

HB Arnett's
COUGAR SPORTSLINE

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TEAMS FROM ARIZONA WEREN'T KIND TO THE COUGARS

Arizona wasn't kind to BYU last week.

The Wildcats of Arizona put a pounding on BYU in football to the tune of 31-21. If the Wildcats didn't turn the ball over going in for a touchdown and didn't surrender a prevent defense late game score, this would have been a blowout.

In basketball, BYU fared much better, but was also on the losing end of a 76-75 score against Arizona State.

The Cougars actually played well in this game until they coughed up a 10-point lead and failed to make some key plays and stop in the closing minutes.

Of course there was the controversial game-winning field goal by Charles Abouo that was called good by the official on the court and then denied after those same official looked at a replay of the action.

On the football side of the ball, it was the same scenario that caused the Cougars their problems with Utah in the last loss of the regular season.

There was not enough defense and too many turnovers.

The Cougars coughed it up three times against Arizona, all by Max Hall. He had one interception and two fumbles.

Defensive, the Wildcats took advantage of their speed and the lack of speed and coverage skill of BYU.

Hall finished the game with 328 yards passing completing 30-of-46 throws.

Austin Collie notched another 100-plus yard game against the Wildcats. he had 11 catches for 119 yards.

Harvey Unga led all Cougar rushers with 71 yards on 17 carries. BYU rushed for a total of 116 yards against Arizona.

In basketball, it was a case of too much James Harden. Actually it was a case of too much James Harden at the free throw line.

The future NBA lottery pick made 21 appearances at the foul line. He made 16 of those charity attempts.

His 21 free throw attempts were more attempts than the entire BYU team had.

Harden is good, but he also received NBA star-like treatment from the officiating crew, in our opinion.

The last time we saw a basketball player go to the line 21 times was a few weeks ago when we saw Tyler Haws of Lone Peak HS and a recent BYU basketball signee, shoot 21-of-25 from the charity stripe against Springville. He ended the game with 35 points.

BYU will now come home to face Western Oregon on Tuesday, Dec 23 in Provo and then go back out on the road for a game at Tulsa.

There will be no television for the Western Oregon game , but the Tulsa game will be televised on CBS C.

In football, the Cougars will now return home to concentrate on recruiting and restocking the shelves with better players.

BOWL LOSS TO ARIZONA EASIER TO SWALLOW WHEN YOU PUT IT IN CONTEXT

The 31-21 loss to Arizona in the Las Vegas Bowl was hard to swallow for BYU fans, especially when the focus is narrowed to a one-game perspective.

Who wouldn't be disappointed and depressed about a team ranked by national pollsters as a top twenty program and revered and recognized by its fans as a player on the national stage getting punked and pounded by Arizona, a middle-of-the-pack team from the Pac 10.

If that is all you had to go on, then bah humbug and BYU can be used appropriately in the same sentence.

If you expand the context of the Cougars to a full paragraph and panorama of the last three-years, however, then it is deck the Max Halls with boughs of holly and ho, ho, ho, how about those 32 wins in the last three seasons?

We will have many more Merry Mendenhall Christmases and many more happy new years of successful football if, as Cougar fans, we base it all on the long term success of the past three years instead of a lone loss in Las Vegas.

Shouldn't that be more than enough cheer to spread around in the fa la la la land of Cougar faithful? Apparently not.

Wreath of Reality

The wreath of reality that Arizona hung on BYU's door was hard to swallow.

Not only did BYU and Arizona go head to head in Las Vegas last week, but so did Santa and sensibility. Santa took one on the chin.

BYU hasn't gone undefeated since 1984. They did not go undefeated this season and they won't go undefeated next season. If you thought Arizona had more athletes than BYU, wait until you see what Mike Stoops' older brother at Oklahoma will bring to the field next year against BYU.

If we can keep BYU football in the proper context, it makes following the Cougars much more enjoyable and entertaining.

This is a team that is more niche than national. Once we grasp that concept, the few and far between losses will go down the gullet much more smoothly.

BYU has created a nice niche for itself. Cougar football makes big headlines provincially in Provo and among its fan base, where it is the lead article.

