

HB Arnett's



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Yes, Virginia, There is a Santa Claus

Unfortunately, he will be wearing Cougar blue and you are catching him during his off season this Saturday in Charlottesville in the season opener for both BYU and Virginia.

For the Cavaliers, this is a new year of Ho, Ho, Ho and high hope. They are coming off a 4-8 campaign of last year. Despite a coaching makeover which included adding two former college head coaches in Steve Fairchild (CSU) and Jim O'Brien (BC and NC State), BYU should be the bah humbug for Hoos fans in this season debut for both teams.

Santa has helpers in coming up with this prediction and those helpers work in Las Vegas. They don't assemble toys, but betting lines. The current line has BYU as a 3-point favorite on the road.

Being a field goal favorite over a projected lower echelon ACC team doesn't sound like an exciting endorsement of the Cougars, but considering the game is on the road and BYU will have to travel two time zones away to play the game in hostile territory, Santa and his helpers are saying this contest should be just another stocking stuffer for Cougar fans to enjoy.

Santa is known for making lists and checking them twice. Here is my list of what will make BYU a much better team than they were last year.

1. Taysom Hill. He is the BB gun BYU fans have had on their Christmas list since the departure of John Beck. Hill is the reason the Cougars changed offenses and will be running a read option attack this fall. He is a picture perfect fit for that scheme. He is the perfect package for Bronco Mendenhall and comes gift wrapped with a bow just waiting for Christmas to happen for Cougar football. Of course like all nicely wrapped gifts, you still have to wonder what's actually inside. The concern for Hill and BYU fans, despite all the positive declarations to the contrary, is how healthy is he really? Is he really 100% good to go or are the all-summer long lingering rumors of loose ligaments just sour sugar plums dancing in our heads? We should know that answer after the Virginia game is in the books.
2. If Hill is tailor made for the read option offense, that same offense is tailor made for improving the play of the BYU offensive line. Smash mouth football and pass protection for the drop back passing game was not the forte of the Cougar offensive line last season. While the talent level of the offensive line has not made a gigantic jump from last season to this year, the new offensive scheme is much more suited to the talent level currently in the Cougar cupboard. An improvement in line play should be evident almost immediately.
3. The tight end train has left the station. When BYU was good offensively, they had good tight ends. There haven't been any exceptional tight ends on the field for BYU since Dennis Pitta left for the NFL. Over the last few years, BYU has stockpiled a ton of tight ends through recruiting. Unfortunately volume without ability is not a good strategy. The Cougars and the new offense have basically down sized the role of the tight end. BYU will still have to work through the glut of tight ends currently on the roster, but natural attrition and graduation will take care of that issue. Meanwhile, if you can't run and get down the seam in the open field and make hard catches look easy, the current cache of BYU tight ends will have trouble seeing the field in this new offense.
4. If you are going to spell Defense at BYU it is better done phonetically as in Bron-co Men-den-hall. Empirically and emphatically, BYU has a defensive coordinator (who also happens to be the head coach) that is almost without peer in college football. His resume at BYU is irrefutable. He has taken no talent defenses and made them serviceable. He has had talented defenses and made them almost invincible. It remains to be seen what he actually has on hand for this season, but you can bet that they will be as good as they can possibly be with Mendenhall in charge. That is why, despite the consternation at corner during fall camp, I look for another good BYU defense. You can count on Mendenhall to somehow, some way find and field a defense that will work and wreak havoc on opponents.

5. BYU's kicking game was a kick in the pants last season. Coaches say they have it fixed. They brought in two new bodies to boot the ball, but in the end they have stuck with Justin Sorensen as their kicker. Sorensen swears that he is now finally healthy after three years, so we will see. If he and the coaching staff are correct in their assessments, a better kicking game will do nothing but enhance the chances of BYU winning games against a very formidable schedule.

I am still adamant that this will be a very good BYU football team. I personally think that Santa and his Las Vegas betting line helpers have underestimated this team. I call it BYU 31 UVA 17.

Two Deep Depth Charts

With just a few days until kickoff here is what the Cougar depth chart currently looks like for the season opener in Virginia.

