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An Interview With:

OHIO STATE COACH JIM TRESSEL

COACH JIM TRESSEL: We had a wonderful trip in, and everything is sure exciting, as you had a chance to watch these past few days, just reminds you how extraordinary the bowl system is.

And just to watch all the pageantry and all the great games and all the kids having tremendous experiences, and it was a lot of great football. And then to feel the feel of New Orleans as we landed here and see how excited they are, and just finished a successful Sugar Bowl and they have a chance to host the title game and they're so excited about the progress that's been made and the people that have pitched in and made a difference in this community. It's going to be great for our young people to experience this and see this, the city they've read so much about. And so we're excited to get to work.

We'll get to work a little bit this evening and then hit the practice field tomorrow and we're looking forward to a great week in New Orleans.

Q. Would you say your team is chomping at the bit a little bit?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: I'm sure they are. I haven't seen all of them. But knowing them, they are. We practiced on Monday morning. And then they were off yesterday. And they were chomping at the bit on Monday morning, because it's something about your football clock goes off in your head around January 1st. It's time to play and I know they're anxious to play.

Q. When is roll call for these guys? Because I know some of them are having some trouble, I think, with connections and stuff?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: Roll call is when they get here. We were hoping they would be here between 3:00 and 4:00. But we really don't have anything until 7:00. Some of the ones that were having trouble getting here we understand just landed. So adjustments were made. So our first team activity is at 7:00.

Q. Did you use last year -- the last year's championship game, do you use that at all, instructional, motivational? Do your guys draw anything from last year?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: Oh, I think both of those things you mentioned. Instructional, first and foremost. You always hopefully -- and that was long ago that we were using that instructional. And I think motivational, everyone uses their experiences.

So I think yes to both.

Q. Has anything changed in availability of players since the last time we spoke to you? Do you have any suspensions, any academic problems along the line, people that weren't making the trip that might not start that would normally start?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: No, not that I'm aware of. It's Wednesday. (Laughter.) Let me say that.

Q. How much does experience in a game like this help?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: I would like to think that experience helps. Especially when you're in a venue like this and it's going to be so exciting and so much energy. And that's one of the neat things about kids having a chance to play at Ohio State. And we have some great opportunities to play in great venues in big games.

And we've had a chance to do that just a

year ago in one this big. So I hope that experience will help us.

Q. How much of a concern is there of a possible home field advantage?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: You know, there's nothing we can do about it. If we would have been given more tickets, we could have changed the home field advantage. But that's part of the reality of it. And that's okay. Because, you know, the neat thing about it, it's going to be so much excitement and so much electricity in this situation that we've got to feed off of that.

Q. Do you guys have a history of finding ways to get bowl tickets to your fans?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: I would imagine they'll get some tickets. I don't know that you would call it a home field advantage for us. But we'll get tickets.

Q. You're practicing at Tulane, correct?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: Yes.

Q. That's outside, correct?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: Yes.

Q. I think LSU is practicing in the dome. Did you have your choice there, or -- because I think you practice indoors a lot?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: We were indoors a lot, since we began preparation. We'll be two days at Tulane, then we'll be a day at the New Orleans Saints, which is indoors. So we've been indoors.

Q. Jim, can you speak to how you've evolved -- you've changed your schedule from last year, didn't come in as early, won't know until next week how it paid off, but so far you feel like it's worked out to your benefit?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: It's been a good thing. A year ago this time we only had part of our facility. We were under construction. And we just couldn't have stayed where we were.

We had all of our facilities in place this year and so we were able to spend a little bit more time preparing where we normally prepare. So I felt good about our preparation.

Q. Do you feel better when in your own place rather than down here, two, three days?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: I think that's normal, that if you're where you normally work you're working.

Q. Can you talk about how you've evolved as a coach since you've gotten to Ohio State?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: How I've evolved?

Q. How much better you are.

COACH JIM TRESSEL: I've gotten grayer (laughter). I don't know. I hope I've learned a lot of lessons.

Q. Anything that comes to mind?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: Oh, gosh. I just think dealing with people. You know, the more experience you have of dealing with your staff and your players and you know when you first get anywhere you don't know anyone. And then you develop relationships and you know your people a lot better. So there's some natural development there. And experiences. Just like it was brought up, will it be a positive that we've had experience in situations like this, I hope so.

Just like all those experiences we've had in the past seven years as a coaching staff hopefully will help us.

