

Walton From Georgia City, Not Ohio Capital

Columbus Is Familiar To Grid Recruit

By Mark Rea

Columbus native Tim Walton said one of the reasons he chose to play college football at Ohio State was because it was closer to home than any of the other schools he considered.

That seems a legitimate reason except for the fact that Walton hails from Columbus, Ga., not Columbus, Ohio.

However, when you consider the 6-0, 170-pound speedster chose the Buckeyes over Syracuse and Michigan, you can see his reasoning.

"Ohio State is far away from Georgia, but it's still closer to home than the other two schools," Walton said. "Plus there were other reasons why I chose Ohio State."

One of the biggest reasons, according to Walton, who has been clocked at 4.4 in the 40, was because the Buckeyes showed interest in him from the very beginning of the recruiting season.

"(OSU assistant) Coach (Gary) Blackney recruited me a lot earlier than anyone else," said Walton. "A lot of other schools started late in the game. They kind of came into the picture after everything had started."

"It meant a lot to me that Ohio State had shown interest so early. That affected my decision quite a bit."

There were other reasons as well. "I really enjoyed my visit to the campus," he said. "I liked (player host) Brent Johnson and all of the other players real well. And I liked the city of Columbus. The people seem nice and it seems like a real active city."

"Then there were the football facilities. They were the best. I've never seen anything like the indoor facility. It was very impressive."

Walton was also impressed with Ohio State head coach John Cooper.

"He seemed like a person who could talk to you one on one, not only as a coach, but as a friend," Walton said. "That was another thing I liked about Ohio State."

The Ohio State women's basketball team also had a hand in recruiting Walton.

Walton has a sister, Sue, a 5-8 junior guard on the Carver basketball team who is apparently very interested in attending Ohio State.

Sue gave Tim a nudge toward OSU after the women's team made a call to the house.

After leading Carver High School to a 9-3 record in 1988, Walton earned the notice of most major college recruiters. He did so by starring on offense at quarterback and on defense at cornerback.

National recruiting expert Tom Lemming named Walton to his Almost All-American list at defensive back.

"He is quick footed and has all the things you like to see in a college cornerback," Lemming said. "Tim excelled at one-on-one coverage and he's very quick and agile. He comes to the ball well."

Two years in a row, Walton collected six interceptions from his cornerback slot, a position he will play for the Buckeyes.

However, if Ohio State decides to feature the option play more prominently in the offense, Walton might get a look at quarterback.

He led the Tigers to the state semifinals in 1988, throwing for 1,300 yards and nine touchdowns, while rushing for 837 yards and six TDs.

As a junior, he passed for 1,680 yards and 14 TDs, but ran for only 500 yards and four touchdowns as Carver's number one running threat was tailback Robert Williams, now with Wisconsin.

"I didn't get to run that much as a junior because Robert had 4.39 speed," Walton laughed. "He was the workhorse for us last year but I got to run the ball more this year."

Ohio State head coach John Cooper said Walton has a chance to contribute to the Buckeyes right away, but as a defensive back, not a quarterback.

"To my knowledge, playing quarterback was never discussed with Tim," Cooper said. "But as far as defensive back is concerned, I think he has as good a chance as any of the others we recruited to come in and play."

"It was no secret we had some problems with our defensive secondary last year. I think any of the ones we recruited this year has a chance to come in and play and certainly Tim is right up there in that group."

Walton said it would not matter to him to play exclusively on defense. He just wants a chance to play.

"That was another reason why I chose Ohio State," he said. "I thought



Tim Walton

going there would give me the opportunity to play a little quicker than some of the other schools that contacted me.

"As far as playing cornerback instead of quarterback, that's just fine with me. Wherever they want me to play, that's where I'll play. If they want me at cornerback, I'll be there. If they want me at quarterback, I'll be there. I just want to play and help the team win."

Helping his team win is something at which Walton excels.

"He's a winner," said Carver High school head coach Wallace Davis. "This season, when we looked for someone to give us the big play, we usually looked to Tim."

Davis said that he has been lucky to coach some excellent players during his tenure at Carver. And, although he declined to rate players from year to year, he admitted Walton was one of the best the school has ever produced.

"We have been fortunate enough to have some excellent players in the past and I think Tim is another one who ranks in that class," Davis said.

"He was definitely a team leader for us, both at quarterback and at cornerback on defense. He also has a good head on his shoulders. Tim's a smart player who won't hurt himself by making mistakes. I think Ohio State has got a good one in Tim."

In addition to his football prowess, Walton also stars on his school's basketball and track teams.

He was the starting point guard for the Tigers' cage team which finished fourth in its region this season, averaging 10 points and five assists per game.

As a sprinter on the track team, he runs the 100 and 200 meters and competes on the 1,600-meter relay team. He has been timed in 9.8 seconds for the 100 and 21.7 seconds for the 200. He also helped Carver's 1,600 relay team to the Georgia state track meet in 1988.

THE WALTON FILE

NAME — Tim Walton

SCHOOL — Columbus (Carver), Ga.

POSITION — Defensive back, quarterback

HEIGHT, WEIGHT — 6-0, 170 pounds

BENCH PRESS — 265 pounds

40-YARD DASH TIME — 4.40 seconds

GRADE-POINT AVERAGE — 3.00

VITAL STATISTICS — Rated by college recruiting experts as one of the best defensive back prospects in Georgia. Earned honorable mention all-state honors. Picked off six interceptions as a senior in 1988 while rushing and passing for more than 2,100 yards and 15 touchdowns. Led Carver to a 9-3 record, losing in the state semifinals. Also a member of the school's basketball and track teams. Would enjoy the chance to play quarterback in college. Ohio State recruited him exclusively at cornerback.

COACH'S COMMENT — "We have been fortunate enough to have some excellent players in the past and I think Tim is another one who ranks in that class. He was definitely a team leader for us, both at quarterback and at cornerback on defense. He also has a good head on his shoulders. Tim's a smart player who won't hurt himself by making mistakes. I think Ohio State has got a good one in Tim." — Carver High School head coach Wallace Davis.

HOBBIES — Dancing, basketball, listening to music.

SCHOOLS INTERESTED IN — Verbally committed to Ohio State on Jan. 31; signed national letter of intent Feb. 8.

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Walton Prefers To Dwell On The Past, Honors Tatum's Bone-Crushing Ways

By TODD HARRELL
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State is celebrating the 25th anniversary of the school's 1968 national championship football team.

And while this year's football team is wearing replica 1968 jerseys in each game this season to commemorate that season, some players are not content just to look like their national championship counterparts.

Some are intent on playing like the Buckeyes of a quarter-century ago.

That is why Ohio State defensive back Tim Walton doesn't talk much about the future. He is dwelling a lot on the past these days.

Although he seems smaller than his listed 5-10 and 180 pounds, no one delivers a harder hit than Walton does. If he has a clear shot at the ball carrier, the OSU senior cornerback literally flies into the opponent.

And that mentality conjures up another former Buckeye defensive back who loved to dole out the helmet-knockers. Twenty-five years ago, a guy by the name of Jack Tatum patrolled the defensive secondary for Ohio State and opposing players knew that to go into Tatum's territory was risking a lot.

"He struck fear into his opponents," Walton said, his eyes growing wider. "That's what we want to do. If you want to throw against us, go right ahead. We just want everybody to know that if you come into our territory, get ready to pay the price."

Walton hopes his teammates follow his lead. He would like nothing more than to finish his final season with people making comparisons between the styles of play of the 1968 and 1993 editions of the Buckeyes.

More specifically, Walton hopes his ferocious play will allow some to think

of Tatum when they begin to describe him.

"He is the legend around here," Walton said of Tatum. "Everyone remembers him for his bone-crushing hits and the way he played the game. That's the way I want to be remembered."

Most people consider Walton's teammate Chico Nelson as the master head banger on the Buckeye squad, but Walton has worked hard to earn a reputation as one of the hardest hitters to ever don a Buckeye uniform.

"It started with Bryan Cook and Roger Harper and Chico a few years ago," he explained. "They were all talking about Tatum and how they wanted all the defensive backs to model themselves after his style of play."

"We were all given his book (*They Call Me Assassin*) to read and I think pretty much everyone has read it. It's not a thing where you go out with the mind-set to hurt someone. You just want them to be aware of who you are and where you are. We just want to give those receivers a little extra something to think about."

Walton has a problem, however. He is not as big or physical as some other defensive backs and many feel he isn't as intimidating as someone larger in stature. But he immediately wants to dismiss that notion.

