

January 4, 2009



An interview with:

OHIO STATE COACH JIM TRESSEL

COACH TRESSEL: It is exciting that it is almost game day. Our guys have had a tremendous week here, and as always the folks from the Tostitos Fiesta Bowl are extraordinary. The folks from the entire Valley of the Sun are tremendous. We can't wait to get out to Glendale this afternoon to have our guys see the stadium and walk through and then wish the game were tomorrow at about noon, but we'll have to anguish through that -- the long day for those later games.

Our kids are excited. They worked extremely hard. I can't ask any more from them, from our staff. We're proud of our fans that have come out and supported us and supported the Phoenix area and supported the Tostitos Fiesta Bowl.

It is just an honor and a pleasure to be a part of this great week.

Q. Coach Brown talked about how similar the two programs are, two prestigious football programs and they are very similar. Can you comment on that?

COACH TRESSEL: I think you can go all the way from very similar institutions: great research institutions, some of the greatest things being done in the world in terms of research and education and educating thousands of kids a year and the culture of both of our states is that we love football. It is deeply intertwined in who we are.

We have that great legacy at both institutions, that football has been successful many, many times. To have a chance to put both of those similar groups in one stage here in the greatest Bowl there is, it is a lot of fun.

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Q. Coach Brown earlier had mentioned when looks at Terrelle Pryor he sees a young Vince Young. Could you comment on that similarity?

COACH TRESSEL: Well, I think when all of us during the recruiting stages were watching Terrelle, that was the first person that came to mind because Vince had just had that tremendous success in taking his team to the national championship and going on and doing very well in the professional ranks.

And I remember talking with Mack about that very thing. We were at an American Football Coaches board meeting during the year prior to his -- to Terrelle signing and so forth, he really felt that he did look similar to Vince in high school. I'm sure as he watches him now, he feels as if that is that type of young man. He works at it extremely hard. I'm sure deep down one of the role models he has for playing that position, and we certainly hope he becomes as good as Vince Young by, like, Monday (smiling).

Q. Coach Brown mentioned he thought there was more pressure on Texas and that they would see a loose Jim Tressel really going for it and that he would have the guns drawn. I'm not sure "loose" is the word I would use to describe you. Are you feeling loose?

COACH TRESSEL: Oh, I'm loose. I think more than loose I'm just appreciative to be out here and you think about the opportunity, especially for our 28 seniors, that you do want to let it all hang out. This is their last opportunity and you are not going to hold anything in reserve and playing against a great team. Arguably the best team in the country.

I don't know that I would consider it -- you are just going to waltz out and casually play the ball game. We prepared extremely hard. It is very important to us. But we're not going to hold

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anything in reserve, that's for sure.

Q. Speaking of those 28 seniors, given their quantity and the quality of all they have accomplished during their career, what sort of emotions do you anticipate feeling tomorrow as you say good-bye? What sort of message do you send to them?

COACH TRESSEL: Just the other day when we were right back in this facility for media day we were sitting around waiting our turn. A lot of those guys were talking about the fact that, man, on Tuesday their whole life is going to change as they have known it for the last four or five years. That was a little bit frightening to them, and a little bit special to them.

There will be a wide range of emotions because we've got guys who have done extraordinary things on and off the field, made an impact in our community and on our campus and in the game. We have had some guys with tough situations arise in their lives, in their football careers and all the rest. There is a huge range of emotions.

Probably the most difficult emotion all of us will have, which I have always felt on the last day of the season, whether it was playing in a national championship game, a Bowl game or the last game of a regular season and that was going to be it, this group as it is this moment will never be together again the same way. You could never have that back.

People keep great records of how many games you won and all those types of things. The thing I have always cherished is the process toward those records. That's what -- that's what you'll miss. They'll tell you they are going to miss the times in the weight room getting after each other, in the locker room and on the practice field and on Bowl trips and all those kinds of things.

So it is a special time, and in other ways it is a little bit of a sad time.

Q. Is Beanie as primed as you have seen him in a while? He seems like he wants to make a statement in this game. Does it come down to you guys being able to control or stop their passing game and them being able to control and stop your running game?

