

MORE THAN JUST A GAME

Hey West Coast college football fans and especially U.S.C. Trojan fans, this Saturday's football game in Columbus, Ohio between THE Ohio State University and the University of Southern California is getting a whole lot of ink in newspapers and play on radio sports-talk shows out my way.



One area of particular interest is how the BIG TEN Conference could use a Buckeye upset win to begin repairing and restoring the tainted image of the conference's football prominence. Secondly, although Coach Pete Carroll in California and Coach Mack Brown in Texas enjoy much larger "ponds" of home-grown football talent than Coach Tressel does in Ohio, it is no secret out my way that Tressel has "stolen" some talent from Florida.

As far as the pressure on the Buckeyes to begin the '09 football season with a win over the Trojans, BIG 10 football fans are hoping for the upset. Supporters and fans of the Midwest's largest colleges and Division I football programs took it on the chin and everywhere else last bowl season. Big Ten football teams won a single Bowl game while losing six!!! These losses included Ohio State's loss to Texas and Penn State's loss to Southern Cal. In fact, the last time that the Big Ten schools had a winning bowl record was 2002. Over the past six seasons, the Big Ten football teams have won 15 and lost 28 in post-

season Bowl games, and they are 3 wins and 8 losses in BCS games!! UGH! The Big Ten's last Rose Bowl victory was ten years ago.

Now, one little 'ole win over perennial powerhouse USC on Saturday will not remove all the tarnish off the Big Ten's inter-conference failings, but it would be a "giant step" in the right direction.

Midwest football pundits are also suggesting two other components for the restoration of Big Ten football national prominence. First, rather than dwelling on Penn State's Joe Paterno's retirement, local and Midwest media should promote JoePa as a legend, icon and living testimony of Big Ten football prowess. For example, Coach Paterno has more wins, 384, than all of the SEC coaches added together (284). Secondly, Midwest pigskin pundits agree that the Michigan Wolverines must return to national football prominence and be a top ten ranked team. How ironic that Ohio State's arch rival, Michigan, can take much of the heat and spotlight off the Buckeyes. Over the last several seasons, the Buckeyes and Wolverines have not been ranked in the nation's Top Ten when they engage in their season-ending match-up. Ohio has done their part, but Michigan has faltered. Isn't it interesting that the "old school" Big Ten administrators, athletic directors and football coaches continue to forgo a Big Ten conference championship game like the rest of the 21st century college football universe? Go Wolverines; beat Notre Dame on Saturday!!!

One more thought. Coach Tressel won't publicly admit that his Buckeyes have struggled against "warm-weather opponents", but he must acknowledge that he has made a concerted effort to go into Florida and attract some of its high school football talent to Columbus. In fact, over the past three years, Tressel and his staff have recruited and signed eight (8) of the top 50 Florida high school football players. Only Florida, Miami of Florida and Florida State have signed more. This Saturday's Ohio State roster will include nine (9) Florida recruits, and eight (8) of the nine will be listed in the Buckeye's 2-deep lineup. Three (3) of these eight will start against USC.

No, you're right, this "little bit of Florida sunshine" for the Buckeyes may not be enough to tip the scales in Ohio State's favor over the mighty Trojans and their home-grown California talent. One thing is certain. Coach Jim Tressel of O.S.U. and Coach Rich Rodriguez will not be content with just a Big Ten Championship over the next several seasons. Both of them, and JoePa too, list a National Championship on the top of their team goals. Good luck, gentlemen.

Al Gizzi
35+ year Football Coach