A new feature this year on the site, Jesse's "The Week That Was" column was a smash hit with our readers, as Mr. Lamovsky took a look back at the previous week's Buckeye game and college football slate in a way that only he can. In this season wrapup edition of that column, Jesse take a moment to re-savor the Rose Bowl win, talks about the redemption for Coach Tressel and Terrelle Pryor, and takes a general look back at what was a very exciting year for the Buckeyes, as well as college football as a whole. Thanks for everything this college football season Jesse!

Some late and parting thoughts on Ohio State's Rose Bowl victory and the rest of the bowl season:

**There is no Substitute:** *(in "Munch" Bishop voice)* Let me tell you something, brother... there's nothing like the Rose Bowl.
*(In my voice)*
There's nothing like those brightly colored end zones; that perfectly manicured field (they could stand to make the rose at midfield a little larger; that sucker stretched from 40-to-40 back in the day) the orange eminence of the San Gabriel Mountains, and the warmth and light the game lends to a cold, dark Ohio evening. Even in this day and age when the BCS Championship is the alpha and omega, the Rose Bowl is a prize worth winning.

For that setting, as well as the boost the result gave to the program's perception, this was Ohio State's best bowl win since the 2003 Fiesta Bowl and deserves a place among the best bowl wins ever for the Buckeyes. This is one to savor.

**Youngstown Vindicator:** Once upon a time, long about December of 2006, Jim Tressel could do nothing wrong. He owned I-AA from Stambaugh Stadium, owned Michigan- after calling them out first- owned the Big Ten, owned BCS games, captained the greatest season in program history, had one National Championship in the pantry and another (seemingly) browning in the oven... the man was on a roll. If Tressel said he was going to cure cancer, bring manufacturing back to Ohio or walk his team across Lake Erie
*("It's gonna be a heck of a challenge; we've got a lot of respect for that body of water... heck, you can't be a lake for as long as it has and not know what you're doing...")*
people would have been ready to believe him.

Then came the Disaster in the Desert, which didn't just crack Tressel's shell of invincibility- it shattered it. More high-profile losses followed- to LSU, to USC, to Texas, and to USC again. All of a sudden, to critics within and without, Jim Tressel wasn't an untouchable anymore. He didn't get the most of out of his talent. His teams beat up on a weak Big Ten and folded against the big boys. His control-the-clock, run-the-ball, play-defense and kick-field goals strategy was an anachronism in an era of high-powered spread offenses. He was too stodgy, too conservative; too *Tressel* to keep Ohio State in the national elite.

Ohio State's conquest of Oregon was Jim Tressel's friendly tap on the shoulder of America: "Hey fellas, not sure if you remember, but I can coach a little bit." On the hallowed stage of the Rose Bowl, the Vest never stepped wrong. He had his team well-prepared, physical and enthusiastic for the task. He was aggressive offensively, going against his tendencies and coming out throwing, while his defense flew around the field and rose to the challenge repeatedly against Oregon's heralded offense. His Buckeyes won and looked damned good doing it. Then he accepted the trophy, flashed his studied Midwestern charm, threw some heck's and darn's out there and gave a shout-out to the Best Damn Band in the Land.

It wasn't a perfect effort. The offense still settled for too many field goals in situations where touchdowns should have been the outcome. As was the case against Florida, LSU, Texas and the first game at USC, the Buckeyes failed to

sustain early momentum. Had it not been for LeGarrette Blount's freak fumble into the end zone late in the third quarter, this game, for all Ohio State's statistical domination, might have had a very different result. But the bottom line is, the Buckeyes won- and they did it the Tressel Way, by controlling the clock, playing defense, winning the battle of the kicking game and letting the other guy make the costly mistakes. And they did it against exactly the kind of high-powered, up-tempo team the Vest isn't supposed to beat.

**Franchise Player:** One thing should be abundantly clear in the aftermath of the Rose Bowl: the Buckeyes can win, and win big, with Terrelle Pryor. The big Pennsylvanian was efficient, mistake-free and reasonably accurate against Oregon, completing 23-of-37 with a two-to-one touchdown-to-interception ratio. He also added the requisite ground yards with 72 on twenty carries and, most impressively, led the offense to 11-of-21 on third down conversions. Ohio State's best defense in the Rose Bowl was its offense, and Pryor was a huge reason for the overwhelming time-of-possession edge the Buckeyes enjoyed- an edge that was *the* big factor in the victory.

