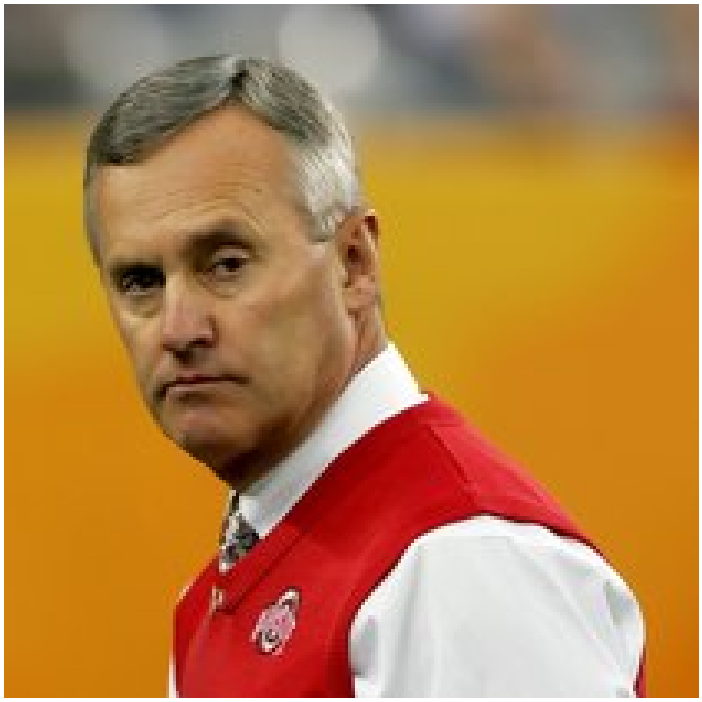

I think Coach Tressel had to go. The minute a head coach becomes a liability to the team or program he's leading- for whatever reason, be it the win-loss record for, well, what we have here- that coach needs to move on, one way or another. That minute arrived for Woody Hayes when he landed the punch to Charlie Bauman's facemask late in the 1978 Gator Bowl, it arrived for Earle Bruce and John Cooper at their own times; it arrived for Jim Tressel this spring. It was time for the coach, the football program and the university to move on.

I think it would be satisfying emotionally to blame this entire mess on the so-called Tat 5- particularly Terrelle Pryor, who at this point seems like an undercover agent recruited for the express purpose of destroying the Ohio State University football program. But you don't blame Terrelle Pryor, you blame the man who sustained him- and that man is Jim Tressel. That having been said, I don't think I will shed crocodile tears if Terrelle Pryor never again puts on an Ohio State uniform. As many games as won, as many spectacular plays as he's made, he has been a net liability for the program- and it's long past time for him to seek his fortune elsewhere. The same goes for the rest of the "Tat 5."

I think the rule regarding players selling their memorabilia is stupid. I think they earn those totems and have the right to profit from them if they so choose. I don't think they should, I'd like to think I wouldn't were I in their shoes (then again, I might) but that isn't the same as believing they shouldn't be allowed to do so. That doesn't excuse them doing so. Flouting rules is one thing, but these guys weren't just playing games with their own futures.

I think if Coach Tressel were a “lovable rogue” a la Barry Switzer the backlash wouldn’t be nearly as strong. But there’s nothing the media establishment loves as much as unearthing a “hypocrite” who talks about God, Family and Country out of one side of his mouth while talking dirty out of the other. In today’s culture being a “hypocrite” is a far worse sin than being a loud-and-proud degenerate. Is that right and proper? I don’t necessarily think so. But that’s the way it is.

I think the vaunted Sports Illustrated article is mostly half-baked trash. I particularly liked the story, based on a conveniently anonymous source, about Coach Tressel rigging raffles during football camps a quarter-century ago. It was a cheap shot and there was no reason for it to appear in print. I think the reliance on anonymous sources for articles like these stories is also crap. This isn’t an issue of national security where the lives of sources could conceivably be on the line. Let’s see some names and faces if you’re trying to destroy a man’s livelihood and reputation. To smear a man based on anonymous sources is the coward’s way out.

