

RISE AND FALL OF OSU COACH

TRESSSEL ERA ENDS

With allegations growing, leaving became inevitable

BY RYAN AUTULLO
BLADE SPORTS WRITER

COLUMBUS — Confronted Friday with damning details unearthed in a Sports Illustrated investigation into its football program, Ohio State officials decided to get rid of the man who ultimately has to answer for his players' transgressions.

Successful coach Jim Tressel tendered his letter of resignation Monday, apparently after being encouraged to do so the prior evening during a meeting with athletic director Gene Smith.

The SI report apparently

THE FIVE PLAYERS SUSPENDED



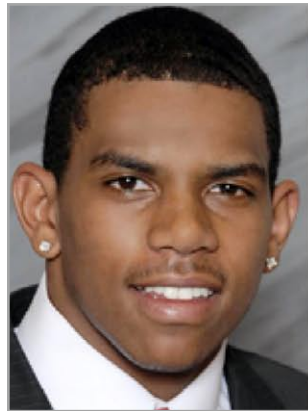
Mike Adams



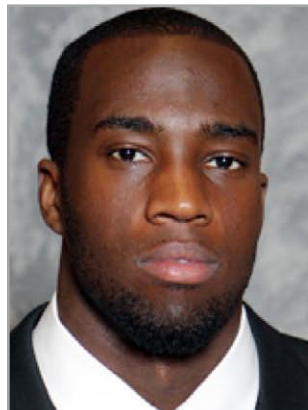
Daniel Herron



DeVier Posey



Tyrelle Pryor



Solomon Thomas

was the final nudge OSU needed to encourage Tressel to resign. His ouster seemed unavoidable after news broke in March that Tressel knowingly lied to the NCAA about six of his players violating rules, and then allowing those ineligible players to participate in the 2010 season.

The magazine published its report Monday evening showing that since 2002 — Tressel's second season — at least 28 Buckeyes players have received tattoos in exchange for memorabilia.

Last week, former OSU receiver Ray Small told the student newspaper, The Lantern, he sold his Big Ten championship rings for cash and that several of his teammates received discounts on cars simply because they played football for Ohio State. Small later refuted his statements, but The Lantern stood by its story.

In December, when six players were accused of trading memorabilia for tattoos, Smith said the football program did not have a "systemic" problem. As SI revealed, Smith was wrong.

Of the 28 accused players, 15 are still on the team, including the six whose names surfaced in December. Additionally, nine former players accused of the wrongdoing might fall within the NCAA's four-year statute of limitations.

Current team members accused of trading memorabilia in exchange for tattoos to Columbus tattoo parlor Fine Link Ink are defensive back C.J. Barnett, linebacker Dorian Bell, running back Jaamal Berry, running back Bo DeLande, defensive back Zach Domicone, linebacker Storm Klein, linebacker Etienne Sabino, defensive tackle John Simon and defensive end Nathan Williams.

Six other current players were accused by the NCAA in December of doing the same. They are quarterback Terrelle Pryor, offensive tackle Mike Adams, running back Dan Herron, wide receiver DeVier Posey, defensive end Solomon Thomas and linebacker Jordan Whiting. All six have been suspended for the start of the 2011 season, with Whiting sitting out one game and his five teammates missing the first five games.

The beginning of the end of Tressel's 10-year run at OSU seemingly began Sept. 13. It was then that Tressel signed an annual NCAA certificate of compliance form indicating he knows of no violations and has reported to the school any knowledge of possible violations.

But about five months prior to his signing of that form, Tressel learned in an e-mail that two of his players — Tressel and Posey — had traded memorabilia for tattoos. By not reporting the violation to the NCAA, Tressel committed a violation of his own, and one that almost always ends with a coach losing his job.

Despite his mistakes, many OSU followers still support Tressel. They instead have cast blame on Pryor and the other accused players, the OSU compliance office, and the media for its perceived witch hunt.

Tressel had enormous success in his 10 seasons, posting a 106-22 record, a 9-1 record against rival Michigan, seven Big Ten championships, and a double-overtime win over Miami (Fla.) in the Fiesta Bowl to win the 2002 BCS national



THE BLADE/JEREMY WADSWORTH

Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel on the sidelines in Columbus. Ohio State announced Monday, May 30, 2011 that football coach Jim Tressel resigned as the NCAA investigates the Buckeyes for possible rules violations.

Jim Tressel in resignation letter: We will be fine.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

COLUMBUS — The text of Jim Tressel's resignation letter tendered on Monday to Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith:

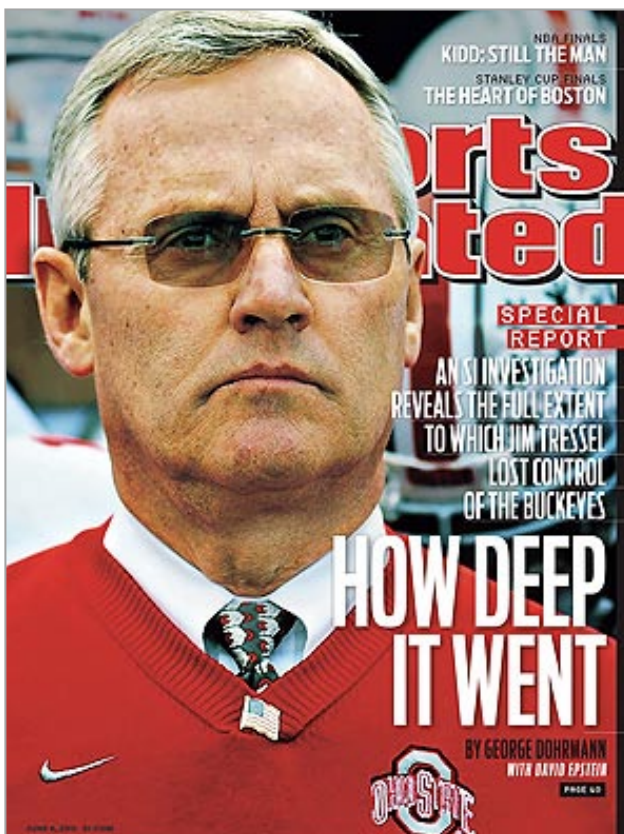
Dear Gene:
After meeting with university officials, we agreed that it is in the best interest of Ohio State that I resign as head football coach.

