

HB Arnett's
COUGAR SPORTSLINE

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Wake Forest 94 BYU 87

BYU IS A VERY GOOD BASKETBALL TEAM...BUT WAKE FOREST IS BETTER

In one of the more entertaining basketball games played in the Marriott Center in years, Dave Rose and his Cougars were able to go toe-to-toe with the No. 6 ranked Wake Forest Demon Deacons before stubbing those same toes in the final minutes.

It resulted in a 94-87 loss and broke a 53-game home court winning streak.

Like very good basketball teams are expected to do, BYU had a chance for a win.

Actually they had several chances, but couldn't finish the game with enough crucial baskets or critical free throws to nail down the win.

The Cougars had Wake Forest down by eight points twice in the second half and actually held a 69-62 lead with 11 minutes remaining in the game.

BYU converted eight of its first 15 field goal attempts in the second half, but from the 11-minute mark in, were only able to hit six of their last 27 tries.

The Cougars only were able to score on nine of 25 possessions in those last nine minutes of action.

Go-To Guys

There are some who are quick to point out that BYU's go-to guys were ineffective when the game was on the line.

That would be in reference to Lee Cummard and Jonathan Tavernari in particular.

After a Jimmer Fredette field goal with just over five minutes remaining, BYU led 80-79.

Blame the ushers for the Cougar loss from that point on.

Somebody must have opened the Marriott Center doors and let in the sub-freezing weather outside.

How else do you explain BYU going 2-of-19 from the floor from that point on?

One good explanation might be Wake Forest and its quickness and length on defense.

The Deacons held the Cougars to their lowest field goal shooting percentage of the season. BYU shot just 40 percent for the game and just 33 percent in the second half.

Still, this was a tightly contested game that was up for grabs with just two minutes remaining.

Can't Close

The Cougars couldn't close the deal.

The fact that BYU was even in a position to get a big win was a result of spectacular play from sophomore guard Jimmer Fredette.

He led all Cougar scorers with 23 points and made crucial baskets all night long to spark the offense.

Fredette was 9-of-17 from the field, including 3-of-6 from three-point range. He finished 2-of-3 from the charity stripe.

The rest of BYU's roster didn't fare as well shooting the ball against Wake Forest.

While Jonathan Tavernari and Lee Cummard both added 18 and 17 points respectively, they took an inordinate amount of shoots to get those points.

Cummard will be remembered as a very good player, but he also is forging a less than stellar history as a player who disappears in games against premier competition.

The 6-7 senior was just 6-20 from the field, including a 0-4 shutout from the arc.

Tavernari was 7-17 for the night, including just 4-13 from three-point land.

Another BYU starter, Jackson Emery was just 2-of-7 from three point range and 4-of-10 overall.

Less than Spectacular

While the outside shooting of BYU was less than spectacular, the rebounding effort was outstanding.

Against a team like Wake Forest that makes a living rebounding the ball, BYU out boarded the Deacons 46 to 42. BYU was especially effective on the offensive glass with 17 boards.

Wake Forest's spectacular sophomore guard Jeff Teague led all scorers with 30 points and showed why there was a boat load of NBA scouts in attendance.

As good as Teague is and was against the Cougars, and as well as BYU played, in our opinion, this game was determined by the play in the post.

BYU was simply overmatched in that area.

The Cougars say they like their offense to go through the post and to see a lot of post touches, but those touches were just for show against Wake Forest. They didn't result in significant points.

Chris Miles had just 2 points and backup post Gavin MacGregor scored 5.

Miles only saw 17 minutes of action because he was in foul trouble, but the mismatch in the post between Wake and BYU was painfully obvious.

45 Points Inside

While the Cougars could manage just 7 points inside, the Demon Deacons were able to score 45 points from their inside front court players.

The fact that BYU was able to still have a chance for a win late in the game with its poor outside shooting and a total mismatch on the inside, is a pretty good indicator of just how good this Cougar club is this year on the guard line and on the wings.

It just wasn't good enough to beat a better Wake Forest team.

BYU will finish non-conference action on Tuesday, Jan. 6 against Western Oregon before beginning Mountain West Conference action on Saturday, Jan. 10 at Colorado State.

The Rams opened MWC play on Saturday with a road loss to TCU. The Frogs beat the Rams 81-67 in Fort Worth.

The BYU-CSU match up will tip at 1:00 pm and is set to be televised live on the Mtn.

NBA EXHIBITION?

Have you ever wondered how a good Division I college team would fare in an exhibition match against an NBA team?

We came as close as we are going to get to that scenario Saturday night in the Marriott Center.