"I set out trying to become an intimidator because I was small," Walton said. "I knew I would have a lot of people coming at me and I knew that I had to hold my ground. So I wanted to make it a point to make good hits on people and get my respect."

"Besides, being big doesn't necessarily mean anything. Look at how big Tatum was when he was here. (He was listed at 6-0, 202 during the 1968 season). He wasn't any monster. You don't have to be."

The fact that Walton is in the midst



"If you come into our territory, get ready to pay the price."

— Tim Walton
OSU cornerback

of his second season as a starter came a little by accident. When former starting cornerback Foster Paulk was declared academically ineligible, Walton stepped into the lineup and quickly seized the opportunity.

He immediately drew attention to himself by recording bone-jarring tackles worth remembering. In fact, he was a little too reckless with his own body. One of his big hits sidelined Walton himself for a couple of games with a concussion and separated shoulder.

Despite missing almost three games, he still managed to tally 54 total tackles along with two interceptions and four pass deflections.

Walton also became a money player for the Buckeyes, coming up big in big games. He had seven tackles and one of his interceptions in the victory over Syracuse, and added seven steps in the 13-13 tie with Michigan.

He also helped the Buckeyes to rank first in the Big Ten in scoring defense as well as number one in pass defense last season. He credits the intimidation factor for those rankings.

"We feel that we can put fear in our opponents and that can make our job easier," Walton said. "The opposition starts to make mistakes on their own because they are worried about what we're going to do."

Statistics would seem to back Walton's hypothesis. Out of 363 passes thrown against OSU, only 199 were completed. That computes to a conference low of 54.8 percent passes completed. The Buckeye secondary also recorded the second highest interception record (19) and allowed the second fewest touchdowns through the air (five) in the conference last season.

This year, Walton switches from the boundary to the open corner, a spot opened by Cook's graduation. In that position, he thinks he will be seeing a lot more screens and running plays.

"My main duties will be watching the wide receivers to the weak side and watching out for the power running plays that could come my way," Walton said. "That's OK with me. I'll do anything I can to help this team win games. We can put the big lick on a running back or tight end just the same as a receiver."

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RECRUITING PROFILE

Doss Jumps At Early OSU Scholarship Offer

By GARY HOUSTEAU
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Receiving a scholarship offer to play college football for Ohio State was the perfect culmination to a magical season for junior defensive back Michael Doss of Canton (Ohio) McKinley.

Just over a month after his 14-0 McKinley team was named the mythical national champion by *USA Today*, Doss was presented with an opportunity to follow in the footsteps of two of his high school teammates and attend Ohio State.

He accepted a scholarship offer from the Buckeyes, just as seniors Kenny Peterson and Jamar Martin did last year. He is one of three early commitments for the Buckeyes for 1999.

"It feels great to know that your education is secure so early in your life, even before my senior year," said Doss. "It makes it a lot more special because, being from Ohio, you just want to be an all-Ohio guy. I really wouldn't want to go play anywhere else."

Doss said that Thom McDaniels, his coach and the *USA Today* national coach of the year, informed him of the pending offer prior to a McKinley basketball game in early January.

Already an avid Buckeye fan, Doss said he has been involved in the Ohio State Young Scholars program. Every summer he goes down to the campus for two weeks to check out college life in Columbus.

Now he can look at not only Ohio State but also his football career from a different perspective. Doss is looking forward to accepting a leadership role that he'll be inheriting this year at McKinley with even greater confidence. He'll have a lot more to prove to himself, his teammates and future opponents.

"All of the younger guys want to go back and do it again. They want another championship, back-to-back," Doss said. "Probably not another national championship — those only come once in a blue moon — but a state championship. Everyone is working hard on a repeat."

And Doss is right there in the middle of all the hard work. He recognizes that the bar has now been raised on the expectations of him, both prior to and during the upcoming football season.

"There is a little bit more pressure to perform even better than last year, especially with this scholarship," said the 6-0, 190-pound strong safety. "But I've already been working out harder than I did the year before, to go out there when the fall comes and be ready to play my best."

Doss was just one of a handful of play-makers on McKinley's defense last year, roaming the defensive backfield with reckless abandon. He used the names of Ronnie Lott and Jack Tatum to describe the style of play he tries to emulate in the secondary.

"They say I'm a hard hitter," Doss admitted but cautioned that there is a lot more to his game on defense. "I thrive on being a hitter, but also I can play man-to-man with any receiver out there. I'm an aggressive type of strong safety."

Due to graduation, he'll be staring at 10 new faces in the defensive huddle for the Bulldogs next year. That makes the talk of a repeat sound even more difficult.

"I'll have to be a leader to those guys coming up and try to teach them quickly and make sure that they'll be listening," Doss said. "McKinley usually has great defenses and we do have some great athletes coming in to fill those positions."

The Doss File

NAME — Mike Doss
HIGH SCHOOL — Canton (Ohio) McKinley
POSITION — Strong safety
HEIGHT, WEIGHT — 6-0, 190 pounds
BENCH PRESS — 300 pounds
40-YARD DASH TIME — 4.5 seconds
GRADE-POINT AVERAGE — 2.0
COLLEGE ENTRANCE TESTS — Scored a 16 on the ACT.

VITAL STATISTICS — Doss is Ohio's sixth-best junior prospect, according to *The Ohio Football Recruiting News*. He was rated the state's No. 3 junior by *Ohio's Future Stars*. He was also included in *G&W Recruiting Report's* early list of the nation's top 75 juniors. Doss had 97 tackles and seven interceptions as a sophomore. This past year as a junior, he had 100 tackles and five interceptions for McKinley's 14-0 Division I state championship and *USA Today* national championship team.

COACH'S COMMENT — "His role as a running back will expand next year. He was in the rotation with three other guys the last two years in that capacity and two of those kids have graduated. His numbers weren't very significant last year even though he played some tailback in every game. While he never came off the field defensively, he didn't really have the opportunity to chalk up great numbers as a running back." — Former McKinley coach Thom McDaniels.

HOBBIES — Runs track (100 meters, 200, 4x100 relay).

SCHOOLS INTERESTED IN — Committed to Ohio State in February, picking OSU over Michigan and Penn State.

At the same time, however, Doss will be learning some new things himself on the offensive side of the ball. He said that new McKinley coach Kerry Hodakievic, formerly at Upper Arlington, Ohio, will be looking to utilize him at the tailback position in a feature role this season.

"I'm just trying to get ready for double duty and for just about anything with this new coach coming in," said Doss, who saw only spot duty running the ball last year. "From what Coach is saying, he really wants me to carry the ball a lot, so I think I'll probably be the No. 1 tailback. But there will probably be a little bit of a rotation going on because I play defense full time."

And it's his prowess on defense that has attracted the attention of the OSU coaches.

"That's what I thrive on, my defense," Doss said, "and Ohio State came to me first and I feel real good about committing to Ohio State."

McDaniels thinks the Ohio State fans will like finding out for themselves what a lot of people already know about Doss.

"Michael has been a starter here since he was a sophomore and he's earned a reputation, not only among his own teammates, but I think among our opponents, for being a kid who makes big plays and for being a big hitter," he said.

"It seems like in every single game that we play there is a significant blowup, a big hit, and Mike Doss seems to be the guy that instigates it. And in more than one instance, in every ball game, there is a remarkable play and, once again, he seems to be the author of it."

"So he's sort of developed a reputation of being a big-play football player, and I think that is one thing that attracted the Buckeyes' attention."

With Peterson and nine other seniors around on defense, McDaniels thinks it's pretty impressive that as the lone junior, Doss had the kind of ability to distinguish himself from the unit.

In the state championship game against Cincinnati Moeller, Doss had a diving interception on the game's opening play, and later in the game he caused a fumble that another teammate picked up and turned into a touchdown.

"His competition for making big plays comes from the guys that he shares the huddle with in many instances, because we had an awful lot of good players, obviously, and he's not the only big-play guy we had," McDaniels said. "That's the trait that the Buckeyes noticed and it's the thing that I think stands out for Mike."

It's all part of a still-developing package that Doss possesses. He has his senior season in front of him to hone both his mental and physical abilities, mainly on the defensive side of the ball, to prepare him for the transition to the college game.

According to McDaniels, McKinley plays the kind of coverage that requires their safeties to provide run support as well as be pass defenders, and Doss fits that description well. All the ingredients are already there for him to advance to the next level.

