warren Ball received a phone call from safeties coach Paul Haynes.

"He told me, 'Ohio State is still Ohio State and it's still the school you want to go to,'" Ball told BSB. "It's still a great place. As far as me, nothing's changed."

"Ohio State is my dream school that I want to go to, and I don't see anything that could change that."

Ball, rated the nation's No. 8 running back prospect and No. 52 player overall, issued his verbal commitment to the Buckeyes on Sept. 1, 2010. He was the second recruit to pledge for the class of 2012.

A central Ohio native, Ball preps at Fickell's alma mater. Ball said he already has a natural comfort level with Fickell owing to their shared schooling experience.

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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

The running back also pointed out that his reason for picking the Buckeyes had little to do with who was in charge.

"You look back at the tradition that Ohio State has and what it's been able to produce, not only athletes but people in general," he said. "It sets you up for a very successful future. Ohio State is a very great place to go."

Still, Ball said he was taken aback when the news began scrolling on ESPN as he watched.

"It was pretty shocking," he said. "I know Tressel is a very great guy and a very high-character guy with great tradition. I was very surprised, but what can you do about it?"

Listed at 6-2, 200 pounds, Ball also held scholarship offers from Iowa, Notre Dame and Wisconsin, among others.

While competing in the state track finals during the ensuing weekend, four-star outside linebacker prospect Joshua Perry said he had talked with Fickell, who had been involved in his recruitment as the linebackers coach.

"He's a great guy," Perry said. "He recruited me and I'm looking forward to seeing what he can do. He told me everything's all right and I'm going to go with his word. I'm going to be a Buckeye."

The standout from Lewis Center (Ohio) Olentangy was the first player to join the class, issuing his verbal commitment June 29, 2010. Perry said he considered asking about the plan to fill the linebacker coaching position but opted against doing so.

"It's hard to decommit," he said. "The only other schools out there are probably like LSU or Stanford, and those are way out there. I haven't even been in touch with them since last year, so Ohio State is the best bet for me."

"I like the system that they have. They have a great staff. Coach Fickell did a great job with recruiting, and you always get good guys going to Ohio State so I knew I'd be playing with some good guys."

Multiple attempts to reach Pickerington (Ohio) Central offensive lineman Jacoby Boren and head coach Jay Sharrett were unsuccessful. Boren, a three-star prospect, became the third member of his family to commit to the Buckeyes when he did so Dec. 4, 2010.

Others On Fence

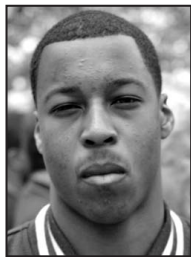
With the current group of verbal commitments in the fold for now, Fickell must turn his attention toward filling out the class of 2012. Early results have been varied but it appears that the coaches have their work cut out for them as they attempt to land another highly ranked class.

The Buckeyes have been viewed as one of the leaders for the services of four-star outside linebacker Ifeadi Odenigbo, but the loss of Tressel appears to have put the program at a disadvantage. A relative neophyte both to the game and to the recruiting process, the 6-3½, 217-pound defender from Centerville, Ohio, has often talked about how important off-the-field aspects will be when it comes to making a decision.

In that regard, losing Tressel has made Odenigbo think twice about the Buckeyes.

"To be honest, it does affect my situa-

tion," he told Scout. "We'll see how it goes. The new coach is Coach Fickell. He's a good guy and he's been recruiting me. I have a pretty good relationship with him. We'll see how it goes. It would've been an honor to play for Coach Tressel at Ohio State."



Warren Ball

The Buckeyes remain one of his top schools, however. Odenigbo said OSU, Northwestern, Notre Dame and Stanford are the four schools in which he has the most interest.

Last season, Odenigbo lined up alongside Michael Bennett, who will be a freshman defensive lineman with the Buckeyes this season. While participating in the state track finals, Bennett told BSB that he is not sure of Odenigbo's plans.

"I would love for him to come to the Buckeyes, but if he doesn't want to I'm not going to give him crap for it," he said. "Wherever he's most comfortable."

Ohio State is not on a list of schools Odenigbo plans on visiting this summer, a list that includes Northwestern, California, Illinois, Michigan, Michigan State, Notre Dame and Stanford.

His hope is to make a decision after having taken some visits.

"We'll see how it goes," Odenigbo said. "If there's a clear favorite, I'll make my decision and I'm not going back. If I can't make a decision, I'll wait till my season is over and make a decision then."

Outside of Ohio, three-star safety prospect Jordan Diggs from Cape Coral (Fla.) Island Coast said he is still considering the Buckeyes.

"I was definitely shocked when I heard the news about Coach Tressel," he told Greene one day after Tressel's resignation. "Right now, I'm still interested in Ohio State and like everyone else I'm going to wait to see who the next head coach will be. I want to see what happens to the staff,

especially the assistant coaches that are recruiting me."

