First-year head coach Darrell Hazell is seeing things from the other side of the fence.

Hazell was a member of Jim Tressel's coaching staff at Ohio State, where he coached the wide receivers as well as handling associate head coaching duties, and he has been in the role of getting Goliath ready for David.

Ohio State usually hosts another in-state team early in the season, bringing the Bowling Greens, Kent States, Akrons and Ohio Universities of the world to Ohio Stadium for a guaranteed payday...as well as a guaranteed loss.

Hazell knows what it takes to get a team ready for an inferior opponent.

"One of the things we used to tell the guys at Ohio State is that you better be ready and you better have your best game," Hazell said. "Teams aren't that far apart and if you aren't on your game you could find yourself in a dogfight in the fourth quarter."

This is what he is hoping for Saturday, when he leads his Kent State Golden Flashes into battle with highly-ranked Alabama at Bryant-Denny Stadium in Tuscaloosa at 12:20. He wants his team to hold on until late in the game, then attack.

"We're going to try to get the game into the fourth quarter, then we'll go after 'em," he said.

Keeping the game competitive into the fourth quarter is a very tall order. Even though the Crimson Tide lost three key offensive players to graduation...quarterback Greg McElroy, running back Mark Ingram and wide receiver Julio Jones...the team returns seven offensive starters including four offensive linemen.

They also feature a running back, Trent Richardson, who will probably get everyone to forget all about the former Heisman Trophy winner, Ingram. Richardson carried the ball 112 times for 700 yards last season, a 6.3 yards per carry average, and put up 144 yards on the ground in Week Two against Penn State while filling in for Ingram, who was recovering after knee surgery.

Replacing Jones might be a bigger issue. The top two candidates to step into the top receiver position at Alabama are Marquis Maze, the leading returning receiver with 557 yards and three touchdowns last year, and Darius Hanks, who caught 32 passes for 456 yards and three touchdowns in 2010. Ohio State transfer Duron Carter has yet to be cleared to play, but when he gets the green light he should step into one of the top slots for the Tide.

Quarterback A.J. McCarron is a sophomore who saw plenty of mop-up action last season. However, he is entering his first season as the full-time starter. Kent will look to mask its coverage schemes and see if the young quarterback can be confused.

Regardless of who is starting where, and how many starters were lost to graduation or the NFL, Hazell knows his team faces the biggest challenge it will face this season.

"Alabama is a fantastic football team on all three phases," he said. "Defensively they have a lot of great players, especially two defensive linemen that are very physical and very fast. Offensively they're going to try to run the ball downhill. And they're so solid in the special teams that you can't get an edge on them in any phase."

Even with seemingly insurmountable odds stacked against them, Hazell said his Golden Flashes are looking forward to the challenge.

"The players are excited to fly down to Tuscaloosa on Friday and get into a great environment with 105,000 screaming fans at Bryant-Denny Stadium," he said. "Everything is against you so it's going to be a heck of a challenge. But we're really looking forward to it."