

Ohio State, Notre Dame Ties Provide Unique Wrinkle To Season Opener



Of the teams that Ohio State will take the field with this season, perhaps none are more intertwined with the Buckeyes than Notre Dame, who will visit Ohio Stadium on Sept. 3.

Whether it be coaches, players or even Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith, an alum of Notre Dame, connections are littered throughout these teams as the season opener approaches.

"Yeah, it's interesting. When you look at both staffs, there is a lot of crossover," Day said Tuesday. "We've got some Notre Dame folks who coached at Notre Dame and, vice versa, there's guys who are Buckeyes over there and they've coached here."

The most notable is Notre Dame first-year head coach Marcus Freeman, who played at Ohio State from 2004-08 and returned to the school as a graduate assistant in 2010.

"I have great memories of running on the field at Ohio Stadium, but the ones that you remember the most are the teammates," Freeman said this week. "What we can't do is let those things that are outside those white lines affect what we do on the field because if you do, it's going to be a long game."

Also on Freeman's staff is former Ohio State linebacker James Laurinaitis, who played for the Buckeyes from 2005-08. Laurinaitis joined Freeman's coaching staff as a graduate assistant this offseason. Another hire made this offseason by Freeman was Al Washington, who will operate as the defensive line coach and defensive run game coordinator for the Fighting Irish.

Washington, a former linebackers coach at Ohio State, was one of the casualties of the Buckeyes' overhaul of the defensive coaching staff this offseason.

"Both traditional powerhouses, obviously, being at Ohio State for the past few years," Washington said. "Great, great program, great history, great culture. Not unlike Notre Dame. I say the exact same thing

here with our guys and the men in our room. It's a proud group, and they definitely understand the task at hand."

Along with some of the player connections - Notre Dame wide receiver Lorenzo Styles Jr. and Ohio State safety Sonny Styles are the sons of former Ohio State linebacker Lorenzo Styles - there are no shortage of intriguing angles to the game.

"It's a small world," Day said. "It is kind of unique, but it's exciting. I think we're all competitive and looking forward to play Saturday night."

The familial aspects of Saturday's contests are just one piece of the puzzle, though, and Day said the season opener will be a great opportunity for the Buckeyes.

"It's hard to probably appreciate right now, because there's just so much going on," he said. "But when you think about what an opportunity this is, for Saturday night, just getting Notre Dame and Ohio State together, the first game of the year...all the things combined, what a great opportunity. That's what college football is all about, bringing people back and making it special."