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

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. In addition, we cannot thank you enough. ... the high school coaches we have worked with over these many years.

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

— Jim Tressel



The June 6, 2011 edition cover of Sports Illustrated.

JIM TRESSSEL BIO

■ **BORN:** Dec. 5, 1952

■ **ALMA MATER:** Baldwin Wallace (1975).

■ **PLAYING CAREER:** Four-time varsity letterman (1971-74); all-conference as a senior.

■ **COACHING CAREER:** Graduate Assistant, Akron, 1975; Quarterbacks, Receivers and Running Backs Coach, Akron, 1976-78; Quarterbacks and Receivers Coach, Miami (Ohio), 1979-80; Quarterbacks Coach, Syracuse, 1981-82; Quarterbacks, Receivers and Running Backs Coach, Ohio State, 1983-85; Head Coach, Youngstown State, 1986-2000 (135-57-2 record); Head Coach, Ohio State, 2001-2011 (106-22).

■ **OVERALL RECORD:** 241-79-2.

■ **ASSISTED UNDER:** Jim Dennison (Akron); Tom Reed (Miami of Ohio); Dick MacPherson (Syracuse); Earle Bruce (Ohio State).

■ **HIGHLIGHTS:** Led Youngstown State to the 1991, 1993, 1994 and 1997 Division I-AA National Championship. Led Ohio State to seven Big Ten Conference titles and to six bowl victories in 10 appearances, including 5-3 in BCS games. Won the 2002 national championship game with a double-overtime win over Miami. Had a 9-1 record against rival Michigan.

■ **ACCOMPLISHMENTS:** American Football Coaches Association National Coach of the Year in 1991, 1994 and 2002; Eddie Robinson National Coach of the Year in 1994 and 2002; Bobby Dodd Coach of the Year in 2002; Paul "Bear" Bryant Award in 2002.

Source: The Associated Press

Reactions to Tressel departure



DAVE HACKENBERG
COMMENTARY

“There are resignations and there are wink-wink resignations. Don’t for a minute think Tressel wasn’t pointed toward the door...”

...It became more than trinkets and tattoos. It became about cars and extra benefits...

...Apparently, winning was so important to Jim Tressel that he ended up losing everything.”

Dave Hackenberg

“There’s still a lot to admire about Tressel, both as a man and as a football coach, but Ohio State has been down this road before. Nobody is bigger than the program...”

Bob Hunter, Columbus Dispatch

“Since he’s at the top, he had the farthest to fall.”

Dane Sanzenbacher
Central Catholic grad and former OSU wide receiver

“Many coaches in the past probably handled player violations in the same way. But the times have changed.”

Bill Livingston
Cleveland Plain Dealer

INSIDE

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Endings often not good for OSU football coaches

By **RAY STEIN**
COLUMBUS DISPATCH

As a friend of Jim Tressel and an occasional colleague on the banquet circuit, Jack Park was saddened to learn the news yesterday of Tressel's resignation as Ohio State football coach.

As a longtime chronicler of Ohio State football history, however, Park was anything but surprised.

"We've never really had a coach who left on his own terms," Park said. "The only guy who really left on his own accord was Paul Brown (in 1944), and that's because he was so young and going into the service[in World War II]."

"I really thought Tressel would be the first one who would coach 15 or 18 years or whatever and say, 'I'm going to retire. I'm going to go out on top.'"

That didn't happen, of course, and instead Tressel became the latest to leave on terms other than his own. Here's a quick look at the exits of the 10 Ohio State coaches prior to Tressel:

John Wilce

Years at OSU: 1913-28

Record at school: 78-33-9, three Big Ten championships

The departure: Wilce resigned on June 3, 1928, effective at the end of the season, to practice medicine and to continue teaching at the university.

Wilce, who obtained his medical degree in 1919, probably had other motives for leaving the coaching profession, Park said. His teams suffered through three consecutive losing seasons in the first three years Ohio Stadium had opened (1922-24) and finished better than fourth in the conference only once in his final seven seasons.

Sam Willaman

Years at OSU: 1929-33

Record: 26-10-5, no Big Ten championships

The departure: The Buckeyes' Big Ten title drought reached 13 years under Willaman, whose teams lost twice to Michigan and three times to Northwestern. His final team finished 7-1, but that didn't keep many alumni from grumbling. Willaman resigned on Jan. 30, 1934, and that same day accepted an offer to become coach at Western Reserve in Cleveland. According to Park's book, The Official Ohio State Football Encyclopedia, Willaman "appeared to be 'happy' for the first time in many weeks" after his resignation.

Francis Schmidt

Years at OSU: 1934-40

Record: 39-16-1, two Big Ten championships

The departure: Schmidt might have been able to run for mayor of Columbus based on his first four seasons, when he turned the tables on Michigan's dominance with four straight shutout wins over the Wolverines. But the honeymoon atmosphere soon faded as Schmidt's teams slipped to 4-3-1 in the 1938 season and his lack of organizational skills became obvious. Schmidt held the detractors at bay with a 7-2 season in '39, but the pressure caught up to him when



his 1940 team underachieved and then was bulldozed by Michigan 40-0. Schmidt resigned on Dec. 16 to avoid being fired by athletic director Lynn W. St. John.

