



# MICHIGAN STATE AT NO. 1 OHIO STATE

## A BROTHERHOOD (AND THEN SOME) OF COACHES

How Mark Dantonio and three Tressel family members all came to coach in Saturday's game between Michigan State and Ohio State:

### Mark Dantonio

Michigan State head coach. Former grad assistant under assistant coach Jim Tressel at Ohio State. Eventually followed Tressel to coaching jobs at Youngstown State and with the Buckeyes.

### Jim Tressel >>

Ohio State head coach.

### Dick Tressel

Ohio State running backs coach. Older brother of Jim Tressel.

### Mike Tressel

Michigan State linebackers/special teams coach. Son of Dick Tressel. Nephew of Jim Tressel. Graduate assistant linebackers coach at Ohio State under Jim Tressel (in 2002-03). Formerly coached linebackers/special teams under Dantonio at Cincinnati.

Ohio State coach  
JIM TRESSEL  
and MSU coach  
MARK DANTONIO  
are more than  
colleagues and  
competitors, they're ...



TERRY GILLIAM/Associated Press

# VEST FRIENDS

# WEST FRIENDS

Saturday's game will pit them vs. each other for first time in Big Ten

By SHANNON SHELTON  
FREE PRESS SPORTS WRITER

**E**AST LANSING — When Mark Dantonio wrestled with the thought of leaving Cincinnati to become coach at Michigan State last fall, he consulted with the people he considered his closest confidantes.

That group included his wife, Becky, and daughters, Kristen and Lauren. Outside of his family, he turned to the man who'd served as a teacher and boss, someone who remained one of his trusted friends, Ohio State coach Jim Tressel.

"We're very, very close," Dantonio said during his weekly news conference on Monday. "Coach Tressel and I are very close friends, and before I took this job, I obviously talked with Coach Tressel. There's a very true friendship. I admire him as a person, as a mentor and as a friend, and he's always been there."

The MSU-Ohio State matchup this weekend will pit the two coaches against each other for the first time in Big Ten competition, but this is not the first time that they've been on opposite sides of the field. Ohio State played Cincinnati twice when Dantonio was head coach in 2004-06, and the Buckeyes won both games.

For almost 10 years, though, they were on the same team. Tressel hired Dantonio as an assistant when he got

See MSU, 4C

Game tugs football family every which way

By SHANNON SHELTON  
FREE PRESS SPORTS WRITER

**E**AST LANSING — Little Logan Tressel told his elementary school teacher that he had a dilemma this weekend.

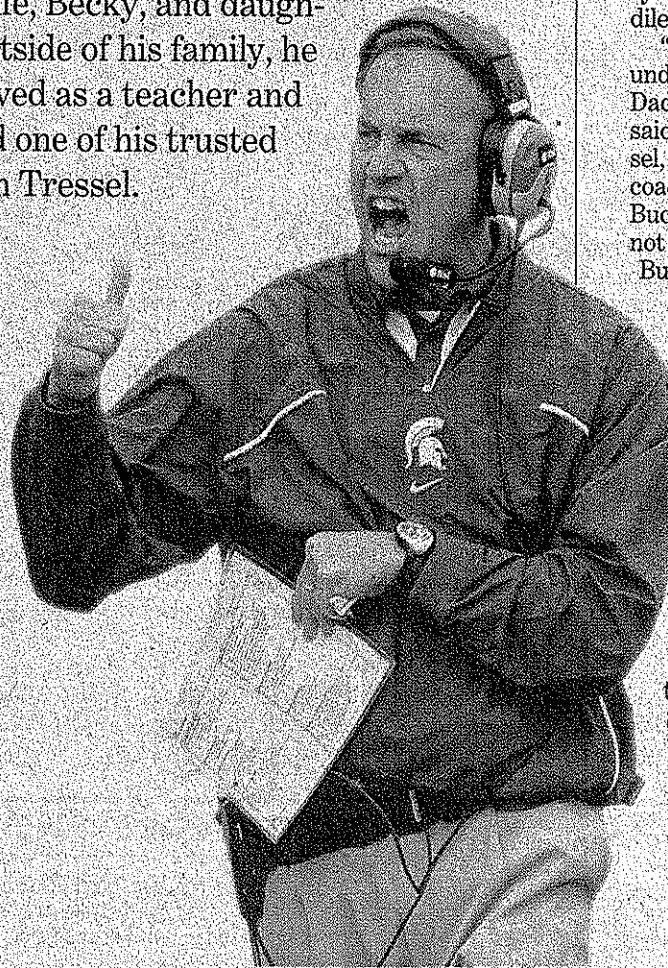
"He has the hardest time understanding it, you know, Dad's playing against Grandpa," said Logan's father, Mike Tressel, Michigan State's linebackers coach. "He typically is 'Go Bucks' and 'Go Spartans.' He's not really allowed to be 'Go Bucks' and 'Go Spartans' this week. It's 'Go Spartans.'"