"He's so physical and he's so tough," McDaniels said, "and he seems to play his best in the biggest games against the best opponents."

McDaniels said that Doss in many ways is pretty close to being on par with the caliber of performer that Martin and Peterson were at this time a year ago.

"I think he is in terms of his athletic ability and his athletic play," he said. "But he's going to have to become more consistent. While he is a big-play guy, he's sort of picked and chosen his spots and he's going to have to learn to be more consistent to be the same kind of player that Jamar and Kenny were."

Doss said he would love to have the kind of senior season that his future Buckeye teammates had, but a new coach and a whole new defense will make that a very difficult task to accomplish.

"I see myself this season going out and playing hard and trying to repeat," Doss said. "I really want to work hard and try to improve to where I can go down to Ohio State and try to contribute as soon as I can. Hopefully I'll contribute in a big way my freshman year."

After a year apart, Doss is hoping to win a national championship once again with his former McKinley teammates, this time as a Buckeye.

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1 More Year For No. 2

Doss Deliberates, But Decides To Come Back

By CHRIS NIDA
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Early on in Michael Doss' press conference at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center Jan. 9, it appeared as if he would do what almost everyone expected and declare his intention to enter the NFL draft a year early.

"I've been playing football since I was 8 years old," Doss said. "My dream has been to play in the National Football League and now that that opportunity has arrived I had to ask myself, 'Is this the best thing for Michael Doss?'"

But several minutes, a couple of breakdowns and many tears later, he announced his true intention — to return to Ohio State for his senior season.

"My mother told me, living in a two-bedroom apartment with nothing to survive on but her son, she told me to get my education, and I will be returning to Ohio State," Doss said.

Though he was raised by a guardian, Doss' love for his mother was clear, as he could barely get through many of his statements about her. The fact that Jan. 9 was her birthday made the announcement even more special for the safety.

Even with his mother's advice, Doss still agonized over the decision. After speaking to his mother an hour prior to the press conference, he sat with his Bible in his car in the parking lot at the WHAC, watching the satellite trucks pull up and media trickle in. All the while, he was trying to figure out what he was going to say.

But when he approached that lectern at 2 p.m., still



TERRY GILLIAM

PRESSURE'S OFF — After agonizing over whether to go pro or stay at OSU, Michael Doss is all smiles having made his decision.

clutching his Bible and his car keys, he wasn't totally sure whether he would be a Buckeye for one more season.

"I am positive I did not know what I was going to

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Tressel Reflects On First Season With Buckeyes

By STEVE HELWAGEN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

The final record may not reflect it, but those directly associated with the Ohio State football program believe it moved forward during a turbulent 2001.

The Buckeyes ended their first season under Jim Tressel at 7-5 after a heart-breaking 31-28 loss to South Carolina in the Outback Bowl. That mark was one game shy of the 8-4 that OSU posted in John Cooper's final year at the helm, which also was punctuated with an Outback loss to the Gamecocks.

"I think we've made progress in every way you could measure it," Tressel said recently. "We are always learning, especially as we put plans into action. We evaluate them and make progress in that way."



Jim Tressel

transgressions and poor showing in the bowl loss.

Tressel was offered and accepted the job on Jan. 17 and was introduced as the

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D'Andrea Ends Chase, Tabs OSU Over Nebraska

By STEVE HELWAGEN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

After weeks of soul-searching, Avon Lake, Ohio, middle linebacker prospect Mike D'Andrea finally ended the suspense Jan. 12 when he committed to Ohio State over Nebraska.

D'Andrea's verbal arguably could be the biggest in the one-year tenure of OSU head coach Jim Tressel.

The 6-3, 238-pound D'Andrea is considered Ohio's No. 1 overall prospect by The Ohio Football Recruiting News. Rivals100.com Recruiting ranked him the nation's No. 2 middle linebacker prospect and the country's 29th-best player overall.

"It was a pretty hard decision," D'Andrea admitted. "I kept switching back and forth. Ohio State and Nebraska were real close."

D'Andrea admitted it was his dream to play for a national championship team. Nebraska, with three national championships since 1994 and a berth in this year's title game at the Rose Bowl, was a hard program to ignore.

But D'Andrea decided the potential for success at his in-state school, where Tressel has already assembled a well-regarded class for the upcoming Feb. 6 national signing day, was too much to pass up.

"I just took a look at everything, but in the end I thought Ohio State was the best place for me to be," he told BSB. "They have a great recruiting class and the coaches there are great. I can see in a couple of years they are going to be great."

Continued On Page 10



CROWN JEWEL — Avon Lake, Ohio, linebacker Mike D'Andrea announced on Jan. 12 that he had chosen to play at Ohio State over Nebraska.

COVER STORY: 1 MORE YEAR FOR NO. 2

Decision Was Made While At The Podium

Continued From Page 1

say (when I got to the lectern)," Doss said. "You could say you watched me decide."

Doss admitted that when talk of him jumping to the NFL intensified after the Michigan game, his first instinct was, "There it is. Go."

He had seen recent OSU players such as Ahmed Plummer, Nate Clements, Nail Diggs, Ryan Pickett and Joe Montgomery advance to the next level and wanted the opportunity for himself. But after further consideration, his thought process obviously shifted.

"The NFL is going to be there this year and it's going to be there next year," Doss said. "They are going to continue to play if Mike Doss ever makes it there or not."

It helped Doss that an NFL advisory committee told him he was probably, at best, a second-round pick.

"They said possibly as high as the second round," Doss said. "They also said nothing is for sure."

One projection had Doss as the fourth-best safety available. In the last 10 years, just one safety has been selected higher than 23rd overall.

Certainly, Doss was hopeful of hearing the words "surefire first-rounder," which would have been worth much more up-front money. He knows, though, he could possibly reach that status with another solid year of college ball.

His decision to pass on the NFL for now means Doss will not be joining defensive back Derek Ross and tight end Darnell Sanders, also OSU juniors, as early entrants into the draft.

The opportunity to earn a degree won out over the money of the NFL this time around.

"In 20 years when I'm not playing football, I hope I have your job, standing here asking some Ohio State junior what he's going to do," Doss told the assembled media to laughter. "I just decided to go ahead and stick it through."

Doss said he consulted with many different friends and family members, including former Canton (Ohio) McKinley High School and OSU teammates Jamar Martin and Kenny Peterson, and the one confidant he knew would always listen to him, "the lord Jesus Christ."

Among members of the OSU coaching staff, Doss spoke with head coach Jim Tressel the Thursday before his announcement and also talked with defensive coordinator Mark Dantonio. But he conversed most often with his posi-

Doss Could Join Select Company

With his return for 2002, safety Mike Doss will have a chance to become just the seventh three-time All-American in OSU history. Previous three-time All-Americans at the school include:

Player	Pos.	Years A-A
Chic Harley	RB	1916-17, '19
Wes Fesler	E	1928-30
Lew Hinchman	HB	1930-32
Merle Wendt	E	1934-36
Archie Griffin	TB	1973-75
Tom Skladany	P	1974-76

tion coach, Mel Tucker.

Tressel was at the American Football Coaches Association convention in San Antonio and unable to attend Doss' announcement. Tucker was the only member of the coaching staff present. He said he was proud of the way Doss tackled the tough decision.

"I am impressed," Tucker said. "He went through a process and thought hard about it and that's all you can ask for a guy to think everything through and I think he did that."

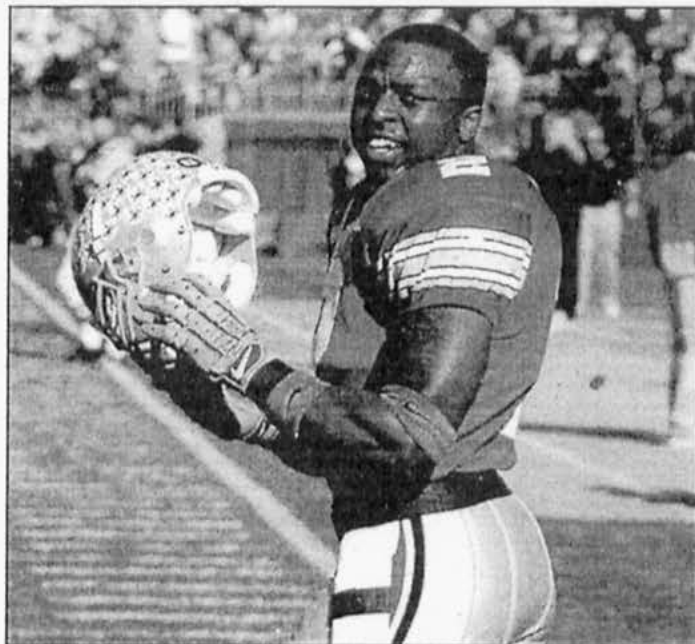
With his return, Doss immediately becomes the leading candidate for a captain position in the 2002 season. In 2001, the 5-11, 203-pound Canton native led the Buckeyes in tackles with 87, including 10 tackles for loss and three sacks. Additionally, he intercepted three passes from his strong safety position and blocked two punts while on special teams.

