

10/11/2010: State of the Big Ten, Volume 7 (premium)

Every Monday, we will be running a weekly series titled "State of the Big Ten," which will be made available to all members of HawkeyeDrive.com. This series of columns will focus on one major headline regarding the conference and go in-depth on the subject at hand.

By Brendan Stiles

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When Alabama was defeated by South Carolina last weekend, fans in Columbus, Ohio had every reason to celebrate.

With Ohio State being ranked No. 2 before manhandling Indiana at The Horseshoe on Oct. 9, it was only appropriate that the Buckeyes would become the country's new No. 1 team in every poll released, including the season's first BCS standings.

Being No. 1 is nothing new to this football program, which for close to a decade now has been the Big Ten's crème de la crème. This is attributed mainly to one man – head coach Jim Tressel.

And it is fitting that after Tressel won his 100th career game as Ohio State's head coach, this is where the Buckeyes would be.

No head coach in Big Ten history has reached 100 victories faster than Tressel. The man nicknamed "Sweater Vest" is halfway through his 10th season in Columbus, and has a 100-21 mark as the Buckeyes' head coach.

Aside from Joe Paterno, is there another current FBS coach in the country that has had as much of a positive influence on

his university than Tressel at Ohio State? If there is, good luck finding that person.

Going by Ohio State standards, Tressel should be judged based on three criteria: Wins over the hated rival Michigan, Big Ten titles, and national championships.

When Tressel was introduced to the Buckeye faithful as the replacement to John Cooper, he vowed to beat Michigan. In his first season, one that saw Ohio State lose a second straight Outback Bowl to South Carolina, he took the Buckeyes to The Big House, beat Michigan, and cost the Wolverines a Big Ten title.

In fact, Tressel's record against whom Woody Hayes referred to as "That School Up North" is 8-1. The lone defeat was in 2003, a season Ohio State still managed to win a BCS game.

Tressel has won either a share of or outright six Big Ten titles, including each of the last five. Three of those six are outright. Another shared with Iowa was a season the Buckeyes won all eight of their conference games.

Speaking of that 2002, it didn't matter how Ohio State was winning games. It won them – 14 to be exact.

That 14th victory just happened to be in the 2003 Fiesta Bowl, and it was the first national championship the Buckeyes won since the Hayes era.

What made that game so significant in the college football landscape was the Miami team he beat was a defending national champion and carried a 34-game winning streak into Tempe, Ariz., that night.

If the saying goes, "To be the best, you got to beat the best," well, Tressel and the Buckeyes beat the Hurricanes, who were considered the best.

Ohio State may not have won any national championships since hoisting the crystal football in January 2003, but the Buckeyes did play in the first two BCS National Championship Games against Florida and LSU.

Tressel's bowl record at Ohio State might just be 5-4. But consider that in addition to his 2002-03 national title, three of those victories include two Fiesta Bowls over Kansas State and Notre Dame, and a Rose Bowl win over Oregon last season.

In fact, that game against the Ducks was the first time in 13 years the Buckeyes had played that New Year's Day game in Pasadena, Calif. It might not be a national championship, but at Ohio State (and any other Big Ten school), a Rose Bowl victory is the next best thing.

Is Tressel perfect? No, he has his flaws. Before winning the Rose Bowl nine months ago, he and his program were mightily blamed nationwide for the Big Ten's struggles in bowls given the aforementioned losses to Florida and LSU, as well as a last-minute loss to Texas in the 2009 Fiesta Bowl.

Amazingly, Tressel also has not won a Big Ten Coach of the Year. Not once.

But with all that said, no one can dispute his impact on the Big Ten, or in college football.

And yet here we are. It's October 11, 2010. Tressel has 100 victories at Ohio State, and at this moment, he coaches the No. 1 team in the land.

When the book is written on Tressel, it should not matter how much "better" Ohio State's resources are compared to other Big Ten teams, or other teams, period. It should not matter whether the Buckeyes land more blue-chip recruits than anyone else.

Ohio State might be one of the most prestigious coaching spots

in college football, and for all the pressure and expectations there are in Columbus, Tressel has delivered.

And as long as "Sweater Vest" is on the sidelines, don't expect the Buckeyes to just disappear anytime soon.