The Luke Fickell era has gotten off to a low-key start in Columbus, to put it mildly. I'm hearing from several people close to the Ohio State program who feel that Fickell has been somewhat slighted by the OSU administration in the week and a half since Tressel's resignation. By the time he meets with the media for the first time this Monday to be formally introduced as the interim head coach at Ohio State, two weeks will have passed since he was named as Tressel's successor on the day of the resignation announcement.

Fickell may be glad to have avoided the glare of the media spotlight during a crazy time for the program, but I'm guessing that complete invisibility wasn't what he had in mind either.

I'm sure he's been busy, and equally sure that meeting with the media isn't the highest of his football priorities. But he is "the face" of the program now, if only an interim one, and he is widely perceived to have been left twisting in the wind by a school that seems not to want to show its face...any face...of late. Fickell has to solidify the recruits he already has committed for 2012, and do his level best to give the program some semblance of stability and continuity in the midst of what looks more like chaos. One hopes the school shows that they're solidly behind him starting next week. Dropping the interim tag might help him do his job.

You can't envy Fickell his task. It's an unbelievably tough spot the Buckeyes' young coach is in. Even before the players come in this July for summer workouts, it seems like at least a mini-shake-up of his coaching staff is inevitable. I hope he sheds some light on the situation when he finally meets with the media on Monday. In the meantime, speculating is what we do here....

Coaching Questions

Surely all the assistant coaches have their resumes dusted off. Why wouldn't they? They can't realistically see a secure future in Columbus beyond one year. The New Regime cometh....and for the OSU administration to ask for loyalty from any of Tressel's assistants at this point would be to invite a chuckle. That is, as long as Luke Fickell has the word "Interim" attached to his title.

Two of the more senior of the assistants, offensive line coach Jim Bollman , and of course the former coach's brother,
Dick Tressel
, have seen the object of their long term loyalty dispatched. And young up-and-coming coaches like
Stan Drayton
,
Taver Johnson
and
Paul Haynes
would make attractive candidates for jobs at any top FBS program. The timing of the resignation may turn out to be positive for OSU's fortunes in 2011, in that most programs have their coaching staff in place at this point in the calendar, and the raiding of the OSU staff may be minimal...for now.

I truly hope Fickell is currently begging defensive coordinator Jim Heacock to stay and solidify the defensive side of the ball, while he tries to figure out what to do on offense. Heacock could have had many a head coaching job in recent years had he wished to go that direction. He has already been a head coach (Illinois State) and he's in his early 60's, so he might be content to hang around Columbus...if they'll have him. He pre-dates Tressel at Ohio State, having been at OSU since 1996, so he doesn't owe his job to the departed. All he does is put one of the nation's top 10-15 defenses on the
field
almost
every
year
.

Bollman has been for years the “offensive coordinator” by title, but there were never any illusions about who ran the offense. Jim Tressel did, and when after several years he started giving up some of the play-calling responsibilities, the duty fell mostly to Darrell Hazell, the former wide receivers coach who left this offseason to become the head man at Kent State.

Fickell is himself a defensive player by background, so it seems obvious enough that he needs an experienced “big picture” guy on the offensive side of the ball. I’d be surprised if either Bollman, who came to OSU from Youngstown State with JT, or the brother Tressel, are still around when camp breaks, joined as they are at the hip with Jim Tressel, the disgraced one.

And speaking of being caught in a bind, how about Nick Siciliano ? He was the quarterbacks coach for the head coach who was himself a quarterbacks coach, and now both Siciliano’s mentor and his pet project of the last two years, Terrelle Pryor, have been sent packing for behaving badly. Siciliano seems like a bright, capable young coach. But can a guy survive those two close associations in a program trying to distance itself from both of them?

That leaves Drayton with an offensive background, and even though he sports some impressive stickers on his suitcase, he’s a recent hire who has yet to coach a game at OSU. He worked in the NFL as a special teams coach for a while, but in the college ranks he has coached mostly running backs, and has never been an offensive coordinator. It’s worth mentioning too that Drayton worked on the staff of Urban Meyer from 2005-07 as the Gators’ running backs coach. It’s also notable that he was the Gators’ recruiting coordinator in 2010.

If they stay in the organization, Bollman is the only person remotely credentialed to be an offensive coordinator. And no Buckeye fan I know is feeling all warm and fuzzy about the prospect of OSU taking the field this September with the offense under his direction. Then there’s the politics of having such a close Tressel associate remaining in a prominent role. For me, Question One for Luke Fickell on Monday would be "Who'll be running the offense?"

TP is Finis

[redacted]