BYU is a good Division I basketball team. Wake Forest is a pretty close imitation of an NBA bottom feeder team. We are thinking Oklahoma City, Washington (without Gilbert Arenas) and Sacramento.

The Demon Deacons have at least three sure-fire NBA players in Jeff Teague as a guard and James Johnson and Al-Farouq Aminu in the front court.

Give the Deacons 82 chances against the bottom of the NBA and, in our opinion, they would get a few wins.

It is all about players and Wake Forest has them.

As a matter of fact, they have enough NBA caliber players that they can make a serious and deep run in NCAA post season play, barring any key injuries.

The other element of an exhibition game between a good Division I basketball team like BYU facing an NBA team is that you would also get NBA officiating.

Bring Their Own

The NBA isn't going to let you play them without their own officials.

Neither did Wake Forest. A year ago in Winston-Salem, it was an ACC crew that officiated the game.

This year in Provo, the officials were from the east coast and a crew that works mainly Atlantic 10 games.

It is a concession that BYU probably had to make in order to get the Deacons to come to Provo.

For the record, when BYU faced North Carolina State in Provo a few years back, it was a MWC crew that did the game.

When the Cougars matched up against Michigan State in Salt Lake City last year, it was also a MWC crew.

While we are talking NBA and BYU, you have to wonder what the NBA assessment of Lee Cummond would be after his outing against Wake Forest and its contingent of future NBA players?

Cummond had a sub par performance against the Deacons and you would assume that a one game evaluation will not determine his NBA or professional viability as a player.

Tail Off

Despite Cummond's credentials, it is hard to argue with the fact that against very good teams with very good players, his productivity seems to tail off. At least that is our assessment for a guy that is supposed to be the premier player in his own league.

In games against the two best teams on this year's schedule, Wake Forest and Arizona State, he has not had stellar performances.

Last year against Michigan State, Louisville and North Carolina, he scored just 9, 9 and 10 points respectively.

We still think Cummond will make a living playing professionally, but we just don't think it will be in the NBA unless he can get a lot stronger and be a more consistent scorer against NBA caliber players.

That said, you still can't take away from how valuable he has been as a BYU Cougar and how important he has been and is to BYU's current basketball success.

Next Step

Speaking of players, it appears to us that Dave Rose has pretty well figured it out when it comes to recruiting under the restrictions placed on him with BYU's unique parameters.

He can get good enough LDS players and enough juco fits at the guard line and wing to be competitive.

The next step is to try and find a way to get the big time bigs.

That won't be easy. The really good ones are gobbled up out of high school by the big boys of college basketball or the NBA.

The LDS talent pool for big men is still extremely small, regardless of the three local big men recruits signed by Rose this past November. Until that LDS talent pool gets bigger and better, we really don't see any realistic solution to BYU consistently finding post players who will be competitive on the national level.

UTAH NO DIFFERENT THAN BYU

Utah deserves to be ranked a top-five football team.

They are that good.

As long as we are being brutally honest, they are currently a better football program than BYU.

They have been invited to two BCS bowl games and won them both.

They have rattled off eight straight bowl game wins.

Those are two things that BYU only dreams of, but hasn't accomplished.

The Utes have been consistently better than BYU on the defensive side of the ball for years. That was especially apparent this season.

Utah is recruiting better athletes than the Cougars. They have a good base of LDS athletes that are, quite frankly, just as good as those LDS athletes that BYU has.

In addition, their recruiting base has now expanded to include skilled non-LDS athletes.

If you are truly objective, it is hard to argue with the fact that the Utes are at the top of the MWC football heap and currently the top dog in the BYU-Utah battle of football programs. Utah is getting its share of quality LDS prospects and taking some of them away from BYU.

Better

It appears that Utah has better speed than BYU. There are some who would argue that the Utes have a better coaching staff than BYU.

That makes it seem like BYU is doomed to be the little brother and second fiddle to the Utes from here on out.

We don't think so for one big reason.

It is all about the quarterback.

There is no question that Utah had superior athletic talent this season as compared to BYU. But when it comes to winning games against each other and to Utah winning bowl games and BCS invites, it is still all about the quarterback.

In the Utes two BCS busting season, they had big-time quarterback play. BYU didn't.

Alex Smith was the first pick in the NFL draft in 2004. Brian Johnson won't be, but he had as good as year as Smith in leading Utah to a national platform.

He was better this season for the Utes than Max Hall was for the Cougars, by far.

In every big game for the Utes against Oregon State, TCU, BYU and Alabama, Johnson delivered big time performances.

Did Not

In contrast, Max Hall, in every big Cougar game against TCU, Utah and Arizona, the BYU quarterback didn't deliver.

