



*Thursday, September 2, 2010*

*Ohio Stadium, Columbus, Ohio*

*Marshall University at Ohio State*

*7:30 p.m. (ET)*

*TV: Big Ten Network*

*The Ohio State Buckeyes will host [Marshall University](#) Thursday night at Ohio Stadium to kick off the 2010 season, the first step in a journey they hope will land them in Glendale, Arizona in January. College football teams all around the country have the same dream, but this year the Buckeyes are one of a handful of teams that arguably have the dream and the team. And these Buckeyes are not shy about going on record that their goal is the national championship.*

Jim Tressel has 15 starters returning from the 11-2 Big Ten and Rose Bowl champions of last year, a team that finished the season on a six-game winning streak, and ranked No. 5 in the final poll. When the Buckeyes look back at the two close losses (Purdue and USC) that kept them from an appearance in the BCS final a year ago, they see games that the evolving OSU team that beat Oregon in January would have won. A certain determination and seriousness of

purpose is the overriding mindset on display these days around Ohio State football. The entire program exudes it.

Tressel is already in hype-management mode with his team, although this does not seem like a group likely to get too full of themselves. Tressel only needs to go back two years to remind them of the sky-high expectations surrounding the 2008 Buckeyes.

Great things were forecast for that team as well, before they barely survived a flat outing against Ohio U. in Week Two, and then crashed and burned against USC a week later. That dream didn't survive September. All OSU did that year was win a share of the Big Ten title and finish No. 9 in the polls. Expectations are a bear.

The Marshall team in town this week doesn't look capable of an upset of Ohio State, or even a scare reminiscent of [the one](#) they gave Tressel's Bucks back in 2004, but stranger things have happened. There are 12 hurdles to get over on the way to the goal, and the [Marshall Thundering Herd](#) is No. 1.

### Openers



Jim Tressel is 9-0 in home openers at Ohio State, and the Buckeyes haven't lost one since 1978, when Penn State came in and beat Woody and his freshman QB Art Schlichter 19-0. All-time, OSU is 108-8-4 in home openers.

And if that's not a high enough bar for the Herd to get over on Thursday night, how about this one...Ohio State has won 54 consecutive home games against unranked non-conference opponents. That kind of stuff my friends, is what the [game notes](#) are for.

Jim Tressel is beginning his 10th season as head coach at Ohio State, and regardless of what happens this year, he is capping a ten-year stretch that Big Ten historians will refer to simply as the Tressel Decade. He has a record of 94-21 (.817) overall at OSU, and 59-13 (.819) in Big

Ten play. In the last five years, he is 36-4 (.900) in conference games. In other words...Dominance with a capital "D".

In nine seasons, Tressel has won six Big Ten titles, gone to seven BCS bowl games, reached three BCS finals and won a national championship. He is 8-1 against Michigan. Woody is envious. Coop is embarrassed.

Since Jim Tressel has been Ohio State head coach, in only two seasons has another team won the Big Ten title outright (Illinois;2001 and Michigan;2003). Despite winning National Coach of the Year honors three times, Tressel has never won the Big Ten Coach of the Year Award. By the way, how do you explain a whole group of college football writers being out to lunch for a decade? Just asking.

On to the Marshall game....

### OSU Personnel Updates

The big news personnel-wise is that starting defensive end Nate Williams is going to sit this one out. His knee sprain is coming along, but the decision has been made to make sure he's ready for Miami on 9/11, so he won't be rushed back into action this week.

Senior cornerback Chimdi Chekwa has been babying a strained hamstring, but the word on Monday was that he's feeling pretty good with it, and he is expected to play against Marshall.

A couple of items from Tressel's media availability on Tuesday:

- Travis Howard will split duty with Chekwa at cornerback Thursday, as Chekwa works his way back from the minor injury.
- The second team offensive line will probably see action as a unit, as has been Tressel's practice whenever possible. That line, left to right, is Andy Miller, Connor Smith, Corey Linsley, Jack Mewhort and freshman Andrew Norwell. Smith was singled out as having had an excellent fall camp.
- Safety Orhian Johnson is back practicing after a minor injury, but C.J. Barnett will still probably get the start alongside Jermaine Hines at safety.
- Kicker Devin Barclay has improved his range, and will probably be the guy on all field goal attempts up to 54 yards or so, with Drew Basil trying "the crazy long ones" of 55 yards and up. Basil will handle kickoffs.
- Jordan Hall will be the first option returning punts, and he and Jaamal Berry will be the deep men on kickoff returns.

### Marshall a Mystery?



OSU coaches have seen all the film of Marshall's 2009 season of course, and they're familiar with the Herd's personnel, but the schemes Marshall will be running are a little less clear due to the changeover in the coaching staff. Most of the preseason punditry has them as a middle-of-the-pack team in Conference USA West behind UCF and Southern Miss.

Doc Holliday takes over the reins of the Herd after former OSU assistant Mark Snyder was fired following the 2009 season. Snyder went 7-6 last year, including a Little Caesar's Bowl win over Ohio U., but his mark over five seasons was just 22-37, prompting the school to pull the plug.

Holliday hails from West Virginia, and he spent 20 years on the staff at WVU before moving on to assistant jobs at N.C. State and Florida. It is presumed that he'll be bringing some version of the spread offense into the Shoe against the Buckeyes. He'll operate mostly out of a one-back spread set, and do his best to get the ball to his playmakers at running back and receiver.