Nationally, it is just a human interest sidebar story.

Interest

It still piques people's interest that BYU can win games despite the uniqueness of the institution. Since Bronco Mendenhall has taken over the program, that uniqueness has been accentuated.

In our opinion, BYU is what it is. The Cougars in football are like the unique boutique from Bountiful that has created a nice niche market for itself and not only sells locally, but can market on line or with mail order on a limited national basis.

It is what it is, but when forced to go face to face and mano a mano with the big box stores or elite BCS programs, both the boutique and BYU are overmatched and undermanned.

The BYU football story is a nice local slice-of-life feature article, but it doesn't consistently resonate nationally.

Some small businesses and BYU football, have found a little slice of the pie, and as long as that small sliver of success is kept in context, fans will be happy and the financials of a small company will be solvent.

Nationally, in business, it is all capitalization and market share. Nationally, in college football, it is all about players and matchups. Those that have the best of both, win most of the games.

Not Enough

BYU has some very good players, but not enough, especially on defense this past season. Against the other mom and pop operations of the Mountain West Conference, in most seasons, the Cougars have better players and matchups they can win.

Against Arizona, it was obvious that the Wildcats had more athletes and more matchups that fell in their favor.

It is still a numbers game. If your athletes are better and more numerous than the other team, ninety percent of the time, that advantage shows on the scoreboard.

The 31-21 final tally of Arizona against BYU bore that out. The same scenario played out against TCU and Utah this season. Both those teams had an advantage in numbers of good players and matchups they could win.

This season BYU was a good team. They weren't great. If Arizona was more talented than BYU and they can't sniff the elite levels of college football, what does that say about the Cougars' chances?

It says that until BYU can figure out a recruiting model that will allow for more talented players to consistently populate the team roster, we need to keep in context what BYU football really is.

Usually Entertaining

It is a program that is interesting, enjoyable and usually entertaining, but when it comes to talent on the roster, it is a long way from being elite.

BYU coaches admit and almost brag about the fact that they have narrowed their annual recruiting pool to only 35 or so prospects that they consider to have Division I talent and have identified as being able to survive in the BYU environment.

Texas and Oklahoma can find 35 prospects in Dallas alone. The only thing they have to worry about is if those prospects are mobile, agile and hostile.

It's a recruiting battle that BYU may win once in a lifetime, but they will never win it consistently against the college big boys.

Even with the small pool of talent that BYU has self selected, when an elite LDS prospect does appear, the Cougars don't have a sterling history of landing those elite players.

You know the names. You also know USC has owned BYU and elite LDS athletes the last five years when it comes to recruiting.

We are what we are and it isn't going to change anytime soon.

In our opinion, when it comes to competing in football at an elite level, it is all about players. You have to have them.

Until BYU finds a way to get that kind of player consistently in their program, then for Cougar fans, it should be all about context and perspective.

RANDOM RECRUITING AND OTHER THOUGHTS

Talent Pool Thin...If BYU coaches admit that their recruiting pool in football is extremely small and that they can't afford to make mistakes in evaluation and selection, what about the coaching pool?

Shouldn't the same scenario hold true?

The list of coaches that can qualify to be employed at BYU is even smaller than the player prospect pool. The margin of error in hiring coaches that actually can survive at BYU and still have a resume that proves they know their x's and o's is extremely limited.

If BYU has made mistakes in evaluating and recruiting players, could an evaluation and hiring mistake in coaching also occasionally happen. Just wondering.

It Truly Is an Inspiring List...Bronco Mendenhall's list of priorities for BYU football players in the program is very inspiring and or interesting, according to your viewpoint.

As a mission president, it is breathtaking. As a football coach it may cause some to catch their breath.

Here is the list of priorities as they have been outlined.

Faith, Family, Knowledge, Friends and Football.

You can see why football at BYU has been considered by some to be the flag bearer of the university.

Football is also a job for coaches and players. They are all paid. Coaches get salaries and players get scholarship checks once a month. They actually cash those checks.

BYU also has a boatload of professors and teachers cashing checks. We are just wondering if listing teaching and research as their fifth priority for employment would go over big with their employer.