I understand George Dohrmann won the Pulitzer Prize for taking down the University of Minnesota basketball program at the turn of the century. I think I’m about as impressed by that as an Order of Lenin won by a Soviet apparatchik in 1988.

I don’t think for a second that Coach Tressel lied to protect his players. At the risk of sounding cynical, I think he lied to protect his chances of winning a National Championship in 2010. I think he gambled on the NCAA not finding out about how deep the rabbit-hole was- and lost. I think he would have been more forthcoming had he seen a 6-6 or 7-5 football team on the horizon instead of a team that had a good shot at competing for the crystal football.

Having said that, I think Coach Tressel is fundamentally a good man who committed a terrible error of judgment- and did so without the cleanest of motives. He deserves to be judged for the way his tenure ended- but that isn’t the totality of the man.

I don’t think this is some kind of “end of innocence” moment in terms of Coach Tressel not quite being the paragon of virtue he was purported to be. I think a squeaky-clean big-time college sports program is as easy to find as the proverbial hooker with the heart of gold. They’re all dirty in some way, shape or form and that isn’t to excuse what went on in Columbus- it’s just the reality. I agree with legendary Kansas basketball coach Phog Allen when he stated, “No team

that has won a championship can look back and say it has kept the real letter of the law." There are too many young men with talent and too many old men with money in close proximity, too many temptations; too many choices that can be made for good or for ill. It's a swamp that can never be drained.

I think the pundits who are responding to this mess by declaring, "We need to pay the players!" need to remember two words: Title Nine. Want to pay football players? Get ready to play female volleyball and lacrosse players as well. Then watch every major college sports program in the country go tits-up bankrupt in about five minutes.

I think a free college education and the opportunity to cherry-pick the best tail on campus is payment enough for these guys, frankly. And like I said before, I think they should have the right to sell things like tickets and memorabilia as well.

I don't think history will be as kind to Coach Tressel as it has been to Woody Hayes, who is still lionized in this state regardless of the tawdry way he went out. Ohio State's football program didn't get whacked because Woody decked a Clemson nose tackle. Coach Tressel, for all the good he did- and he did a ton of good- is leaving the program in worse shape than when he found it. His legacy will not escape the stain of how he left; nor should it.

That doesn't mean I think history will leave Coach Tressel's legacy completely in the dustbin. History won't forget the BCS National Championship (unless it winds up being vacated, which I don't think it will be.) Nor will it forget the 9-1 record versus Michigan, the Big Ten Championships or the BCS bowl victories (again, depending on how many of those are vacated.) To a large extent Tressel's place in the cosmos depends on how quickly Ohio State bounces back from the setback that's bound to take place in the next few years. If the damage isn't long-lasting it helps him. If it is, well…

I think the Ohio State fans that complained about Coach Tressel's stilted offenses, his fetish for field position and the punt, his habit of playing not to lose, are going to find out that the grass isn't necessarily greener on the other side of the fence. I could get as frustrated by Tressel as anyone- I still think he was responsible for the Buckeyes' 2009 home loss to a USC team they should have beaten easily- but there is no such thing as the perfect coach. They all have their warts. Some members of Buckeye Nation were spoiled by the Tressel Era. They're about to get un-spoiled.

I think Luke Fickell has his work cut out for him. He's an Ohio State lifer- a tough, dependable defensive lineman for John Cooper's powerhouses in the mid-90s and one of the architects of Tressel's superb defenses in the last several years- and he might be a fine head coach. But he's in an awfully difficult situation. Fortunately, not much will be expected of him.

I think the 2002 National Championship, the 14-0 season, the greatest season in Ohio State football history, is worth the crap we're putting up with in the here and now. I'd gladly trade the latter for the former.

I think the Buckeyes are in for a tough few years. But this is Ohio State. They'll be down- but they won't be down forever.