When is a mistake too big to overcome?

That's the question that Ohio State Athletic Director Gene Smith, Ohio State President Gordon Gee and each member of the Ohio State board of trustees is actively weighing when it comes to the future of head football coach Jim Tressel.

It's been a few weeks now since the notice of infractions from the NCAA that everyone knew was coming finally did show up on Ohio State's doorstep. Though it really didn't contain anything knew, it provided another round of fodder for those who were looking to knock the Buckeyes down a peg or two anyway. That's not the problem.

The problem is it also gave fodder for those who have been defending Tressel another opportunity to rethink their position and each time that opportunity arises, undoubtedly some will do just that.

For me, I won't be revisiting where I landed on the Tressel situation initially. That said, I do understand those that are beginning to feel differently. If nothing else you just get the sense that Tressel's dishonesty or naïveté or however you want to paint his reaction to emails from a Columbus attorney about his players trading memorabilia for tattoos is starting to spook some of

his most ardent backers.

Smith, for example, all but threw Tressel to lions in a recent and somewhat bizarre interview with USA Today. Smith intimated, for example, that Tressel was supposed to apologize at that initial press conference and did not, requiring Smith to remind Tressel of his obligations in that regard. Smith further intimated that Tressel was even somewhat reluctant to apologize because of, essentially, pride.

Well, Tressel did apologize and took full responsibility at the press conference. Apparently it wasn't exactly in the format Smith wanted. Fair enough, Smith is the boss and has the right to dictate the terms and the obligation to express his unhappiness when performance falls short.

But Smith going public about that small point, and it was a small point, is evidence that this incident has worn Smith's patience thin and that for now and the foreseeable future Tressel has absolutely no margin for error. It's also suggestive of a clear rift between the two.

This isn't at all to demonize Smith. The responsibilities of his job make it absolutely critical that the inmates never be seen as running the asylum and in this circumstance and irrespective of his status, Tressel is still one of the inmates.

But it's still a little unseemly for Smith act that way toward Tressel publicly. If Smith has lost confidence in Tressel, that's understandable. If that's the case, then replace him and move on. But treating Tressel publicly like a pariah says at least as much about Smith's lack of leadership skills as Tressel's lack of candor says about his credibility.

The irony in all of this is that neither Smith nor Tressel lack for leadership skills or credibility, generally speaking. Both have been extremely valuable additions to the Ohio State athletic family. Yet because a group of knuckleheaded 18-20 year olds with an entitlement attitude and a desire to cut corners put both of them in the most difficult of spots, both now find themselves having to account for careers that essentially were unblemished until then.

Then of course were the recent comments from B1G Ten Commissioner Jim Delaney seeking a

little distance between himself and his involvement in allowing Terrelle Pryor and company to play in the Sugar Bowl. Delaney went down the predictable "if I had known then what I know now" road by suggesting that on second thought he shouldn't have gone to bat for the group.

The national writers, like Stewart Mandel at Sports Illustrated, treat every story related to this sordid mess as more evidence to support a completely made up theory that Tressel's job status is in trouble. Joel Hammond, writing recently for Crain's Cleveland Business, made Mandel's same points, just on a local level. So have many others.

And yet there really hasn't been anything new in this story since that initial press conference because Smith isn't commenting (except when he does), Tressel isn't talking and someone put a harness on Gee, probably for good reason.

For those who are starting to question whether Tressel can or should continue, I understand the argument because it's the easy one to make. Pull out a copy of his book, The Winners' Manual, find a passage or two about honesty and integrity, and then label him a hypocrite unfit to coach young men.

The problem with that narrative is that it suffers from a false premise itself. Tressel isn't a hypocrite, by text book definition or otherwise. A hypocrite is one who pretends to have certain virtues that he in fact doesn't have. Where's the evidence that Tressel meets any of that criteria.

Falling short on one occasion doesn't make one a hypocrite or, if it does, then let the first person among us who isn't a hypocrite apply for the Buckeyes' head coaching job. It won't be a very long line outside of Gene Smith's office.

A hypocrite implies someone having a pattern of saying one thing but doing another, like Newt Gingrich running on a family values platform as he moves on to his third wife, or is it his fourth?

When it comes to Tressel no one has suggested such a pattern because there in fact isn't one.

Indeed, the reason virtually every former Buckeyes player not named Kirk Herbstreit, not to mention virtually every notable college football coach in the nation, has come out so strongly in support of Tressel is because his actions here were so anomalous.

That isn't to suggest that any of them agree with Tressel's actions here because they are indefensible. He had any number of other ways he could have handled this and chose absolutely the wrong one. He's in the midst of being punished, may be subject to more, and the program is likewise going to be punished. It's all deserved.

But the punishment, too, has to fit the crime. There is a reason that not every crime carries the death penalty and whatever else one may think about what Tressel did, he didn't commit a death penalty crime.

There may come a point where Tressel's future should be seriously reconsidered but simply because the formal allegations everyone expected finally arrived isn't it.

Tressel will survive this mess and so, too, will the Buckeyes. It will be tough in the near term when the additional penalties finally hit. But there's a cycle to this story just as there is with most others and I suspect that those writing Tressel's death notice now will be the same ones writing about his remarkable resurrection sometime down the road. Because the thing to remember most is that if there's one story people enjoy more than the one where the hero alls from grace it's the one where the hero rises again and redeems himself.