

HB Arnett's

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HAPPY TALK, HAPPY HOUR AND HAPPY PILLS

In local news, they call the inane banter between evening anchors “happy talk”. We usually call it flatulence at it worst and fluff at its best.

In the bar and beverage industry, they call it “happy hour”. We call it numbing and plumbing. From our viewpoint, beer and bars are only good for numbing and dumbing the senses and keeping the urinals flowing and flushing.

In BYU spring football in general and Bronco Mendenhall in particular, we call it “happy pills”.

The head football coach of the Cougars has either been put through some serious counseling sessions with a public relations firm or is heavily medicated with “happy pills”.

In the past, his demeanor towards the public and press has appeared to be one of toxic toleration. Our perception was that both entities were both just something he had to put up with in order to draw his paycheck.

This spring, he appears to be much more natural, pleasant and pleasing in his public and press interactions.

Is it public relations classes or happy pills?

Actually there may be a third option to explain the almost glowing and gabby demeanor of Mendenhall this spring.

The Cougars could actually be very, very good this fall and Mendenhall doesn't need a “happy hour” this spring to see that BYU is already “loaded”.

Okay, maybe we need to cut back on our daily dosage of “happy pills”, but it is not unreasonable, based on this spring, to think BYU will be a better football team this fall than they were last year.

Now it is your turn to take a few “happy pills”.

BYU will be better. We didn't say their record will be.

Mendenhall is saying that he really likes the chemistry and camaraderie of this current team. As Dave Rose found out a few weeks ago, in sports, it is all about players.

BYU still has some very good ones in football and it has the Cougar coach breathing easier and bantering more naturally and easily.

Quarterback...There have been 10 MWC football championships since the inception of the league. Some of those titles have been shared by conference schools.

Here is why Mendenhall and BYU fans should have optimism for this fall. Of the ten championships, BYU has won or shared four crowns. Three of those titles were delivered by senior quarterbacks. They

included Kevin Feterik, Brandon Doman and John Beck. Max Hall delivered the fourth MWC football title as a sophomore.

In that same time frame since the MWC started, Utah and CSU have won or shared 3 football championships. Bradlee Van Pelt won as a senior, Brian Johnson won as a senior and Alex Smith won two for the Utes.

A talented returning senior starting quarterback is a major step towards winning a MWC title.

Hall is a returning and talented senior. He is bigger and stronger this spring. He and his teammates also are playing with less pressure.

The "quest for perfection" campaign is behind them. So far there is no slogan for the coming season. How about this one?

The sooner the Sooners spank us, the sooner the pressure is off and BYU can get back to playing their brand of football.

If Hall goes down this season, look out, but don't look far for help.

Brenden Gaskins was the backup last year and this spring for Hall.

Riley Nelson is now back from his LDS mission and in town and will be enrolled this spring. He is a player.

Last year, an injury to Hall would have been the end of the season. If Hall happens to go down this year, it won't be the end of the world. Nelson is that good and talented.

Receivers...Despite the loss of Austin Collie to the NFL, BYU has three proven pass catchers.

Dennis Pitta and Andrew George are both talented and proven tight ends. Mendenhall has a third tight end that is just as good, but green.

There is a reason that BYU coaches are finding a way to get Braden Brown, the redshirt freshman tight end, on the field this spring.

They are doing it by sticking him at fullback. Brown will do some damage and make noise before he is done with his career at BYU.

McKay Jacobson proved he can play as a freshman. He is now back from his LDS mission, but has missed action this spring with a hamstring injury. He can play, when healthy.

BYU is banking on being able to share the ball with more receivers this coming season in hopes it makes for a better offense.

The jury is still out on that one, in our mind. Collie was special. If Phoenix shared the ball late in the season instead of going to Larry Fitzgerald, do you think they would have made it to the Super Bowl?

In our opinion, with Collie, if BYU coaches wanted to share the ball, they should have done it last year between Collie and the running game.

Running Back...Speaking of the running game last year, Harvey Unga had no health and help.

He has both this spring and will have more in the fall.

Unga was seriously dinged for most of the season last year. It showed.

