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Vol. 28, Issue 8, September 24, 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.

FALCONS FIX FENDER FOR COUGARS WITH 31-6 BYU WIN

One week ago, there were some noticeable dings and dents on the Cougar football car.

At 1-2, BYU had just experienced two consecutive fender benders against Tulsa and UCLA while on the road.

Air Force was BYU's perfect auto body shop.

With a convincing 31-6 win over the Falcons, those ugly dings and dents are now nicely hidden and safely parked in the friendly Cougar home garage.

It's amazing what a little hammering by the defense and a new paint job and 31 points by the offense will do to get a banged up vehicle looking like new.

The quick fix was needed by BYU to get back on the winning track. The Cougars are now 2-2 on the year and 1-0 in Mountain West Conference play.

Despite the win, what we don't know yet is if there is more body work to be done.

Did the UCLA and Tulsa losses inflict more serious damage to the Cougar chassis?

That won't be answered until the Cougars get back out on the road and see how the car drives in Albuquerque against New Mexico.

500 Miles

That is still five hundred miles and five days away.

Meanwhile, back in Provo, the pre-game prognosis for the battle of vehicles between Air Force and BYU, didn't look promising. It appeared to be a head on matchup of a Humvee versus a Hyundai.

The Falcons were driving the Humvee, having won three straight games, including two against pre-season conference contender picks Utah and TCU. BYU was behind the wheel of the Hyundai, with its air bags already having been deployed by the defensive crash experienced in Tulsa.

BYU's dominating win over the Falcons reminded us once again why we don't bet on horses, Humvees or Hyundais.

Betting on Max Hall, however, is certainly becoming more enticing.

After four games, he is a sure thing.

You can count on him throwing at least one interception and getting blindsided from the backside by a blitz and coughing up the football.

You can also count on him putting up enough offensive production to win games.

Betting on Hall

The problem with betting on Hall and the BYU offense is that the bets all have to be parlayed with the BYU defensive effort in order for the Cougars to collect at the pay window.

That ding, ding, ding, ding, you heard Saturday afternoon from LaVell Edwards Stadium, was the Cougar jackpot.

Without a quarterback with the skills of Tulsa's Paul Smith and without wide outs that could run by Cougar defensive backs as did those of the Golden Hurricane, and with a determined BYU defense eager to redeem itself, the odds were certainly in favor of the Cougar defense in this encounter.

They didn't disappoint.

Quinn Gooch, BYU's safety, went from gauche to golden boy in just under a minute of the opening kickoff. He transitioned from being torched by Tulsa a week ago, to setting the tone for the rest of the game when he picked off a Shaun Carney throw on Air Force's opening drive.

That set up the Cougar offense with a short field and it was quickly a 7-0 BYU lead with just 3:58 gone from the clock.

That score was a 1 yard run by Manase Tonga.

Hall found Matt Allen in the end zone for the second Cougar touchdown from 9 yards out in the second quarter and Mitch Payne added a 42 yard field goal for a BYU 17-0 lead at the intermission.

Go-To-Guy

Harvey Unga continues to prove that he is a go-to-guy and Hall did just that by throwing a 29 yard scoring toss to Unga on a fourth and nine situation.

Tonga topped off the BYU scoring in the fourth quarter with a 2 yard plunge.

Max Hall completed 23-33 passes for 293 yards and one touchdown. He also had the one pick.

BYU added 159 yards on the ground for a total offensive production of 452 yards.

Unga was the key guy on the ground for the Cougars. He had 22 touches for 111 yards. He also caught the ball four times for 49 yards, 29 of which came on his td score.

Dennis Pitta led all Cougar receivers with 5 grabs for 114 yards. He has developed into a legitimate offensive threat for BYU while running across the middle or down the seams in match ups with linebackers.

Austin Collie, BYU's best wide out, saw just two plays of action before being put back on the sideline and in street clothes for the rest of the game.

He probably could have played if absolutely needed, but was held out to make sure that he is ready to play this coming week against New Mexico.

Below

The BYU defense limited the Falcons to just 231 yards of offense. That was well below what Air Force

had been averaging in their first three games.