"Ohio State football will always be Ohio State football, regardless of who the head coach is. The tradition will always be there, even if the scheme or system changes. As far as Coach Tressel, I still think of him as a great man and I feel really bad for what happened."

Listed at 6-1, 194 pounds, Diggs took in OSU's spring game and left Columbus listing the Buckeyes among his favorites. He also holds offers from Auburn, Illinois, Michigan State and Nebraska, among a number of others.

Since the visit, Diggs said he had been in regular contact with the OSU coaches.

"I'm still considering Ohio State and it hurts to think I won't have the chance to play for Coach Tressel if I went there, but I have a good relationship with Coach Johnson and Coach Haynes," he said May 31. "I spoke to Coach Johnson a few days ago, and things are good between us."

"I definitely like Ohio State, but I'm going to sit back and see what happens going forward. I'm still hearing from a lot of schools and I'm considering all my options. I will probably be talking to the Ohio State coaches in the next few days, and I am definitely still interested in them."

Jordan Diamond, a four-star offensive tackle from Chicago Simeon, told

Scout that he still sees opportunity in Columbus.

"It rattled Ohio State, but the opportunity at Ohio State is still there," he said. "There's an opportunity to play early. They don't have that much depth."

Listed at 6-6, 290 pounds, Diamond is rated the No. 9 prospect nationally at his position. He also holds offers from more than two dozen schools including Michigan, Wisconsin, Auburn and Florida State.

"Coach Tressel, he was a great person," he said. "We had a good conversation every time we talked, even when I went down there face-to-face. He was a good guy. That surprised me."

Finally, one of OSU's top early targets for the class of 2013 remains interested in the program. Safety Cameron Burrows from Trotwood (Ohio) Madison said he will attend a summer camp on campus this season.

"I've been a fan of them since I was little," he said. "I've always had an interest to play for them. I love the game atmosphere. I went to one of their bowl game practices. I would have loved to play for Coach Tressel, but it doesn't really change my feelings for them that much."

The Buckeyes have already offered the 6-2, 195-pound Burrows a scholarship.

BSB staff writer Marcus Hartman contributed to this report.



Jordan Diamond

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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

Incoming Freshmen Want To Make Tressel Proud

By MARCUS HARTMAN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Most members of Ohio State's incoming class of football freshmen chose to stay mum on the topic of Jim Tressel's May 30 resignation, but a handful who did go on the record all had similar messages.

They will follow up on their signed pledges to be Buckeyes (though the school would have to release them from their national letters of intent before they could play at another school) and get to work trying to carry on the long-established tradition Tressel tried to uphold during 10 years on the sidelines in Columbus.

"When I look at Ohio State, in my opinion, I see Coach Tressel is Ohio State," Massillon (Ohio) Washington wide receiver Devin Smith said after winning the Division I long jump and 100-meter dash championships at the Ohio High School Athletic Association state track meet in Columbus on June 4. "The things he's done since he's been there are amazing, and losing him is real tough."

Smith, who verbally committed in June 2010, found out about Tressel's resignation from director of football operations Greg Gillum via a phone call the morning it happened.

"It hurt to know that because losing a guy like him is tough," Smith said. "We're still going to have the same mind-set as if he was still there. All the guys are still fired up and ready for the season to get going."

Akron St. Vincent-St. Mary defensive back Doran Grant was in Columbus for the

state track meet, too, and declared it the end of a crazy week.

"Everybody – family, media, friends – was calling me and wanting to know what's going on, asking if I was leaving or not," he said after helping the Fighting Irish 4x200-meter relay team to a state championship and an overall team title in Division II. "I'm going to Ohio State. I'll be there June 19."

Grant learned the news of Tressel's resignation from his father – eventually.

"My dad kept calling me, and I'm not going to lie, I was ignoring his call because it was early and I was trying to wake up, but then he kept calling so I was like, 'Maybe I should call him,'" Grant said. "He told me and I turned on the TV and it was there, breaking news. I was a little shocked."

He expressed no reservations about playing for interim head coach Luke Fickell, who served under Tressel for the past nine seasons in various positions.

"He was a part of my recruitment, actually," Grant said. "He's a good guy. He'll discipline you if he has to, but he's a good coach and a strong coach. He knows what he's doing."

Like Grant and Smith, defensive lineman Michael Bennett of Centerville, Ohio, told reporters at the state track meet his views of Ohio State and Tressel remained unchanged even after the events of the week. Defensive coordinator and line coach Jim Heacock informed Bennett of the news via telephone.

"I think it's sad for Coach Tressel because I think everyone who's met him knows how good a guy he is," said Bennett, who won the Division I shot put title and finished second

in the discus throw. "If he did those things, he did them for a reason. I know it's against the rules, but I support him until the end."

While the confidence of recruits from Ohio probably comes as little surprise to most, a pair of soon-to-be Buckeyes from out of state shared similar views with reporters in the wake of the resignation as well.

