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Vol. 28, Issue 14, November 5, 2007

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As a subscriber, you are allowed to access our new blog. You can view it by going to www.cougar-sportslines.blogspot.com

Just a reminder that we are now sending the newsletter via two separate email accounts to help solve distribution issues that many subscribers experienced last year. That means you may receive two identical letters. If that is the case, please just discard the extra.

OUT OF SIGHT AND OUT OF MIND, BUT NEVER OUT OF FIRST PLACE

With BYU's bizarre schedule during the month of October (they played just two games in 34 days) the Cougars have been mostly out of sight and out of mind, but never out of first place in the Mountain West Conference football standings.

It's been hard keeping the fire of Cougar fans burning brightly, thanks to a scheduled bye and unfortunate and unscheduled circumstances in San Diego during the last month.

BYU's 35-16 public pounding of CSU last Saturday in Provo certainly went a long way in rekindling the fervor in Provo and putting BYU football back on the front pages of MWC sports sections.

More importantly, the win kept the Cougars at least two games in front of any and all MWC contenders.

That was a fact that seemed to get lost with the inactivity of this team in October.

While other MWC teams were playing and pontificating in the paper about their prowess, BYU was always in first place in the standings despite being sidelined by its schedule.

Scheduling Spectrum

Beginning this Thursday, the Cougars will now go from a period of inactivity on the field to the opposite end of the scheduling spectrum. Starting with TCU this week, BYU will play their four remaining games of the regular season in a period of just 24 days.

Speaking of inactivity and a few extra days off between games, the layoff seemed to help BYU quarterback Max Hall. Against the Rams he put up some nice numbers, the most impressive of which, was the one he didn't produce.

It sounds confusing, but isn't. Hall completed 22-of-30 passes for 355 yards and three touchdowns.

Not bad numbers. What we thought was more impressive, however, was that this was the first game of his short BYU career in which he didn't throw an interception.

Hall's three touchdown passes went to Michael Reed, Austin Collie and Joe Semanoff. Reed's reception of 9 yards came on the Cougars first possession of the game. The Collie catch was a 45-yard strike in the second quarter and the Semanoff snatch was a 5-yard game clincher in the fourth period.

Ground Game

BYU didn't forget its ground game. The Cougars rushed for a respectable 106 yards on 38 carries. Harvey Unga was again the leading ball carrier for the Cougars. He rushed for 51 yards on 11 carries.

He is head and shoulders above all other BYU backs in rushing productivity, yet in this game his rushing touches were limited. In our opinion, when you have a thoroughbred, you ride him, not put him out to pasture.

We will give the offensive coaches a pass on this one. Maybe they wanted Unga, their best offensive player, in the pasture instead of taking a pounding of 20 carries. Maybe they are saving him for the stretch run or maybe it was their way of trying to keep him healthy.

Or maybe they figured he had already done enough. Did we mention that Unga set the tone for the game on the Cougars' first offensive play from scrimmage?

The freshman back took a short pass from Max Hall and scooted 53 yards to put the Cougars in great field position. Unga had three catches for the day for 110 yards.

Receivers

Austin Collie led all BYU receivers with 8 catches for 111 yards.

Defensively, the Cougars allowed just 311 yards of offense to the Rams, but they did have some lapses and lulls in an otherwise sound performance.

Ben Criddle came up with an interception and Jan Jorgensen recorded 2.5 sacks.

GROUND GAME WILL DETERMINE WINNER

If you are looking to advance vocationally, here's a tip: Keep your nose to the grindstone.

If you are looking for the winner of Thursday's BYU-TCU football game, here's a better tip: Keep your eyes to the ground.

This contest will be decided by TCU and their rushing attack. If they can successfully run the ball, they will win. If they can't, you can look for another league loss for the Horned Frogs.

It really is that simple.

Last week in a 37-0 whipping of New Mexico, TCU rushed for 234 yards. If they come anywhere close to those numbers on the ground against BYU, they will soundly whip the Cougars.

Trust us. TCU is not going to win games this season because of its quarterback play and throwing the football. Andy Dalton, the young TCU quarterback, will not beat you throwing the ball.

