



As the Jim Tressel years at Ohio State shrink in the rearview mirror, we can begin to assess his legacy and take stock of his accomplishments along with his mistakes. Since much of the last year has been spent dealing with the latter, a project to document the best of the Tressel years seemed appropriate right about now.

So we set out to identify the top ten Ohio State games of the Tressel era, a process that got a bit harder after the obvious No. 1 was set in stone. We counted down from No. 10 to No. 2 in [Tressel's Top Ten - Part One](#), so if you haven't seen that yet, you might want to go do that first. We'll wait here.

Like I said, the worst-kept secret has to be the game that comes in at No. 1 on our list....so let's get right to it.



#1 - [OSU 31 - Miami 24 2OT - 1/3/2003](#) - The 13-0 Ohio State Buckeyes squared off with the 12-0 Miami Hurricanes in the BCS Championship Game in the [Fiesta Bowl](#)

at the conclusion to the 2002 season. The Hurricanes had won 34 consecutive games, and were the reigning national champions from 2001. OSU was coming off a 7-5 season in 2001, and were in their second season under Jim Tressel. The Buckeyes were 11.5 point underdogs in Tempe that night, and absolutely no one outside of Ohio was giving them any chance to come out on top against the powerful 'Canes. The rest, as they say, is history.

Ohio State got off to a slow start and fell behind 7-0 after one quarter, but took advantage of two Ken Dorsey interceptions to help them to a 14-7 halftime lead. They stretched that lead to ten at 17-7 in the 3rd, but Miami clawed back to tie the game with a field goal at the end of regulation. Two heart-stopping overtimes later, and after one of college football's most controversial plays ever, Ohio State stopped the Hurricanes on a goal-line stand to win the first national

championship for the program since 1968.

[ESPN Box and Stats](#) - [Complete Play-by-Play](#) -

[YouTube highlights - Part 1](#) - [YouTube highlights - Part 2](#)

(Part 1 highlights above dispenses with the last minute of regulation, but we know what happens there...Miami kicks the tying field goal to send it to OT, which is where Part 2 picks it up.)



I caught up with Steve Helwagen at one of one of the OSU scrimmages this August, and anticipating the interview that follows below, asked him if I could get a copy of his book, "*The Greatest Game Ever Played*", the story of the 2003 Fiesta Bowl.

Steve is the Managing Editor of *Bucknuts.com*, an award-winning journalist, and a veteran of the Ohio State media corps. The book itself is a treat for any OSU fan...an 80-page publication in magazine format, packed with terrific photography from the game, to go with a detailed play-by-play narrative, and all the statistics, rosters, quotations and background you could possibly want. He intended it as a "keepsake" for Ohio State fans, and that's just what it is.

Steve still has some copies of the book available, and you can [purchase one online at eBay](#) , or mail a check to the address at the end of this article. Steve and I spent almost an hour on the phone the other day talking about the Tressel years, the book project, and of course the game. I hope you enjoy the conversation as much as I did.

DW: Steve, for the benefit of our readers, tell us a little bit about your background. I guess you could say you're doing what you always wanted to do...sort of a dream job, I guess...covering

the Buckeyes...



SH: Definitely....I grew up right outside of Columbus...watching the Buckeyes, obviously, on TV, and went to Ohio State. I started covering high school sports right out of high school, and then got up to Ohio State and started working on the school newspaper, and also got hooked up with *Buckeye Sports Bulletin* while I was there. Worked part time for them, and just kind of fell into it after that. I worked full time for BSB for eight years, and I've been at Bucknuts for eight years, so I've been covering Ohio State sports full-time for about 16 years now, but I've really been around it going back to '86 or '87. So, yeah, I'd say it's something I've enjoyed doing...kind of a dream job for me. I've counted up...I've covered Ohio State events in 25 states, so it's taken me all over the country. It's been lots of fun.

DW: Your book is called "The Greatest Game Ever Played", speaking of course about the championship game against Miami. Tell us a little bit about how that project came together. It came out about '06, right?

SH: It came out about three and a half years after the game was played. You know, it was such an amazing game, and it took me a couple of years to wrap my arms around the idea. I started gathering stuff for the book sort of subconsciously...starting from the week that we were there...at the game, in the weeks after the game...going to all the different events...the celebrations...the trip to the White House...and I got to thinking...hey, this would make a great keepsake for all the people around my age, who have never seen anything like this...going all the way back to 1968 when they won the national championship before.

And that was a different era...a different time. I don't want to say they were *down* in the 90's, but they were never able to have that breakthrough, and I think it was so close so many times with John Cooper that it was an amazing thing that Jim Tressel, in his second year, was able to get it done.

DW: A lot of close calls in the 90's... '95, '96, '98....



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