As well as the BYU offense and defense played against the Falcons, the Cougar kicking game was better.

This aspect of the game will never be spectacular this season, but it was steady and reliable against Air Force.

That is a major step up from where it has been during the first three contests.

BATTLE OF TWO BEST CONFERENCE TEAMS SET FOR SATURDAY

Let's get out of the gate early on this one.

We don't expect BYU to be able to beat New Mexico in Albuquerque this Saturday.

This Cougar squad has yet to prove that they can win on the road and New Mexico has the same kind of athletes, if not better, on offense than Tulsa has.

That doesn't have us brimming with confidence when it comes to the Cougars' chances.

The Lobos have the league's best running back in Rodney Ferguson. In case you forgot, he gashed BYU last year in Provo for 138 yards on just 20 carries.

BYU won that game because New Mexico couldn't stop John Beck. The Lobos also were playing with their third team quarterback.

This Saturday, they will have their top guy back at the helm in Donovan Porterie. He is the second best qb in the MWC behind Max Hall.

Where it gets scary for the Cougars and the BYU secondary is that New Mexico has the two best receivers in the conference. They are better than any receivers the BYU defense has faced this year.

Better Than Tulsa

Yeah, they are better than the Tulsa speedsters who ran through the Cougar secondary like it was standing still.

This New Mexico offense will test the magic and mojo of Bronco Mendenhall as a defensive coordinator.

We really will see if his defense has learned its lessons from the Tulsa fiasco.

We know it is hard to take the New Mexico offense as being good, because the Lobos have been ordinary for so long. Trust us, they have some special weapons at their disposal now.

Porterie is very athletic and now healthy. He presents a challenge because he can get outside with his legs and cause panic and pandemonium when running loose.

Ferguson is a sure fire NFL back. He has size and just keeps pounding until he breaks one.

Where the real danger lies, however, is on the outside with Marcus Smith and Travis Brown, the two Lobo receivers.

They both are special and will require special attention from the BYU defensive game plan.

This is not your grandfather's or father's New Mexico offense. If you want proof, here are the stats of UNM's big four offensive weapons in their first 4 games of the year.

UTEP at El Paso (10-6 loss)

Porterie...25-39 for 190 yards passing

Ferguson...33 carries for 132 yards

Smith...11 catches for 77 yards

Brown...5 catches for 25 yards

New Mexico State at Albuquerque (44-34 win)

Porterie...17-24 for 342 yards passing

Ferguson...26 carries for 118 yards

Smith...6 catches for 128 yards

Brown...6 catches for 106 yards

Arizona at Tucson (29-27 win)

Porterie...29-41 for 327 yards passing

Ferguson...26 carries for 94 yards

Smith...11 catches for 164 yards

Brown...10 catches for 121 yards

Sacramento State at Albuquerque (58-0 win)

Porterie...19-26 for 229 yards passing

Ferguson...18 carries for 131 yards

Smith...7 catches for 69 yards

Brown...6 catches for 105 yards

These guys will score points on the Cougars. The dilemma for BYU and its defense is which guy to you try and game plan for and take out of the contest?

If you try and double or help with Smith, Brown will kill you and vice versa. If you load up the box and try and contain Ferguson, the Lobos just go up top with their passing game.

We are extremely interested to see how the Cougar defense holds up here.

BYU can win, but it will have to be in a track meet with the Cougar offense scoring on almost every possession. That is what happened in Tulsa, but the Cougars came up short with turnovers on some of their possessions.

The good news for BYU hopes for a win is that New Mexico and Rocky Long and his 3-3-5 defense have the same dilemma with the Cougars. Do they load up the box and take away the running game and Harvey Unga? Do they double on the outside against Austin Collie and leave Dennis Pitta alone against a linebacker?

Homecoming

Did we mention that this was New Mexico's homecoming game? Did we mention that the Lobos are not fond of BYU and still remember the game two years ago when BYU came back from behind and stole a game from UNM?

This will be the real litmus test for BYU. If they are going to repeat as conference champs, a win here is essential.