COACH TRESSEL: I would say this: I think Beanie is really excited. Beanie has the same emotions toward those 28 guys as the rest of us do. It is really important to him to do the best he can possibly do. And so I don't know if he is as

interested in making a statement for Beanie as he is for his teammates.

As far as is it that simple as to the outcome of the game? I think every play is going to have a chance to make the difference in the game, whether it's a punt return or a field goal snap or an open field tackle on one of the great Texas receivers or us coming up with a big catch or us diving for the first down.

That's the beautiful part of football. There will be, I don't know, 175 total plays or whatever and you don't know which one is going to be the different maker. That's why you have to play each one of them like that will be the difference.

Will there be moments we got to make sure we try to contain that great passing offense? Absolutely. But you better tackle the run game too. You better tackle them when you punt it to them, kick it off to them and all the rest. Yes, we need to do a good job of running the football, but we better throw it too because if we don't run it effectively, we probably won't be able to run it.

The beautiful part of football is it is all tied together.

Q. Two questions about the offensive line. First, Mike Brewster as a freshman center, what progress have you seen from him during Bowl practice? And where is he as he gets ready for this game? Also, the other day Jim Bollman said if the game was that day, Ben Person would have been the starting left guard, Steve Rehring at right guard, and Jim Cordle working in. Has anything changed with that?

COACH TRESSEL: That will be the rotation for now. Jim missed a good bit of the practice back home and has done all the practice here, and Ben took all the snaps back home. So Ben will begin the game, but Jimmy is going to play plenty.

As far as Mike Brewster, I think he has evolved throughout the whole season, all the way from whatever it was, Game 3 or 4 when he took over the center duties and all those guys next to him helped him figure it out. I think he is a little bit closer now to the point where he has a little bit more of it figured out on his own, although he sure counts on help from the veterans, I'm sure.

The Bowl practice was very valuable for him because he lined up against our guys every day and they put pressure on you, and so this experience against a great Texas front will be

another great thing for Michael Brewster as he tries to develop and become a very, very good center.

Q. Along those same lines, can you just talk about what jumps out at you about the Texas defense?

COACH TRESSEL: Speed to start with. I mean, those guys can run. They're always in the right place. They play with a lot of enthusiasm. They just keep coming. They are relentless. One of the things we always hope that we can have as a defense is a group that's relentless; no matter what happened the last play, whether it was a good thing or bad thing, they are coming back after you the next play.

The other thing I would say about Texas defense is they have great depth. They play a lot of guys in the front, a lot of linebackers. They have played, especially due to some injuries and so forth, a significant number of guys in the back end. As many teams as they have faced that spread the ball out all over the field, they have four and five, six DBs in the game at times.

So they've got a lot of folks who have played a lot of football and they can flat out run and that's what you want in your defense. They love to hit you.

Q. I just wondered if there was anything that happened this week injury-wise, discipline-wise that would affect playing time at all on Monday. Also, if you could give us your latest thoughts on Nathan Williams.

COACH TRESSEL: Nathan will miss some playing time. But we should be in pretty good shape otherwise.

Brandon Saine, I don't know if he will be able to help. He really hasn't worked as much as we would like. He is going to dress and so forth. Really the only guys that won't dress and won't be available would be guys like Curtis Terry and Lawrence Wilson, Willie Mobley, some guys that have had some season-ending injuries.

J.B. Shugarts has practiced a little bit more. He will probably have a post-season surgery. He will at least be available for some backup role. Michael Adams is coming along a little bit more and is more ready to play significantly, if needed.

So I think we are in pretty good health and will be ready to go.

Q. Can you just talk about the uniqueness of the stadium and the rolling in

and out of the field and how does it make it for your guys.

COACH TRESSEL: Well, our guys, unless they have seen it on TV or something, wouldn't even have maybe known that it rolls in and out. It has probably been in there with the play-offs and the Cardinals and all that. The fact that you are indoors playing on an outdoor field is a little unique, and they do a great job with it. They have had the Insight game and the Cardinals play-off game and now our game. And I know the folks at the Fiesta Bowl well enough to know they are working night and day to make sure it is the best and safest surface we can possibly have.

