With all due respect to whoever said “It’s the most wonderful time of the year” when referring to Christmas, well, that guy obviously lived in a time before the NCAA tournament. I’m not sure there is a more enjoyable 10 day period on the sports calendar than the time between the start of Championship Week and the NCAA tournament. Not even the drama over Jim Tressel and the Ohio State football team can kill the buzz. So let’s talk college hoops and look at the Tressel situation as well in this edition of The Weekend Wrap.

And hey, it’s been at least ten minutes since we’ve had any Cam Newton talk so let’s give that some run as well if we have time.

Blood Sport

Michael Reghi called Akron-Kent State “One of college basketball’s best rivalries”. Reghi might well be the King of All Hyperbole but Saturday night’s MAC final pitting the two best programs in NE Ohio certainly delivered on the entertainment side of things.

Akron beat Kent in overtime to earn their second trip to the NCAA’s in three seasons at the expense of their bitter rivals. In a game that you will not see referenced in any instructional video or free throw shooting clinics the two teams gave a big crowd at Quicken Loans Arena an entertaining and spirited contest that ended with Akron celebrating and fighting all at the same time the confetti was falling from the ceiling.

The game was physical and thrilling and at times turned into a football game (which truly benefitted neither program given their sad football heritage) and it gave the MAC a shot in the arm as an ESPN2 television crowd looked on at the drama.

Say what you want about the quality of MAC basketball but the tournament at The Q rarely disappoints in terms of entertainment value and drama and it's extremely well run. Getting the most heated rivalry in the conference as the televised final certainly didn't hurt. The lower bowl at The Q was nearly filled by the tip off and there was a pulse in the arena that's been lacking down there since LeBron le-quit in Game 2 of the Eastern Conference semi-finals against the Celtics. There's nothing quite like a college basketball atmosphere with the bands and the dance teams keeping their fans into the ball game. The game certainly lived up to the quality of the environment.

The only thing missing Saturday night was the Ball State Dance Team. Ball State was eliminated Friday night but not before their dance team left a nearly x-rated image in the memory banks of all who watched them. They danced the way you might expect the professionals in a Flo-Rida video to dance in uniforms that were just on the conservative side of pasties and g-strings. I think there's a strong possibility many of those ladies were able to get back to Indiana in time to dance their shifts at The Crazy Horse or Tiffany's or wherever they may be employed and I swear I saw few fans seated on the floor slip a few dollar bills to the girls.

The best part of having media credentials at The Q was having a television on both sides of my laptop which was set to ESPN and scrolling scores. At one point Saturday I was watching the Big12 final on the TV to my left, the Big10 semi-final game between Penn State and Michigan State on my right and the first half of the Kent-Akron game in front of me. There is a very good chance that every day in heaven starts just like that.

The NCAA couldn't have planned Saturday any better. Added to the MAC drama were games that featured overtimes and buzzer beaters all day long. Princeton beat Harvard at the buzzer to advance to the big tourney, Washington beat Arizona at the buzzer in OT to win the PAC10 title and Kemba Walker capped off a Big East performance for the ages by leading UConn to a one point win over Louisville in the Big East final. It remains to be seen what toll UConn's five wins in five days has on them in the NCAA tournament but Walker's performance and UConn's run will supersede their results in the big dance unless they happen to win the whole damn thing.

Whew.

I've gone through a page or so of NCAA basketball talk and haven't even touched on top-seeded Ohio State. The Buckeyes played down to the competition in wins on Friday and Saturday over Northwestern (in overtime) and Michigan respectively.

They didn't exactly play with great urgency Sunday in the title game against Penn State but it didn't matter as the Buckeyes got an easy win against the Nittany Lions.

The Buckeyes earned the NCAA tournament's top seed and will play in Cleveland this week. You think the bars on East 4th Street and elsewhere downtown might be having a big week with St. Patrick's Day on Thursday and a Buckeye basketball game on Friday? A few beers will be passed over the counters downtown this week.

That Other Buckeye Thing

I didn't go to Ohio State but I am an admitted and unabashed Buckeye honk. Let's get that straight going forward. That said, I'm not buying how this whole Tressel-Tattoo Gate thing went down. Jim Tressel may be a lot of things but stupid is not one of them.

There's simply no way he didn't tell AD Gene Smith or Associate AD Doug Archie about former Buckeye turned attorney Chris Cicero's warning that Terrelle Pryor and Devier Posey were cavorting and trading merchandise with the subject of a federal investigation in exchange for free tattoos.

No way.

What I think went down (and understand this is absolutely nothing but conjecture and

speculation) is that Tressel waited to tell Archie or Smith about the emails Cicero sent until the issuet actually became concerning to him (which was likely well after he received the first email from Cicero).

I'm have to believe Tressel gets tons of emails that pertain to the behavior of his athletes and that there is a certain vetting process he goes through to separate crap from relevant. At a certain point Cicero's emails crossed that boundary and became concerning to The Senator. When exactly that happened is the issue but I believe there was a time that Tressel actually approached either Archie or Smith (and as this is my imaginative narrative I'll say it was Smith because I find it hard to fathom that Tressel would report through Archie) with the news.

