Jesse Lamovsky has a confession to make. When it comes to college football rooting interests, he's a self-admitted carpetbagger. He roots for Ohio State, but he's not of Ohio State ... and actually went to school at Kent State. Jesse has a long history watching Buckeye and Golden Flashes football games, and in his latest column for us ... talks about how those experiences have shaped him as a college football fan.

I have a confession to make, although what I'm confessing isn't exactly a secret, and I'm sure I'm not the only one who is guilty. When it comes to college football rooting interests, I'm a carpetbagger. You see, I root for Ohio State, but I'm not *of* Ohio State. I've spent a grand total of about three weekends on the OSU campus, none of them as a paying student. I went to school at Kent State- I didn't graduate, but I paid several thousand dollars in tuition, books, and parking fines, which damn near makes me an alumni. Really, I should be a Kent State football fan, not an Ohio State fan. But I don't root for Kent- not in football, at least.

I do have a lot of Kent State football in my past, which is part of the problem. I grew up right off the KSU campus, so I went to quite a few games as a kid. There were constants in Kent football- each of them bad. The weather always seemed to be miserable, regardless of the time of year. It was as if a stationary cold front sat directly over Dix Stadium every Saturday in the fall. The Flashes always seemed to be in the middle of one of the nation's longest losing streaks. Matter of fact, I remember being at a game late in the 1983 season in which Kent broke a twenty-two game losing streak by thrashing Eastern Michigan, 37-13. After the

game ended the fans at Dix Stadium- what fans there were- stormed the field and tore down the goalposts. Taking down the goalposts at the end of a long losing streak was a tradition at Kent, kind of a junior-league version of the old "Lake the Posts"
ritual at Northwestern.

On another occasion a couple of years later, I was at a game in which Kent was trailing Western Michigan, 34-0. It was bitterly cold, there was freezing rain coming down in sheets, and Kent's coach, the late Dick Scesniak, called a timeout in the final seconds and sent his field-goal unit on to spoil the shutout. That was fantastic, especially since my brother and I were only there to watch John Offerdahl
anyway. A few years later, in the midst of a winless season, Kent lost to Western by a score of 26-4 (thankfully, I missed out on that one.) I don't know for sure, but that might be the first and only time since the abolition of the Flying Wedge that a college football team has scored four points in a game. That same Kent team went the entire season without kicking a single field goal. I kid you not.

Since 1977, Kent State has had two winning seasons. That's right- two, in thirty-one years. They've had *four* seasons in which they haven't won a game. You almost have to try to be that bad. And this isn't a case of an academic school trapped in an athletic conference. This isn't Northwestern or Duke or Vanderbilt, or Rice in the old Southwest Conference. There is no built-in disadvantage. It's simply a school that cannot put a winning team on the football field. Coaches and players come and go, but the suck is terminal. Bring in a Dick Crum or a Dean Pees to coach and Kent sucks. Put Eric Wilkerson at tailback or Josh Cribbs
at quarterback, and Kent sucks. The suck is part of the landscape, like May 4th, Halloweens on Main and Water, and the sound of the trains passing through town.

That's not to say it's all been bad. In 1987, Glen Mason's last season as the head coach, Kent went 7-4, finished second in the MAC to Eastern

Michigan, and came within a field-goal attempt that bounced off the upright of going to the California Bowl. Eric Wilkerson led the nation in all-purpose yardage that year, and the Flashes even beat a Big Eight team (it wasn't Oklahoma or Nebraska; it was Kansas. But still.) Then Mason left for Kansas, and it was right back to the abyss.

I can actually remember the exact date on which I disowned Kent State football for good. It was September 29, 1990. Against an equally awful Cincinnati team, the Flashes squandered opportunities, committed unpardonable gaffes in every phase, and lost, 27-24. As usual, the weather was horrendous. As I sat high in the visitor's section, soaked to the skin by a cold, driving rain, I thought to myself, *"You know what, Jesse? Eff this."*
I went home that night and shucked my Kent State football fandom with my waterlogged clothes, and I haven't put it back on since. I gave myself over to the basketball team when I enrolled at Kent a few years later, but as for football, I was D-O-N-E. I'd sat through one too many losses in one too many downpours. I'd seen one too many botched special-teams plays, one too many stupid penalties. I'd had enough.

