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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.

We Love It When History Helps And We Only Have To Cut And Paste

As it says at the top of this week's newsletter, this is our eleventh issue of the current publishing year. It will cover the football game played last Saturday, Oct. 13 between BYU and UNLV.

Don't ask us how or why, but before we even started to write this week's issue early this morning, we accidentally accessed our eleventh issue of 2005. It reported on the BYU vs. CSU game played on Oct 15 of that year.

It was a Twilight Zone moment.

Reading what we wrote almost exactly two years ago was eerie and made this week's writing easy. At least for a few paragraphs, all we had to do was cut and paste the name of Max Hall for John Beck and Harvey Unga for Curtis Brown. We didn't even have to alter the score. Both games were 24-14 wins for the Cougars.

The original was written during Bronco Mendenhall's first year as BYU's head coach. It was a season in which he finished with a 6-6 record and furnished big promises of future success.

Based on the context of two games almost exactly two years apart and the identical scores, we think this gives a good barometer on Bronco and his ability to back up what he promised.

Here is an excerpt of what we wrote in 2005. We only had to add a few different names and statistics.

PATIENCE AND POUNDING THE FOOTBALL PRODUCE 24-14 WIN OVER CSU (UNLV)

The perception of BYU as a passing football team is not inaccurate. There have been enough numbers put up this season by John Beck (Max Hall) and company to validate that assessment.

In BYU's 24-14 win over Colorado State (UNLV) last Saturday night in Provo (Las Vegas), perception took a one-night sabbatical to production and pounding the football.

Somewhere in that alliteration you also need to add patience.

Behind the 31 (25) carries for 147 (177) yards and two (one) touchdown of Curtis Brown (Harvey Unga) and the 274 (227) yards rushing the ball put up by the BYU ground game, the Cougars literally pounded the Rams (Rebels) into submission and their first (second) conference loss of the season.

BYU now improves to 3-3 (4-2) on the year and 2-2 (3-0) in conference play.

The Cougar football team (2005) is a lot like living in Laramie only at the other end of the spectrum.

Living in Laramie isn't the end of the world, but you can see it from there.

BYU's sudden surge of 2 consecutive wins doesn't mean that that the football program (2005) has revived itself to its former level of success, but at least now we can catch a glimpse of the end that Bronco Mendenhall continue to say he has in mind for this team.

Improving

It is obvious that both the team and coaching staff are improving. We were pleasantly surprised that the coaches had the patience to stick with the running game. We were also delighted to see that the running game could be executed so consistently and proficiently.

The play of Brown (Unga) and his running mate Fahu Tahī (Manase Tonga), who had 14 (10) carries for 86 (36) yards, was good. Even better was the play of the Cougar offensive line.

The ground game produced early and often and more importantly, they produced late and under pressure, when first downs and touchdowns were needed to secure the win.

As good as BYU ground game was, however, a little caveat is in order.

BYU still needs to be able to pass the football, because the numbers against CSU (UNLV) should not be used to judge how BYU will rush the ball against other teams.

Okay, let's fast forward two years to the UNLV victory last Saturday night.

The Cougars were on the verge of a major computer crash against UNLV. They had turned the ball over three times in the first half and were nursing a 7-6 lead at the intermission.

When a passing and pass protection program isn't working properly, it is time to shut it down and reboot in a safe mode.

That is exactly what BYU offensive coaches did in the second half.

The restarted the offensive program in a safe mode. It allowed the offensive tackles of BYU to be able to retreat and forget the fact that they haven't been able to handle any speed rusher they have seen this year.

Instead, they were able to play to their strengths instead of their weaknesses and start pushing people off the line of scrimmage and opening huge holes for BYU running backs to run through.

The running game employed by BYU in the final two quarters also gave Max Hall some time to reboot.

Home Town Honks

The redshirt sophomore has been extremely good for his first season, but even the home-town honks would have to acknowledge that he struggled throwing the ball against Vegas.

He was 21-33 for just 214 yards and one touchdown. More poignantly, he had three picks, all of which cost the Cougars three scores.

Hall has now thrown 8 interceptions on the year. More are on the way. Don't panic. We didn't write this, but we did find it in the statistical archives of BYU football.

Ty Detmer threw 28 interceptions in 1990. Steve Young had 18 picks in 1982. Robbie Bosco was intercepted 24 times in 1985.

Don't expect Hall to be anywhere near that neighborhood this season. The difference is that he has

a running game to bail him out when the passing is not as pure as it should be.

While the Cougar running game garnered the headlines in this win for BYU, it was the defense that did the dirty work that went mostly unnoticed.

UNLV was having success this season running the ball with their talented back Frank Summers gaining 100 plus yards in each of his last three games.

BYU put a stop to that streak, holding Summers to just 50 yards on 13 carries.

Taking a step back to what we wrote before, in Vol. 27, Issue 34 which was published after one week of spring football this past April, here is what we said about Unga.

A lot of names have surfaced in this first week as potential running back candidates for the fall. They are all just background noise. Harvey Unga, who is still being held out of full contact, will be the primary ball carrier for the BYU offense this coming fall.

Most people have no idea just how good he is. He will be a redshirt freshman.

His size to speed ratio is outstanding. He is the real deal.

In case you forgot, he was injured his hip against Boston College last season while playing special teams.

All of which made us shiver when we saw him on some special teams situations this past week.

Trust us that won't last long.

Despite what transpires during the next few weeks of spring drills, when fall comes around and BYU lines up against the Wildcats of Arizona on Sep 1 in Provo, Unga will be on his way to becoming BYU's leading rusher for the 2007 season.

For those keeping track, Unga is on track to be a 1000-yard rusher for the Cougars this year.

