

HB Arnett's
COUGAR SPORTSLINE

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45-42 Win

HOW GOOD WAS BYU'S OFFENSE?

How good was the BYU offense in the 45-42 win over CSU last Saturday in Fort Collins?

They were very good.

BYU had 13 possessions in the game. The Cougar offense accounted for 9 touchdowns and a field goal in those 13 tries.

Of course, three of those touchdowns were scored by CSU thanks to Cougar turnovers. That just means that despite putting on an offensive show, there is still room for improvement for this BYU offense.

Still, a six touchdown and one field goal performance was one of BYU's better outings this season.

The fact that the last game-winning touchdown came with the Cougars trailing and only 1:36 remaining on the clock was even more impressive.

As bad as the BYU defense played, they didn't get any boost from the BYU offense. CSU scored 21 points as a direct result of BYU offensive miscues.

Max Hall fumbled his first snap of the game and CSU picked up the miscue and scored.

Catch Up

BYU was playing catch up the rest of the game.

J.J. DiLuigi fumbled in the fourth quarter and that resulted in another CSU touchdown. Before Hall's last drive heroics, he threw an interception that led to CSU's final and go-ahead touchdown and a 42-38 lead.

That was the bad. It was vastly outweighed by the extremely good parts of the BYU offense.

How about these numbers?

Austin Collie went berserk in the first half.

All he did was score all of BYU's points in the first half which ended in a 21-21 tie.

Collie scored on a 58-yard touchdown toss in the first quarter and followed that up in the second quarter with scoring catches of 15 and 10 yards.

For the day, Collie caught 9 balls for 156 yards and three scores.

CSU defensive coaches decided they had enough of Collie beating them and double teamed him in the second half.

That left the stage for Dennis Pitta.

He went berserk in the final two quarters, scoring two touchdowns and ending the game with 12 catches for 175 yards.

Go-To-Guy

He was the go-to-guy for Max Hall late in the game and scored the game winner with just 22 seconds remaining on a nice 17-yard grab and score.

His best catch of the night, however, was his first td reception. It was from 23 yards out and between two defensive backs who wanted to take his head off.

They succeeded in taking off Pitta's helmet, but not the touchdown.

BYU also had a 40-yard td run from Harvey Unga late in the fourth quarter. Unga finished the game with 133 yards rushing on 24 carries.

Collie and Pitta were the stars of the show against CSU, but somebody had to deliver them the ball. That would be Max Hall.

He was spectacular, especially on the final game-winning 6-play, 76 yard winning drive.

All six plays were passes by Hall. He completed five of those six throws, including the game winner to Pitta.

His final stats were 28-35 with five touchdowns and one interception for 389 yards.

Total Offense

BYU rushed for another 162 yards for a total offense number of 551 yards.

It would have been bigger if not for the three turnovers BYU gave away.

With the win, the Cougars are now 8-1 on the year and 4-1 in MWC play.

IF IT'S SAN DIEGO STATE, THERE MUST BE SMOKE

A year ago, BYU's game with San Diego State was postponed until December 1 because of wildfires and smoke during the week the game was originally scheduled.

Expect more smoke this Saturday with BYU's smoking hot offense.

The Aztecs are the worst team in the league. They are 1-8 overall and 0-5 in MWC play.

This contest will be the closest thing to a bye that BYU can get.

With the Cougars nursing so many injuries to their secondary, it would be a surprise if BYU didn't try to eat up some clock with its running game.

That would protect the battered defense and make sense based on SDSU's defense.

Last year, the Cougars rushed for 311 yards against the Aztecs.

Last week, hapless Wyoming rushed for 378 yards against them.

You can expect SDSU to try and move the ball in the air.

They threw it 52 times against the Cowboys and netted 311 yards in the air.

Dictate

BYU should be able to dictate how much they want to score. That is how bad this Aztec defense really is.

The question will be, as it has been the last few weeks, how will the BYU defense respond?

BYU is a 36-point favorite with the Las Vegas bookies.

We call it BYU 52 SDSU 21.

FLUFF AND STUFF

Defensive Back Dilemma... We have been very clear in our opinion about BYU's defensive back situation. We think BYU is very ordinary at the safety spots and think that the cornerback play has been typical of BYU cornerback play in the past, present and future.

It has not, and never will be, at a high level. BYU simply can't or won't recruit the athletes needed to perform and a normal Division I standard for corners for a variety of reason.

To make matters worse, due to injuries to some key defensive backs over the last two weeks, in medical jargon, BYU's secondary status has none gone from serious to critical.

BYU's best corner, Scott Johnson, has been hampered by injury the last two weeks, but was finally forced from the field against CSU and could be doubtful for the upcoming SDSU game on Saturday.

Brandon Bradley, another of BYU's corners who logs a lot of playing time, also was injured against the Rams and couldn't finish the game.

That left Brandon Howard and redshirt freshman Steve Thomas to finish up as Cougar corners.

If the name of Thomas draws a blank, it is because he was in obscurity as a third unit player until last Saturday.

BYU has simply run out of bodies at corner.

We actually think Thomas, who was moved to corner from safety just a few weeks ago, has a future as a safety, but when it comes to corners, it is now an all out fire drill.

There are plenty of players on the current roster listed as defensive backs, but the fact that Bronco Mendenhall said after the CSU game that he will move some players from offense to the defensive back side of the ball pretty well gives his assessment of the ability of those players.

After perusing the roster, our best guess for players that could make the switch really boils down to two guys.

That would be Stephen Covey and Bryce Mahuika.

Coming out of high school, BYU coaches were excited about Covey's possibilities as a defensive back because of his quick feet.