I think playing in a NFL stadium like this is a thrill for the kids because it is something they have dreamed about their whole lives, is to do that. It adds one more tremendous thing to this experience. They have had so many great experiences being here. This is a week they will never forget.

Q. You already mentioned special teams a couple times. How would you compare yours and Texas' special teams?

COACH TRESSEL: I think both sets of special teams have made a difference for their respective squads. I don't think either of us would be here if it weren't for some of the big plays that the special teams made.

I think back to -- it was 14-3 Oklahoma and Oklahoma kicked off and Texas -- Shipley ran it back for a touchdown all of a sudden and a great punt return against Texas Tech and all those things.

Ray Small had a great return against Michigan. We had similar things. A.J. Trapasso did a great job knocking people down and giving us field position and a chance to turn the tide in games. I think their specialists are very talented. Their return guys are lightning.

When you have depth like they have on defense, you are going to have great speed in your special units and so they do a great job of whether it is blocking punts or kicks or covering punts or kicks, they do it with great effort.

Our coaching staff puts a lot of emphasis on special teams, as you can tell theirs does. I think both groups -- I think both of us are in the top seven or eight in the nation in net punt and those kinds of things.

So both are very good, and that's going to

be a huge difference maker. Who is going to make that play? Which of those 30 special teams plays are going to change the game, and that's -- you have got to be on guard every single play in a football game like this, most especially in the special units.

Q. Each year each team stands by itself. But the way the last two years ended for Ohio State, is it fair to say at all that's put an extra burden on this team to play well tomorrow night?

COACH TRESSEL: Well, I suppose if it's something that an individual is thinking about and it distracts them from thinking about what they should be, perhaps. But really as you started at the outset each team, each play is independent of another and our focus has got to be an Ohio State 2008 team playing in the 2009 Fiesta Bowl against a great Texas team.

If we're thinking about anything other than that, it is going to distract you from having the ability to handle a very difficult task.

I would hope that there aren't guys on our team that are disappointed or whatever, that they happened to make the national championship game the last two years, because that's not too bad.

Q. What are the next 36 hours like for you? Do you still get butterflies? Do you get nervous and anxious as game time approaches?

COACH TRESSEL: I think the last 36 hours are the most difficult because we are the kind of people that always want to be doing something, to be getting ready, and we have had so many meetings, so many practices. They have heard the same things so many times that you just want that clock to tick.

Probably the only thing worse than the 36 hours before the game is the hour before the game because you are really feeling as if you're fairly useless and so forth.

But of course I get butterflies. If it is important to you, you get nervous about it. And do I think we're prepared? Absolutely. Our kids have worked extremely hard. Our coaches work extremely hard. But that doesn't mean I'm not nervous about Colt McCoy and all those other guys because they are pretty well prepared too.

Q. You have intimated that Beanie is ready for the pros, and when he talked the

other day he seemed to diffuse the situation saying, I'm not -- I haven't decided, perhaps not to take anything away from this game. Do you sense that this is his last game? That he would go out with this senior group?

COACH TRESSEL: I think that he is feeling as if he doesn't want to do anything to distract from this moment because it is a special moment, and he'll not have this moment with those guys.

I have felt all along that with his talent and the position he plays and those kinds of things that it may end up being the best thing as we sit down and talk about that after the season, that he move along.

But we haven't had that discussion, and he has prepared with the intent of the only thing that's important is the Fiesta Bowl. We will cross that bridge as we go.

Q. On ESPN, 90 percent of the respondents picked Texas to win this game. First of two questions, what have you done to instill confidence in your team that they can win this game? Secondly, there seems to be some situation that maybe Brian Hartline committed a team rules violation. Is it affecting his status with this game? Will he start? Will he play?

COACH TRESSEL: Confidence comes in preparation. And as you prepare and you watch the film and you watch yourself practice, then you watch the practice film, if you feel as if you're doing what needs to be done, that instills some confidence.

Now, there is a reality part of it as well. You have to go out there and do that against them, and you have to do it play after play after play. That will determine how successful we'll be and whether it is 90 percent or 40 percent or 60 percent, I have been in games where there have been varying opinions, sometimes more people thought we were going to win and we didn't. Other times less people thought we were going to win and we did or didn't.