It's hard to call Pryor's performance *great*- he still had those happy feet and missed on what should have been a touchdown pass to Dane Sanzenbacher in the third quarter- but it's a measure of just how talented the kid is when he racks up 338 total yards on just a "solid" outing. He'll still have his ups and downs in the coming year (or years, as the case may be), but at the very least the loose talk about converting him to wide receiver should come to a merciful end. And we know he's got the talent to win a game practically single-handedly.

**A Corner Turned:** Ohio State didn't just lose the game when it was steamrolled by Florida in the 2007 BCS Championship. The Buckeyes seemingly lost the measure of confidence and tenacity a team needs to win big games against top opponents. You could almost see the shoulders slump and the heads drop when LSU and USC got rolling. Those games snowballed in large part because the Buckeyes didn't think they were capable of reversing the avalanche. . The belief just didn't seem to be there. The team always seemed to be waiting for the other shoe to drop.

Ohio State might have turned the psychological corner in last season's Fiesta Bowl, when the Buckeyes rallied from a 17-6 deficit to take a late lead over Texas. From then on it was just a matter of finishing the game the right way, and although it didn't happen against USC, it did against Oregon. You'll never erase the Disaster in the Desert completely from the memory banks- and absolute payback won't come until Ohio State beats an SEC opponent for the National Championship- but at the very least that lousy night should no longer stalk this program's every waking step.

**Trenches Über Alles:** Of course, it wasn't all psychological in those big-game losses. Part of it was the battle at both lines of scrimmage, where the Buckeyes fared like Napoleon III at Sedan . Ohio State won the National Championship in 2002 with an offensive line that was good enough and a defensive line that could generate pressure on its own, freeing the back seven to plug the holes and make plays in pass defense. Without that kind of defensive front the Buckeyes were at a distinct disadvantage, and it showed. It was never about "speed" in the blanket descriptions of the co-called experts: it was always about the trenches.

What a difference a good defensive line makes. Ohio State's talent and depth up front was its best of both since 2002. With the dominant players in front of them, the linebackers were kept clean and given the opportunity to flow freely to the ball and make critical plays against the pass. The defensive line whipped USC everywhere but the scoreboard; destroyed Penn State and continually stymied Oregon's read-option attack. Just about everything positive about Ohio State's defense started with the big men in the trenches.

You can't win a National Championship without having real strength on the defensive line. After a dry spell, Ohio State has that strength back. And for the first time in a relatively long time, the Buckeyes look ready to compete physically with the teams they'll need to beat to win it all.

**High Confidence:** If the folks in Buckeye Nation are feeling a little bullish these

days, it's tough to blame them. The onerous BCS losing streak is over, the team has finished a healthy fifth in the national polls, and the program got some golden news when Cameron Heyward, along with Ross Homan, Chimde Chekwa and Jermale Hines, decided to stick around for their senior seasons. Thad Gibson is going pro, but the chances of keeping both Gibson and Heyward in the fold were long to begin with; one is about the best we could hope for, and if one of those guys is going to stay it might as well be the Son of Ironhead, who mauls everything in front of him.

There's a ton of talent coming back as a whole. The Buckeyes retain their quarterback, top three rushers, top two receivers, and four starting linemen on the offensive side of the ball, while a raft of experienced players come back to man the defense. It wouldn't be a surprise to see Ohio State ranked as high as second in the preseason polls, after Alabama- which puts the Buckeyes in the pole position for a BCS title-game run next season. Most seem pleased with an outright Big Ten title and a Rose Bowl victory in 2009 (I know I'm pleased as punch about it) but it's looking like a crystal football-or-bust type of proposition in 2010.

***Around the Nation:***

**Big Ten, What:** After a good three years of being college football's punch-line conference the Big Ten finally did a little punching back. Facing arguably the toughest bowl slate of any conference, the Big Ten rocked and socked its way to a 4-3 overall record, four wins over favored top-fifteen opponents, a clean sweep of BCS games and a 1-1 standoff with God's Conference down Dixie way. Even the losers- Minnesota, Northwestern and Michigan State- acquitted themselves well. 4-3 isn't perfect, and the conference still hasn't won a National Championship since Ohio State turned the trick in 2002- but prestige-wise, the Big Ten is still in as good a shape as it's been since the Buckeyes and Michigan met in the one-versus-two showdown in 2006.