Funny thing was I always thought Kent's football program would wake up *before* the basketball program. The on-campus facilities for football are pretty decent, it's one of the largest non-urban schools between Syracuse and Notre Dame, and it's located smack-dab in the middle of one of the richest lodes of high-school gridiron talent in the country. Plus, unlike the basketball program prior to the arrival of Gary Waters the football program at least had *some* semblance of a winning tradition
- Don James, Jack Lambert, the 1972 MAC Championship team and Tangerine Bowl entry. For a long time I saw Kent's football program the same way Gabe Paul saw the Indians- as a "sleeping giant."

Only the giant is still sawing logs.

And you know, at this point it wouldn't matter if the giant woke up- at least not to me. Mid-American Conference football, even for the winners, is a cul-de-sac. You win nine, ten, eleven games, take the MAC title, and your reward is a trip to Detroit or Toronto in late December, to play a middling foe from a major conference. Basketball is different. In basketball, the champions of even the tiniest crackerjack leagues are given an opportunity to play for the National Championship. It isn't a realistic opportunity- the last school from outside one of the six power conferences to win it all was UNLV of the Big West in 1990- but no matter how long that shot is, it's a shot all the same, and the shot is all that really matters.

Here's the difference. Two years ago I went down to the Horseshoe for a game between Ohio State and Kent State. I got the tickets from a Kent booster, sat in the Kent section, cheered whenever Kent did something positive- which wasn't often- but my cheers were only out of politeness and consideration toward the people around me and to the man from whom I got the tickets. I didn't even wear Kent gear. My heart wasn't in it. I didn't want Kent to beat Ohio State, that would have been a fiasco; a disaster for the Buckeye program, and a meaningless fluke for the Flashes program.

Now, put me in the stands at the Schottenstein Center for an Ohio State-Kent State *basketball* game, and it's another story altogether. I would drape myself in blue-and-gold livery and scream for Kent until my lungs bled. After all, a win over the Buckeyes would do wonders for our at-large chances, and give us in-state bragging rights besides. And if Kent and OSU ever meet in the NIT or, God love it, the NCAA

Tournament, you can forget about it. I'd be baying for Scarlet and Gray blood. The only regret I have from Kent's wonderful 2001-02 season - other than all those three-pointers Indiana hit- was that the Flashes didn't play Ohio State that year. It would have been fun to watch Trevor, ‘Drew, Demetric and Antonio wax the Buckeyes. And they would have.

That, ultimately, is why I root whole-soul for Kent State in basketball, and basketball only. It isn't just that the program has been successful- that helps, to be sure, but I've been a fan ever since going to the Tournament was a pipe dream, when the best we could hope for was an occasional trip to the NIT. Mid-American Conference basketball matters in a way its football counterpart does not. My school, Akron, Bowling Green, Ohio- we of MAC hoops are sewn securely into the quilt of the game, even if we aren't one of the gaudier pieces. In football, though, we're a remnant, and it isn't worth my time, and it wouldn't be even if Kent could put a decent team on the field, which it shows absolutely no signs of doing.

It would be easier if Kent didn't have a football team at all, like Cleveland State or Xavier. There would be less duality. But since the program isn't going to be dissolved, I'd at least like to see the MAC move down to the FCS, with the Southern Conference and the Missouri Valley and the Big Sky and the other basketball mid-and-low-majors. At least there we'd have a chance to play for a National Championship. It would beat this purgatory in which the MAC presently exists- caught in the netherworld between big-time and small-time college football, a place where dreams of even fleeting glory don't exist, not even in theory.

Am I rationalizing my lack of loyalty to my old school? Yeah, I guess so. And maybe I'd feel differently if I'd known something other than awful, awful football when I was in my formative years. But it's not as if I haven't stuck with bad teams in other sports. Anyway, the ship has sailed. I've become one of the despised, a turncoat; a hanger-on to the Buckeye football bandwagon. The legendary Michigan broadcaster Bob Ufer once referred to the typical Ohio Stadium crowd as "10,000 alumni and 74,000 truck drivers." I'm one of the truck drivers. You can hate me if you want; hell, I even hate myself a little bit. But there's no turning back.