Paul Brown

Years at OSU: 1941-43

Record: 18-8-1, one Big Ten championship, one national championship

The departure: Brown made a national name for himself by leading the Buckeyes to the 1942 national title; the next year his "Baby Bucks" team was decimated because of a shortage of players owing to World War II.

After that season, at 35, Brown was still young enough to be drafted into the service. He accepted a commission as a Navy lieutenant and became coach of the football team

at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center, with the idea among all parties that he would return to OSU after the war. Instead, in February 1945, Brown signed a contract with Cleveland businessman Arthur "Mickey" McBride to coach the team that would become the Cleveland Browns.

Carroll Widdoes

Years at OSU: 1944-45

Record: 16-2, one Big Ten championship

The departure:

Widdoes had been installed as a gatekeeper of sorts until Brown could return to run the show, but he found instant success with an unbeaten team in 1944 that included Ohio State's first Heisman Trophy winner, Les Horvath. But Widdoes did not find happiness. He was a quiet man who did not particularly enjoy dealing with the media and alumni clubs, Park said, and on Jan. 2, 1946, he asked to return to his former role as an assistant coach. St. John granted the request.

Paul Bixler

Year at OSU: 1946

Record: 4-3-2

The departure: Bixler was elevated from assistant coach to replace Widdoes, but he found the seat no cooler than most of his predecessors. OSU won only one of its first four games and finished the season with two losses, including a humiliating 58-6 defeat at home against Michigan. On Feb. 5, 1947, Bixler cited the pressure of the job in his resignation. He accepted the coaching job at Colgate on the same day.

Wes Fesler

Years at OSU: 1947-50

Record: 21-13-3, one Big Ten championship

The departure: Ohio State's reputation for being a "graveyard of coaches" was in full swing as former OSU All-American Fesler stepped in to become the Buckeyes' fourth coach in five seasons. Ohio State won a Rose Bowl and had a Heisman winner (Vic Janowicz) under Fesler but his final season, 1950, fizzled after a 6-1 start. First was a 14-7 loss to Illinois, and then came the famous Snow Bowl loss to Michigan, when Fesler ordered a third-down punt that was blocked for the only touchdown of the game. Two weeks later, Fesler resigned under pressure — then accepted the coaching job at Minnesota within two months.

Woody Hayes

Years at OSU: 1951-78

Record: 205-61-10, 13 Big Ten championships, three national championships

The departure: Hayes had escaped troubled times throughout his 28-year tenure at Ohio State, including NCAA sanctions for improper benefits in 1956 and many calls for his dismissal from a disgruntled fan base, some of whom hanged him in effigy for his team's failings. But nothing could undo Hayes' career like a roundhouse to the jaw of an opponent. Hayes sealed his fate when he punched Clemson nose guard Charlie Bauman late in the 1978 Gator Bowl after Bauman made a game-sealing interception. Hayes was dismissed the next day.

Earle Bruce

Years at OSU: 1979-87

Record: 81-26-1, four Big Ten championships

The departure: Bruce was a Rose Bowl win over Southern California away from winning a national title in his first season following a legend, but seven consecutive three-loss seasons began to wear on a public that had gotten spoiled by Hayes' mid-1970s powerhouses. The end for Bruce came after a three-game losing streak late in 1987, capped by a loss to Iowa in which the Hawkeyes scored the winning touchdown on a fourth-and-23 play in the final seconds. Bruce was fired two days later.

John Cooper

Years at OSU: 1988-2000

Record: 111-43-4, three Big Ten championships

The departure: Dogged by his record against Michigan (2-10-1) and in bowl games (3-8), Cooper wouldn't have lasted as long as he did without some perfectly timed wins — 1994 and 1998 against Michigan and the 1997 Rose Bowl victory over Arizona State. But Cooper's luck ran out as the new century arrived. His players were running afoul of the law and the Buckeyes still weren't winning the big games. The last straw was an undisputed loss to South Carolina in the 2001 Outback Bowl. Cooper was fired the next day.



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Ohio State assistant head coach Luke Fickell watches from the sideline during an NCAA college football Spring Game, in Columbus, Ohio. Ohio State announced Fickell will serve as interim head coach for the 2011-2012 season.

Interim coach Fickell thrust into the spotlight

By **DOUG LESMERISES**

(CLEVELAND) PLAIN DEALER

COLUMBUS — Luke Fickell has long been viewed a future head coach, though there has always been the question of whether Ohio State's co-defensive coordinator would take a head job at another school to prepare himself for the chance to lead the Buckeyes some day.

"I'm still young and I'm learning a lot," Fickell told the Plain Dealer three years ago. "People always say to be a head coach [at Ohio State], you've got to be a head coach somewhere else, that you've got to leave. If that's the case, maybe it's not the right thing for me."

Since then, Fickell, 37, has thrown his name into the ring for some head jobs at other schools, and Ohio State gave him a raise when Notre Dame talked about his joining its staff. But he wasn't in a hurry to leave his alma mater or the Columbus area, where his family was settled, for just any job.

And now he has The Job, named the Buckeyes' interim coach for a full year in the wake of Jim Tressel's resignation Monday. Fickell was the interim coach for Tressel's five-game suspension at the start of the season, but now has a full year to show he can lead a program.

As the linebackers coach, he was praised by players for his ability to play the bad cop in practice and maintain great relationships off the field. At the very least, he should serve as a stabilizing force between

LUKE FICKELL BIO

Luke Fickell, Ohio State interim coach

■ **AGE:** 37, married with four children.

■ Columbus native and graduate of DeSales High School.

■ **PLAYING CAREER:** Defensive lineman at Ohio State 1992-96, making 212 tackles, while the Buckeyes went 41-8-1 in his four years as a starter.

■ **COACHING CAREER:** Ohio State graduate assistant in 1999; Akron defensive line coach 2000-01; Ohio State assistant for nine years, starting in 2002, first as the special teams coordinator for two years, then as the linebackers coach beginning in 2004, then adding the co-defensive coordinator title in 2005.

the chaos of today and the unknown future.