Mike Tressel, 34, is the son of Dick Tressel, who happens to be the running backs coach at Ohio State. Dick is the older brother of the most famous member of the Tressel family, Buckeyes head coach Jim Tressel.

Those family ties create some awkward moments when they all face each other on the field, as they will Saturday when the Spartans visit No. 1 Ohio State.

Mike coached against his father and uncle when he

See TRESSELS, 4C



# MSU | Coaches Dantonio and Tressel are vest friends

From Page 1C

his first head coaching job at Division I-AA Youngstown State, and later called him when he became head coach at Ohio State. Dantonio left his job as an assistant head coach and secondary coach at MSU to become Tressel's defensive coordinator in Columbus.

Together, they compiled a 32-7 record and coached the Buckeyes to the 2002 national championship.

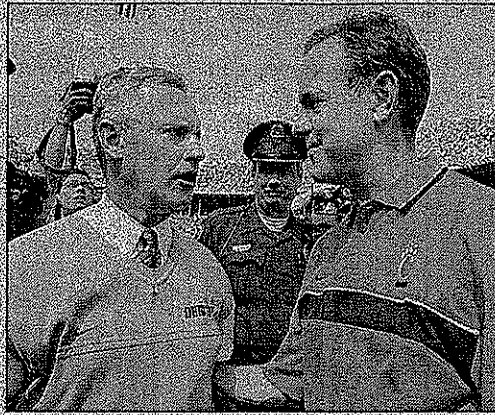
Although the stakes are higher for both coaches Saturday — Ohio State is aiming to hold on to its No. 1 ranking and MSU is trying to secure a signature victory — there's little chance the coaches' relationship will suffer in the process.

A friendship that has lasted more than two decades can survive one football game a year.

Tressel, 54, and Dantonio, 51, met in 1983 when both were working at Ohio State under head coach Earle Bruce. Tressel was an offensive assistant charged with overseeing the graduate assistants, and Dantonio was a graduate assistant for two seasons.

Dantonio left for Akron in 1985, but lost his job as an assistant when the Zips hired a different head coach. Around the same time, Tressel took the Youngstown State job and invited Dantonio to join his staff.

"A lot of the things that we do are patterned after what I've



JAY LAPRETE/Associated Press

experienced with him," Dantonio said. "Empowering our players, I really believe in that, bringing back tradition, searching for the tradition that you have, doing things of that nature. Even at Youngstown State, we went back and searched for traditional things that brought people back in."

Dantonio has few qualms about being compared to Tressel — in fact, he embraces it. From his declaration that the Spartans would beat Michigan — something Tressel did soon after he took the Ohio State job — to the motivational sayings he shares with his own players, many of the changes instituted in the MSU football program over the past year bear the Tressel family imprint.

"I'm a good soldier," Dantonio said when asked if he ever had philosophical differences with Tressel. "That's one thing that Tressel did in my three years

as a defensive coordinator, he's never once gotten on the phone and said, 'What are you doing here?' 'What are you going to call here?' 'Play this here.' 'Why did you call that?' Not one time. He's always empowered his coaches to coach, and that's what I want to do here. I think you get continuity when you do that."

Inside the Duffy Daugherty Football Building on the MSU campus, Dantonio hung posters containing inspirational statements to encourage the Spartan players.

One of the quotes comes from Tressel's father, Lee, a longtime coach at Division III Baldwin-Wallace College. "They don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

Jim Tressel carried that belief throughout his coaching career, and it's one that Dantonio uses often with his players.