Q. Anything on the field?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: Anything on the field?

Q. Your philosophy on the field.

COACH JIM TRESSEL: Our philosophy on the field really has been fueled by who our personnel is. And so I'd like to think we have always done a decent job of featuring the talents of our people, and hopefully we'll do that on through Monday.

Q. What's the players' curfews and rules for being down here?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: The players have set their own curfews. I'm not going to rattle that off. I guess it comes under FRPA. I don't know (laughter). But they're making themselves pretty accountable for being in and getting plenty of rest.

Q. From the captains and everybody on down?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: The older guys, I had a group of older guys, it wasn't just captains. But a group of older guys.

Q. Do you think those guys -- not that last year's team wasn't on a mission, but do you sense those guys are even more on a mission based on kind of the way things went last year?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: You know, I've been pleased for this entire year of the focus that our kids have had, all the way back to their interest in spring practice and summertime and preseason. And that's why I think they were able to accomplish a little bit so far.

So, yeah, I've been really happy with the way they've been focused in.

Q. Kind of along those lines, you said a couple times at Columbus that you didn't think the focus was where it needed to be when you got to the bowl site last year. Does arriving late solve that or do you have to say anything to that, let them handle that or -- to make sure that it's where it needs to be?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: I don't have the ability to solve things. I have the ability to help things, hopefully. I think just in pure number of days that you're somewhere, you know, it's a little bit easier, I think, to stay on a task when you're only there for X days rather than X plus five or whatever. But still it's up to us individually. And I feel good about how our guys will approach it.

Q. Are there a lot of players who might still have had problems in transit? Are you aware of anybody that's gotten stuck because of weather at an airport or anything like that that you can tell us about?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: The only ones we've heard of is there's a group -- I'm not sure where they're going through, Atlanta or Chicago -- Chicago. There was a group, but they got here. There was another group I think through Atlanta. And I think they just landed.

So I haven't heard of anyone who is going to have a problem getting here when we need them.

Q. Much easier way been to just hop on a bus and drive an hour and a half here? I mean, how much of an advantage can that be?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: Oh, I don't know. There's some excitement of going and seeing a

different part of the world than you've ever seen. And there's an advantage to that, too. Now, obviously, there's an advantage to being close to home and efficiency.

But I think there's no disadvantage to our scenario.

Q. There were a lot of reports about the Southern Cal win last night, Georgia's win and how impressive they were, they may have a legitimate claim in some circles to a national championship, do you really feel that you're playing a national championship and those guys have no say-so whatsoever, no claim to that?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: I know we're playing for that silver crystal, you know, which signifies the national championship. I think there's only two teams that have a chance at that.

Now, outside -- there's other championships and polls and that type of thing. But for the one that really counts, LSU and Ohio State.

Q. Will you be able to claim that, though, or not?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: Their seasons are over and there's nothing else to talk about right now. But those are great teams now. Now, I watched some great football. Georgia was outstanding. Southern Cal was outstanding. Michigan was outstanding. You know, Missouri was outstanding. There was some fabulous football games. And they should feel extraordinary about their seasons.

Q. You mentioned rooting for Missouri, but did you feel good about Lloyd going out the way he did?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: I felt great. Lloyd Carr is one of the great gentlemen in our profession. To see his team respond and play so well and obviously they're members of our conference, and we're proud of that and Lloyd Carr has had an extraordinary career. If you look at his resume of what he's accomplished, it's always nice for someone to end that way.

Q. Does it mean anything to think your team to see a Big Ten team beat Florida, beat an SEC team six days before your game? Because everybody keeps talking about the

differences, you know?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: I'm sure our guys were pulling for their Big Ten counterparts. But will it do anything for us? No, we're still going to have to hang onto the ball and still have to tackle and block and all those things. But I'm sure our guys were excited.

Q. Is it natural to be concerned about the rest that has set in, not playing football for a while?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: I think it's natural for any of us that haven't played last week, you know -- we're all kind of in the same boat. Some guys played eight weeks ago. Some guys played five weeks ago, whatever it happens to be. None of us played last week. So I think we all have to be concerned about that, but there's nothing you can do other than practice and prepare and go out there and get hit a few times.

But everybody, you watch those bowl games, those were well played. And there was a lot of people that hadn't played in a while.

Q. Having gone through it last year, though, do you think you're prepared to have -- get your team ready in terms of knocking the dust off a little bit?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: Better than we were last year, the year before, the year before. We've had a long layoff many, many times. I hope we do it better than we did last year, yeah.

