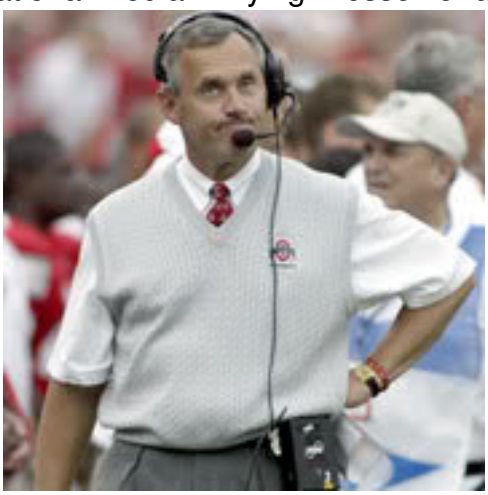
Great piece from Gary Benz this morning. In it, he discusses the hypocrisy from Bill Livingston, who did a hatchet job piece on Jim Tressel in yesterday's PD. Gary takes aim at Bitterman Bill, as well as all of those in the national media villifying Tressel for abstaining in this week's coaches poll. A solid read ...



One unfortunate off-shoot of the controversy surrounding the selection of the second participant in this year's BCS National Championship game is the intense criticism that Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel has endured from nearly every corner of the country. The knock on Tressel is that he abdicated his responsibility as a voter in the USA Today/Coaches poll by refusing to weigh in on whether Florida or Michigan deserved the nod.

It's interesting that Michigan head coach LLLLLoyd Carr found the time to publicly criticize Tressel on his non-vote but didn't have the time to campaign to voters on why his team was worthy of the number 2 spot. Carr claimed that such politicking was undignified, but calling out another coach, indeed your white whale, isn't? Talk about being slick. Is there anyone left who doesn't seriously understand exactly why Carr can't get Michigan over the hump?

It was also interesting to note the flip-flop that the Plain Dealer's Bill Livingston made yesterday regarding Tressel. Livingston claims he originally supported Tressel's call but now, when considering the bigger picture, finds much to criticize. Disregarding the more pertinent question (and, more importantly, the most obvious answers) as to why Livingston didn't put more thought into his original column, his new opinion is just simply more of his Tressel bashing. It appears as well thought out, frankly, as his original column.

We've noted previously how ridiculous Livingston can be, especially when it comes to Tressel. But what caught our eye was that Livingston's rationale for his flip-flop is really nothing more than a rehash of why he felt Tressel was ill-suited for the pro game. This convinces us that even Livingston's editors have stopped paying attention, but we digress.

Our previous observation about Livingston remains pertinent today. Livingston's intent is not to analyze the situation objectively but instead to try and strip away what he believes is the veneer coating Tressel. In both columns (the initial column is available here) Livingston continues to criticize Tressel for a supposedly too light suspension of linebacker Robert Reynolds in 2003! Even assuming that the penalty wasn't stiff enough, that hardly seems like an appropriate launching pad from which to extrapolate greater meaning as to why Tressel abstained from voting last week. Hopefully, for Livingston's sake, no one, particularly his editor, is actually tracking his body of work. We'd hate to think anyone would conclude that Livingston is even less than he appears to be.

As for the current criticism of Tressel, we think he's being pummeled not for his actual actions but more as the tangible and convenient embodiment of the ills that underlie the BCS system. Most who have criticized Tressel have fairly noted that he exercised his vote every week, thus helping position the teams for that final, fateful vote. Having done so, the argument goes, to abdicate his responsibility because he was in a tough situation is, at best, weak and, at most, an act of cowardice.

But this criticism comes at the expense of the bigger issue: why we allow a system designed to decide the participants in the college national championship to put any coach in that position in the first place. The Tressel situation highlights the inherent conflicts of a coaches poll when it is used for anything but interesting conversation. Indeed, the whole selection system is a Gordian knot of inherent conflicts of interest.

Personally, we have no major problem with Tressel's actions. Vote for Florida and risk giving an emotional edge to that Team Up North for the next hundred years. Vote for Michigan and risk giving bulletin board material to the Florida team he knew he was likely to face. It's easy for others, like LLLLLoyd Carr, to weigh in because, of course, they weren't faced with the dilemma. We would have done the same thing and, we suspect so too would most other coaches looking down the barrel of that gun.

Another point that most critics have glossed over is the fact that Tressel's vote, either way, would have had no impact on the outcome. While that may not excuse what he did, it is a fact. More importantly, it is a fact that Tressel well knew when he made the decision. We're pretty sure, too, that Tressel knew that the outcome in Florida's favor was already secured. Put it this way, if he didn't then Athletic Director Gene Smith isn't doing his job very well.

What we do think, though, is that there probably was a slightly better way to handle all of this. Tressel should not have just abstained, he should have resigned as a voter and publicly proclaimed that the system is broke and should be reformed and that he'll lead that charge. This at least would have blunted most of the criticism being tossed his way. But this is just arguing on the margins anyway.

Tressel is not, of course, perfect and never claimed to be. But knocking him in this instance as an excuse to not attack the bigger issues is like blaming the radio for playing a Brittany Spears song.