If this was during the season the brass would have likely looked at the timeframe (and maybe at the Buckeyes record and poll rankings at the time) and determined there was nothing to gain by reporting the issue at that time because there was already a tardiness to Tressel's response and there was a chance it would all go away anyway.

It clearly didn't. And I believe once the shit hit the fan in a big way in December that the course of action was plotted to have Tressel fall on his sword and save the Athletic Department really big embarrassment. In turn for the serious wounds Tressel's image was to sustain his job would never be in jeopardy and he'd have the remainder of his contract (and maybe more depending on what goes down in the future) to make amends to Buckeye Nation and restore his credibility.

Tressel really had little choice given he delayed reporting what would clearly be infractions and he signed off on an NCAA document in September that stated he was in compliance with NCAA reporting standards. If he hadn't taken the pipe on behalf of the university his 'neglect' could have been brought up by the NCAA or Ohio State to show they were never made aware of the possible issues. And again, I'm saying it could very well have been that Tressel had already 'mentioned' the Cicero emails to Smith's office (as I can't believe that a man of Tressel's character and intelligence would believe that a federal investigation into drug traffickingreferencing two of his most high profile players would just disappear) and that as a group the Buckeyes administration decided to sit tight.

I'll go to my grave believing Smith or his office knew before December (but after it would have been reasonable for Tressel to declare the issue to Smith's office) that there was an investigation that referenced the football players and OSU was complicit in not reporting it to the NCAA. Again, there's no proof that such is the case but I can't get past how ridiculous it seems

that Tressel wouldn't have brought up such serious allegations at least informally.

It also smells that Smith's office allegedly caught wind of the Tressel 'cover-up' while investigating 'an unrelated legal matter'. That's when the email chain between Tressel and Cicero was allegedly uncovered.

How convenient that this nebulous 'unrelated legal matter' came into play a week after the BCS win over Arkansas and how convenient that not another single soul in the football program was linked (there's no better way to eliminate 'conspiracy' from the proceedings).

I'm expected to believe that a man of Tressel's reputed character received word that a couple high profile players were caught up in a federal drug trafficking case and he never even informally mentioned this fact to another soul in the program? Not even a, "Hey, you remember Chris Cicero? He's an attorney here now and he sent me an email we might want to discuss"?

Come on. What in Tressel's history indicates he's that dumb? There may have been some scars from Mo Clarett's brief tenure at OSU and from the Ray Isaac scandal at YSU but those were always cases where The Vest was accused of turning his head or looking the other way when overzealous boosters showed their appreciation for specific players.

Nope. I believe Tressel stepped in it when he didn't immediately react and when he signed off on that NCAA reporting accuracy document in September of last year. He had already hung himself in terms of timely reporting when he likely told Smith or the Compliance Office about the emails from Cicero and/or the complicity of his players in the matter.

And based on that being a fireable offense in and of itself Tressel was forced to go along with falling on the sword so that he could retain his position and hopefully overcome the stain on his record that was going to be forced upon him one way or the other.

Maybe I'm way off and my fiction is stranger than the truth.

But I don't think so.

Hearts Are Aflutter

Word out of NFL circles is that the browns will be working out Auburn QB Cam Newton in a private session before the April NFL Draft. That has half of Browns fans scared to death that Cleveland will take Newton and the other half worried they won't be able to get him anyway.

This clearly means one of two things:

1. The Browns are interested in Newton despite the front office's statement that Colt McCoy is 'the guy'.

2. The Browns are doing their due diligence on Newton and by doing so are giving the impression that they could conceivably select him at the #6 position next month.

Number two would not only insulate the Browns from ***some*** criticism in five years should Newton be the next John Elway ("We looked at him seriously but we liked Player X after careful consideration" as opposed to "We never saw that coming") but it would also strengthen the Browns negotiating position should the team have the opportunity to field trade requests come draft day. A team that believes the Browns are genuinely interested theoretically needs to pay more for the right to move up than if they are certain the Browns have no interest in the Heisman Trophy winner.

Number two is just good business regardless of whether or not the Browns have any legitimate interest in Newton.

And I'm convinced they don't.

That pick is going to be either AJ Green or the best defensive lineman on the board if that DL is higher overall than Green on the Browns wish list. Just the way it seems to be headed in Berea. Still wondering what happens if Patrick Peterson and AJ Green are both on board at #6 with Cleveland's first choice at DL having been picked.

Well, let's enjoy the draft and its intrigue regardless. Might be the only excitement and subject worthy of discussing that NFL fans have for the next 8 months while these jagoffs divide $9billion.

Thought it Ended Saturday?

I could have sworn the MAC tournament ended Saturday night. Apparently no one told the people at The Q because the Cavaliers continued with the MAC-caliber play Sunday afternoon in another embarrassing loss, this one a 95-75 beat down at the hands of the Oklahoma City Thunder.

The only thing that really changed were the Cavaliers logos replacing the MAC logos on the court.

That moves the Cavs to 12-53 on the season and really puts a stranglehold on that top spot for draft lottery opportunities.

I'm wondering if the Cavs could just save people the travel expenses and the arena-related expenses and petition the league for a 15-67 record. Along with expenses it will save us from having to watch them play out the string.