This should be a very interesting and entertaining game. As much as we were disappointed in the outcome of the Tulsa contest, it was very interesting and entertaining. We expect more of the same on Saturday in Albuquerque.

Kickoff is set for 6:30 pm Mountain time and the game will be telecast live on CSTV.

We repeat what we called earlier. We see it New Mexico 38 BYU 31.

You can still take some hope and take us to the woodshed if we are wrong. The oddsmakers, in their opening line, are against our prediction. They have BYU favored on the road against the Lobos by 7.5 points.

FOOTBALL FLUFF AND STUFF

If you want to know why Bryan Kehl will likely be on an NFL roster next season and why BYU will likely never be in a BCS bowl in my lifetime, I refer you to the 11:45 mark of the fourth quarter in Saturday's Air Force - BYU match up.

The Falcons had the ball at their own 16 yard line. Chad Smith, the Air Force running back, was sweeping right against the BYU defense and found a hole and was headed for the end zone and a score.

Kehl had crashed from the backside and was blocked, but then started to pursue Smith down the sideline. He ran him down after Smith had a 10-yard head start. That saved a touchdown and only allowed a 45-yard gain instead. The BYU defense stiffened and kept the Falcons from the end zone before turning the ball back to the Cougars.

Kehl's successful pursuit showed the kind of speed NFL scouts are looking for at the next level.

Unfortunately, it also showed why BYU will have a hard time cracking a BCS bowl.

Not only did Kehl run down Smith, he ran down two BYU defensive backs who also had a significant head start on him in their pursuit of Smith. Kehl overtook and passed them both during his chase of the Falcon ball carrier.

No matter how you cut it, color it, frame it or phrase it, BYU's lack of speed at critical skill positions will eventually come back to haunt them against the big boys and the BCS.

Last week we talked about how you can never have enough good quarterbacks on the roster. The same applies for running backs.

With the season ending injury to freshman J.J. DiLuigi during fall camp and with the broken hand of Fui Vakapuna, BYU now only has three scholarship running backs available.

That won't be enough to get through the year. Fortunately, BYU only has to get through another three weeks and they will get Vakapuna back.

The upside to Vakapuna's injury is that his hand issue is doing what BYU coaches couldn't or wouldn't do. It is giving Harvey Unga more carries and touches.

When you have a horse you give him the ball. We don't advocate what Michigan did last week against Penn State in giving Mike Hart 44 carries in a game, but it did produce a win for the Wolverines.

Except when he was corralled by coaches of BYU against UCLA, Unga has produced when the ball is consistently in his hands.

BYU is still in the recruiting market for another running back this year.

They have a verbal commitment from Seta Pohahau and Jerry Bruner, but we expect Bruner to be a linebacker instead of a running back.

The Cougars are still trying hard on Sausan Shakerin, the premier high school prospect in Utah this year. He has been hampered early in the season with a knee injury and with opponents ganging their defenses against him, but he is still the real deal.

We still maintain what we said a few weeks ago. This will be a BYU - Utah recruiting battle.

We also think that BYU needs to sign a high school quarterback. They were in the hunt early for Kevin Prince, an LDS qb from Crespi HS in California, but he was more interested in UCLA when they offered him. He has since injured his knee and is gone for the season.

We look for BYU to continue to scour the juco ranks for players that can help a specific need right away.

Cougar coaches are trying extremely hard to land Simoni Lawrence, a 6-1, 210 pound safety at Valley Forge Military in Pennsylvania. He is LDS and also has a brother and sister in school in the Utah Valley area.

He made an official visit to BYU during the Arizona game and also visited Minnesota this past weekend. Other schools in the hunt include Utah, West Virginia and Pittsburgh.

TELEVISION TIMETABLE

BYU vs. New Mexico

Saturday, Sept. 29 at Albuquerque

Kickoff: 6:30 pm Mountain Time

TV: CSTV

October 6 - **Bye**

BYU vs. UNLV

Saturday, Oct. 13 at Las Vegas

Kickoff: 7:30 pm Mountain Time

TV: Mtn

BYU vs. Eastern Washington

Saturday, Sept. 20 at Provo

Kickoff: 3:30 Mountain Time

TV: Mtn