He is now healthy and it also shows this spring. He is looking like his old freshman self. He is a very good college back. If coaches think that they need to share the ball in the passing game, they also need to share the pounding with Unga.

They didn't have any options last year.

Based on spring performances, that appears to have been solved with the improved play and ball security of J.J. DiLuigi and the appearance of Malosi Te'o.

Te'o is a freshman out of Hawaii who signed with UNLV and then went on an LDS mission before enrolling with the Rebels. He is enrolled now, only he did it in Provo instead of Las Vegas.

He appears to be a player that can contribute right away.

Add Manase Tonga to the mix in the fall, if academics permit, and BYU will have the depth and bodies to share the load and shield Unga from the pounding he took last season.

Offensive Line...Pass the pills. In his “happy talk” of this spring, Mendenhall says that there should be no drop off in the play of the offensive line this fall, despite BYU losing four starters.

BYU has the bodies. They are big and some even have experience.

We mentioned those bodies last week, but it is worth repeating.

Matt Reynolds, the lone returning starter, has NFL ability.

R.J. Willing will likely be the starter at center. He has racked up a lot of plays as the first reserve off the bench the last two seasons.

Terance Brown saw starts as a true freshman before his mission. He is manning one of the guard spots this spring. The other is taken by Jason Speredon. Nick Alletto is the other tackle opposite of Reynolds.

Others in the mix and looking for playing time include Jesse Taufi and Braden Hansen, who is back from an LDS mission.

The depth chart took a hit when Garrett Reden hung up the cleats because of lingering injuries.

Cornerbacks...Before this sore spot gets fixed, we may all become “happy pill” addicts.

BYU didn’t have any cornerbacks last year and they don’t have any this spring.

That is as succinct as we can put it.

The big hope is that BYU can find some suitable D-1 corners between now and fall.

They have three in the wings waiting. There are the two jucos in Brian Logan and Lee Aguirre and redshirt freshman Robbie Buckner. He is very athletic, but raw as a returning missionary. Everything else this spring is strictly stop gap.

Safeties...They will be better. They have to be. Scott Johnson and Andrew Rich will man the position. If it really was only all about “position mastery” BYU would be all conference here.

The Cougar safeties will be better, but they won’t be all-conference.

Linebackers...If you take “happy pills” during “happy hour” it can be dangerous and exciting to expectations.

By now you should know that Jordan Pendleton, a redshirt sophomore, made the switch from safety to outside linebacker this spring.

You should also know that Mendenhall said that Pendleton was a better athlete than either Bryan Kehl or David Nixon, both of whom played that same spot the last two years.

Mendenhall said that while Pendleton may be a better athlete, he still has to prove that he is as good of a football player as Nixon and Kehl were at BYU.

To be as good as those two, you have to first start with talent, which according to Mendenhall, Pendleton has.

Throw in some other names in Grant Nelson and Terrance Hooks, both of who are returning from injuries, Brandon Ogletree and Aveni Leung-Wai, both returning from missions, and the lean linebacking corp from last season, on paper, at least, already looks better.

Defensive Line...Last year, this group wasn’t dominating, but it wasn’t bad. Seniority and another season, should do nothing but make it better because all players who saw significant action last year return for this season.

Jan Jorgensen is the headliner, but others who should play include Russell Tialavea, Matt Putnam and Brett Denney.

Bernard Afutiti has struggled academically and didn’t see the field last year or this spring, but if his grades ever match his talent, BYU will have something here.

Many are expecting Romney Fuga to return from his mission and be a factor this fall. We don’t.

We expect him to be moved to offensive line instead.

Spring Game...Save the pills and beverages. We don't need any of them to be happy about BYU cancelling the annual spring game.

We know we are in a distinct minority, but the last ten years of BYU spring games have been as exciting as watching grass grow.

That is what we will do in April and what you can do also if you still want the spring game experience.

Just pass by LaVell Edwards Stadium and watch crews install new grass on the field.

It is the real reason that the annual game has been cancelled this year.

SATURDAY SATURATION

BYU and the Mountain West Conference have gone retro in respect to football scheduling.

Remember the good old days when college football was played on Saturday? That was before ESPN and television discovered Tuesday and Thursdays and kinky kickoff times.

BYU and the MWC announced the Cougars' 2009 football schedule for the coming season last week. They also announced the television coverage for the same. Here it is.

Sat Sep 5 **Oklahoma** at Dallas, Kickoff: (TBA), TV: ESPN or ABC

Sat Sep 12 at **Tulane**, Kickoff: 1:30 pm MT, TV: ESPN2

Sat Sep 19 **Florida State**, Kickoff: 5:00 pm MT, TV: Versus

Sat Sep 26 **Colorado State**, Kickoff: 4:00 pm MT, TV: Mtn

Fri Oct 2 **Utah State**, Kickoff: 7:00 pm MT, TV: Mtn

Sat Oct 10 at **UNLV**, Kickoff: 8:00 pm MT, TV: Mtn

Sat Oct 17 at **SDSU**, Kickoff: 4:00 pm MT, TV: Mtn

Sat Oct 24 **TCU**, Kickoff: 5:30 pm MT, TV: Versus

Sat Oct 31 **BYE**

Sat Nov 7 at **Wyoming**, Kickoff: Noon MT, TV: Mtn

Sat Nov 14 at **New Mexico**, Kickoff: Noon MT, TV: Mtn

Sat Nov 21 **Air Force**, Kickoff: 1:30 pm MT, TV: CBS C

Sat Nov 28 **Utah**, Kickoff: 3:00 pm MT, TV: CBS C and Mtn

Here's some fluff and stuff about BYU's schedule.

San Diego State is the only league team who has a bye before facing BYU.

In the last 5 games against Wyoming in Laramie, four have been scheduled for November. BYU's trip to Laramie will make it five out of six seasons that the game in Laramie will be set for November.

Speaking of Wyoming, the Cowboys get Texas in Laramie in September. We know you are wondering how that happened. It is a two-for-one scheduling contract. The same thing was done with Tennessee a few years back. Wyoming had the Volunteers on the hook for an appearance in Laramie, but Tennessee bought out the contract with some huge money and brought the game back to Knoxville.

The game against TCU this year will be played on a Saturday. The previous three contests against the Horned Frogs were all on Thursdays.

BYU was originally set to play Arizona State in Tempe this season, but the Sun Devils bought out the contract so they could play a winnable game at home against Louisiana Monroe.

BYU supplanted the Sun Devils with a date against Tulane that will be played in the Super Dome.

BYU's defensive deficiencies last season were most often attributed by fans to the Cougars lack of speed.

We will find out in a hurry if BYU's defensive team speed has improved as the Cougars face two of the fastest and quickest teams in the nation in Oklahoma and Florida State.

Last year was a banner season for the conference as teams from the MWC went 9-5 against BCS conference schools.

The biggest wins were turned in by Utah last season with victories over “name” teams like Michigan and Alabama.

Utah’s “name” teams don’t quite have that same luster this coming season. The Utes will play Oregon in Eugene and Louisville in Salt Lake.

Other BCS conference teams appearing on MWC schedules this season include Air Force at Minnesota, CSU at Colorado, New Mexico at Texas A&M, San Diego State at UCLA, TCU at Virginia and Clemson, Oregon State at UNLV and of course Texas at Wyoming. The Cowboys also play at Colorado this season.

By our count, that will be 13 games against teams from the BCS. Only three of those 13 games will be hosted by teams from the MWC.

SPRING SPORTS

Disc jockeys have gone the way of vinyl records and over-the-air requests.

On-line requests are still coming in, however.

We have had several subscribers ask for an update on BYU Rugby.

Here is all we know.

BYU defeated Utah State 111-3 last Friday in Provo. The score is not a typo.

The Cougars went undefeated in regular season play with a 15-0 record.

They now await the USA Rugby Playoffs which begin April 17.

The USU match was televised live by BYUTV and was the first self-produced nationally televised home game by a rugby team in the US.

That contest is slated for rebroadcast over the next two weeks. You can go to www.byu.tv for details.

If you are looking for some tough guys or some linebackers, you can check them all out at www.byu-rugby.com.