

VESTED INTEREST

Once unfashionable sweater vests have become hip

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While opposing football teams may fear the sweater vest - practically synonymous with Ohio State University Coach Jim Tressel, who wears one on the sidelines at games - there's no need for the rest of us to be alarmed.

It's OK to put one on, even if you're not a stodgy fashion conservative. In fact, sweater vests are actually kind of hip these days.

"Yes, they can be cool and they don't have to be grandfatherly," said Adam Rapoport, style editor at GQ magazine in New York City. "I think it has made a comeback the last couple of years."

Don't just take his word for it. Look around. Turn on your television and see young golfer Camilo Villegas sporting one. Or notice the sweater vest on NBA star Dwyane Wade when he's off the court.



Ohio State football coach Jim Tressel has made wearing a sweater vest his signature look. (THE BLADE)

"It's kind of a return to this sort of classic American preppy style, which is kind of coming back into fashion," Mr. Rapoport said.

It's part of a larger migration in men's fashion from business casual to a more conservative professional dress that includes vests and three-piece suits, according to Laura Schara, a trend expert for Macy's in Minneapolis.

For hipsters who want to incorporate the sweater vest into their wardrobe, she suggests a more fitted European cut, such as you might find with labels Calvin Klein, Kenneth Cole, or Ben Sherman. Pair it with a long-sleeved dress shirt and tie for a pop of color and you'll be as fly as Justin Timberlake.

"That is the way to make it really trend-right," she said.

Here in Toledo, stores have noted the increased popularity of sweater vests and it's reflected in their inventory. Dillard's at Westfield Franklin Park, for example, carries more than 20 different kinds, said Jeff Russell, assistant menswear manager.

PHOTO GALLERY

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"It's a very professional look. It's as much about fashion as it is about the warmth," he said.

It doesn't hurt that the king of Buckeye Nation has made it his signature look.

"It's really put that fashion in the spotlight," Mr. Russell said.

Tressel told the Columbus Dispatch for a story last year that there was no defining moment that led him to make the sweater vest his uniform, but he did joke with the newspaper at the time about its return to style.

"See there, I'm setting the tone," he said.

At the Buckeye & Wolverine shops in Sylvania and Perrysburg, sweater vests are among the top five best-selling items, said Tim Kralovic, general manager.

"A lot of people started it as a Halloween costume and then it poured over into everyday gear," he said. "We sell

them like crazy and it's strictly because of Jim Tressel."

The store even carries a T-shirt version of the sweater vest - reminiscent of the old tuxedo T-shirt - that was created by John Amato, a Central Catholic High School graduate.

If you're going to wear a sweater vest - a real one, not the T-shirt - Mr. Rapoport from GQ said it's important to get one that fits well. You don't want it to be too big, especially if you want to wear it under a suit jacket on a cold winter day, and it shouldn't extend beyond your own shoulders. If you're thinking of wearing one over a T-shirt, you should think again, he added.

In the case of Tressel, the sweater vest is something that he wears well, and it's earned the coach plenty of imitators on game days. But it has its limitations. As Mr. Rapoport pointed out, "They don't seem to help him in national championship games."

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