Ohio State coach Jim Tressel, left, and Cincinnati coach Mark Dantonio, former defensive coordinator for Ohio State, shake hands after Ohio State's 27-6 win on Sept. 4, 2004, at Columbus, Ohio.

"That's always been one of our core beliefs as a staff that we have to make sure they understand that, yeah, we want them to get first downs and touchdowns and win games and all those things, but that's not the only part of who we are and what we want from a relationship with our players," Tressel said. "But I think Mark innately had that prior to ever being with us."

When Dantonio accepted the job at Cincinnati at the end of the 2003 season, one of the graduate assistants he took with him from Ohio State was Mike Tressel, Jim's nephew. Mike Tressel now coaches MSU's linebackers and special teams.

"On game day, Mark's more outwardly emotional, and Coach Tressel is more even-keeled," Mike Tressel said. "You wouldn't know if they're winning by 40 or losing by 40. But the way they call the game, their beliefs in running the football and playing great defense — the organization of everything in the program is very similar."

There is a Tressel trademark, however, that Dantonio does not plan to adopt.

Sweater vests are just not his style.

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# TRESSELS | Game tugs at a football family's ties

From Page 1C

was an assistant at Cincinnati, but this year will mark the first time he'll work against them in a Big Ten game.

Dick Tressel is quick to note, however, that Saturday's game won't be the first time he has faced one of his three sons in a conference matchup. Luke Tressel, his 28-year-old son, is the wide receivers coach at Minnesota. (Ben Tressel, 32, is a high school teacher and football coach in Minnesota, according to Ohio State.)

"It's a little bit awkward, but the bottom line is this: I grew up in a coaching family," Mike Tressel said. "I've played my dad and my uncle two of the past three years."

Mike, Ben and Luke represent the third generation of the Tressel family coaching tree. Their grandfather Lee spent 23 years at Division III Baldwin-Wallace College in Ohio, where

## MSU at Ohio State

Matchup: Michigan State 5-2, 1-2 Big Ten; No. 1 Ohio State 7-0, 3-0.

When: 3:30 p.m. Saturday.

Where: Ohio Stadium, Columbus, Ohio.

TV: ABC (Channel 7 in Detroit).

Line: OSU by 17.

## U-M at Illinois

Matchup: No. 24 Michigan 5-2, 3-0 Big Ten; Illinois 5-2, 3-1.

When: 8 p.m. Saturday.

Where: Memorial Stadium, Champaign, Ill.

TV: ABC (Channel 7 in Detroit).

Line: U-M by 2 1/2.

he won the 1978 national championship.

Dick Tressel started his full-time collegiate coaching career in Detroit, serving as Wayne State's defensive coordinator in 1974-77. Wayne State won

the Great Lakes Conference title in 1975, its last league championship. He then moved to Hamline University in Minnesota, where he spent 23 years before joining Jim at Ohio State in 2001.

Mike said he grew up with an appreciation for small-college football and planned to follow the same path as his father by coaching at smaller schools. He was a four-year starter in the secondary at Cornell (Iowa), but after a few years of coaching in Division III and Division II, he became a graduate assistant at Ohio State in 2002-03.

That's when he began working with Mark Dantonio, then Ohio State's defensive coordinator. Dantonio hired him as a full-time assistant when he took the head coaching job at Cincinnati, setting up the present intra-family rivalry.

"We talked a little bit about the game, but certainly there's not much smack talking going

on," Mike said about his conversation with his father over the weekend. "That's not the way we do it ... not. My linebackers are going to stuff your running backs."

Dick Tressel had a different take on the conversation.

"I felt like he was asking me a little more about the offense," he said. "I didn't take the bait."

Mike's wife, Megan, son, Logan, and 2-year-old daughter, Quincy, will be staying with Grandpa Dick and Grandma Connie at their Columbus home this weekend. Dick said he hasn't seen his grandchildren since the summer, and he is excited about the visit.

Connie Tressel will claim to be neutral, Mike said, but he thinks she'll be rooting for Ohio State.

As for Mike's family, Dick Tressel has no question about their allegiance.

"They will be wearing green," he said.