One of the biggest recruiting catches of the season, five-star linebacker Curtis Grant of Richmond (Va.) Hermitage, told Scout.com reporter Laura McKeeman he maintained support for the school's former head coach. Despite being disappointed to lose the opportunity to play for Tressel, Grant added that he was quite familiar and comfortable with Fickell, who played a major role in his recruitment as linebackers coach.

Wide receiver Evan Spencer of Vernon Hills, Ill., is no stranger to Fickell, either, but his familiarity sprang from a different source than recruiting. Fickell played defensive line at Ohio State from 1993-96 while Evan's father, Tim, was a member of John Cooper's coaching staff, and the elder Spencer was still coaching running backs at Ohio State under Tressel when Fickell joined his staff in 2002 as special teams coach.

"(Tressel) was important because my dad coached with him before and I knew him personally," Evan Spencer told BSB. "We'd have family dinners and he would be there. He influenced my decision, but he wasn't the sole reason I went there. There were multiple other reasons why I decided to choose Ohio State."

When reached on June 1, Spencer said he had already spoken to nearly every member of the 2011 recruiting class and liked what he had heard.

"Everybody I've talked to has really stuck together," he said. "I know that all of us that are in the 2011 class, we're pretty close right now as it is, and it's only going to get closer. Everybody I've talked to, which is pretty much everybody, said that."

Back in Ohio, two of the future Buckeyes

were in agreement on something else – their belief Tressel has unfairly taken too much criticism in the press.

"I don't like all the negative talk about him," Doran Grant said. "Everybody wants to blame everything on him, saying, 'Tressel's a liar, he's a cheater. He thinks he's stronger than the NCAA,' but it's not that at all. They're taking it the wrong way. I think some of the media and some of the people out there are just glad that he's out because they're tired of him winning every game."

Added Smith, "I think they've given him too harsh of a penalty, but I guess you've got to say, 'It is what it is,' and move on."

Seven players in the class took part in spring practice under Tressel and continue to be enrolled at Ohio State: quarterback Braxton Miller of Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne, offensive

tackle Tommy Brown of Akron Firestone, defensive lineman Joel Hale of Greenwood (Ind.) Center Grove, tight end Jeff Heuerman of Naples (Fla.) Barron Collier, linebacker Ryan Shazier of Plantation, Fla., safety Jeremy Cash of Plantation, Fla., and safety Ron Tanner of Columbus Eastmoor.

Seven Set For Big 33

Before they move to Columbus on June 19 for the start of summer quarter, seven of the incoming freshmen have one last piece of high school business to which to attend.

Grant and Smith along with Elyria defensive lineman Chase Farris, Toledo Rogers defensive back DerJuan Gambrell, Canton McKinley defensive lineman Steve Miller, Shaker Heights offensive lineman Antonio Underwood and Westerville Central tight end Nick Vannett are all on the Ohio roster for the 54th Big 33 Football Classic.

They will represent the Buckeye State against a team of all-stars from Pennsylvania on June 18 in Hershey, Pa.

"I'm excited because I've got some future teammates going and I'll get a chance to play with my (high school) teammate Justin Olack, so it's going to be a fun weekend," Smith said.

Some Numbers Claimed

The future Buckeyes at the state track meet also spilled the beans about what they knew about their living arrangements for the beginning of their college careers as well as what numbers they will be issued.

Doran Grant said he will wear No. 12 as a freshman and room with Curtis Grant.

Smith will wear No. 15 and said he and Spencer are set to share a living space.

Bennett plans to continue wearing the No. 63 that adorned his high school jersey, and his first college roommates will be offensive linemen Underwood, Brown and Brian Bobek of Palatine (Ill.) Fremd.

"I can't wait," Bennett said after winning the shot put title but before competing in the discus throw. "Once discus is done, it's all Ohio State. I'm excited. I can't wait to get up there."

Having added 25 pounds since playing his senior football season at 260 pounds, the 63 Bennett said he is optimistic he can find his way into the rotation this fall as a true freshman.

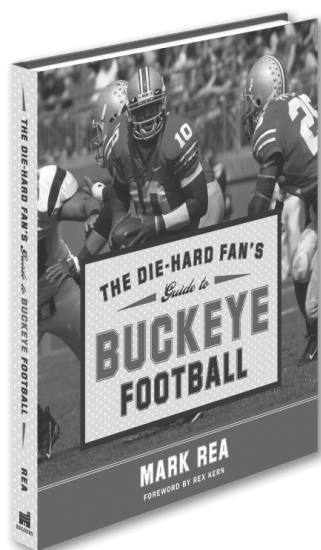
"I think if I take care of business, do what they tell me, get bigger and learn the defense, I don't see why I can't play," he said.

BSB staff writer Adam Jardy contributed to this report.



Devin Smith

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OPINION

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 Wachsmen

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 flippanantly 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

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.

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

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.