**God's Conference Rules:** The SEC might not be quite the omnipotent force it's made out to be- Tennessee and South Carolina looked awful in defeat and

Auburn and Arkansas looked slightly less awful in victory- but for the fourth consecutive year, folks in the Region Formerly Known as the Confederacy are clinging moonshine glasses in celebration of a National Championship. God's Conference is now 6-0 in BCS Championship Games, with a full third of its member teams- Florida twice, LSU twice, Tennessee and Alabama- hoisting crystal footballs in that span. No other league has the balance or the hardware to match up.

And yeah, I know the "ESS-EEE-CEE" chants and the National-Championship pimping by Kentucky and Vanderbilt fans is annoying. But they're going to keep doing it until one of those teams gets taken down in the title game, and there's no sense in complaining about it. Barring injury, Ohio State will have as good an opportunity as anyone to do the honors.

**Snoop Dogg- Find another Bandwagon:** Because USC's is on the verge of being stripped and left up on blocks. Pete Carroll is headed to Seattle one step ahead of the NCAA, which now should find the initiative to actually go after the Trojans now that Petey's store-bought Camelot is out of business. If the hammer falls you can pretty much forget about Troy as a national power for the time being. It's going to be almost impossible under the circumstances for USC to bring in a coach capable of keeping them in the conversation. The Trojans, afterthoughts in their own conference as the last decade began, ended it as perhaps the nation's most consistent winner. But they end the decade in turmoil as well- and in Los Angeles, the next ten years don't look quite as bountiful as the last.

**Check That:** Did I say *USC* was the country's most consistent winner? I'm sorry, I misspelled *Boise State*. The Broncos bowled to a 112-17 overall record, four undefeated regular seasons, two perfect seasons, two BCS bowl victories and eight Western Athletic Conference titles during the 00's. Their rise from I-AA stalwart to I-A pocket grenade has been fueled by a feeble conference and a strong reluctance to go east of the Mississippi; they've been hindered by the corresponding hit to their overall credibility. They're doing

something about the latter in 2010, by going to Washington DC to take on Virginia Tech. They'll need to do something about the former if they aim to get that National Championship they covet.

**Little Help Here, Please:** Someday Nebraska's Bo Pelini hopes to build a team his defense can be proud of. Fueled by its overpowering front four the Huskers whitewashed Arizona 33-0 in the Holiday Bowl, finishing the season tops in the FBS in scoring defense (10.4 ppg) and third in yards-per-play allowed at 4.0. Despite boasting arguably the nation's best defense the Huskers lost four games, including three by a total of four points thanks to an offense that scored 34 points in those heartbreakers. It's appropriate that the Wildcats were the victim of Nebraska's bowl thrashing: the spiritual successor to these Huskers is the "Desert Swarm" Arizona teams of the early ‘90s who were pushed by a great defense and pulled by a horrible offense.

***Winners of the Bowl Season:***

**Alabama:** The Crimson Tide pounded Texas for 205 rushing yards and got the crucial breaks as they finished up their first perfect National Championship season with a 37-21 win over the Longhorns. They very well could have lost the game if Colt McCoy hadn't gotten knocked out- I think they would have- but it doesn't matter.

**Iowa:** The Hawkeyes won their first major bowl since 1959, shutting down Georgia Tech's triple option and dominating the Yellow Jackets in the Orange Bowl, 24-14. Completing a trend among the Big Ten's top four teams, Iowa completely owned total yardage and time of possession while allowing its opponent to hang around with wasted scoring opportunities and turnovers. Up front the Big Ten can play with any conference in America, but it could stand to get a little more efficient as a whole when it comes to scoring the football.

**Florida State:** Bobby Bowden went out a winner as the Seminoles overcame a

14-3 deficit to steamroll West Virginia, 33-21. The 80-year old Bowden leaves the game with 375 career wins; or 361 if you click your heels three times and make fourteen of them magically disappear.