"Luke Fickell is going to be a great head coach," said OSU legend and College Football Hall of Fame member John Hicks. "Unfortunately, I wish he wouldn't have gotten it under these circumstances, but he will shine and he'll be a great leader for the program."

The 2011 season should serve as his audition, though OSU athletic director Gene Smith has always

said he's a proponent of wide-open national searches. At this stage, no reasonable national search could have been conducted now, so it was delayed until after the season. So expect Fickell to be a contender for the full-time job, though the Buckeyes should have some proven head coaches to choose from. Of course, if the program is hit with major NCAA sanctions, some potential hires may no longer be interested.

Fickell should always be interested.

"I'm excited for Coach Fickell, for Luke," former OSU receiver Anthony Gonzalez said after expressing his sadness over Tressel's departure. "As all Buckeye fans should, I'm fully supportive of him and wish him the best. He's worked hard and he deserves the opportunity he's getting."

At the start of spring practice, when Fickell was announced as the interim coach, he made it clear that the team still belonged to Tressel. He's in the process of realizing now that, at least for this season, it belongs to him.

"This place is not about one person. It's not about Coach Tressel, it's not about whoever is going to be wearing the headsets on Saturday afternoon. It's much bigger than that," Fickell said on that day in late March.

"And we always know that Ohio State never has been and never will be about just one person in particular. It's about Ohio State football and most importantly it's going to be about these 2011 Buckeyes."

Fickell learned under Cooper, Tressel

By **TIM MAY**

COLUMBUS DISPATCH

COLUMBUS — Luke Fickell was installed as Ohio State's 23rd head football coach Monday, in the wake of the ouster of Jim Tressel.

A warrior as a nose guard for the Buckeyes in the mid-1990s and a firebrand as a linebackers coach the past few years, the 37-year-old Fickell had been named assistant head coach in March. He also had been appointed the interim coach for what was expected to be a five-game suspension for Tressel to start the 2011 season.

Neither Fickell nor OSU athletic director Gene Smith was available for comment.

Certainly, it suddenly is a much bigger situation for Fickell. He has no head coaching experience, and now he's taken the reins of a program under intense NCAA scrutiny.

Fickell will lead a team that will be without five of its primary players "" quarterback Terrelle Pryor, running back Daniel Herron, receiver DeVier Posey, left tackle Mike Adams and defensive end Solomon Thomas "" through the first five games for NCAA violations related to their selling and trading of memorabilia for discounted tattoos.

In announcing the promotion in March, Smith praised Fickell's commitment to the Buckeyes.

"We have great trust and belief in Luke's ability to work with our entire



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel, right, walks away as assistant head coach Luke Fickell, left, looks over a list of plays during the first day of 2011 spring practice.

coaching staff to lead our young men through the first five games this fall," Smith said then. "I have confidence our entire football family will work together to maintain our standard of excellence."

Whether Fickell is ready for the full-time role is uncertain. But his athletic background shows he is a competitor.

At DeSales High School, Fickell was a three-time state wrestling champion, winning 108 matches as a heavyweight without a loss in his last three seasons. He also was an all-star football player, signing with Ohio State in 1992.

After a redshirt season, he started a school-record 50 straight games in the next four years, from 1993 to 1996.

During that span, the Buckeyes went 41-8-1 and shared in two Big Ten titles.

The last game of Fickell's streak was the Rose Bowl win over Arizona State. He played the entire game despite a torn pectoral muscle.

Not taken in the 1997 NFL draft, he signed as a free agent with New Orleans but never played. He spent a year on the injured-reserve list before being released.

Fickell graduated in 1997 and, in 1999, was named a graduate assistant coach by coach John Cooper. The next year, Fickell was hired by Akron as its defensive line coach.

In 2002, Tressel, in his second year with the Buckeyes, brought Fickell back as special teams coach. Fickell moved to linebackers coach in 2004 and a season later was elevated to co-defensive coordinator with Jim Heacock. He became assistant head coach when Darrell Hazell was hired to coach Kent State.

Now, Fickell is the man in charge. He indicated in March that he had learned much from nearly a decade working under Tressel.

"As a coach, from the time we walked into Ohio State or our first coaching job, we're always watching and learning," Fickell said. "That's the great thing about being here: having the ability to watch and learn from one of the best."

Ohio State faces uncertain future

By JILL RIEPENHOFF AND MIKE WAGNER
COLUMBUS DISPATCH

COLUMBUS — Beaten down by more than a decade of disappointments in big-time football games and off-the-field embarrassments, the Ohio State Buckeyes faithful soaked up the message as if it were a Sunday sermon:

“I can assure you that you’ll be proud of our young people in the classroom, in the community and, most especially, in 310 days in Ann Arbor, Mich.”

His newfound followers cheered. They clapped. But most of all, they wanted to believe.

In the decade since Jim Tressel made that bold statement on Jan. 18, 2001, the day he was hired as Ohio State’s football coach, Buckeye fans at times have beamed with pride for things that have happened off the field.

Tressel instilled a sense of Buckeye pride among his players. They were required to learn and sing Ohio State’s alma mater, “Carmen Ohio,” and memorize the names and hometowns of every teammate. They paraded to games at Ohio Stadium in dress shirts with ties or suits.

Tressel preached the value of an education. The team’s academic score now is the fifth best in the country among schools that play in the Football Bowl Subdivision, according to NCAA data released this month. OSU trails Northwestern, Rutgers, Northern Illinois, and Duke.

He and his wife, Ellen, have given generously in time and money to the OSU, Youngstown State and central Ohio communities. They were co-chairmen of fundraising for the OSU library expansion and contributed \$100,000 to the cause. They’ve visited the sick and injured.