Following the season, Doss was selected to the All-Big Ten first team and was a Sporting News and Walter Camp All-American. He also was a semifinalist for the Thorpe Award, an honor he figures to contend for again in 2002. Doss has a shot to be just the seventh three-time All-American in OSU history (see sidebar).

But those accolades weren't enough to secure Doss a surefire first-round pick. The NFL composite scouting report he received pegged him as a second-round pick at best, a late third-rounder at worst.

Doss knew he could have moved up at the NFL scouting combine and during individual workouts, but he also realizes there are skills he can improve.

"I'm going to work on better tackling — you can always become a better tackler," Doss said. "Man coverage ... I'm just going to keep working hard. Hopefully you'll see



STEVE HELWAGEN

THREE-TIMER? — Now that he's coming back for his senior season at Ohio State, Michael Doss can concentrate on leading his team to a Big Ten title and becoming a three-time All-American.

me out there on special teams and maybe offense."

Above any individual awards, Doss is placing a premium on returning the Buckeyes to Big Ten champion status.

"Go out there and win a Big Ten championship. That's my goal here," Doss said. "All the individual awards, they're OK, but the main goal — the team goal — is trying to get victories and hopefully get a Big Ten ring."

His position coach said that work toward improvement begins right away.

"Obviously we all can get better as players and coaches and that's what you work hard to do every day," Tucker said. "We're going to work toward that, getting better every day and working hard."

Now that the weight of the NFL is off his shoulders, Doss said he knows what he will do.

"Take a deep breath and get back to school and playing football and getting ready for next year," Doss said. "Trying to get some game plans going for (the Sept. 7 opener with) Kent University."

Happy He's Back

BSB caught up with Tressel upon his return from Texas Jan. 11 and he shared his thoughts on having Doss back.

"It's exciting," Tressel said. "Michael Doss is an impact guy in so many ways. He can be an impact guy in our weight room, on our campus and in this community."

"It can be great for our program. It's hard to put a tangible value on what this means."

Tressel also is hoping Doss can have a major impact on the Buckeyes' fortunes in 2002.

"I like to believe he'll have one of those extraordinary preparation times before his senior year," Tressel said. "If he can do that, I hope at the end of the year we can say he is one of the outstanding players in the country."

Tressel said he tried to counsel Doss as much as he could on the decision.

"I talked to him before I left for Texas," he said. "I met with him and a couple of

his uncles. I know he was talking to them as well as some other people he has great faith in. I talked to him by telephone two or three times from San Antonio."

"I know each time I talked to him, I got more excited about what I was hearing. But I didn't know for sure until after he announced his decision."

"The thing I appreciated most about Mike's decision was the in-depth study he did. Mike is going to be an extraordinary person in society. He has some goals in life. This is another glimpse of what he's all about."

The coach said he expects Doss to continue to be a team leader for the Buckeyes.

"He and I have had a lot of talks over the last couple of weeks," Tressel said. "I asked him to give me a list of his aspirations and what he is going to do to achieve them."

"I told him I would come up with my own list of expectations."

In December, Doss revealed that Tressel had discussed possibly showcasing Doss by using him on special teams and perhaps even on offense. Tressel confirmed as much but said it will be up to Doss to show he should be used in other ways.

"One of the first expectations I have for him is I want him to spend an extraordinary amount of time catching punts and kicks," he said. "Those kids are always out there working out and, if he's serious about doing that, he needs to be out there catching them."

"He also needs to run some routes. He needs to work on his cover game, of course, but he also needs to run some, too, if he's serious about that."

"If he wants to be like an Eddie George, he needs to have that commitment. They say that it didn't matter if they had three lift times and two runs a day, Eddie George was here all the time. That's how you become a special guy — you do a special amount of work."

Steve Helwagen and Darrell Dawson contributed to this report.

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COVER STORY: TRESSEL'S FIRST SEASON

Winds Of Change Slowly Blowing Through OSU

Continued From Page 1

new coach in Columbus a day later. Since then, he has dealt with:

- The arrests of two of his players, Derek Ross and Steve Bellisari, on traffic-related charges;
- The death of one of OSU's football recruits, Drushaun Humphrey;
- The death of his mother, Eloise Tressel;
- The uncertainty locally and nationally following the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11;
- The ongoing controversy surrounding Bellisari's status as the starting quarterback; and
- A handful of painful, close defeats, including single-digit losses to UCLA, Wisconsin, Penn State and South Carolina.

"I don't think about those things," Tressel answered when asked whether he agonized over such losses. "I worry about the things we need to do better. Some things went better than we expected they would and some did not."

"But I'm not going to complain about our situation. We were appreciative and blessed to be able to play in the Outback Bowl this year."

Certainly, though, Tressel had his share of triumphs (see The Jim Tressel Timeline on pages 8-9). The Buckeyes pulled off their first road win in Michigan since 1987, and he and his staff have been burning up the recruiting trail.

By all accounts, they have slowly begun to change the culture of Ohio State football. They have tried to create a family atmosphere for the players. They have made academics and community service two key priorities for anyone who wants to attach his name to the OSU program.

When Ohio State will next win a national — or even Big Ten — championship remains a mystery, but the positive vibes flowing from the Woody Hayes Athletic Center are hard to miss.

"We've had a lot of amazing days this year," Tressel said. "Somebody asked me the other day, 'How many kids do you have?' I said, 'I have 112 at work and four at home.'"

"With the world turning and the reality of that, it's been a very rapid year. It's been a year with a lot of change — personally, family-wise, occupationally."

"There's been a lot of change with the young people we've been working with, a lot of changes in the world. The world changed back in September."

"But it's a wonderful game that we have the good fortune to be a part of. It's a wonderful country we live in, a wonderful university we work at. It's just been tremendous."

Behind The Scenes

It was last year's Outback Bowl loss — and a month full of controversy preceding it — that led OSU athletic director Andy Geiger to cite a "deteriorating climate" when he fired Cooper.

"John Cooper is a fine man, an honest man, so it was hard to see it heading in the direction it was heading," Geiger said while in Tampa, Fla., prior to this year's Outback Bowl.

"But it got there in a hurry. You get yourself in a trap sometimes when the focus is entirely on winning games, and



THAT'S A WRAP — Jim Tressel's first season as Ohio State head football coach officially came to an end with the loss in the Outback Bowl. Here, he's shown congratulating South Carolina coach Lou Holtz (right) on the Gamecocks' victory.

there's less focus on the 'how.' You can never lose sight of how you win games."

Geiger believes Tressel has put the football program back on the right path.

"He's put the 'college' back in college football, as far as Ohio State is concerned," Geiger said. "It's a constant application of the value system he believes in."

The AD noted OSU's improved academic showing and the way Tressel and his staff dealt with the few bumps in the road.

"We just had a much stronger performance in the classroom," he said. "I can't tell you the difference. It was a sea change. It was the highest grade-point average we've had in the fall quarter in a long, long time at Ohio State."

"Even when there was an error made, it was handled by the coaches and players in exactly the manner it should have been."

"The outreach that has been provided and the role of our players in the community has just been tremendously upgraded in a special way. I am as proud as I can be of the way our program is evolving."

The latest Outback Bowl loss was still a tough one to take: OSU fell behind South Carolina 28-0, only to make a furious rally and tie the game at 28 before a late interception paved the way for USC's game-winning field goal on the final play.

Still, Geiger, speaking moments after the loss, was satisfied that OSU had made a strong accounting of itself while in Florida.

"I see the way the team managed the week," he said. "I see how they were at public events, how they were in private, how they were around the hotel, how they prepared and how they fought back from a pretty rugged situation."

"We didn't win the bowl game, but we made just a heck of an effort with some handicaps. They had some injuries to deal with, but we rallied."

"They went down throwing bullets. They went down firing. I think I made a comment once after a game that we died

with our guns in our holsters. We didn't do that today. We fired them all and it was terrific."