At the mid way point of the season with six games played and another six yet to be contested, Unga has rushed for 539 yards on 110 carries. He is averaging 89.8 yards per game and 4.9 yards per rush.

With the win over UNLV, BYU has solidified its role as MWC front runner and the odds on favorite to repeat as league champ.

They are currently 4-2 overall and 3-0 in league play.

EWU Better Than A Bye

No disrespect to the Eastern Washington Eagles. They will be in town this Saturday afternoon to face BYU in LaVell Edwards Stadium.

They are playing well and hold a 4-2 record. They are averaging 34 points per game and putting up almost 500 yards of offense per contest.

Their two losses have been by a total of 8 points. In one of those losses to Montana, they out gained the Grizzlies 565 yards to 289 yards and still lost 24-23.

They are a balanced offense and seem to move the ball well passing and running.

The point we want to make is that EWU is a good Division I-AA team.

To be more accurate, they are a good Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) team.

Based on BYU's current three-game winning streak against MWC opponents, the Cougars appear to be a pretty decent Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) club.

There is a huge difference between the two classifications and it should be readily apparent on Saturday when the two teams collide.

It was just a few weeks ago that Appalachian State, another I-AA or FCS team shocked Michigan in Ann Arbor.

Don't expect a repeat of that upset in Provo.

EWU doesn't have the kind of team speed that Appalachian State displayed against the Wolverines.

For BYU this game is better than a bye.

It is the best of both worlds for Bronco Mendenhall. He can play his first units on both sides of the ball for two quarters to allow them to stay sharp and work on specific aspects of their game that he deems necessary.

He can even rest and not play personnel that are still dinged up.

Best of all, he should get the chance to play second and third unit players for at least two quarters and reward them for their hard work all fall. It will allow him to acknowledge those players for their full investment in the program with a payout in playing time.

We will let you call the score on this one because nobody knows how many minutes BYU starters will log or how intensely BYU backups will play.

We will simply call it a BYU win.

The only way the Cougars lose in this one is if a key player goes down with an injury.

FOOTBALL FLUFF AND STUFF

In the past we have criticized Bryce Mahuika for a non-descript career as a kick and punt returner. He was anything but non-descript last Saturday against UNLV.

He had his career-best outing against the Rebels. He returned four kickoffs for 104 yards and put the Cougars in good field position on each kick.

UNLV punted five times during the game, but Mahuika fielded just one for a fair catch.

C.J. Santiago and BYU punted just once during the contest. The punt was 37 yards.

There certainly weren't any style points awarded for BYU's field goal and point after attempts.

All were successfully made by Mitch Payne, but they were anything but artistic or airborne.

We still maintain that the BYU kicking game at its present level, will likely cost the Cougars a win this season.

As good as Harvey Unga has proved to be this season, he may end up hurting BYU in the recruitment of running backs this season.

If you were somebody like Sausan Shakerin, whom BYU has offered, would you want to come and play for a team that will have a premier and go-to back for the next three seasons?

That is why the Adam Timo's early commitment is so valuable. The junior tailback from Snow Canyon HS in St. George has already said that he will be signing with the Cougars in 2009. That puts a minimum of two years between Timo and Unga in eligibility.

Throw in a redshirt year for Timo and a potential LDS mission and the two talented tailbacks could never even cross paths at BYU. Timo rushed for over 200 yards in each of his last two games.

We should have never said never. That is what we thought about Matangi Tonga. We never thought he would be back in the BYU football program after some serious off-the-field problems last year.

It now appears that if all goes well for the sophomore defensive tackle, he will be back on the Cougar roster this coming January.

Tonga is currently enrolled as a student at UVSC and apparently is on track to resolve all of his legal problems.

GLOSSY IS GOOD, BUT BEATING UTAH IS BETTER

Sooner or later, the message is received by all BYU coaches. Regardless of how you paint your program, you eventually have to prove that you can beat Utah.

For the most part, when it comes to coaching, we have laid off the women's side of the BYU athletic equation.

Now it is time to take on soccer.

Let's start with the positives. BYU has established a very good women's soccer program.

They are perennially a contender for the league title and almost annually get an invite to the NCAA post season tournament.

The coach, Jennifer Rockwood, has an amazing coaching record. She is currently 204-62-20 in her career at BYU. She has earned many conference and national accolades for her program. She almost always has her team nationally ranked.

You can't ask for more.

Well actually you can.

You can ask that she beat Utah and the Ute's coach Rich Manning.

Manning was hired at Utah in January of 2002. Since an initial loss to BYU in his inaugural season and before he could recruit and get his system in place, he has dominated the Cougars.

Even when it appears that BYU has superior talent, they can't whip the Manning coached Utes.

In six seasons Manning is 4-2-1 against the Cougars. In the last three years, he has not lost to BYU.

The latest loss came in Provo Saturday night. BYU was ranked No. 15 in the nation by Soccer Times and undefeated on the season with an 11-0-2 record. The Utes were 9-2-3 on the year. They came away with a 1-0 win.

It only took Bronco Mendenhall one loss to Utah during his first season on the job to draw criticism for losing to the Utes.

Dave Rose figured it out very early in basketball.

Since Manning took over the Utes five years ago, maybe it is time BYU administrators and fans finally started to pay attention to how he has manhandled the Cougars.

TELEVISION TIMETABLE

BYU vs. Eastern Washington

Saturday, Oct. 20 at Provo

Kickoff: 3:30 Mountain Time

TV: Mtn

BYU vs. San Diego State

Saturday, Oct. 27 at San Diego

Kickoff: 7:30 Mountain Time

TV: Mtn

BYU vs. Colorado State

Saturday, Nov. 3 at Provo

Kickoff: Noon Mountain Time

TV: Mtn