Back when he first became a head coach, at Youngstown in 1986, Tressel began compiling quotes, motivational sayings, poems — anything that struck him as useful in guiding his players to reach their potential, on and off the field. That motivational material eventually became one of his signature teaching tools — a loose-leaf binder that every one of his players was given and had to read.

He called it the “Winners Manual” and, in 2008, it was converted into a book. Tressel donated all of the profits to the OSU library fund.

The book was overtly spiritual, filled with Bible quotes, and contained his “Big Ten” fundamentals



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Ohio State football coach Jim Tressel, left, is flanked by athletic director Gene Smith during a news conference Tuesday, March 8, 2011, in Columbus.

for being successful. It sold well, landing at No. 3 on the New York Times bestseller list among advice books.

Tressel also made his players read a book each summer and then write a book report during preseason camp. One year, it was about developing into a leader. Another year, it was about Navy SEALs training. Most recently, the players studied World War II, because the 1942 OSU national championship team was to be honored during the 2010 season.

He was serious about being well-rounded, despite the uncounted hours he spent in the football office.

“I think we have a good perspective of where football is in our whole scheme of things,” Tressel said in 2009. “It’s our passion — it’s what we love to do — but it’s not who we are.”

In February, the publishing company released a smaller, repackaged version of the Winner’s Manual, called *Life Promises for Success: Promises from God*. Tressel was conducting a book signing on March 7 in a Columbus grocery store when news of his NCAA vio-

lation first was reported.

One area in which Tressel became more involved as time went on was helping the U.S. military. He reached out to service men and women, issuing open invitations for them to attend practices, or even providing them tickets to games.

In June 2009, Tressel joined other coaches in visiting the Middle East to spread cheer among the military. He was profoundly affected.

“It humbled you to think how unselfish these men and women are,” said Tressel, who last season was honored by the Ohio National Guard with its Patrick Henry Award.

It was in the context of all that good that OSU president E. Gordon Gee said of Tressel this year, “His integrity and the body of his work is quite remarkable.”

But his decade-long tenure at Ohio State also was pocked with off-the-field issues.

During his first season, Tressel suspended Steve Bellisari after the starting quarterback was arrested for drunken driving. “This can be a good life lesson,” Tressel said.

The suspension contributed to a loss to Illinois.

Since then, at least two dozen other players and recruits have been arrested.

Some were sent to Tressel’s doghouse; others just disappeared from campus.

Many fans excused Tressel from blame because they said he couldn’t monitor the behavior of 19- and 20-year-old kids 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

But it was the NCAA trouble that began in 2003 with running back Maurice Clarett that helped secure Tressel’s nickname of “Senator” because of his ability to keep his players’ problems from tarnishing his image and because of his knack of saying little with a lot of words.

The NCAA and Ohio State suspended Clarett, a freshman phenom who played a major role in securing Tressel’s only OSU national championship. Investigators accused Clarett of accepting thousands of dollars worth of extra benefits.

He never played another down of football for OSU, but Tressel remained loyal to his one-time star. After Clarett’s release from prison for weapons crimes last year, Tressel urged a judge to allow him to lift a probation term that prevented him from leaving the state for a football tryout.

The year after Clarett’s problems, quarterback Troy Smith found himself on the sidelines with an NCAA suspension for accepting cash from a booster.

Two years later, Tressel choked back his emotions as the oncescandalized athlete accepted the Heisman Trophy.

“It was such a special night, when you think about all that Troy has gone through and what this means to he and his teammates and Ohio State, and it’s just a great reminder how blessed we are to work with him,” Tressel said that night.

Tressel escaped both scandals with his integrity intact in the eyes of his bosses at Ohio State: then-athletic director Andy Geiger, who hired him, and then-OSU president Karen Holbrook.

But his image took a direct and ultimately fatal hit last December, when the U.S. Department of Justice informed the university that federal agents had recovered OSU football memorabilia during a raid at a suspected drug dealer’s house.

That tip led to an 11-day investigation by Ohio State that resulted in the announcement on

Dec. 23 that quarterback Terrelle Pryor, running back Daniel Herron, receiver DeVier Posey, lineman Mike Adams and defensive end Solomon Thomas would sit out the first five games of the 2011 season but, thanks to the NCAA, play in the upcoming Sugar Bowl.

The decision outraged many college football fans — here and nationwide — who thought the players should have been suspended from the bowl game, as well.

In an attempt to tip the scales of public opinion, Tressel announced days before the game that he had made the players promise to return next season and serve their punishment instead of bolting for the NFL.

All the while, though, Tressel was keeping a secret from his OSU bosses: He knew in April that those players had sold memorabilia in exchange for tattoos and cash. Those transactions are NCAA rules violations that render an athlete ineligible to compete, and Tressel knew that, too.

Even when it found that out, OSU stood by Tressel, although it suspended him for the first two games of the upcoming season. Tressel eventually upped his suspension to match that of his players — five games.

“Throughout this entire situation, my players and I have committed ourselves to facing our mistakes and growing from them; we can only successfully do that together,” Tressel said in a statement in March.

Bit by bit, though, the depth of the coverup became public. Tressel had talked about the situation to a Columbus lawyer, Pryor’s mentor and an FBI agent. He had forwarded emails. Possibly the most egregious action was his having signed an NCAA compliance form affirming that he knew of no violations.

The program now faces an uncertain future, with NCAA sanctions a near-certainty. Ohio State must appear before the association’s infractions committee in August. If he wants to coach at an NCAA school again, Tressel will have to be there, too.

In a video statement posted by OSU on YouTube yesterday, athletic director Gene Smith thanked Tressel for “his long service to our university. There were a lot of people that he touched in a highly positive way.”

Dispatch reporter Ken Gordon contributed to this story.

Tressel restored glory to Buckeyes

By TIM MAY
COLUMBUS DISPATCH

COLUMBUS — Late on Jan. 3, 2003, coach Jim Tressel stood on the portable awards stand in the middle of Sun Devil Stadium in Tempe, Ariz. His second Ohio State team had just upset the Miami for college football’s national championship, OSU’s first since 1968.

In the midst of the postgame bedlam, Tressel held the Bowl Championship Series crystal football in his hands while Buckeye Nation rejoiced at his feet.

“We have always had the best damn band in the land,” Tressel bellowed over the stadium’s public-address system. “Now we have the best damn team in the land.”

In less than two years on the job, Tressel had rustled the Buckeyes from the doldrums of the final two seasons of coach John Cooper’s tenure.

Cooper had gone 2-10-1 against rival Michigan in his 13 seasons and flirted with but failed to land a national championship in the last three of those seasons. Tressel already had matched that win total over Michigan in his first two years, and in his hands that night he held the grand prize.

On the field, there was no doubt about it: Tressel was getting the job done. OSU had just become the first major college team to go 14-0 in one season. It was the acceleration point of the winningest 10-year run in Ohio State football history.

How tarnished that golden age now will become remains to be seen in the wake of Tressel’s unexpected resignation, one that was encouraged by university officials.

It also remains to be seen whether OSU will have to vacate some or all of the wins from the 2010 season, in which the Buckeyes went 12-1 using players who were later deemed to have broken NCAA rules — something Tressel paved the way for as early as April 2010. Tressel and OSU officials are scheduled to go before the NCAA committee on infractions Aug. 12, after which further penalties could be assessed.

Regardless, Tressel’s reputation and career have taken a massive hit, to the point that the Buckeyes’ win over Southeastern Conference foe Arkansas in the Sugar Bowl in

January might have been his last major college game.

He walked out of the Superdome that January night in New Orleans with a 241-79-2 record in his 25-year career, making him the second-winningest active coach in major college football behind Penn State’s Joe Paterno (401-135-3). Tressel was 135-57-2 in 15 seasons at Youngstown State, part of the Football Championship Subdivision, and 106-22 at Ohio State.

Tressel won four national titles at YSU, and his team played for it two other times. That’s the main reason OSU came calling after then-athletic director Andy Geiger fired Cooper following the Outback Bowl loss to South Carolina on Jan. 1, 2001.

Tressel didn’t turn the ship around immediately. His 2001 team went 7-5, also losing to South Carolina in the Outback. But the Buckeyes built some late-season momentum on the strength of a 26-20 upset win at Michigan and a 31-28 loss to the Gamecocks in the bowl, a game in which OSU trailed 28-0 in the third quarter.

The momentum carried through the recruiting season as the Buckeyes reeled in the No. 2-ranked class in the nation for 2002, which included running back Maurice Clarett.

The stage was set for the magical run to the 2002 national title, led by quarterback Craig Krenzel and a stout defense and capped by the double-overtime win over Miami in the Fiesta.

OSU returned to the Fiesta Bowl the following year, beating Kansas State, but the next season the Buckeyes suffered on-field hiccups for the first time. Ohio State lost its first three Big Ten games, including a loss to Northwestern for the first time since 1971.

But the Buckeyes rallied at the end of the year behind quarterback Troy Smith to upset Michigan and win the Alamo Bowl to finish 8-4, despite Smith’s suspension from the bowl and the 2005 opener for accepting \$500 from a booster.

Tressel went on to guide Ohio State to two more national championship games — after the 2006 and ’07 seasons — and lost both.

The first might have been the most humiliating defeat in Tressel’s career, a 41-14 loss at the hands of Florida in Glendale, Ariz.



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OSU coach Jim Tressel holds the championship trophy after the Buckeyes beat Miami 31-24 to win the Fiesta Bowl, Jan. 3, 2003.

Smith — after leading his team to the “game of the century” win over No. 2 Michigan and then winning the Heisman Trophy — and the OSU offense were all but no-shows against the Gators.

The next season, the Buckeyes were outscored 38-24 by Louisiana State in the 2007 title game, casting doubt on whether Tressel could win the really big game again.

But in his own Big Ten backyard, Tressel dominated. In 10 seasons, his OSU teams won or shared seven Big Ten titles, including the league record-tying streak of six through last year, matching the mark set by Woody Hayes’ Ohio State teams from 1972-77.

During Tressel’s 10-year reign, he owned “The Game” like no other OSU coach, going 9-1 against Michigan.

That helped explain why they were almost always in line for an invitation to a Bowl Championship Series game at regular season’s end. While the Buckeyes went 6-4 in bowls overall under Tressel, they were 5-3 in BCS games, including 1-2 in the national-championship matches.

And just when it seemed Tressel

had lost his postseason edge, dropping three straight to Florida, LSU and Texas (in the Fiesta Bowl after the 2008 season), his teams rebounded to beat Arkansas in the Sugar.

Among many Ohio State fans, however, the winning was only half the battle. As the years went on, Tressel became a popular target among fans who did not appreciate his “Tressel Ball” approach. Some cursed his seeming timidity when it came time to render the killer blow.

It last reared its ugly head in the second half of the win over Arkansas. After taking a big lead, the Buckeyes wound up in a fight for their lives, escaping with the 31-26 victory only after a late interception by defensive end Solomon Thomas — following a punt block by Arkansas — saved the day.

But that’s part of what Tressel was as a coach. The day he took the job, he proclaimed that “the most important play in football is the punt,” taking a page from the book written by John Wilce, the first great OSU coach.

Critics never took wholeheartedly to Tressel’s approach on offense. Still, when his team had the lead midway through the third quarter of games, he usually did

flip down to the conservative run-it-down-their-throat-or-punt segment of the play sheet.