"How is always important — the how you run your program, how well you do the parts always dictates how the end comes and how you feel afterwards. I'm very disappointed that we lost the game, but the effort was tremendous and a great start for the future."

When news of the Cooper firing broke last January, fans and media clamored for Ohio State to make a high-profile hiring. Oklahoma's Bob Stoops, Stanford's Tyrone Willingham, Oregon's Mike Bellotti and the Oakland Raiders' Jon Gruden all had their names linked to the job at some point.

But Geiger went a different direction in hiring Tressel, who won four Division I-AA national championships in 15 seasons at YSU.

"I'm delighted with my choice," Geiger said. "We visited with Tyrone. We visited with Mike Bellotti, and we visited with some other guys."

"This guy has matched them all. All of the research we did told us he was the right guy for Ohio State."

Geiger went a step further, predicting, "I think this is a good time for Ohio State football, and it's going to be a great time."

Other Viewpoints

Tressel has raised and clarified expectations from his players, according to assistant coach Tim Spencer, one of three assistants Tressel retained from the Cooper regime.

"It's definitely a different mind-set for the kids," he said. "They're a lot more focused and there is a lot more structure. They know what's expected of them."

The players seem to be accepting the new approach.

"I know Coach Tressel has used the term before, but we're family," said defensive tackle Tim Anderson, who just completed his sophomore season. "We all have our own part to play, each guy on offense and each guy on defense."

"Each guy has to do their individual job. If each guy does that, we're going to be tough to beat."

While Anderson was a Cooper recruit, Tressel at least had a hand in recruiting and signing OSU's 2001 class. One of those players, freshman defensive end Simon Fraser, said he likes what he has seen so far at OSU.

"I'm very pleased with where this program is at and where it's heading," Fraser said. "You could kind of get a sense of that when we were at Michigan."

"People are buying into Coach Tressel's beliefs and what he wants to do with this program. I think within the next couple of years, if people keep believing and working hard, there's going to be some good things coming out of Ohio State."

Getting It Done

If this year has shown anything, it shows that Tressel can deal with setbacks.

He has dealt two more of those in recent weeks as Ross and fellow junior Darnell Sanders each declared a year early for the NFL draft.

But Tressel takes a realistic view of his position and knows making excuses and worrying about things he can't control are a waste of his time.

"Young people have the same basic needs and desires," he said. "Believe it or not, all of the guys at Youngstown State thought they were going to the NFL. I had parents of backup players come in after the national championship game and ask me what the chances were in the NFL draft for their son ... and they were backups for us."

"We all have similar goals and passions and directions we need to nudge our young people in. Once you're in the stadium and facing the field, it's really irrelevant how many people are behind you. So I haven't found a whole bunch of difference."

The cold hard facts say Ohio State endured more losses over the last three years, when it went a combined 21-15, than it did over the previous six, when the Buckeyes were a stellar 62-12-1 and won three Big Ten championships.

Returning the program to that championship level — while maintaining the academic and community standards set this season — will be Tressel's next challenge.

"We're a long way from where we want to be," he said. "We have a lot more getting to know each other to do, a lot more development in the weight room to do. But I feel good about the effort of our football team, and that's something that doesn't take height, weight or speed."

"The challenges have been great. We know we have lots and lots of work to do. But I feel good about the progress we've made."

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COVER STORY: D'ANDREA ENDS CHASE

Decision By Top LB Should Boost OSU Class

Continued From Page 1

"I'm real excited about it and looking forward to playing with everyone there."

D'Andrea notified Tressel and Nebraska head coach Frank Solich of his decision in the early evening hours of Jan. 12. Then he dutifully made calls to local and statewide media outlets to inform them of his decision.

"I called Coach Tressel and I talked to all of the assistants as well," D'Andrea said. "They were at the stadium, hosting a bunch of recruits. They were real excited."

"Coach Tressel is just a real good guy. He's real easy to get along with. I like their linebacker coach (Mark Snyder) a lot, too."

D'Andrea becomes the 18th verbal commitment in an OSU class that could number anywhere from 23 to 25 players. His verbal could help OSU, locked in a battle with Texas for the top spot in the current class rankings, wind up with the nation's No. 1 recruiting class.

"I think this was huge," said Bill Kurelic, editor of TOFRN and the BSB Internet site (ohiostate.rivals.com). "He was the best player in the state and a guy everyone wanted to know about. There was just so much speculation about what he was going to do."

"For Ohio State, it is a big boost. They are in the running right now with Texas for the top class and, depending on who else Ohio State is able to land, this could be one of if not the best class the school has ever had."

In addition to his national recruiting rankings, D'Andrea earned first-team All-Ohio honors in Division II and was named to the 25-man USA Today All-USA first team. The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer named him its all-area defensive player of the year.

"He's got it all," Kurelic said. "He's got size, he's a great athlete and he's extremely strong. He runs well and makes plays."

"He is the best linebacker prospect to come out of Ohio since Andy Katzenmoyer (in 1996)."

Wait Was Long For This Shoreman

D'Andrea wrapped up his football season in late November then turned his attention to official visits. He ended up stacking his visits to four schools — Michigan, Nebraska, Notre Dame and OSU — over a three-week period.

After returning from his last trip to Nebraska on Dec. 16, D'Andrea told reporters he had removed Michigan and Notre Dame, then in the midst of a coaching change, from consideration. A decision, he said, was expected before Christmas.

But when Christmas — and then New Year's Day — came and went without a decision, D'Andrea found himself in the middle of a media frenzy.

"I never thought it would be like this," D'Andrea said. "I put it off (over the holidays) to get it out of my mind. But I couldn't because no one would ever let it go."

"So I just decided to get it over with."

Kurelic stayed in constant contact with D'Andrea and his family and was able to break the news of the verbal just moments after the player contacted the respective coaches.

"I don't think it was that bad for Mike because he had a lot of people around him supporting him," Kurelic said. "It was probably more agonizing for the fans of both schools and the coaches than anybody else. It had to be tough for those coaches to wait it out."

"For the fans, there was a lot of speculation on the Internet. A lot of people were sitting on the edge of their seats, waiting for him to decide."

D'Andrea's parents, Bob and Sue D'Andrea, helped their son stay grounded during the whole process. They asked him not to participate in the Jan. 5 All-American Bowl in Texas when they thought that trip would distract from his studies.

"It feels real good, but we all feel it was Mike's decision," Bob D'Andrea, an OSU alum, told The Plain Dealer. "We had a lot of people praying about it. He's comfortable with it, and that's good."

"The level of interest people have in that program is unbelievable. It's a good decision for Mike, a good one for the community and a good one for Ohio State."

Where Will He Play?

There is already a player at Ohio State manning the middle linebacker spot in returning starter Matt Wilhelm, who will be a senior. Wilhelm, ironically, hails from Elyria, just 10 miles from Avon Lake in Lorain County.

However, there will be two openings at outside linebacker, where Wilhelm began his OSU career. But D'Andrea said the OSU coaches never made him any promises about how they plan to deploy their troops.

"They didn't really say anything about that," D'Andrea said. "I talked to Matt a little bit when I visited down there. He's a nice guy and we got along pretty well."

"They are recruiting me as a middle linebacker. I guess I will just go in there in the fall and try to win the spot."

D'Andrea became a familiar name across the state when he earned All-Ohio honors as a junior. He suffered a strained knee early in his senior year but did not let that hold him back.

He ended the regular season with 112 tackles, nine tackles for loss, three sacks,

three fumble recoveries and two interceptions as Avon Lake went 9-1 and locked down the No. 1 ranking in Division II.

The team then went 2-1 in the playoffs, including a 17-14 regional semifinal win over Defiance in which D'Andrea tallied 15 tackles, five tackles for loss and an interception.

As impressive as his numbers on the field have been, D'Andrea has built a reputation as a tireless worker in the weight room. He boasts 4.4-second speed in the 40 and a 38-inch vertical leap. He also has been a state- and national-caliber champion in the shot put and discus and hopes to compete for the track team at OSU.

Plus he is a solid student with a 3.5 GPA and a 1060 on the SAT.

"I think he has continued the tradition of Avon Lake and taken it up one step," Avon Lake coach David Dlugosz told the Lorain Morning Journal. "He's been not just a good player for us, but a very good role model for the rest of the kids."

A Clean Sweep?

D'Andrea's commitment gives Tressel and the Buckeyes verbal from the state's top four prospects. Running back Maurice Clarett, quarterback Justin Zwick and offensive lineman Doug Datish had verbally previously.