It is that simple.

In the head-to-head matchup against Johnson and Hall, Johnson was clearly the better quarterback. Despite Cougar consternation to the contrary, there was a valid reason that Johnson was MWC play-

er of the year and Hall wasn't.

That is why we are not as worried as some Cougar faithful about the appearance of Utah as program distancing itself from BYU.

It is all about the quarterback.

When Utah has had a good one in Smith and Johnson during his senior year, they were very, very good.

When BYU has a dominant quarterback, regardless of how good or bad their defense is or isn't, the Cougars are very, very good.

The question isn't a matter of who has the better program and best athletes. It still is who has the better quarterback.

Hopefully, with Max Hall a year wiser and a senior, he can deliver for BYU next season. We will be extremely surprised if Utah can produce a quarterback as good as Johnson next season.

When it comes to BYU and Utah in football, in our opinion, it is always about who has the dominant quarterback.

Don't get distracted by all the peripheral football fluff when it comes to BYU-Utah. Stay focused on the quarterback.

From our perspective, BYU looks to be fine in that department for the next few years and we expect it to be proven in the results of the BYU-Utah football games during that same time frame.

BYU'S EGGS IN ONE BIG RECRUITING BASKET THIS WEEK-END

Bronco Mendenhall is certainly unique in his coaching methods.

That also holds true when it comes to recruiting.

He has narrowed his recruiting base to almost all LDS prospects. That has made his recruiting pool extremely miniscule.

He has also narrowed his campus recruiting visits for prospects to almost just one weekend a year.

BYU tries to bring in all of their potential signees on the same weekend for official visits.

It is a unique recruiting model as compared to other schools.

This is that big weekend.

BYU will be hosting almost all of those prospects that have already given verbal commitments to sign with the Cougars and that the Cougars hope to persuade to sign with BYU in February.

Here is a list of current commits that should be in Provo this weekend.

Terry Alletto, OL, 6-3, 260, Ponderosa HS, CO
Trevor Bateman, DB, 5-11, 180, Palm Desert HS, CA
Craig Bills, DB, 6-2, 205, Timpview HS, UT
Tui Crichton, OL, 6-4, 280, Timpview HS, UT
Jray Galea'i, DB, 6-0, 175, Kahuku HS, HI
Anthony Heiuli, RB 5-11, 225, Mountain View HS, UT
Peni Maka'afi, RB, 5-10, 215, Layton HS, UT
Mitch Mathews, WR, 6-5, 195, Southridge HS, OR
Ryan Mulitalo, OL, 6-3, 285, Hunter HS, UT
Remington Peck, TE/LB, 6-5, 215, Bingham HS
Brett Thompson, WR, 6-3, 210, Oak Ridge HS, CA
Adam Timo, RB, 6-1, 190, Snow Canyon HS, UT
Fono Vakalahi, OL, 6-4, 320, Bryan HS, TX
Brad Wilcox, OL, 6-7, 240, North HS, OK

Richard Wilson, TE, 6-3, 225, Spanish Fork HS, UT

Here are other recruits BYU is still hoping to land that will be on campus this weekend.

Kyle Van Noy, LB, 6-4, 210, McQueen HS, NV

Xavier Su'a-Filo, OL, 6-5, 285, Timpview HS, UT

L.T. Filiaga, LB, 6-0, 235, Bingham HS, UT

Bijon Samoodi, DB, 5-8, 170, Servite HS, CA

Manti Te'o, LB, 6-2, 230, Punahou HS, HI (maybe)

LaDarius Perkins, RB, 5-10, 195, St. Joseph HS, MS (maybe)

Te'o is the most coveted recruit for the Cougars, but there is a chance that he won't be making an official visit to Provo this weekend. He says that he has already been to Provo many times and is very familiar with the school already.

Perkins is a running back from Mississippi that BYU got into late in December. He originally committed to Auburn, but the coaching change there has put Miss State in the picture. He says that he will know by Wednesday of this week if he will be tripping to BYU. We consider this kid an extreme long shot.

No Show...One name missing from the visit list for this weekend, is Latu Heimuli, the outstanding defensive lineman from Highland HS in Utah. He committed to Utah over the weekend. This is a big loss for the Cougars. They currently have no defensive linemen committed for this recruiting class. In our opinion, they are sorely needed.

TELEVISION TIMETABLE

BYU vs. CSU

Saturday, Jan 10 at Fort Collins

Tipoff: 1:00 pm Mountain Time

TV: Mtn

BYU vs. TCU

Tuesday, Jan 13 at Provo

Tipoff: 8:00 Mountain Time

TV: Mtn