Q. Do you change the way you carry yourself around the team for this bowl game as opposed to last year, because things -- you've alluded to the fact that you didn't like the way that you guys prepared last year?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: I'm not sure we did a great job preparing once we got to the bowl site. I haven't seen them yet at the bowl site. But I don't know how much you have to say about that, because I probably have that opinion because they have that opinion. And so I don't know how much we have to talk about that.

Q. Can you talk about some of the doubts and questions people on the outside may have about this team, how much have you used that as kind of a motivational thing for your guys this past couple of weeks?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: You know, I think you always talk to your guys about doing the best you're capable of doing. And certainly the

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opportunity to show that you're pretty good. And so I guess you remind yourself constantly of, hey, the only way you can feel good about your performance is do it as well as you can.

And the neat thing about this is the whole world will then get to see it.

Q. What made you decide to have the DVD sent home with the guys over the Christmas breaks?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: I do a lot that my coaches think they're a good idea.

Q. Could you talk about the progress Nader Abdallah has made this season, particularly the role his brother played coming up there and helping him out?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: His brother is a tremendous achiever. I don't know if he was number one in his class at Tulane Law, way up there. He's a guy that's really focused on excellence. And I thought it was a neat thing that he would take time out of his career to come and help his brother, and obviously as you think about what happened here in New Orleans and their family was greatly affected and the need for camaraderie.

It just so happened it was at a time when Nader was moving up in years in his college career. It was great timing for the family. Great timing for Nader. And you can see a big difference in his growth. Not maybe all because his brother spent time with him, but a lot of the things that happen naturally.

And the coaches were very patient in watching him grow and so forth. But his brother made a big impact.

Q. How extraordinary is it for players, basically a noncontributor for three years, to move up and become a starter like that?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: Well, you know, that's what you hope happens when guys graduate. We graduated, I don't know, four of our top six guys, something like that, from that front from last year. So there was going to be a need for some people that hadn't contributed before to step up, and Nader has been one that has stepped up.

Q. Have you seen anything on the practices so far in Columbus that would lead

you to believe there would be some changes on the two-deep roster in some spots, guys that might have moved up to starting that had not started, vice versa?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: Not really, no. No. We use -- when we're in bowl practice, the ones, the twos, the threes, everyone gets lots of reps. But, no, I haven't seen any earth-shaking changes at two deep or anything.

Q. Both coaches in the title game from Ohio, what does that say about that, football ties to this game?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: To the state of Ohio, football is culturally a very important thing. And that is kind of a neat thing that we can boast the fact that a year ago both coaches grew up in Ohio and much of their staff, the same thing here, both coaches grew up in Ohio. The defensive coordinator from LSU is an Ohio State grad, all those kinds of things.

So it just tells you we're very fortunate in Ohio to have a lot of interest in football, a lot of excellence. And it's -- I guess it's the cradle of coaches, I don't know.

Q. Has anybody coached you up on the dome other than just being unbelievably loud, anything that you've talked to other guys about?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: Not really. Other than the fact that they say that it's even -- if you've played in a dome, this is even louder than any dome you've played in. But, again, that's exciting. And we've practiced hard for noise situations throughout the entire year. Because the Big Ten is a pretty noisy place.

And we had some games in our state college and the Big House and out in Washington, which was unusually loud because of the makeup of the stadium and so forth.

And so I think we've done all we could possibly do to try to prepare for it. But until you're there and have to deal with it, you know, you're not totally prepared.

Q. What did you get for Christmas?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: What did I get?

Q. Anything good besides socks?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: I got some socks and nice shirts. Got a nice coat. Nice winter coat. I didn't bring it down here. But I got a nice winter coat.

Q. Maybe you should have (laughter)?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: Today when I got to playing maybe I should have.

Q. Talking about Lloyd and once he retired he talked about his fire going out. He's not that much older than you?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: He talked about the fire going out?

Q. Yeah. He's not that much older than you are, and you're about the age Jack was when he retired, given any thought about how much longer you're going to coach?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: Unfortunately, my father retired for health concerns and would still be coaching if he could be. Have I given any thought to how long? No. At Ohio State, you go game by game (laughter).

Q. Jim, your thoughts on LSU, no one has even asked you about your opponent yet?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: You know, they're a great football team. And they have great talent, but the thing I've said -- by the way, people have asked me for six weeks about LSU. But the thing I love about them is they're tough. They went through a season, a bunch of injuries, had a brutal schedule. They had some balls bounce the wrong way, taken into overtime. Playing without some of their best players at times and withstood all that.

