

Ohio State gets bowl ban, other penalties

Written by Administrator

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COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Ohio State players broke the rules and got to play in the Sugar Bowl anyway. Jim Tressel knew about infractions and let it all happen.

Now the Buckeyes and new coach Urban Meyer will pay for it next season.

The NCAA hit Ohio State with a one-year bowl ban and additional penalties Tuesday for violations that started with eight players taking a total of \$14,000 in cash and tattoos in exchange for jerseys, rings and other Buckeyes memorabilia.

Tressel was tipped to the violations in April 2010 but didn't tell anyone — even after the athletes got caught last December but were allowed to play in the Sugar Bowl against Arkansas if they served suspensions to start the 2011 season. Among those in the group: starting quarterback Terrelle Pryor and leading rusher Daniel "Boom" Herron.

Tressel's silence damaged Ohio State in the eyes of the NCAA and the result is that the Buckeyes, with a plum 2012 schedule and one of college football's best coaches in Meyer, will watch next year's bowl games on TV.

"Had we known what (Tressel) knew, we would not have played those young men in that bowl game," said an emotional Gene Smith, Ohio State's athletic director.

Forced out in May and now on the staff of the Indianapolis Colts, Tressel was called out by the NCAA for unethical conduct and will have a hard time coaching at the college level again.

"He's not going to appeal. He accepts the committee's decision. That's all there is to say," said Gene March, an attorney for Tressel.

The university had previously offered to vacate the 2010 season, return bowl money, go on two years of NCAA probation and use five fewer football scholarships over the next three years.

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But the NCAA countered with the postseason ban, more limitations on scholarships and tacked on a year of probation.

"It is still my goal to hire excellent coaches, recruit great student-athletes who want to be a part of this program and to win on and off the field," Meyer said in a statement. "The NCAA penalties will serve as a reminder that the college experience does not include the behavior that led to these penalties."

Ohio State might still have escaped more severe penalties had its problems stopped with the original scandal, which grew out of players' relationship with a Columbus tattoo parlor owner named

Eddie Rife who was under federal investigation in a drug-trafficking case.

But the school and the NCAA discovered two additional problems — after Ohio State went before the committee on infractions in August.

Three players were suspended just before the start of the season for accepting \$200 from booster Bobby DiGeronimo. Then midway through the Buckeyes' 6-6 season it was revealed that several players had been paid too much for too little work on summer jobs — supplied by the same booster. He has been disassociated from the program.

The NCAA on Tuesday found Ohio State failed to monitor its athletic programs.

It was all a sobering blow to Ohio State and to Smith, who through the lengthy NCAA investigation had maintained there was no way the Buckeyes would be banned from a bowl game after the 2012 season. He also had refused to surrender a bowl invitation this season in order to save next year's.

"I never went there because we were confident we would not get a bowl-game ban," Smith said.

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"We were wrong."

As shocking as the Ohio State case was when it broke, it has since been overshadowed by three other scandals in college sports. Former Penn State football assistant coach Jerry Sandusky was charged with more than 50 criminal counts related to child sex abuse, an ex-Syracuse basketball assistant coach was fired after being accused of fondling boys and young men, and a University of

Miami booster caught masterminding a Ponzi scheme claimed he provided money, cars and even prostitutes to Hurricanes athletes.

Tressel, who guided Ohio State to its first national championship in 34 years after the 2002 season, was pressured to resign after 10 years with the Buckeyes. The NCAA hit him with a five-year "show-cause" order which all but prevents him from being a college coach during that time.

"Of great concern to the committee was the fact that the former head coach became aware of these violations and decided not to report the violations," the NCAA Division I Committee on Infractions wrote in its report.

Greg Sankey, associate commissioner of the Southeastern Conference and a committee member, said in a teleconference that Tressel's failure to act was, "considered very serious and, frankly, very disappointing."

Under a show-cause order, any school that hired Tressel would have to present its case for why it needed to employ him, and would risk severe penalties if he were to commit any further infractions after that.

The NCAA also issued a public reprimand and censure, put the Buckeyes on probation through Dec. 19, 2014, and reduced football scholarships from 85 to 82 through the 2014-15 academic year.

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The Buckeyes are preparing to play Meyer's former team, Florida, in the Gator Bowl on Jan. 2. Meyer, a two-time national title winner with the Gators was hired to much acclaim on Nov. 28 and has built a solid recruiting class despite the ongoing NCAA problems.

But a bowl ban could affect those verbal commitments. Even if not, next year's Ohio State team will lose the extra practices allotted before a bowl game.

Herron, Ohio State's starting tailback, was suspended not only for accepting improper benefits from the tattoo-shop owner but also in his summer job. He was voted the team's MVP.

Asked if he felt burdened by the NCAA sanctions, the senior said, "Of course. It hasn't been easy the situation we went through. We all definitely learned from it. We moved forward from it."

Other players said the Buckeyes could follow the example of Southern California, which received even more stringent NCAA sanctions but went 10-2 this season despite not being able to play in a bowl game.

In light of the many problems in college athletics grabbing headlines these days, Sankey was asked if the NCAA was trying to send a message with the bowl ban against Ohio State.

"I would not suggest that this is necessarily a new day," Sankey said. "But these penalties are significant and that's part of the committee's role in both finding violations and then assessing penalties."

Ohio State President Gordon Gee said Tuesday night he hoped that remedies had been taken to avoid any further embarrassing scandals at the university.

"Any president hopes that what they have done is to put in place a process that will assure our

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integrity," he said between halves of the second-ranked Buckeyes' men's basketball game against Lamar. "Saying that, I feel very confident that we have done the things that we need to do to assure that further problems will be identified early and taken care of."