Offense

Left Tackle Ryker Mathews So. 6-6/309, Brad Wilcox Fr. 6-7/300

Left Guard Solomone Kafu Jr. 6-2/315, Tui Crichton So. 6-3/343

Center Terrance Alletto So. 6-3/292, Brayden Kearsley Fr. 6-4/295

Right Guard Brock Stringham Jr. 6-6/292, Kyle Johnson Fr. 6-4/295

Right Tackle Michael Yeck Jr. 6-8/292, De'Ondre Wesley Jr. 6-7/330

Quarterback Taysom Hill So. 6-2/221, Ammon Olsen So. 6-3/210

Running Back Jamaal Williams So. 6-0/200, Adam Hine, 6-1/205

Wide Receiver Cody Hoffman Sr. 6-4/210, Mitch Mathews So. 6-6/206

Wide Receiver Skyler Ridley Sr. 6-0/182, Ross Apo Jr. 6-3/207

Inside Receiver JD Falslev Sr. 5-8/175, Marcus Mathews Jr. 6-4/200

Tight End Kaneakua Friel Sr. 6-5/261, Devin Mahina Jr. 6-6/247

Defense

Left End Bronson Kaufusi So. 6-7/282, Logan Taele So. 6-2/252

Nose Tackle Marques Johnson Jr. 6-2/308, JonRhyheem Peoples Fr. 6-4/339

Right End Eathyn Manumaleuna Sr. 6-2/305, Remington Peck So. 6-4/252

Outside Linebacker Kyle Van Noy Sr. 6-3/245, J. Leuta-Douyere So. 6-0/231

Buck Linebacker Spencer Hadley Sr. 6-1/227, Tyler Beck Sr. 6-1/220

Mike Linebacker Uani Unga Sr. 6-1/233, Austen Jorgensen Sr. 6-2/239

Outside Linebacker Alani Fua Jr. 6-5/215, Manoa Pikula Fr. 6-1/235

Field Corner Robertson Daniel Jr. 6-1/198, Eric Thornton So. 5-10/180

Boundary Corner Mike Hague Sr. 5-10/190, Skye PoVey Sr. 5-11/200

Kat Safety Daniel Sorensen Sr. 6-2/208, Michael Wadsworth So. 6-1/205

Strong Safety Craig Bills Jr. 6-1/205, Blake Morgan Sr. 5-11/195

Football Fluff and Stuff

San Jose State and BYU announced last week the signing of a home and home deal in football. The Cougars will travel to California on Nov. 7, 2015 with the Spartans making the return engagement in Provo on Oct. 28, 2017.

While Notre Dame signed a scheduling agreement in football with the ACC earlier this year, BYU has nothing signed with the Mountain West Conference, but even without a contract, it is looking more and more like BYU and the MWC has some sort of de facto deal going.

Next year the Cougars will play MWC schools Utah State, Nevada, Boise State and UNLV. In 2015 BYU is slated to face Boise State, San Jose State, UNLV, Fresno State and Utah State. As yet, no games with MWC schools on the eastern side of the conference have been scheduled.

Jake Heaps, the former BYU quarterback, continues to garner headlines in Kansas and nationally as he embarks on his attempt to resurrect his college football career. What I find interesting is that Heaps still gets attention, but what nobody wants to talk about is how BYU lost a legitimate NFL quarterback a few years back to Southern Utah.

There are plenty of people who like to bring up that Bronco Mendenhall and his staff may have misevaluated Ziggy Ansah, based on his starting only a few games last season and yet landing in the NFL.

A similar story may be told this week because it looks like Brad Sorensen will make the San Diego Chargers' roster. In my opinion, that is another misevaluation black mark against BYU football coaches.

They were so enamored with Jake Heaps that Sorensen, the 6-5, 230 pound qb and the older brother of current BYU safety Daniel Sorensen, left BYU for Southern Utah and now is NFL material and looks like he has stuck as the Chargers No. 3 QB. San Diego cut Nate Enderle of Idaho this past week and now have only 3 quarterbacks on the roster; Phillip Rivers, Charlie Whitehurst and Sorensen.

Austin Collie looks questionable, according to San Francisco 49er media, in his quest to make the roster of the 49ers. He has shown enough health wise, however, this fall that some team will more than likely add him to their roster if the Niners don't keep him. NFL teams have to get down to the 53 man roster date by Saturday, August 31.

Basketball Briefs

Dave Rose and BYU missed in recruiting on Jamal Aytes, the 6-6 front court player from Southern California. BYU had made an all out effort to land Aytes and had pursued him hard for almost six months. Aytes decided to attend UNLV last Monday, after the Rebels made a late charge at him.

There are some BYU basketball pundits who think the loss of Aytes will come back to haunt the Cougars this season. Don't count me in that group.

Aytes may well have been a stellar player for the Cougars down the road, but for the immediate future, this coming season, BYU has restocked with impact players.

Let me just say this. By the first of January, I predict that BYU basketball fans will be saying Brandon who?

Eric Mika and Luke Worthington will both make the transition from Brandon Davies in the post to a new front court smooth and easy. I don't even want to hint at what I am hearing. There are those who think both Worthington and Mika will immediately be an improvement in BYU's post play this coming season.

The other impact player for the Cougars is not new, but a newly returned LDS missionary. That would be Kyle Collinsworth. Throw in the proven Tyler Haws and the streaky Matt Carlino, and this BYU basketball team will make some noise.

Somebody will be Right and Somebody will be Wrong

The BYU Women's soccer team started their season off on the right note with a 3-1 win over Cal State Fullerton last week.

The Lady Cougars were ranked No. 6 in the nation in the national preseason poll, but were only picked to finish 3rd in the WCC.

Santa Clara and Portland were the preseason picks by coaches to finish 1 & 2 in the league standings. Santa Clara was ranked 16th nationally in the preseason polls while Portland came in at No. 22 in that same preseason national poll.

Somebody, either the national pollsters or the league pollsters, knows something that the other doesn't. Time will tell which is right.

Television Timetable

BYU vs. Virginia

Saturday, Aug 31 at Charlottesville at Provo

Kickoff: 1:30 pm Mountain Time

TV: ESPNU

BYU vs. Texas

Saturday, Sept 7 at Provo

Kickoff: 5:00 pm Mountain Time

TV: ESPN2

BYU vs. Utah

Saturday, Sept 21 at Provo

Kickoff: TBA

TV: TBA

BYU vs. Middle Tennessee

Friday, Sept 27 at Provo

Kickoff: 7:00 pm Mountain Time

TV: ESPNU

BYU vs. Utah State

Friday, Oct 4 at Logan

Kickoff: 6:00 pm Mountain Time

TV: CBS Sports Network