OSU also is recruiting the state's fifth-best prospect in Piqua defensive tackle Quinn Pitcock.

Since 1995, OSU has succeeded in signing the state's top five players just one time, in 1999.

In addition to Pitcock, there are a number of other key prospects at the top of OSU's wish list for the school's last five to seven spots.

They include Ohio linebacker Bobby Carpenter, Ohio tight end George Cooper Jr., North Carolina offensive lineman Derek Morris, Florida offensive lineman Max Jean-Gilles, Florida wide receivers Antonio Holmes and Richard Washington, and Florida linebacker Buster Davis. (For updates on all of these players, see Recruiting Outlook on pages 12-14.)

Davis, in fact, has become a long-distance telephone friend of D'Andrea and was leaning heavily to OSU after learning of his friend's commitment.

"I'd really like to play alongside him," D'Andrea said of Davis, who was also a USA Today All-USA first-team pick. "He's a great player."

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OHIO STATE RECRUITING PROFILE

Smith Wants To Play QB, Not An 'Athlete' Role

By GARY HOUSTEAU

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

One thing is certain in the mind of Troy Smith from Cleveland Glenville High School, and that is that he has every intention of playing quarterback at whatever university he eventually chooses to attend next season.

"That's the most important thing to me right now because when I choose a school, that's the position that I'm going to play when I get there," the 6-1, 205-pound Smith said.

With less than a month to go until national signing day, West Virginia is clearly offering Smith an opportunity to be their quarterback of the future, while it looks as if Ohio State is just now beginning to warm to that idea.

"Right now at Ohio State, it's more from a quarterback standpoint than ever," Smith said. "But previously it was all 'athlete' from Ohio State and just as far as me going to school, that's not what I wanted to hear. That wasn't going to fit me as to what I want to do when I go to school. So it was going to be an easy selection."

"But right now as we're winding down toward signing day time, basically, I'm just going to the schools that are primarily talking about quarterback."

With practically everybody expecting Massillon (Ohio) Washington's Justin Zwick to be the Savior at quarterback for the Buckeyes, possibly as early as 2002, Smith can see himself benefiting from that hypothetical scenario if he were to also choose OSU.

"For me it's kind of easy because the world's weight is not on my shoulders," he said. "I don't have to worry about a lot of things. All I have to do is go there and perform."

"But being the franchise player, you've got a lot of stuff on you, and coming in that's a lot of pressure. So going in, not having a lot of pressure on my shoulders will help me a lot so I can perform a little bit better."

Confidence in his ability to play the quarterback position is definitely not something lacking in Smith.

"I've been playing quarterback since I was 7 years old," he said. "That's all I know. All I was ever taught to do was be a leader, lead my team, make good decisions and protect the ball."

Obviously, it would be against his nature to play anything other than quarterback. But if he were to accept a scholarship offer from Ohio State and get beat out for the quarterback position, Smith would then have to face the reality of either having to remain a backup or choosing to use his athletic talent at a different position.

"First of all, hopefully I wouldn't get beat out," Smith said. "But picking a college is something where you have to be happy and content with where you are, no matter where you're going to play on the field, even if your dream is to play quarterback."

"But if you don't, and you get into a situation where you have to play somewhere else, then it comes to where it's a team thing and it becomes bigger than you. And whatever you can do to help your team win, then you do it, whether it's playing quarterback, receiver, safety, wherever."

But Smith has the luxury of knowing he can eliminate all those hypotheticals by choosing a school like West Virginia, which seems to be rolling out the red carpet for him.

"West Virginia has just been on me since the jump," Smith said. "Since day one they wanted me to play quarterback. They say I'm their number one guy."

"And just as far as quarterbacking skills go in their type of offense, it sort of fits me a little bit more because it's more of a free-lance offense, being able to be mobile, moving around, running a lot more different type of plays than your pro-style offense. But then again, pro-style offense isn't that bad either."

Smith first became a hot commodity as a

junior, when he helped lead Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward to a Division I playoff berth. He transferred to Glenville after that football season and helped the Tarbloaders also reach the playoffs this year.

According to Ted Ginn, his coach at Glenville, Smith has the kind of talent and athletic ability to excel in either type of offense at the next level.

"Troy is a very intelligent young man and he picks up on the scheme of things real quick," the coach said. "He is very mobile and I know he has one of the strongest arms in the country. I don't think there are too many other kids in the country at his age that have an arm such as his."

"With his intelligence and his mobility, I think he can be a real good quarterback in college."

That's the situation facing Smith as far as picking OSU instead of West Virginia.

"He wants to be a quarterback and they have Zwick," said Ginn. "But he also likes Ohio State. I guess he's weighing all his options to see what place he thinks fits for him."

The good news is that if he were forced to play another position as a Buckeye, Ginn thinks he can be a very effective wide receiver as well.

"Troy has so much athletic ability that as a wideout, there is nobody that can touch him," the coach said. "He's got one of the best pair of hands that I've ever seen or coached. And he just has so much athletic ability that he can lay out for balls, he can go over the top of people for balls. He's just a big-play type guy as a receiver."

If Smith's decision comes down to an issue of trust in the head coach, then Ohio State scores well in that department.

"As far as Coach (Jim) Tressel goes, so far, I love him because of his honesty," Smith said. "The first thing that I have noticed in the recruiting business is that honesty comes first. Honesty has been there since day one, just telling me that, 'We want you in this program and if you can't play quarterback then you can play somewhere else.' That helps me to get to know the program a little bit more."

"If you look at Ohio State they're bringing in a hell of a recruiting class and all they really need is a quarterback, and they're recruiting the two premier quarterbacks in the state."

"If we were to both go there then there is no more '10,000 yards over four seasons (Zwick's career numbers).' We're starting on a clean slate and the best man wins. So just as far as them coming to me now more from a quarterback standpoint than ever is knowing that the best man may win and the previous records mean nothing when you go to college."

That's precisely what makes the challenge exciting for Smith.

"Every program I've ever been in, there has been speculation of trying to move me to another position because there was another guy there who could throw the ball and I could do other things," Smith said.

Make no mistake about it, Smith knows Zwick: They both attended the Elite 11 quarterback camp in California last summer and Smith has the utmost respect for Zwick as a football player and a leader as well.

"I like his attitude just as far as being a quarterback," Smith said of Zwick. "There has to be a sense of, I wouldn't say cockiness, but you have to sure believe in yourself. Every quarterback has to have a little bit of an ego, not a big one, just knowing that when you're a quarterback, you are a leader. And he's demonstrated that for the last couple of years. He's a great player. He has a great attitude, a great arm and as far as being a quarterback I respect him."

Smith has worked hard on developing his arm. He wasn't known to have a strong arm when he was at St. Edward's because, according to Smith, whenever he threw the ball hard his receivers would drop it, so he had to

The Smith File

NAME — Troy Smith

HIGH SCHOOL — Cleveland Glenville

POSITION — Quarterback

HEIGHT, WEIGHT — 6-1, 205 pounds

40-YARD DASH TIME — 4.48 seconds

BENCH PRESS — 245 pounds

GRADE-POINT AVERAGE — 2.8

COLLEGE ENTRANCE TEST — Scored a 14 on his first ACT attempt. He said without the test score he'll likely enroll at Ohio State and pay the cheaper in-state tuition.

VITAL STATISTICS — Smith threw for 1,400 yards and rushed for 500 more as a junior at Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward. He transferred to Glenville after that football season and starred there as a senior. He completed 54 of 128 passes (42 percent) for 969 yards with 12 touchdowns and four interceptions. He also rushed for 329 yards and scored four touchdowns as Glenville ended up 9-2 and qualified for the Division I playoffs. This past summer, Smith attended 10 different camps, including the prestigious Elite 11 quarterback camp in California. He has run an impressive 4.1-second time in the pro shuttle. He was averaging 17 points, nine assists and four rebounds as the school's basketball point guard this winter. He is rated Ohio's 13th-best prospect by The Ohio Football Recruiting News and the nation's 13th-best "dual threat" quarterback by Rivals100.com Recruiting.

COACH'S COMMENT — "I think it would be a great asset for Ohio State to have the kind of quarterback that (Justin) Zwick is and the type of quarterback that Troy is. To me, Troy would either be the best receiver to make Zwick the best quarterback, or he would push Zwick to be the best quarterback or even beat him out. With him going to Ohio State, that would make Zwick an even better quarterback or he will beat him out."