Again, we never said these thoughts were right or wrong, we just said they were random.

Here is one more. We can certainly understand how the list of priorities for the program inspires and uplifts Cougar fans and followers of the faith.

We can also understand how that same list could antagonize and be considered arrogant by those not of the faith who are coaches, players and fans of other teams against whom BYU competes. With football ranked fifth, it could be perceived that BYU is saying that we are so much better than you that we can still beat you without even giving our best effort.

The context and camp in which you reside when evaluating this list of priorities most likely will determine how you feel about it.

FLUFF AND STUFF

Deja Vu for Defensive Tackles...It was just a few years ago that Haloti Ngata's mom gave a verbal commitment for her son to Gary Crowton when the Cougars were recruiting the talented LDS defensive tackle.

Ngata himself never said he was coming to BYU and he signed with Oregon.

It was a story that repeated itself just recently.

Hebron Fangupo is a 6-3, 320 pound defensive tackle at Mt. SAC JC in California. He is considered by some to be the best juco defensive tackle prospect in the country.

He is also LDS and a returned missionary.

Last May he committed to USC. A few weeks ago it became apparent that he would not qualify as a mid year transfer and BYU also made some headway in getting their foot in the recruiting door.

According to reports we get, Fangupo's mom wanted her son at BYU.

That isn't what Fangupo himself wanted and he recommitted to USC just last week and says that he will definitely be a Trojan and sign with Pete Carroll in February.

Cougars Sign Two...BYU inked two junior college mid year transfers to letters of intent last week.

Jordan Atkinson is a 6-3, 235 pound linebacker from Diablo Valley JC in Northern California. He is LDS and has BYU connections with his dad, Dave, being a former player for LaVell Edwards and his

grandfather, Chick, being a former head coach of BYU.

Atkinson was also recruited and had an offer from Colorado State.

Also signed by BYU was juco cornerback Lee Aguirre, a 5-10, 185 pounder from Fullerton College. He had an offer from Hawaii but chose to ink with the Cougars.

BYU also had offered mid year linebacker transfer Aaron Gress of College of the Sequoias in Visalia, California, but Gress opted to sign with Illinois. Neither Gress or Aguirre are LDS.

BYU is still trying to land at least another juco cornerback. The name that is now at the forefront of the recruiting effort is Dominique Gaisie, a 5-10, 170 pounder from Mt Sac JC.

Gaisie is seeing his recruiting stock pick up dramatically. He prepped at Bishop Amat HS in La Puente, California.

He will trip to BYU in early January and is also getting a rush from Washington and Steve Sarkisian. Sarkisian just recently hired Gaisie's Mt Sac defensive back coach.

BASKETBALL BRIEFS...BYU lost to ranked Arizona State last week 76-75. Despite the controversial last second and shot loss, we still like the Cougars.

We especially feel better about BYU's chances to finally break through in an NCAA tournament game. We base that on the vastly improved play on the guard line. NCAA play is usually all about guards and BYU has definitely experienced an upgrade at that position with Jimmer Fredette, Jackson Emery and Lamont Morgan, Jr.

BYE BYE ASU...According to published reports from Arizona, it is looking more and more likely that the ASU Sun Devils won't be on BYU's football schedule for this coming year.

The Cougars and ASU were slated to play in September in Tempe. It now looks like ASU has replaced BYU with Louisiana Monroe.

That would seem to indicate that the BYU-Oklahoma game is going to happen for sure.

If there was any real doubt about the matchup, we would surmise that Bob Stoops, the coach of Oklahoma, after watching in person the game with Arizona, would be licking his chops to get the Cougars on his schedule.

TELEVISION TIMETABLE

BYU vs. Western Oregon

Tuesday, Dec 23 at Provo

Tipoff: 7:00 pm Mountain Time

TV: None

BYU vs. Tulsa

Tuesday, Dec 30 at Tulsa

Tipoff: 6:00 pm Mountain Time

TV: CBS C

BYU vs. Wake Forest

Saturday, Jan 3 at Provo

Tipoff: 6:00 pm Mountain time

TV: Mtn