Their bread and butter for wins is running the ball.

Funny how that TCU team strength plays right into BYU defensive strength of stopping the run.

It is what the Cougars do. They lead the Mountain West Conference in defending the rush. They only allow an average of 97.9 rushing yards per game by opponents.

Match Up

This should be a very interesting match up. Especially since TCU has found a big back to compliment the speed of Aaron Brown.

Joseph Turner, a 6-1, 230 pound sophomore running back for TCU, gashed New Mexico last week for 115 yards on 28 carries.

We are constantly amazed that BYU is so good and consistent against the run. They don't seem to have the athletic makeup to overpower ground games with their strength and speed, but somehow find a way to control offenses that can run the ball.

Another match up to watch is BYU's passing game against TCU's pass defense. It will be a battle of the No. 1 MWC passing game in BYU versus the No. 1 passing defense of the Horned Frogs.

BYU is averaging 310 yards passing per game and TCU is only giving up an average of 180 passing yards per contest.

While Max Hall had his first game of his BYU career in which he didn't throw an interception, don't expect that to stay the same against TCU.

The Frogs will bring pressure on Hall and get in his face. You can also expect a big backside hit on Hall as has been the norm in almost all games this season.

Top Defender

TCU finally returns their top defender to the lineup in Tommy Blake. Blake is NFL material. You can expect to see him coming every down from his right defensive end spot.

BYU will have to make adjustments if they want to keep Hall on his feet against Blake.

If this does turn out to be a defensive struggle, we expect TCU to win because they have a decent field goal kicker. Chris Manfredini will give the Frogs a chance if they get in field goal range.

BYU's kicking game woes are well documented and could cost the Cougars this game if they can't score points inside the twenty.

Fortunately, we don't expect this to be a defensive struggle. BYU should be able to score 30+plus points on this team and that should be more than enough to get BYU's fifth consecutive conference victory.

We call it BYU 35 TCU 24.

FOOTBALL FLUFF AND STUFF

We watched BYU's AAA football affiliate, Timpview HS, play in the state quarterfinals last week.

The Thunderbirds dominated a pretty decent Cottonwood club in gliding to a convincing 31-13 win.

You can expect many of Timpview's roster to get called up to the big league BYU club in the next three years.

Michael Alisa and Kevan Bills will be the first make the trip. They both are committed to the Cougars and will sign letters of intent in February.

Bills, who plays defensive end at the high school level, will be a linebacker in college. He is 6-3, 230 pounds and appears to have a motor that won't quit.

We were pleasantly surprised to see the play of Alisa against Cottonwood. He looked like another Bryan Kehl waiting to happen. This kid is 6-2, 220 pounds and extremely athletic. He just kept making play after play against the Colts.

Craig Bills is just a junior, but he is a head hunter and hitter. It doesn't hurt that in addition to hitting, he has an overall range of football abilities. He is 6-2, 205 pound now and appears to be a perfect fit for Bronco Mendenhall's Katback position at the next level.

Bronson Kaufusi is just a sophomore, and at 6-6, 215 pounds, he is not dominating anybody with his strength, but he does dominate with his quickness and defensive intensity. He is the son of BYU defensive line coach Steve Kaufusi.

He also has verbally committed to play for the Cougars in two more years.

All he needs is about 50 pounds to put the Kaufusi name back in the headlines at the college level in

a couple of years.

The guy we really like at Timpview is just a junior. We are referring to Xavier Su'a Filo, he 6-4, 270 pound defensive tackle.

There is a reason that BYU has already offered and a reason that they should stay on this guy full time and full bore. He can play and make an impact as a college player.

Did we mention Tui Crighton yet? He is another Division I caliber player at Timpview. He is still a junior and plays on the offensive line at 6-4, 280. Both Utah and BYU have already offered.

Timpview will now move on to the 4A state semis in Salt Lake City. They will face Mountain Crest on Thursday at Rice Eccles Stadium. Kick off is set for 2:30 pm.