To me they have great toughness and great maturity. Because you can't do that without both of those things. Now, they're very talented in every possession. Tremendous skills, tremendous ability to do a lot of different things.

They're as far from vanilla as you can get. They bring at you scheme-wise an extraordinary amount and are amazing in terms of how well that they're able to do so much. Of course, as I said at the outset, very talented, very tough, very mature.

Q. As you watched the Sugar Bowl last night, did you leave that game with a greater appreciation for the speed, the athleticism in the SEC than maybe you had before?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: No, you can't get much greater respect than for what I have for the SEC. I've had a chance for two years in a row to watch almost every team play, because when you're in a bowl game you have every film. You

watch every team in the league of the folks you're preparing for.

And I have as much respect for that league, and that's why I answered the question about, you know, what's LSU all about for them to go through a conference like that, with the adversities that they had. But Georgia, they were something last night.

I confess, I didn't make it through the whole game. In fact, the game just ended about an hour ago, didn't it (laughter)? Something like that. We had to get on a plane. But, I mean, they were flying all over the place.

But it's been neat when you hear the people in New Orleans talk about the game and both teams and what a great week they had and all that. They were so proud of the fact that the Hawaii fans stayed until the final down. And that that was one of the first things they brought up about the game.

That just tells you how much pride they have in hosting these. But Georgia certainly showed that they're one of the top teams in the country.

Q. If you can do one thing differently from the preparation from a year ago, what would it be, for the bowl game?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: Well, one thing we did already is probably the one thing and that's one of the things, I don't know how many days we were out there last year, but it was, I think, hindsight, too many.

Q. Along the lines from earlier, you talked about the SEC, there's been a lot of talk about the two leagues seeing each other, has there been much said about that among your staff and players, the SEC rivalry and all?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: That's been talked about quite a bit because we have bowl alliances that line us up. And I think we do that, I'm sure our Big Ten fathers do that because we want to be matched against the best. And, you know, we have tremendous respect for the SEC and all that they bring.

And so that's talked about a lot whether you're talking about the Wisconsin/Tennessee game or Florida/Michigan game or our game coming up. Just so happens that we've gotten a bonus Big Ten/SEC matchup the last couple of years. But that's natural to talk about all the time.

Q. You mentioned the injuries that LSU has had to go through and some of the other adversities, can you imagine trying to have to coach a team through some of that stuff and also have to deal with that Michigan/LSU thing that was going on?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: That's why you have to tip your cap to what LSU has done. They've had as difficult scenarios thrown at them as you can have. They've risen to the challenge every time. Have you to respect that.

Q. As a coach, though, can you imagine going through what he's had to go through sort of at times?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: I've been a head coach for 22 years, I think it's been 22. Something like that. I've been through that many times. And that's just probably the least fun times you can have. I've been playing for the national championship and had one of the illustrious media folks come up to me on the sideline during the game and ask me if I'm going somewhere.

And, you know, so, believe me, it's no fun. For them to do what they did -- we won that game by the way (laughter) -- for them to do what they did with an additional hardship like that, I thought Les handled it well.

Q. Can you offer up a suggestion how that can be handled better from a coaching standpoint, coaches generally?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: How what could be handled better?

Q. The rumors, guys going back and forth. Football is pretty much held hostage at that point every year.

COACH JIM TRESSEL: I'm sure rumors are a 12-month deal, whether it has to do with football or politics or whatever. If I can solve the rumor thing I'd get out of this business and go solve the rumor thing. But that's not going to change in this world.

Q. Why do you think it seems offenses are so much more prepared during the bowl season, just seems like teams score a little more than they average. Why do you think that is?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: You know, one of the things that you have to do well to keep people

from scoring is tackle. You know, one of the things you don't do that much in December preparation compared to maybe August preparation is tackle. Because you've really already figured out who are your best tacklers. It's not like someone is going to change and become a better tackler than the other guy over a three-month period. So there's really not a tryout camp, if you will, at that point. You know who is healthy and you know who has been tackling.

So maybe I don't have this number but there's numbers for everything. I'm sure we could go back and find it. I bet you there's more missed tackles in bowl games than there are in the regular season. Maybe I'm wrong. But to me I don't know any other answer for how there's more points scored, because if you tackle them, they don't score.

So I'm guessing more missed tackles.

Q. Do you get to enjoy the bowl game?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: Oh, absolutely.

Q. How much time do you set aside for work and how much time set aside for play?

COACH JIM TRESSEL: The beauty of my job is work is play. And so I love the heck out of bowl games. Thank you so much. I appreciate it.

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