**States That Grow Potatoes:** Spud-sewing season is long over in Idaho, but there was still plenty of reaping to be done in terms of bowl heroics spun by bold and creative coaching. In the Humanitarian Bowl Idaho coach Robb Akey, mixing confidence in his team's offense with skepticism in its defense, eschewed the extra point and went for two and the win. It paid off as Nathan Enderle hit Preston Davis to nail home a 43-42 win in maybe the most exciting of all the bowl games. Boise coach Chris Peterson broke open a defensive struggle in the Fiesta Bowl with a fake-punt call from his own 33-yard line midway through the fourth quarter. It worked for a 29-yard gain and the Broncos were on their way to the score that would give them a 17-10 victory over TCU. Idaho isn't exactly thought of as the heart of college football, but with Peterson and Akey no state has a higher concentration of FBS coaching talent.

**Mid-American Conference:** The MAC snapped a 14-game bowl losing streak with Central Michigan's come-from-behind, 44-41 double-overtime triumph over Troy in the GMAC Bowl. Despite its 1-3 overall record the MAC gave a good account of itself: Central Michigan won, Bowling Green put forth a great effort in the loss to Idaho, and Temple led favored UCLA for most of the EagleBank Bowl before fading late. The league's headliners also came to play: Dan LeFevour threw for 395 yards in CMU's win over Troy while BGSU's record-setting Freddie Barnes, who always seems to be wide open, had 17 catches for 219 yards and three touchdowns in his team's loss to the Vandals.

***Losers of the Bowl Season***

**Texas:** The Longhorns just couldn't catch a break in their 37-21 BCS title-game loss to Alabama. They lost Colt McCoy on their fifth offensive play and without

their leader parlayed a massive early edge in momentum and field position into a mere 6-0 lead. Backup Garrett Gilbert was hampered by his own inexperience and some crucial drops by his receivers. A vapor-locked shovel pass call turned into an Alabama touchdown right before halftime to give the Tide an insurmountable 24-6 lead, and Texas's second-half comeback was short-circuited by, among other things, a couple of pass-interference penalties that weren't called. The Longhorns deserve kudos for continuing to fight when it looked as if they were going to be blown out; but it just wasn't their night.

**TCU's Offense:** The balanced attack which had devastated opponents throughout the regular season was nowhere to be found in Glendale. The Horned Frogs were 1-of-12 on third downs, piled up a measly 36 yards rushing, committed seven penalties and turned the ball over three times in their Fiesta Bowl loss- including a pick-six which gave Boise an early 7-0 lead. It was a surprisingly lackluster effort from a team that had been getting best-in-the-nation buzz going into the game and a disappointment for the Mountain West, which had enjoyed a sensational bowl season up to TCU's pratfall.

**Cincinnati:** A tumultuous several weeks culminated with a catastrophic 51-24 loss to Florida in the Sugar Bowl. The Bearcat defense was roasted for 659 total yards while Cincinnati's players embarrassed themselves with undisciplined play and ill-timed antics (doing the Gator Chomp might be fun; doing it while down thirty points is not recommended.) In retrospect, the worst thing that could have happened to the Big East was Cincinnati's comeback win over Pitt in the *de facto* conference championship game. Pitt's program was much more stable than Cincinnati's and the meat-and-potatoes Panthers, with their ball-control offense and strength in the trenches, would have been a better physical match-up for Florida than the Bearcats.

**Pac-10:** As if having its flagship member kneecapped wasn't bad enough, the Pac-10 limped through a 2-5 bowl season that included two decisive losses to Mountain West schools and the league's first Rose Bowl defeat since 2000. The wins- UCLA's comeback against Temple and USC's Emerald Bowl snoozer over Boston College- weren't much to write home about either.

**South Carolina:** For the second consecutive year the Gamecocks stumbled listlessly through their bowl game, putting up only a token effort in a 20-7 loss to Connecticut in the papajohns.com Bowl. Once again it was two steps forward, two steps back for this enigmatic team, which looked great in its win over Clemson in the season finale yet just didn't show up in January. South Carolina has great facilities, a doting and supportive fan base, and is a member of the most prestigious football conference in the country. The program seems to have potential. Yet it just hasn't found the man who can tap that potential- and its plain by now that Steve Spurrier is most definitely not that man.

**In Closing:** Thank you for taking the time to read this column and for your feedback- whether positive or negative. It isn't perfect, it isn't as good as it could be (and will be), but it is certainly fun to write and I hope some of that came across. Next season can't come soon enough.