Last year's quarterback [Brian Anderson](#) is expected to be the starter again under Holliday. He's coming off a 2009 season with 2,646 passing yards, and 14 TD's along with 13 interceptions, completing 58% of his throws. The Herd has a couple of talented young backups as well, although the highly-regarded Clemson transfer Willy Korn left the school this summer when Anderson won the starting assignment.

The Herd has three starters back on the offensive line, led by Strongsville native Chad Schofield, a senior center. Schofield made some online noise in Columbus this week by commenting that [he hates the Buckeyes now](#), after having grown up an Ohio State fan. (*You're not exactly part of an exclusive club, kid.*)

The Herd has some experience and size at the tackle spots, but it should be a long day for them all, blocking the OSU front seven.

Last year's leading rusher Darius Marshall is gone, but sophomores [Martin Ward](#) and [Andre Booker](#) show promise in picking up the slack. Ward had 383 yards with three TD's in '09, including 75 yards in the bowl game. There seems to be better depth at running back than anywhere else on this Marshall offense.

[Antavious Wilson](#) leads the returning Herd receivers. The 6' 0", 196 lb sophomore had 60 receptions a year ago for 724 yards and three scores. Chuck Walker (33 rec, 350 yds, 3 TD)

and tight end Lee Smith (23 rec, 335 yds) are the other key pass catchers coming back for Marshall. Phil Steele rates Smith as first team all-CUSA.

### Marshall Defense a Good Test

The Herd has a 2009 All-CUSA player at linebacker in Mario "Thumper" Harvey, (6' 0", 250, 4.3) so called for fairly obvious reasons. Overall the defense is this team's better half. Up front at least, the Herd could make a game of it against the OSU rushing game. The secondary has been severely depleted though, by the suspensions of both starting cornerbacks during the offseason.

The defensive line should put up a good fight against the Buckeye rushing attack. End Vinny Curry and tackle Michael Januc team up with Johnny Jones to form a pretty strong unit, with Curry as the best pass rusher of the bunch. Kellen Harris (71) in the middle combined with "Thumper" (117) for 188 tackles in 2009. These guys want the opponent to challenge them in the middle of their defense. How the Buckeyes' offensive line deals with them will be one of the things to watch carefully in this game, because it gets a lot tougher on 9/11 against Miami.

Here's what I want to find out...



...about the 2010 Buckeyes that I don't know....

I want to find out how well the safeties cover downfield in pass defense. Jermale Hines and Orhian Johnson and the Star back Tyler Moeller are big, strong and tough, and they all tackle well. Can they be exploited over the top and deep? Will C.J. Barnett outplay Johnson and remain a starter?

I want to find out why the coaches are so excited about #42 Andrew Sweat at Sam linebacker.

I want to find out how often Jim Tressel will try a field goal when he's got 4th-down at the opponent's 38-yard line instead of punting, since he has [a kicker](#) that can make a pretty high percentage of them from 55 yards out.

Speaking of which, I want to find out how often Jim Tressel will go for the first down on 4th-down at the opponent's 38-yard line instead of punting, because he trusts his defense, and he has lots of different bullets in his gun on offense.

I want to find out how effectively the increased coaching focus has worked on the kickoff return, and the kickoff return defense units.

I want to find out if Tyler Moeller has still got it.

I want to find out if the OSU cornerbacks Chekwa and Torrence and Travis Howard will improve at reacting to the thrown ball, and making plays on the ball in the air.

I want to find out what freshman Philly Brown can do on the football field at receiver...or returner.

I want to find out if Terrelle Pryor is as calm and decisive and accurate and under control at quarterback as he looked in spring and summer scrimmages.

I want to find out who will emerge at the #3 wide receiver spot...can Taurian Washington catch footballs in the fall? Or will it be Chris Fields or Philly Brown instead?

I want to find out if I can key on Zach Boren on every offensive play and still keep up with the game. I also want to find out if Boren becomes the major player in this offense that I think he will be.

I want to find out if Cam Heyward can be better than he was last year

This could go on all night.

Here's what I think I know now...

The Buckeye defense will hit the Herd quarterback, receivers and running backs early and often. By the third quarter or so they will wear down the smaller Marshall players and mistakes, errant throws, fumbles, and dropped balls will result on offense for the Herd.

Without special teams or defensive touchdowns, Marshall won't score more than ten points on Ohio State.

The OSU offense will look like the continuation of the Rose Bowl, with the passing game setting up the run. You'll see a lot more of Pryor rolling out and bootlegging than you did last year.

Pryor will throw the ball at least 25 times, and the OSU tight ends and running backs combined will have at least five receptions. You will wonder where they have been keeping Jake Stoneburner.

Posey and Sanzenbacher will have a field day against two green Marshall cornerbacks. *(I know...they're all green at Marshall)*

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Jim Tressel doesn't blow teams out on opening day. This year might be different, but I still think the Thundering Herd will cover the 28-point spread. I see this one 31-6 Buckeyes.

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Links:

[OSU-Marshall Game Notes \(pdf\)](#)

[2010 OSU Roster](#)

[2010 OSU Schedule](#)

[Marshall - ESPN Home](#)

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