

July 24, 2008



An Interview With:

COACH JIM TRESSEL

COACH TRESSEL: It's an exciting time for all of us coaches to get ready to get back at it. It's hard to believe when you look at some of your older guys and think about the fact they've been with us for four or five years and they're getting ready to head into their last go-around and think about all the growth they've had and the experiences they've had. And we have good fortune from the standpoint of returning a number of guys who have experienced a lot of things, a lot of great things and some things that weren't the way that we'd hoped they'd happen. In fact, we have I think 40 guys on our rosters right now that are entering years four or five and there's a little challenge there in our eyes to make sure that those guys come back into training camp, they don't think it's same-old-same-old, and I know what's going to happen today, tomorrow and the next, so it's a lot of fun.

I'm sure the reason you like doing what you do is because every day is different, every year is different and that's the fun of heading into another preseason. We're excited about our football team. We have a number of kids that we know, enjoy being at Ohio State and being a part of the great tradition and living with the great expectations.

We think we'll have excellent leadership. We don't know much about our leadership until it's tested, until there's some adverse times and some times that they really need to take charge. We're excited about our guys who are moving from rocky status into the status of having the opportunity to contribute a little bit more, and we're also excited about new guys that are coming into the program.

All of our freshmen had a chance to be with us this summer and all reports that we got is that they seem to be a good bunch of guys working

extremely hard, and we're excited about August 3rd as we return for the preseason.

Q. Coach, you're 6-1 against Michigan in seven years. To what do you attribute your success against Michigan and is this perhaps the best rivalry in all of sports?

COACH TRESSEL: We've had very good players. I think if you look at the last six or seven years' draft boards in the NFL, we've had a significant number of guys that have had a chance to go on to the next level. We've had excellent quality leadership over the course of time. We've been very fortunate.

I think guys that choose to come to Ohio State, a large part of it is they have a chance to play in a great rivalry. It's exciting for them. So the ball has bounced right a few times, we're not afraid to admit that, and it's just tremendous being part of that rivalry, and what's important to us is what happens in 2008 not what has happened in the past.

Q. You probably heard Carson Palmer's comments?

COACH TRESSEL: I didn't see them but I caught wind of them.

Q. Did you celebrate by sending him an Ohio State jersey?

COACH TRESSEL: No, it just tells you one thing, he's proud of the place he played and he lives with us in Ohio and I'm sure he gets to hear a lot about the Buckeyes. And I'm sure he's excited about the fact that we get to play against his alma mater and you know Woody used to always say, whether they're talking good or talking bad, keep them talking.

Q. Coach, I just wanted to know how soon you plan on incorporating Terrelle Pryor in your offense and how much of a role he'll have this year?

COACH TRESSEL: August 4th he gets to start practicing. He's going to be incorporated into

our offense that day. He's got a lot of things that he's got to build as a foundation. The communication system, the way that we do things, the way that our things work together, but he's the kind of guy that as I've gotten to know him more and more, knowing exactly what's going on is very important to him. He loves to train. He loves to compete. He's got great ability, so I would think that from day one he'll be a guy that you're going to take notice of.

Q. Coach, 20 returning starters this year. Can you talk a little bit about the difference in preseason preparation coming off of the two National Championship games the last couple years, if any?

COACH TRESSEL: Well, you mentioned 20 returning guys, and I mentioned that we have 40 guys that have been there, entering their fourth or their fifth year. One of the things we've discussed a lot is making sure that you continue to challenge guys and not have them come into preseason camp thinking it's the same-old-same-old.

So we'll challenge them intellectually, we'll challenge them physically. We'll try to get a handle on where we are. I think an assumption that you make with 20 returning starters is that you're already at a certain level. I think that would be a false assumption. You have to go back and make sure fundamentally we are very, very good.

I think our guys love to compete. I hope they've learned lessons from those two games you brought up. Hopefully they learned lessons from the other 24 games they've had a part of over the last two seasons, but I think you can't forget about the fact that there are some guys that need to start from square one also.

So there's a good blend, a good mesh of what you've got to try to do in the preseason camp, and the fun part of preseason, it's a two-and-a-half, three-week time where you're really focused all day long on football unlike any other time of the year. Once school begins once you're in spring practices, whatever you've got, X number of minutes and hours with them.

But preseason you get to make a lot of tracks, a lot of work and hopefully we'll make it creative enough and new enough and challenging enough that we can take them from wherever they are now into the next level.

Q. A lot of interest in your game out at USC. Talk about that challenge of going out to Los Angeles and playing a team that has only lost one home game in the last six seasons.

COACH TRESSEL: One of the things that philosophically we decided on a number of years ago is that we always wanted to have a national home and home series in our every-two-year schedule. That's why we set that up with Texas and that's why we have that set up here with Southern Cal. And it's an exciting thing when you talk to guys in recruiting, that hey, you're going to have a chance to not only play in the great Big Ten Conference and have a chance to see if you can earn a bowl game opportunity, but you're also going to have a home game with Southern Cal and two years later with Miami Florida and so forth. And how difficult is the challenge? Tremendously difficult. You go into the Southern Cal team, Coach Carroll has done a great job not just with the fact that he has great talent, but his folks have tremendous fundamentals and they're well schooled. They bring a lot at you, so it's a tremendous challenge.