Having a stout running game was at the heart of his philosophy because in Big Ten country it served the team well in cold Novembers and usually meant the defense wasn’t put in jeopardy. He often said he had little to do with the defense, leaving it up to his coordinators, who included Mark Dantonio, now the head coach at Michigan State, the first few years and Jim Heacock the past six seasons.

“Get lined up right, and play fast” was Tressel’s primary message to his defensive coaches, meaning he wanted a unit that was sound and always ran to the ball. That was the hallmark of most OSU defenses the past 10 years.

But what baffled those who watched and even played for the Buckeyes was the way Tressel tinkered with the offense regularly. Though Jim Bollman held the title of offensive coordinator, Tressel primarily called the plays. And through all 10 years, those on the inside said Tressel was known for bringing in a batch of new tricks from week to week to be run or thrown from sometimes odd formations.

Tressel Ball or not, the Smith-led Ohio State offense in 2005 and 2006 was as consistently potent as any in the country. It was forecast to be that way again when the Buckeyes landed quarterback Terrelle Pryor, the No. 1 overall prospect in the country, in 2008.

Instead, the past two years the Buckeyes only flirted with a run at the national title, though they did get the postseason monkey off their backs with Pryor-led wins over Oregon and Arkansas.

The 2011 season had promised to present Tressel with his greatest test in coaching. Not only was he going to be suspended for the first five games after admitting to his NCAA violation, so were Pryor and running back Daniel Herron, receiver DeVier Posey, offensive tackle Mike Adams and Thomas.

Team insiders talked about how Tressel actually relished the challenge, much as he readied Krenzel, then an inexperienced sophomore, for his first collegiate start in the 2001 Michigan game.

Transcript of AD's video on Tressel resignation

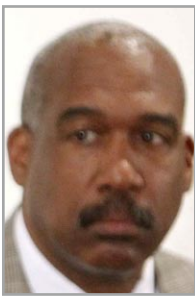
ASSOCIATED PRESS

COLUMBUS — The text of Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith's video provided by the university Monday in the wake of head football coach Jim Tressel's resignation:

"Buckeye Nation, by now you have news that our head football coach, Jim Tressel, has decided to resign. We announced it this morning.

"I want you to know that last night, Sunday night, when Jim returned from his vacation, he and I sat down for a while and talked about the state of our program. It was at that time that he decided to resign. We met again this morning in his office and chatted some more and he submitted his formal letter of resignation. We did meet with part of the team this morning. Those who were not there, they were contacted by their position coaches. But coach Tressel did what we all knew he would do. He did an eloquent job of explaining to the young men what transition really means and what they really needed to focus on. So he met with the team and exited.

"Prior to the team meeting I did meet with the coaching staff and the support staff around our football program and shared with them that Jim had decided to resign. But prior to that I met with Luke Fickell and asked him to be our interim head football coach through the 2011 season,



Smith

which he agreed to do. So when we met with the team, Luke had an opportunity to share some things with the team and he did an excellent job of talking about the things that are important.

"This happens to be finals week. They obviously need to focus on finishing their classes, which is really what we're all about — making sure they get their education and their degrees. We are coming off of a time frame where our football program achieved its highest academic rating ever. So we're proud of that accomplishment of those young men and we want to stay on that trajectory and Luke and this staff are committed to surrounding them with the support that they need to make sure they stay focused in that regard.

"As you all know, we are under NCAA investigation. We will not discuss any of the matters around that case or any further accusations that may emerge. We will do what we always do. We respond to them, we collaborate with the NCAA and try and find the truth.

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

Inevitable

Continued from Page e1

championship. "It's very important for us Buckeye fans and alumni to remember all of the great things that he did and the positive impact he and his players have had on the community over the last 10 years," said Craig Krenzler, who was the quarterback on the 2002 team.

Replacing Tressel on an interim basis will be defensive coordinator Luke Fickell. Fickell, 37, grew up in Columbus and played for the Buckeyes from 1992-96.

OSU officials will not begin recruitment of a new coach until the conclusion of the 2011 season. Many fans have clamored for Urban Meyer, the two-time national champion coach who was once a graduate assistant at OSU. Meyer, who resigned from Florida after the 2010 season, plans to take this season off from coaching and serve as an analyst for ESPN. Prior to Florida, he was the head coach at Bowling Green and Utah.

Lifelong Ohio State fan Demian Browning of Sylvania views Tressel's resignation as a minor setback to one of the nation's most prolific college football programs.

"[Ohio State] will still win," he said.

Gary Hollon of Sylvania said he thought the situation could have been handled differently.

"I hate to see him go the way he did," Hollon said.

Blade staff writer Taylor Dungen contributed to this report.



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Ohio State coach Jim Tressel and quarterback Terrelle Pryor (2) lead the Buckeyes in singing 'Carmen Ohio,' the school's alma mater after defeating Michigan 37-7 last year in Columbus. Tressel had a 9-1 record against the rival Wolverines.

Players , fans still support Tressel

ASSOCIATED PRESS

COLUMBUS — As others labeled him a cheater and liar, Ohio State fans stood by Jim Tressel on Monday as the coach resigned amid an NCAA investigation into the football program.

A red spray-painted "Tressel til I die" banner hung over a porch near campus, and members of "Buckeye Nation" on Twitter continued to sing praises for the coach who led the team to a national championship and lost to rival Michigan only once in his 10 years at the helm of the Buckeyes.

Ohio State announced the resignation as the athletic department approaches an Aug. 12 date with the NCAA's infractions committee over several possible rules violations stemming from players selling memorabilia to the owner of a local tattoo shop.

Buckeyes fans and players immediately came to Tressel's defense.

Startinglinebacker Andrew Sweat tweeted, "You have done a tremendous amount for us as football players but more importantly developing us as men." Former tight end Jake Ballard called Tressel "one of the best human beings I have ever met" and said "all he ever did was care and help people."

Students on campus also rallied around their former coach.