The key will be can we keep that focus on the task at hand because our guys have prepared. And so I think they're confident in that and they certainly have been acting as if they understand the plan. The coaches, I think, have done an extraordinary job of setting a plan, and I think we happen to have every understanding of the

difficulty of the task. We are playing against a great team. A team that is not going to make mistakes or give you anything. You will have to earn every yard you get.

But I think our kids have good confidence, but we'll have to see how that unfolds.

As far as Brian Hartline goes, we may have some discussions as we go. But for the moment, Brian Hartline, the only thing I would say is that he is going to have a great part of this football game.

Q. You said when you got here that you have never been more excited about a post-season game or you couldn't remember, at least. And having coached in as many big ones with huge implications, why is that?

COACH TRESSEL: There aren't any post-season games that aren't big. I have been a part of almost 40 post-season games and every one of them was huge. There is not one huger than the other because of the relationship you have with the kids involved.

Why is this one? Why do I feel that way? There has been something awfully special about this group of kids. Maybe it is because it is today, I don't know. They have been very unselfish. They have prepared extremely hard. They care about one another. They have fun with one another. We're playing against a great team that we have great respect for.

We're in a venue that's terrific. The people, as we landed, we knew we would have a chance to reconvene our friendships. It was just a warm feeling and so you tie all those things together and you have those emotions.

But hopefully there will be a day when we're at another post-season game and we think that's the greatest one in the world. We are excited about this one.

Q. You have emphasized the Michigan game and obviously had a lot of success in that game recently. Are there any elements from that preparation that you take into these other big games, Bowl games and other regular season big games given you have had so much success in that specific game?

COACH TRESSEL: I think a league and a traditional rivalry and a Bowl scenario are really different things. You know when you are in a league that there are some teams you will get to play every year and they will get to play you. They know you, you know them. You bump into them all

the time. Then add to it the fact that all of us have that rivalry game.

I think whenever you look at a season, you say to yourself that your conference is number one and your rivalry game certainly ranks high up there.

And then I don't know that you ever take for granted that you are going to be in the post-season. You go to work. Once you have earned the opportunity to be in the post-season, you really rev it up and get excited about whomever it is you are playing and whatever your situation happens to be.

So I think it is a little bit different. You have a lot longer time and people talk a lot about the amount of time and do you do well when you have more time or less time and all those things. It is a little bit like, do you do well on your openers? You had nine months, those kinds of things.

But I think it is a little bit different than your league and your rival.

Q. A lot of college football fans throughout the decades have grown to appreciate the accomplishments of Archie Griffin. What does it mean to have him around the program, around the kids, here in Phoenix as an ambassador for Buckeye football and a voice the kids can listen to?

COACH TRESSEL: It is pretty special when you are at a university that the CEO of the alumni association is a former football player. That tells you about the culture going all the way back to the first question. It is two schools that are so similar in their culture.

Ohio State loves football. And the fact that we've got the only two-time Heisman trophy winner that's the CEO of our alumni association, and our guys are very aware of his presence and his accomplishments and his class and how much he cares about Ohio State and the impact he makes around the community, not just for Ohio State but for other causes.

It is a great role model for our guys to see and you probably could ask the majority of the college football players in the nation who's the CEO of your alumni association and they might not know. But I would hope our guys know it is Archie Griffin. I can't speak for all of them. But it is pretty special.

Q. Do you think Utah has a legitimate

claim to the national championship?

COACH TRESSEL: Oh, gosh. We have a system. And as a part of the American Football Coaches Association and also Mack and I are both on the board of trustees, we have an agreement that we'll vote the winner of the BCS national championship game as the national champion.

So I have always been one that believes that you go with the system because you agreed upon it on the way in the door.

Now, did Utah have an extraordinary year? Absolutely. For them to -- we they went over to Ann Arbor and beat Michigan. They beat TCU and BYU and all the folks in their league and Oregon State or Oregon, somebody. Then they go over to the Sugar Bowl and beat Alabama. Man, they're good. They will be ranked very high on my ballot.

But for me to say that they should be ranked number one, I don't think so because we have a system.

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