I think every single one of our guys knows that and we look forward to having that opportunity.

Q. Jim, you guys are the overwhelming No. 1 pick in this conference in the preseason poll with Wisconsin, Illinois, but there's no Michigan or Penn State in that top three. How accurate do you think that poll is?

COACH TRESSEL: It hasn't been very accurate in the past, which is a little frightening. But, you know, it's really kind of irrelevant because there is Penn State, there is Michigan, there is Michigan State, there is Purdue, there is Minnesota and on and on and on, and you have to line up. You get to line-up against eight folks in your league to see who the champion can be, and outside of this next week or two there's not much discussion on the preseason poll.

Q. Good afternoon, Coach. Like you just said, you guys were picked to win the conference, and is there any pressure, and do you like buying favorites this early on?

COACH TRESSEL: Well, among the Ohio State faithful we're expected to win the conference every year and just like the other coaches are at their places. I don't know that that adds anything.

I think had our guys come to play at Ohio State or come to coach at Ohio State they understand that the expectation is that we want to deserve to be the Big Ten Champions, and that's what it is. And just because a poll said so before the year, I don't know if that adds anything.

We've got a lot of guys who have been here and seen a preseason poll come up while they've been here and seen that it hasn't always been accurate, so maybe that will be a good reminder for us.

Q. Coach, what differences have you season in quarterback Todd Boeckman now in his first full year as a starter?

COACH TRESSEL: Well, Todd now has a body of work that he can evaluate, and he has some experiences that he now has seen instead of being in a practice field or sitting in a media room having a ball cap on and signaling a player. He's got some real-life experiences. There's no price tag on experience, and he can now evaluate things from a whole different perspective.

I think it's a lot easier for him to step up and take charge of a football team. I'm sure as he came into last year, part of him was saying, hey, I have to prove to these guys I can be a quarterback and now he has proven to them that he's been their quarterback, and I think it will be a little easier for him to take things and take charge and be in command and all those things that you would love from your quarterback, and along the way, though, evaluate himself where he needs to get better with his individual performance.

Q. Jim, I asked Coach Tiller the same question. Joe Paterno is in the last year of contract. His future won't be decided until the last game of the season. There's a possibility that he won't return. Can you imagine Penn State without Joe?

COACH TRESSEL: It hasn't been in my coaching lifetime, that's for sure. This is my 34th year of college coaching, and he's been the head coach at Penn State throughout my coaching lifetime. He's been extraordinary for the game. He's helped not just the game of football but he's helped intercollegiate athletics through hurdles and so many things. It will be hard to imagine, but if I were a betting man I'd say he'll be there in 2009.

Q. Coach, did you pick out a dark horse in the Big Ten Conference this year or do you think that might be overlooked?

COACH TRESSEL: Well, you know, it's got to be one of those eight that we play. That wouldn't be right if it's not that. You know, I really couldn't. We look at every team we play the week we play them as being the folks that we have to beat to become the Big Ten Champions, and every single group on our schedule, you could go right down and we could talk about why we think they're going to be a better football team.

I think the Big Ten in 2008 is going to be better than it was in '06 and '07. I think there are more returning players. Obviously we think that this is the finest group of coaches in America. It's just what we believe of one another. So when you do line up in the Big Ten, I'm sure like every other conference feels about themselves, every team could be the champion, and it would be impossible for me to see a dark horse.

Q. Coach, do you think it's fair that perception of the conference of you guys in particular has been kind of pinned to like basically four BCS games, two by you guys the last two years, two Rose Bowl games the last two years, as the conference being down or the conference might not be what you guys may have first thought? Is that a fair assessment and do you understand where that comes from?

COACH TRESSEL: Well, I know from our standpoint where it comes from is we played the National Championship the last two years and haven't been successful, so is that fair? I think that's fair we haven't been successful. Should that paint a picture of our whole conference? I don't think so.

But it also makes me feel a little disappointed that our performance in two championship games I guess brushes with a wider brush or whatever they say, but I don't think it's fair. But what I think doesn't matter and what you think doesn't matter, either.

What happens in the games matters, and so that's why we are excited about preseason and we get to play the games and we'll find out how it looks in 2008.

Q. Coach, would getting to a National Championship Game and losing it again, would that have a positive outlook looking back on it for you or would that be a negative or a disappointing season for you if it happened again?

COACH TRESSEL: Well, if that happened again that means we were the Big Ten Champions, and I would never be disappointed about being the Big Ten Champions; I would be very proud of that. If we got to the game and didn't win it and didn't play as well as we were capable of playing or didn't prepare as well as we were capable, obviously I would be disappointed in that, so I guess that was a bad answer.

JULIE DUNN: Thanks, Coach.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports