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BYU, NCAA, and the DMV

The only thing more frustrating than waiting in line to conduct business at the state DMV, is waiting for BYU to win a game at the NCAA basketball tournament.

At both places, you are assigned a number.

BYU was given an eight seed in the current NCAA tourney. Based on the Cougars' 67-62 one-and-done loss to Texas A&M last Thursday in Anaheim, the number should have been higher.

The best number we have ever received at the Department of Motor Vehicles when waiting to renew a license or take a test was 34. Instead of a number, it would have been more appropriate to issue patrons one of three printed cards.

They would read: "Hope you brought a lunch", "Not in your lifetime", and "Don't worry, you won't need a car or license in the next life".

When it comes to BYU basketball and waiting for the Cougars to win a game in the NCAA tournament, we ate our last tuna sandwich years ago and we already have passed the Laramie life stage. Like LaVell Edwards said about the Wyoming town, "It's not the end of the world (or life), but you can see it from there."

After 16 years of not winning an opening-round NCAA game, it may be time to play the "Next Life" card. When it comes to BYU basketball, we will apparently just have to wait until cars and Cougar fans are both relegated to obsolescence.

Utah DMV

Actually, when it comes to BYU and the NCAA tournament, the Cougars could learn a lot from the Utah DMV.

We are now talking about the Utah Utes and their past post-season basketball successes.

Forget Rick Majerus and favorable seeds, the Utes did it with DMV.

That would be Mike Doleac, Andre Miller and Keith Van Horn. Winning NCAA games eventually comes down to who has the most NBA quality players on their roster.

When Utah had NBA talent, they won.

So did BYU. When the Cougars made their deepest run ever in the NCAA tournament, they did it with three NBA-type players in Danny Ainge, Fred Roberts and Greg Kite.

Despite Van Horn being a lottery pick and Doleac drawing a paycheck as a journeyman backup player, it is Andre Miller who is still starting as an NBA guard.

While Kite and Roberts never made any waves in the NBA, it was Ainge who had a pretty decent pro-

fessional career.

Go Deep

Here is the point. To win consistently and go deep into the NCAA tournament, you need players who at least will get a cup of coffee or Postum in the NBA, but more importantly, you need legitimate NBA quality guards.

Utah's best and BYU's best basketball was when both teams had great guards.

Forget Majerus and Dave Rose and start thinking guard play in the NCAA.

Rose and BYU have enough talent to win some games in post season play, but not without better guard play, and more specifically, better point play.

BYU has a good coaching staff and good players. They are competitive and reflect Rose's fervor for winning.

That is good enough to win two consecutive MWC titles and play well against good non-conference teams in early season games.

That doesn't matter. The NCAA tournament always exposes your guards as either good enough or not good enough to continue playing.

Bad Seeds

BYU's long losing streak in the NCAA tournament is not about bad seeds or bad karma. It is about guard play that is not that bad, but just not good enough to win at that level.

Not to hammer it to death, but can you name the last BYU guard to be selected as a first team all league selection? It was Terrell Lyday in the 2000-2001 season. Remember, Mark Bigelow and Travis Hansen were wing players, not guards.

Lyday was the best BYU guard of the last decade, but even he couldn't help BYU to a NCAA post season win.

The life blood of basketball recruiting for the Cougars still revolves around LDS players.

There are usually enough big bodies and front court players produced by the LDS Church for BYU to compete at a high level. The problem is that good LDS guards that can play on the big stage, apparently only come along every 20-30 years.

Trust us, Dave Rose and his staff and every past BYU basketball coach knows the importance of guard play. They also know that the top tier high school guards prospects are not lining up to play in the Mountain West Conference in general and BYU in particular.

Intense Effort

That is why Tyler Haws, the LDS guard prospect who is still in high school, is the object of such an intense recruiting effort.

That is why Dave Rose is constantly scouring the junior college ranks in search of stop-gap guards until the next good LDS guard shows up.

To make our point about guards, name the best LDS guard you can remember playing for BYU since Ainge.

Better yet, name an LDS guard, other than Ainge, that has played in the NBA in the last 20 years. The only one we can think of is Pace Mannion, and he was the ultimate Postum player in the NBA. He had a small sip of the grain-based drink before heading off to the espressos of Italy.

There might be others, but none that ever distinguished themselves as a guard at the NBA level. In our opinion, having guards that can just get an NBA look or a smell of the Postum pot is what it will take for BYU to get back on the winning track in NCAA tournament games.

NEXT YEAR'S GUARDS

While we have been talking about the quality of guard play needed to succeed at the highest collegiate level, we should not dismiss the contributions of graduating senior guards Sam Burgess and Ben Murdock.

Both were good and gritty enough to help BYU win a conference title in the Mountain West Conference.

As good as they were at that level of play, will the guard play for BYU get better or worse next season?

We think it will be better. We expect BYU to be bringing in another guard if they can find one from the juco ranks. If they can't find one good enough to make a marked improvement, then here is what Dave Rose will have to work with next year.

His biggest plus will be the return of Jimmer Fredette for his sophomore season.

We like Fredette. We expect him to be BYU's next all conference first team selection as a guard before he finishes his career as a Cougar.

Premier Player

If he progresses at the rate of Lee Cummond, he will be one of the premier players in the MWC as a junior.

Barring any new influx of juco guards, we expect Fredette to see most of the minutes as a point guard next season. Lamont Morgan red shirted last year as a juco transfer and is a better penetrator with the ball, but he lacks an offensive game and is too small to provide a defensive presence against guards bigger than 6-foot. He has the quickness, however, to be a player that can provide help in certain game situations.

Michael Lloyd, Jr. is a very good open court player and the best the Cougars have in pushing the ball in search of early offense, but he also has an extremely limited offensive game. Again, we see him as a situational player next season.

Matt Pinegar will be a red shirt freshman after sitting out this past season. He is a very good spot up shooter, but BYU is loaded with those. What is needed is a guard that can penetrate, defend quickness and create a shot.

We will see how that plays out for the Timpview HS product.

Best Addition

The best addition to the guard roster next season most likely will come from Jackson Emery. He proved he can contribute as a freshman, but after returning from an LDS mission, it will take a while to see if he can get back in shape quick enough to provide substantial minutes of contribution.

The guard line for BYU should be better, but still probably not good enough to take the Cougars to the next level of consistent play in NCAA tournament action.

Another MWC title is very doable, but an NCAA first round win would still be doubtful.

HALL STILL THE REAL DEAL

Despite BYU looking to find at least eight new starters on defense, there is really only one big story during spring football drills for Bronco Mendenhall and his troops.

Max Hall is still the real deal.

That is where the BYU football story starts and ends.

Mendenhall has proven that he can take almost anybody and put together a decent defense. The names keep changing, but the results remain the same.

Expect BYU to be decent to very good on defense this fall.

Expect BYU to be better on offense this fall than they were last season.

That should get you excited.

BYU has Austin Collie and Harvey Unga returning. The Cougars have their entire offensive line returning with the exception of Sete Aulai.

The two top tight ends come back.

That is all nice, but Hall makes it happen.

Last year it was all about Hall getting reps to get back into football game shape and seasoning.

This year it is all about fine tuning the offense and installing more formations and plays.

Barring an injury to Hall, the BYU offense will be scary good.

Where all the names are changing is on the defensive side of the ball.

There will be four new starters in the defensive backfield. Actually, Kellen Fowler started the last few games last season because of an inordinate amount of injuries at the safety spot.

He is back and the most experienced defensive back.

Joining him at safety is red shirt freshman Jordan Pendleton. He has been taking all first unit reps.

David Tafuna missed all of last season with a foot injury, and he is seeing spot action this spring because of that injury. He will be a factor at safety in the fall.

BYU has more athletic ability at the corner spots than they have had in some time.

Whether that ability translates into productivity on the field will be seen shortly.

Brandon Howard is working with the first unit defense as the field corner and Scott Johnson is the first unit boundary corner.

G Pittman is competing with the 2's behind Howard with Brandon Bradley battling for playing time behind Johnson.

The defensive unit that took the biggest hit after last season was the linebacker corp.

With only David Nixon returning as a starter, there was a reason that Vic So'oto and Matt Putnam were moved from tight end and defensive line to try their hand at linebacker.

Inside, if Shawn Doman's back can hold out, he will be good. He has seen plenty of live action from last year. Matt Bauman is the other inside linebacker who teams with Doman on first unit reps.

Other than Nixon, So'oto, Grant Nelson, Masi Tuitama and juco transfer Coleby Clawson, are also vying for attention on the outside.

VEGAS VENTING

It doesn't seem quite so important now that BYU is done with post season basketball play, but we received some major input from subscribers about the MWC post season tournament situation this past week.

Nobody was happy with the tourney being held on UNLV's home court.

There were lots of suggestions, including wanting BYU to refuse to participate next season and forfeiting games and the conference check.

After all, the worst the conference could do is boot BYU from the league and that wouldn't be a bad thing, would it? The worst the NCAA could do is give the Cougars a bad seed and that wouldn't be anything new would it?

We had lots of email from subscribers saying that they won't go to the tournament again as long as it is held in Las Vegas.

We also received some interesting input from some very credible sources that told us that BYU really doesn't make any money from the tournament being held in Las Vegas, but at least they don't lose money.

When it came to seeding, we had input from someone with a close relationship with a selection committee member. They said that in regards to BYU's and UNLV's seeding as it pertains to UNLV's home court advantage, the general feeling was that if the Mountain West Conference wasn't willing to fix the bias in its tournament location then the selection committee wasn't going to bail them out.

FLUFF AND STUFF

One of the advantages of having Max Hall and the BYU offense look so good in the opening week of spring drills was that Jake Heaps saw how a good quarterback could be showcased in the Cougar offense.

Heaps is the LDS high school quarterback from Skyline HS in Seattle. BYU has already offered him a scholarship and he will be only a junior this coming fall. He was in town this past weekend with his family to catch some of BYU spring action.

As we mentioned last week, his high school coach of last season was one of the speakers at the BYU high school coaching clinic which was also held last week.

Steve Gervais will not coach Heaps this year because he was hired by Tyrone Willingham to be a running back coach for the Washington Huskies and specifically to help recruit the local in-state talent. That talent includes Heaps.

Speaking of Heaps, the 6-2, 185 pound qb led his Washington entry to the title of the Badger/New Level Pass Camp 7 on 7 tournament in Las Vegas last a few days ago.

The tournament had teams from all over the West, including two from Utah and several teams from California which include premier prospects from that state.

SPRING SPORTS

The BYU baseball team swept a three-game home series this past week from Air Force. The Cougars are now 3-3 in MWC play having been swept the week before by San Diego State. That series was played at SDSU.

The Cougars beat Kansas State in Provo in two games before the Air Force series and will face defending national champ Oregon State in two games on Monday and Tuesday.

In softball, the BYU women are now 18-12 after participating in the Stanford Invitational last week.

The Cougars racked up wins over Princeton, East Carolina and Wisconsin, but came up short against Stanford.