

Holtz weighs in on issues

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By MATTHEW PEASLEE - Special to the Review , The Review



WINTERSVILLE - Open the local paper or watch the local news and you're bound to see stories of drug problems littering the Ohio Valley.

That wasn't the case when Lou Holtz was growing up here.

"We didn't have any drug problems," said the Follansbee-born, East Liverpool- raised Holtz. "However, we did have one drug problem in the early 1950s when Calvin Jones of Steubenville drug us all over the field. Other than that, we had no drug problems."

Holtz, who hosted his annual Lou Holtz Upper Ohio Valley Hall of Fame Dinner at St. Florian Hall on Wednesday, opened his press conference by lauding the Big Red great.

"He was the best high school player I have ever seen," Holtz said, "bar none."

Holtz told the story of how Jones originally intended to play football at Ohio State, but changed his mind at the last minute to join his friends Eddie Vincent and Frank Gilliam at Iowa.

A lot has changed in the college football landscape since then. Holtz, who played linebacker at Kent State, has seen it all.

"I think college football is greater now more than ever," Holtz said.

One reason is because of the College Football Playoff. Ohio State and Alabama were the first two national champions crowned on the field by this new playoff system.

"I think the playoff is a great thing, but you have to go to an eight-team playoff," Holtz said. "I think it's a shame that the conference champion is not automatically assured of being in the playoff."

In 2014, Oregon, Florida State, Ohio State and Alabama made the four-team playoff. Big 12 Conference Co-Champions TCU and Baylor were jilted from the tournament.

In 2015, Clemson, Oklahoma, Alabama and Michigan State were chosen, while Pac-10 Conference Champion Stanford was turned away.

Notre Dame, which went 10-2 in the regular season before an eventual loss to Ohio State in the Fiesta Bowl, also made a case for inclusion into last year's playoff. Holtz, being a legendary coach at Notre Dame, made a case for his Fighting Irish to be included in the playoff.

"Do you take Notre Dame, which is a national treasure, or do you turn your back on the Big 12 two years in a row?" he said. "There would have been all kinds of hell to pay if that had been the case. If you have more teams in the playoff, you get the conference champions and then you take a couple of others like Notre Dame, Houston and some second place teams. It would be great to give more teams a chance."

The 2015 college football season marked the first in the past 10 years in which Holtz was not on ESPN's Saturday coverage. He still appeared on weekly radio programs, but his arguments with former Pitt standout Mark May were surely missed by millions of viewers.

"We had no teleprompter, no script and no rehearsals," Holtz said. "It was great for the mind. I would have loved to have agreed with Mark May, but then we both would have been wrong."

Holtz said he stepped away from television on his own terms. The 79 year old said that Bristol, Conn., home of the ESPN studios, is "in the middle of nowhere" and he didn't adapt well to the harsh November conditions of the Northeast.

From his home in Florida, Holtz was able to make phone calls to add his commentary to nationwide radio shows.