"Troy has been an excellent leader here, he's been an excellent student here, and he's been an excellent student-athlete here for us," — Glenville head coach Ted Ginn

HOBBIES — Watching movies and DVDs.

SCHOOLS INTERESTED IN — Smith is considering West Virginia, Ohio State, Iowa and Toledo. He visited WVU, Toledo and Michigan State previously and has trips set to Iowa Jan. 18 and Ohio State Jan. 25.

let up on it some so they could catch it easier.

"I work on my arm all year around," he said. "I work on my legs, my arm, my whole body. But my arm has been my secret weapon."

Although Smith is prepared to take his strong arm and athletic ability to a place where he really enjoyed his visit, he said he is still expecting to be overwhelmed on his official visit to Ohio State at the end of January.

"Out of a hundred I'd say West Virginia was about a 99, maybe even a hundred," he said. "I enjoyed my whole time there. They treated me really well and I had a nice time with the coaches and the whole bit. But without a doubt, I'm looking to be knocked off my feet with the visit to (OSU) because that's what separates West Virginia from the other schools right now."



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OHIO STATE FLASHBACK

No Stretching Truth – Sutherin's Kick Was Huge

Editor's Note: Buckeye Sports Bulletin is celebrating the 50th anniversary of the 1957 national championship team with special features throughout the 2007 football season.

By ERIC LOUGHRY

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The way Don Sutherin figures it, 50 years could be worth almost 30 yards.

The field goal Sutherin kicked early in the fourth quarter of the 1958 Rose Bowl to give Ohio State a 10-7 win over Oregon was officially 24 yards, but time has a way of padding stats.

When Sutherin and other members of the 1957 national championship team get together on homecoming weekend in October to celebrate their 50th reunion and reminisce, maybe the distance of the game-winning field goal will have grown to new proportions.

"It might get up to 52 (yards)," Sutherin said. "You know how that goes."

It's not stretching the truth to say that Sutherin did it all for the Buckeyes during his career from 1955-57. A standout cornerback for the Buckeyes, he also played on offense at the halfback position and took care of the punting and placekicking. For good measure, he also returned punts. For example, during the Buckeyes' 17-0 win at Michigan in 1955, Sutherin played all 60 minutes.

The amount of success Sutherin would go on to enjoy both as a player and coach in the Canadian Football League only sounds exaggerated. But it's why he was inducted into the CFL Hall of Fame.

During his 12-year career as a cornerback and placekicker, Sutherin played in eight Grey Cup championship games with his team winning four. A three-time all-league selection on defense, he picked off 58 passes during his career, including 12 in postseason play, and twice led the CFL's Eastern Conference in interceptions.

On top of his prowess in the defensive backfield, Sutherin also led the conference in scoring five times before he retired in 1970. He still holds the record for most career converts (called PATs in U.S. foot-



FILE PHOTO

GAME WINNER – Ohio State kicker Don Sutherin (45) kicks a 24-yard field goal against Oregon in the 1958 Rose Bowl, providing the Buckeyes with their winning margin in a 10-7 victory that clinched the 1957 national championship. Sutherin went on to a hall of fame career in the Canadian Football League.

ball) in Grey Cup games with 17.

"I loved to kick," he said. "I loved to be in pressure situations."

Sutherin would later become a highly regarded defensive coordinator in the CFL, winning four more Grey Cups in that capacity during a coaching career that spanned more than 20 years and four teams. Early in the 1994 season, he took over as head coach of the Hamilton Tiger-Cats and held that position through the 1997 season before returning to defensive coordinator until he retired following the 2002 season.

It was during his time as coach of the Tiger-Cats that Sutherin was approached by a young man from Hamilton who was determined to break into the coaching ranks.

Sutherin was impressed by Dennis McPhee's knowledge of the game and let him help out as a "guest coach" before eventually giving him a full-time position on the Tiger-Cats' staff.

Now Sutherin is a guest coach on McPhee's staff. A first-year coach at the University of Waterloo, McPhee asked Sutherin to come to Ontario this past spring and summer to help him install a defense. Sutherin, who resides with his wife of nearly 40 years, Nancy, in Uniontown, Ohio, near Canton, was more than happy to return to Canada to help McPhee.

"To have a guy with his wealth of experience up here has been a godsend for sure," McPhee said. "He's good with the kids."

He's demanding – extremely demanding. (He) played for Woody Hayes, so the apple doesn't fall too far from the tree."

Where's My Pumpkin Pie?

In the fall of 1953, Hayes and assistant coach Gene Fekete made the trip to Toronto, Ohio, a small town on the Ohio River, to watch Sutherin play on a Friday night. Sutherin didn't disappoint, throwing for two touchdowns and running for another, to lead his team past rival Winterville.

Sutherin not only won the game that night, he won a scholarship to OSU. But he lost a pumpkin pie.

The customary pumpkin pie that his mother always had waiting for him after games was gone by the time he got home that night. His mom filled him in – Hayes was impressed not only with Sutherin's performance that night but also with the homemade pumpkin pie.

"She told me, 'Woody Hayes was here and ate your pumpkin pie,'" Sutherin remembered. "And then the next morning, she said, 'You're going to Ohio State.'"

After spending the 1954 season on the Buckeyes' freshman squad, Sutherin was hungry for playing time at the varsity level as a sophomore in 1955. He played throughout the year on both sides of the ball but got his fill in the season finale against Michigan in Ann Arbor, playing the entire game as OSU shut out the Wolverines to finish the season as Big Ten champions.

"When you're young like that," Sutherin said, "you can run all day and never get tired."

The win at Michigan would help senior halfback Howard "Hopalong" Cassidy, who was playing in his final game for OSU, secure the Heisman Trophy. Throughout the game, Sutherin regularly moved into Cassidy's normal spot at left halfback while Cassidy shifted over to right halfback. The maneuver wasn't the result of a special plan – Sutherin simply realized that he was bet-

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OHIO STATE FLASHBACK

ter suited to block the Michigan defenders, particularly future College Football Hall of Famer Ron Kramer.

"Hop had trouble blocking those big guys," said Sutherin, who at 5-10 and nearly 200 pounds, was about the same height as Cassidy but outweighed his teammate by at least 30 pounds.

Sutherin suggested that when a play was called for him to carry the ball, he would switch with Cassidy and block instead.

"Woody thought that was a good idea," Sutherin said, and it turned out to be an excellent strategy. Cassidy ran for 146 yards and a touchdown that afternoon to give him a leg up on the Heisman competition.

Late in the game, a series of scuffles broke out between the teams. As the final seconds wound down, Sutherin said he was sucker-punched in the face by Kramer.

"My eye went completely closed on me, but it didn't matter," he said. "We won the football game."

From Probation To A Title

It was the OSU athletics department that was given a black eye in the spring of 1956 when the NCAA banned all Ohio State teams from NCAA-sanctioned tournaments – including the Rose Bowl. The probation came after Hayes had casually mentioned on his weekly TV show in 1955 that he occasionally gave pocket money to players, prompting an NCAA investigation.

The Buckeyes managed to win six of their first seven games in '56 but were left licking their wounds after being shut out at Iowa (6-0) and then by Michigan (19-0) in their final two games of that season.

After losing the 1957 season opener to Texas Christian, it appeared Ohio State still hadn't recovered from the nosedive it had taken at the end of the previous season.

The week after the 18-14 loss to TCU, the Buckeyes traveled cross-country to take on Washington in Seattle. Still mired in a funk, the team was tied with the Huskies 7-7 early in the second half when Sutherin provided the jolt the Buckeyes needed with an 81-yard punt return for a touchdown. He picked up some key blocks on the return and saw daylight once he got to the sideline.

"I set it up by going up (the middle) and then cutting out to the outside," he said. "I got on that sideline and I just took off."

OSU would go on to beat Washington 35-7 for the first of nine consecutive wins that season. And while Sutherin is probably best remembered for his field goal in the Rose Bowl, the punt return at Washington might have been the most important play of that '57 season. Years later, Hayes often cited the return as the turning point of the season.

"That seemed to give us enough oomph to get going, and we certainly came on," Sutherin said.

A week after the win at Washington, Sutherin caught a 6-yard touchdown pass from quarterback Frank Kremblas for the



FILE PHOTO

BEFORE ARCHIE – Nearly two decades before Archie Griffin would make No. 45 famous at Ohio State, the jersey belonged to Don Sutherin, shown here running the ball during the 1957 national championship season. Sutherin was a talented offensive halfback, cornerback and kicker for the Buckeyes during their title chase.

