

Jim Tressel
Response to Notice of Allegations
Case Number M352

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ALLEGATION 1

[This is the portion of Allegation 1 directly citing Coach Tressel.]

Additionally, Jim Tressel, head football coach, knew or should have known that at least two football student-athletes received preferential treatment from and sold institutionally issued athletics awards, apparel and/or equipment to Rife, but he failed to report the information to athletics administrators and, as a result, permitted football student-athletes to participate in intercollegiate athletics competition while ineligible, as set forth in Allegation No. 2 [NCAA Bylaw 14.11.1]

Coach Tressel's Response

Coach Tressel agrees that he failed to report his knowledge of potential violations to athletics administrators, resulting in football student-athletes participating in competition while ineligible [NCAA Bylaw 14.11.1].

Discussion

In his February 8, 2011 interview with the enforcement staff and the institution, Coach Tressel stated he knew the athletes would inevitably have an NCAA problem, but he did not focus on the issue of eligibility for the 2010 season. He acknowledges the serious mistake and has explained his thinking at the time in his response to Allegation 2.

ALLEGATION 2

[NCAA Bylaw 10.1]

It was reported that Jim Tressel, head football coach, failed to deport himself in accordance with the honesty and integrity normally associated with the conduct and administration of intercollegiate athletics as required by NCAA legislation and violated ethical-conduct legislation when he failed to report information concerning violations of NCAA legislation and permitted football student-athletes to participate in intercollegiate athletics competition while ineligible. Specifically, in April 2010, Tressel received email notification that football student-athletes, including [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], received preferential treatment from and sold athletics awards, apparel and/or equipment to Edward Rife, owner of a local tattoo parlor; however, Tressel failed to report the information to athletics administrators. Additionally, Tressel withheld the information from April 2010 until the institution discovered the emails in January 2011, including throughout the 2010 football season when he permitted football student-athletes to compete while ineligible and during the institution's investigation of the violations in December 2010. Further, in September 2010, Tressel falsely attested that he reported to the institution any knowledge of NCAA violations when he signed the institution's certification of compliance form, which is required under Bylaw 18.4.2.1.1.4.

Coach Tressel's Response

Coach Tressel agrees that he violated NCAA Bylaw 10.1 when he failed to report information concerning violations of NCAA legislation.

Discussion

In his February 8, 2011 interview with the enforcement staff and the institution, Coach Tressel acknowledged the serious mistake he made in not reporting information concerning potential violations of NCAA legislation. He noted at several points in the interview that he should have taken the matter to officials at Ohio State.

At the time he received the emails Coach Tressel had several concerns that led to his error in judgment. In his interview he prioritized those concerns as his focus on the safety of the student-athletes, the gravity of the federal criminal investigation, and the request for confidentiality made by the individual who provided the information. At the time, those concerns trumped any thought he had relating to possible NCAA rules violations. However, Coach Tressel stated in his interview, and acknowledges now, that he should not have allowed those concerns to override his duty to report possible NCAA violations.

Coach Tressel acknowledged that when he received the information, he knew the players could not sell the memorabilia or receive preferential treatment. He also understood that the University policy called for him to notify the compliance office regarding possible violations. He has explained his thinking at the time, but offers no excuses here for his decisions. He understands better than anyone the very serious nature of this case and the allegations against him.

Coach Tressel's Contributions to the Ohio State Community and the Academic Success of His Players

Since he came to Ohio State in January 2001, Coach Tressel and his family have devoted countless hours in service to the Ohio State community. The Tressels have been actively involved with The Ronald McDonald House Children's Charities, Athletes in Action, Nationwide Children's Hospital, the OSU James Cancer Hospital, and the Mid-Ohio Foodbank.

The Tressels have donated over \$3,000,000 since 2001. Their primary beneficiary has been Ohio State as they have gifted \$1.1 million to OSU projects such as the OSU Libraries, OSU James Cancer Hospital and Renovation, and OSU Athletic Facilities. In addition to their cash gifting, the Tressels have created The Tressel Family Fund for Cancer Prevention Research. This fund has grown to over \$1.4 million.

The academic success of a football team is due to the hard work of the players individually and a team effort made by other campus employees and administrators. During the ten years he was head coach, the academic performance of the football team improved significantly, culminating in the Ohio State football program having the Number 1 Academic Progress Rate (APR) score in the nation among the Top 25 teams in the final 2010 USA Today/ESPN Football Coaches Poll. The APR provides a real-time look at a team's academic success each semester by tracking the academic progress of each student-athlete on scholarship. The APR accounts for eligibility, retention, and graduation. Coach Tressel is proud of the success of his teams over time, on the field and in the classroom.

Coach Tressel's Reputation at Ohio State

Among the individuals who serve as the liaisons between an institution and the NCAA membership, there are none more important than the president, faculty athletic representative, and the director of athletics. These three individuals are also crucial actors with significant responsibility in matters relating to enforcement of NCAA bylaws. At Ohio State, those individuals are Gordon Gee, John Bruno, and Gene Smith. They were the three signatories on the institution's March 8, 2011 self-report to the enforcement staff. Their conclusion regarding the actions of Coach Tressel in this matter is noted at page 5:

The institution is very surprised and disappointed in Coach Tressel's lack of action in this matter. His behavior in this situation is out of character for him and is contrary to his proven history of promoting an atmosphere of NCAA compliance within the football program. Since his hiring as the head football coach in 2001, he and his staff have attended NCAA rules education sessions on a consistent basis, regularly sought interpretations, and self-reported secondary violations. His lack of action in this matter appears to have been the result of indecisiveness regarding the appropriate actions to take in this specific situation in which he was placed, as opposed to a blatant disregard of NCAA legislation. Nevertheless, we recognize that he should have forwarded this information in some manner to appropriate institutional officials. With the exception of this mistake, he is a man of integrity and high moral standards.

Coach Tressel has explained his thinking at the time, but offers no excuses for his faulty judgment. While Ohio State correctly noted in its self-report the mistakes Coach Tressel made in April 2010 and the months that followed, the conclusions of the president, faculty athletic representative, and athletic director regarding Coach Tressel's integrity and proven history of promoting rules compliance should be weighed by the Committee on Infractions in the consideration of penalties in the case.

Coach Tressel's contributions in time and resources to the University community, his proven history of promoting an atmosphere of NCAA compliance, and his efforts to promote improvement in the academic performance of his teams during his ten years as head coach at Ohio State must not be forgotten. The people in leadership positions at Ohio State know Coach Tressel and his core values based upon years of working closely with him. Their assessment of him in the March 8 self-report, while recognizing the serious mistake he made, accurately reflects his character over time as head coach at Ohio State. Coach Tressel has paid a terrible price for his mistake, losing his job at one of the premier programs in the country.