The interesting match up here will be Timpview's loaded defense against the Mustangs and their ninth grade quarterback Alex Kuresa. Actually, Kuresa, who is just 14 doesn't attend Mountain Crest. He goes to South Cache JR. High.

If that name sounds familiar, he is the younger brother of former Cougar Jake Kuresa, only about 18 inches shorter and 150 pounds lighter.

He has started the last three games for the Mustangs and all have been wins.

We forgot to mention that BYU received another verbal commitment last week in football.

Iona Pritchard, a 6-1, 230 pound linebacker from Bingham HS in Utah was offered by BYU and has accepted that offer to play football for the Cougars.

Pritchard becomes the third Bingham player to verbally commit to the Cougars. Austin Holt, a tight end and Justin Sorensen are the other two.

It's never too early to start thinking about Utah and the Nov. 24 match up in Provo.

Bronco has done wonders for BYU since taking over as the head coach, but in our opinion, those wonders stop at Utah.

In his first two games against the Utes, BYU was an 11 point favorite both times. The Utes defeated BYU in the first game in Provo and BYU had to rely on a once-in-a-lifetime play to hang on for the win last season in Salt Lake City.

Bronco's mantra always is that he doesn't worry about the other team. He just wants to focus on his team and their execution.

If we have a knock on Bronco, especially when it comes to Utah, it is that it might be time to focus on the Utes and try and put something new in the game plan that they haven't seen before.

Like we said, it is never too early to talk BYU-Utah.

The BYU-San Diego State game has now been officially rescheduled with a kickoff time and television arrangements.

The game will kickoff at 4:30 Mountain time on Saturday, Dec. 1. It will be televised live on the Mtn.

If BYU does indeed get the invite to the Las Vegas Bowl, it is now a distinct possibility that Cal could be the opponent. That is not a favorable match up for BYU if that should happen.

BASKETBALL BRIEFS

BYU will officially open their 2007-08 basketball season this week against Long Beach State.

The game is set for Saturday, Nov. 10 at the Pyramid in Long Beach and will tip off at 3:00 pm Mountain Time.

There will be no television coverage of this game.

The 49ers return four players from last year's team. They also will be introducing a new coach.

Dan Monson, who was at Minnesota for seven years, was hired to replace Larry Reynolds, whose contract was not renewed despite turning in a 24-8 record and a spot in the NCAA tournament.

Monson parlayed success at Gonzaga into the gig at Minnesota.

BYU, which will have another tune-up game this Wednesday in an exhibition contest against Bryant University, will start a front line of Trent Plaisted, Lee Cumard and Jonathan Tavernari. The starting

back court will be Ben Murdock and Sam Burgess.

This lineup may start, but there will be very few occasions when they finish the game intact.

Match ups and quickness of the opponent will require Dave Rose to go to his bench to find more favorable match ups.

Fortunately, for the third-year coach, he has some viable alternatives on his bench.

We still hold to our early assessment that this will be Rose's most talented and deep team.

That is especially true on the offensive end. There will be plenty of guys to score, but just how good this BYU team will be will depend on their defensive ability to stop other teams.

We expect Jonathan Tavernari to lead the Cougars this year in scoring. He is always looking for his shot and when he finds it, it goes in more often than not.

That sounds like he is seeking the ball, but his offensive production actually comes from the flow of the offense.

Speaking of offense, before league play arrives in January, you can expect MWC coaches to have to account for the offensive production of Jimmer Fredette. We don't expect him to start any games anytime soon, but he will see many minutes and score lots of points while playing those minutes.

TELEVISION TIMETABLE

BYU vs. TCU

Thursday, Nov. 8 at Provo

Kickoff: 7:00 Mountain Time

TV: Versus

BYU vs. Wyoming

Saturday, Nov. 17 at Laramie

Kickoff: Noon Mountain Time

TV: Mtn

BYU vs. Utah

Saturday, Nov. 24 at Provo

Kickoff: Noon Mountain Time

TV: Mtn, Versus, and CSTV

BYU vs. San Diego State

Saturday, Dec. 1 at San Diego

Kickoff: 4:30 pm Mountain Time

TV: Mtn