Matt Parker and Curt Stine, who graduate this spring, heard honks from passing motorists and words of support from pedestrians after they turned a white blanket into their "Tressel til I die" banner and hung it above their porch.

"A lot of the students here love Tressel because of all the winning we've done recently, especially beating Michigan," said Parker, a political science major planning to attend law school at the University at Buffalo.

Parker, 22, said he wasn't surprised by the resignation itself, but by its timing, about three months after Ohio State president E. Gordon Gee and athletic director Gene Smith had expressed their support for the coach.

"I figured he was our coach and we were going to fight through it with him," said Stine, 21, a political science major and logistics manager for UPS. "I don't think it was his decision so much as the athletic department putting pressure."

In March, Ohio State announced it had suspended Tressel for two games and fined him \$250,000 for failing to report what he knew about players receiving improper benefits from the tattoo-parlor owner. The suspension was later increased to five games, the same punishment given five players who sold memorabilia, including star quarterback Terrelle Pryor.

"Coach Jim Tressel has made positive contributions to Ohio State and its student athletes during his tenure," Big Ten commissioner Jim Delany wrote in a statement on Monday. "He has also acknowledged making a serious mistake and his resignation today is an indication that serious mistakes have serious consequences."

Tressel, 58, had a record of 106-22-0 in 10 years at Ohio State. He led the Buckeyes to a national championship and eight Bowl Championship Series games. Prior to taking over the Buckeyes, he had a 135-57-2 record in 15 years at Youngstown State.

Nebraska coach Bo Pelini, who grew up in Youngstown and played



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Ohio State students Matt Parker, left, and Curt Stine hang a sign on their porch near campus, in support of Ohio State coach Jim Tressel

Students react to football without Tressel

By COLLIN BINKLEY

COLUMBUS DISPATCH

COLUMBUS — Ohio State University junior Eilen Liu had planned to buy football tickets for her senior year. Singing the school songs and rooting on the team for the last time as a student is almost a rite of passage.

But her optimism in the team's future — and her eagerness to open her wallet — faded yesterday when Jim Tressel resigned as coach.

"I kind of changed my plans," said Liu, 21, a junior human resources major. "I just don't think it would be as exciting. Part of the reason to go see it is Tressel and his vest."

Other students say they, too, are rethinking plans to buy tickets when they go on sale this week.

Without Tressel in command, students say, they might not be so quick to plunk down \$170 for a package of five home games.

"Now that Tressel's gone, I don't know how good this new coach is

going to be," said Michele Brizgys, 20, a sophomore studying chemical engineering. "I don't want to pay to see them lose."

News of the coach's resignation traveled quickly around campus yesterday.

Dan Ebert, a 26-year-old graduate student in mechanical engineering, was surprised by the email OSU President E. Gordon Gee sent announcing the resignation.

"I thought he would be able to stay on for this year and maybe be able to resign after the year," he said. "I didn't expect to wake up today and find that out."

Many students seemed to have mixed feelings about the news. Some remembered how Tressel revitalized the football program.

"But he did break the rules," said Steven Friedberg, 18, a freshman civil engineering student. "It was a pretty serious thing."

Other students weren't so quick to pass judgment.

"I don't think he's the only coach

... dealing with that right now. I think it's pretty much a nationwide problem. He's just the only one who got caught," said Mike Perko, 21, a junior studying strategic communication.

The announcement's timing was a sore spot for some fans roaming campus yesterday.

Jim Hettinger was celebrating his 63rd birthday yesterday with a walk around campus with his sister, Barb. Both call themselves Buckeye fans.

Once a year, he visits from San Diego and takes a walk around campus.

Jim Hettinger also is a Navy veteran who served in Vietnam. Both siblings said they were disappointed that the university announced the news on a day reserved to honor those who have died in military service.

"I think they could have waited a day," Barb Hettinger said. "In my estimation, that was a bad call."

Dispatch sports reporter Tom Reed contributed to this story.

free safety at Ohio State, issued a statement calling Tressel "an outstanding football coach and a good man."

"I've followed and respected his career since his days at Youngstown State, and through his tremendous success at Ohio State the past decade," he said. "He will be missed in college football."

Alumni who rang in to support the coach were surprised by the resignation.

"I was completely shocked and saddened by it," said Eddie Langhenry, a 2008 graduate in sports and leisure studies who grew up in Cleveland. "I wouldn't deny he did something wrong, but thought he was going to serve his penalty and coach through it."

Tamiaka Cobb, a 2003 graduate, said she "immediately just stopped" when she heard about the resignation.

"I couldn't believe it," said Cobb,

29, a real estate agent in Columbus. "It's like the end of era."

Cobb grew up in Youngstown watching Tressel coach the Penguins and said he "always put his players first."

"It's like he sacrificed himself for his players," she said. "He wants to make sure his players have a good career after all this over with."

Ohio State said linebackers coach Luke Fickell will serve as interim coach for the 2011 season and a search for a Tressel replacement will start after the season. Fickell already had been selected to be the interim coach while Tressel served the five-game suspension.

Langhenry, 25, said he believes Ohio State will still be among the top college football teams in the country.

"It's Ohio State. They'll be fine," he said. "They'll take it. They'll recover."

Parker said he hopes the resigna-

tion, by separating the coach from the school, helps the university as it heads into the NCAA infraction hearing. He said he hopes Ohio state doesn't see players transferring, withdrawing commitments or playing for rivals.

"If we lose some of our top recruits from Michigan," he said, "that would be the worst thing I think."

But the beat goes on for Ohio State officials, who still have to prepare to go before the NCAA in August.

"Since Ohio State discovered and received information indicating possible violations in its football program in December 2010, it has consistently reported the information in a timely and collaborative way to the NCAA," Delany said. "The Big Ten Conference regards this approach as fundamental and necessary and has confidence that Ohio State will continue in this manner with regard to any newly discovered or reported information."