Buckeyes' final score in a 21-7 win over Illinois. At Wisconsin two weeks later, he kicked a 20-yard field goal early in the third quarter to give Ohio State a 16-13 victory.

"Without him, the season could have been different – very different," said Galen Cisco, a starting linebacker and a senior co-captain of the '57 team.

Sutherin, who started kicking as a kid in friendly backyard competitions against one of his buddies, always enjoyed that aspect of the game. He also liked when his number was called on offense. But defense was his true calling.

"I was pretty well pleased when I got to play some offense, but my specialty was defensive corner," Sutherin said.

To go along with clutch field goals and a punt return that jump-started a season, he also delivered quite a blow when taking down ball carriers.

"Don was quick on his feet and a tough, tough customer," Cisco said. "I mean, he would hit you at the drop of a hat – hard. He was a fierce defender."

The Buckeyes closed out the 1957 regular season by avenging their losses from the year before, knocking off Iowa in a hard-

fought 17-13 decision and then rolling to a 31-14 victory over Michigan.

That set up a Rose Bowl date with Oregon, a team that was supposedly over-matched. And when the Buckeyes drove 79 yards on their first possession to take a 7-0 lead, it appeared the game would go as expected.

But the Ducks came back to tie the game in the second quarter, and Ohio State was unable to get its offense going for the rest of the afternoon. Sutherin admitted that he and some of his teammates may have lost some of their focus after the Michigan game, particularly once they arrived in Pasadena.

"We were out there and we were all 18-, 19- or 20-year-old kids, and it's kind of hard to keep your attention on football," he said.

Sutherin had no trouble focusing, though, when he lined up for a 24-yard field goal early in the fourth quarter. As a straight-on kicker, he usually kept his head down well after the kick. But he did allow himself to take an early peek after Kremblas, the holder, shouted, "It's good!"

Sutherin looked up to see the ball sailing between the goalposts.

Continued On Page 36

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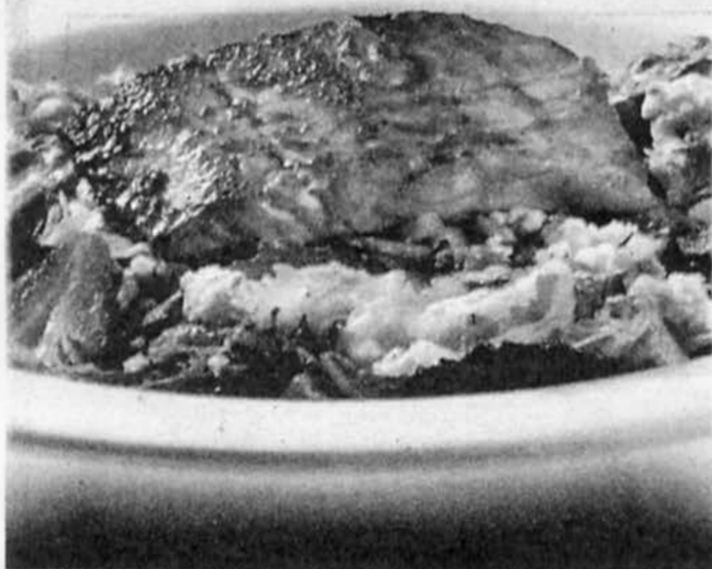
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OHIO STATE FLASHBACK

Rose Bowl-Winning Kicker Starred In CFL

Continued From Page 35

"That was one of the highlights of my football career," he said.

It would be a few years before Sutherin had similar highlights at the professional level. Selected in the eighth round of the 1958 NFL draft by the New York Giants, he didn't play that season for the Giants, who loaned him to the CFL's Tiger-Cats so he could gain some more experience. Hamilton won the Grey Cup that season, defeating Winnipeg 32-7 in the championship game.

Sutherin returned to the Giants for the 1959 season but played in just two games before he was released. After finishing that season with Pittsburgh, appearing in six games, he returned to the Steelers for the '60 season and registered his first NFL interception. Unfortunately, it would also be his last. He played in just four games for the Steelers before he was released.

His professional career was far from over, however. It was just getting started.

Starring North Of The Border

Understandably discouraged about being cut in Pittsburgh, Sutherin decided to return to the CFL and rejoined Hamilton for the 1960 season.

"I wasn't happy with it, but I tell you what," he said of being released. "It did open a lot of doors for me in the Canadian Football League."

He found all kinds of success as soon as he went through those doors, too. Playing defensive back and handling the kicking duties, he led the Eastern Conference in interceptions and scoring in 1961 and '62 and was an All-CFL selection at defensive back in '62.

Hamilton reached the championship game in each of Sutherin's first three seasons back in the CFL, only to lose to the Winnipeg Blue Bombers each time. The Tiger-Cats finally got it right in 1963, taking the Grey Cup with a 21-10 win over the B.C. Lions.

"When you win the first one as a player, that's a big thrill," Sutherin said. "I don't know if it was as big a thrill as the Rose Bowl, (but) certainly it was quite enjoyable."

The Lions would get their revenge the following season, defeating Hamilton 34-24 for the 1964 Grey Cup, but Sutherin was again tabbed as an all-league defensive back. A year later, in their fifth consecutive trip to the championship game, Hamilton defeated Winnipeg 22-16 to win the '65 Grey Cup.

In 1967, Sutherin joined the Ottawa Rough Riders and helped that team win back-to-back Grey Cups in 1968 and '69. He led the Eastern Conference in scoring in '68 and had two converts and a field goal in the championship game to make the difference in a 24-21 win over Calgary.

The following season, his last in Ottawa, Sutherin was again recognized as an All-CFL defensive back as the Rough Riders won another Grey Cup, scoring a 29-11 win over Saskatchewan.

Sutherin retired after playing for the Toronto Argonauts in 1970 and returned to the Canton area. It was there after a couple of years that he got the itch to get back in the game as a coach. He said it seemed like

a natural fit because "as a player, I always wanted to know what everybody else was doing."

He began his coaching career at Tuscarawas Valley, a small rural school south of Canton. After one year there, he coached three years (1978-80) at Uniontown Lake High School, located between Canton and Akron.

It was during his time there that Sutherin was contacted by Ralph Sazio, who had coached him in Hamilton and was then the Tiger-Cats' general manager. Sazio arranged for an interview between Sutherin and new Tiger-Cats head coach Frank Kush, who had been a longtime coach at Arizona State.

Sutherin caught a flight to Florida to meet with Kush at a coaching convention, but Kush didn't show for the interview. Sazio set up another meeting the following night, but the scheduled time for the interview came and went again without any sign of Kush.

It appeared the trip had been a waste of time, but then Sutherin bumped into George Brancato, head coach of the Rough Riders. When Sutherin explained that he was looking to land a coaching job in the CFL and had been stood up by Kush for an interview, Brancato offered him the defensive line coach position with Ottawa.

Sutherin, of course, jumped at the opportunity, beginning a coaching career in the CFL that would last more than 20 years.

Most of those years were as a defensive coordinator as he won four more Grey Cups as a coach — two with Ottawa and two with Edmonton. He also coached with Calgary before finally winding up back in Hamilton.

After the Tiger-Cats started out the 1994 season with a 1-5 record, Sutherin moved from defensive coordinator to head coach, replacing John Gregory. Hamilton finished 4-14 that season, but Sutherin appeared to have the team on the right track. The Tiger-Cats posted back-to-back seasons of 8-10 in '95 and '96, but when they won only two games in 1997, Sutherin was relieved of his head coaching duties.

"I was quite disappointed in the head coaching position because I spread myself too thin," he said. "I wanted to know what was going on with the offense and special teams, and I was a defensive guy."

He also was never comfortable with the peripheral matters that go along with being a head coach, preferring to concentrate on football instead of press conferences and public appearances.

"That's just not me," Sutherin said. "I'd rather go in the back room and break down film, get ready to play a game."

Sutherin stayed on as a defensive coach with the Tiger-Cats until retiring after the 2002 season. He's not completely done with coaching, however. McPhee, who is trying to turn around a program that has endured seven consecutive losing seasons, saw to that.

"He's done a great job of helping with the entire defensive package we're putting in," McPhee said.

Once that's taken care of, Sutherin will get back to Ohio — and to golfing.

"I play golf five days a week, then I rest up two days," he said with a laugh. "Tough life, huh?"