

Jim Tressel Helping Guide Ryan Day's Special Teams Philosophy



Ohio State is without a special teams coordinator entering this season, and with Ryan Day seeking solutions for how to handle the game's third phase, he turned to the guru of Ohio State special teams in former head coach Jim Tressel.

"Quite honestly, I made a bunch of calls to a bunch of coaches," Day said on Tuesday. "One in particular that hit with me was when I talked to Coach Tressel, and he shared with me that he did this when he was here. He assigned one of the special teams to each of the coaches."

Special teams were one of Tressel's calling cards during his time with the Buckeyes from 2001-10, known for his brand of "Tresselball" that emphasized field position and strong defense. His success in special teams came not from having a dedicated coach, but from assigning various aspects of special teams to different assistant coaches, allowing the entire coaching staff to have involvement.

"It got great buy in from the players because as a player, you want to really impress your position coach, you want to push your coordinator, you want to press the head coach," Day said. "Sometimes the special teams coordinator can be a little bit low down the line. But when your position coach is up there, and he's coaching special teams, and being the head coach, being a very much a part of it with them, it provided a lot of buy in from the players."

Day is putting that in practice with his current team. Safeties coach Matt Guerrieri and linebackers coach James Laurinaitis are focused on the punt and kickoff units, while tight ends coach Keenan Bailey and wide receiver coach Brian Hartline are in charge of punt and kickoff return. The entire special teams unit is overseen by analyst Rob Keys, a former head coach at the University of Findlay.

"(Keys) can really do a lot of the legwork in terms of off the field stuff, breaking down the film, helping get things organized for us as we get into the meetings," Day said. "But if you've sat in on one of our punt meetings, Matt Guerrieri is running that entire meeting. We get into punt return, Keenan will be up there. He'll be up there a little bit of help from from Brian Hartline."

"I'm going to be right there for every meeting and be a part of it, but Rob is kind of the guy behind the scenes who's going to organize everything for the coaches."

It will be a welcome change for Ohio State after several years of struggling special teams, with kickoff and punt returns largely a nonfactor for the Buckeyes and occasionally costing the team yardage or even entire possessions. With those special teams taking a backseat in recent seasons, Day felt it was time to change up how Ohio State approaches that side of the ball.

"It really made sense to me," Day said. "We're doing a little bit different than (what Tressel did), but that kind of resonated with me and I thought that was the right thing to do this year."