He will compete next spring and fall with Riley Nelson for the backup job to Max Hall, and has been running the scout team since fall camp. He has already redshirted so he wouldn't be blowing away a year of eligibility by making a season ending stop at defensive back to try and stop the hemorrhaging for the Cougars in that position.

Covey or whoever else makes the switch, will be a stop gap measure.

The real question is from where does relief come for the future.

At corner, both Johnson, Bradley and Howard return for next season. Two new bodies show up in Robbie Buckner and Rhen Brown. Both will be coming off missions.

At safety, Mike Hague returns from his mission and BYU will sign Trevor Bateman in February, although there is a possibility he could be a corner.

Two things that you can't count on for next year are help from G Pittman and any influx of decent juco talent at defensive back.

Pittman has moved on from BYU and will transfer. In Pittman's case, if he leaves BYU at the end of the semester and is not in good academic standing, he will have to make a stop at a junior college first.

Good juco defensive backs are hard to come by. There is usually a reason that the good ones are snapped up quickly by the BCS big boys. There is also a reason that good juco defensive backs are at a junior college and it usually has to do with academics.

Since Bronco Mendenhall has been the head coach at BYU, the recruitment of decent defensive juco backs has been few and far between.

The recruitment of juco players in general by Mendenhall has also tapered off.

In his first year, he signed jucos Justin Robinson (db) and Chris Bolden (lb).

During Mendenhall's second year on the job, he signed jc defensive lineman Mosese Foketi, deep snapper Matt Johnson and two cornerbacks in Tico Pringle and Andre Saulsberry.

In his third recruiting class he signed Aveni Leung Wai (lb) and Levi Mack (ol).

This past February, he signed Bernard Afutiti (dl) and Jesse Taufi (ol).

Andre Rich was not signed and walked on.

Stop us if you see any impact players in this list of players.

While we expect Afutiti and Taufi to contribute next year, it appears that journeyman is the best BYU can hope for from its juco recruiting.

The last good juco defensive backs we can remember for BYU would be Tim Mctyre and Omar Morgan from the mid 90's. For every Mctyre and Morgan, there have been many more Danny Phillips and Derrus Wilsons.

STILL BUBBLING IN BCS...It was just a week ago when we outlined what would have to happen for BYU if they wanted to keep their hopes alive for a BCS bowl game invite.

A few of those roadblocks have now been removed.

Tulsa and Ball State have been removed from in front of the Cougars in the latest BCS standing.

Don't look now, but despite almost standing still in the USA Coach's and Harris polls, where BYU is ranked No. 16 in both surveys, the Cougars vaulted an amazing five spots in the poll that counts; the BCS Rankings.

BYU went from No. 20 last week to No. 15 this week.

Even more amazing, the Mountain West Conference teams are in the top 15 of the BCS standings.

With Utah at No. 8 and TCU at No. 12, and including BYU at No. 15, that is twenty percent of the top fifteen BCS ranked teams.

While there are five Big 12 teams in that group and 3 SEC teams, the MWC has more teams in the top 15 than the Big Ten (2), Pac 10 (1) and ACC (0) and Big East (0).

BYU still needs some help. They need Utah to defeat TCU this Thursday in Salt Lake City. The Cougars will need to beat Utah on Nov 22 and look for some help and a major upset of Boise State during the next three weeks.

Actually, in our opinion, If BYU wins out, and a couple of other teams in front of BYU in the No. 10-14 range get beat, that could put them within a couple of spots of BSU. Wins over Air Force and Utah could vault the Cougars over even an unbeaten Boise State.

The Bronco's soft schedule is making them undefeated, but could come back to haunt them if the Cougars can whip Air Force, currently 7-2 and Utah, currently 9-0.

A week ago, we thought a BCS bowl bid was impossible. It is still a long shot, but looks brighter than it did.

For those holding out hope that two non-BCS teams will get invited if they are both in the top 12 of the rankings, you can forget about it.

The BCS boys are only obligated to take one team and they will not share a big payout with anybody but their inner circle of six leagues if they don't have to regardless of the rankings.

The money is too big to share more than they have to.

FIRSTS...It was a first. For the first time in three and a half years, BYU ran a draw play against Colorado State.

That particular play used to be a mainstay of the BYU offense, but it hasn't been seen until last Saturday.

We still can't remember seeing a screen pass in that same time frame either. Maybe next week.

Speaking of firsts, the BYU defense giving up points in bunches certainly isn't anything new for the Cougars.

In case you forgot, in Gary Crowton's first season, BYU surrendered 30 or more points in 7 of their 14 games. That included giving up 72 points to Hawaii.

When Bronco Mendenhall came aboard as defensive coordinator in 2003, his defense gave up 30 plus points in 5 of 12 games, including 58 to CSU and 50 to Boise State. Both games were in Provo.

The next year, while still a D-coordinator, Mendenhall gave up only three games of 30-plus points,

including 37 to Stanford, 42 to USC and 52 to Utah.

As a first year head coach, his team gave up six games out of 12 with 30 or more points scored against them.

In 2006, only Utah scored 30-plus points. The next year, BYU held all teams on their schedule to less than 30 points, with the exception of Tulsa which lit up the Cougars with 55.

This year, BYU started out well in controlling points scored against them, but the last three games have allowed 32 to TCU, 35 to UNLV and 42 to CSU.

Defense has never been the forte of BYU and likely never will. History has shown that when it comes to winning games, it is still all about offense.

BYU has a good one this year and consequently, despite the defensive disappointments, the Cougars, at 8-1, are having an exceptional season.

TELEVISION TIMETABLE

BYU vs. Concordia

Thursday, Nov 6 at Provo

Tipoff: 7:00 pm Mountain Time

TV: BYUTV

BYU vs. San Diego State

Saturday, Nov 8 at Provo

Kickoff: Noon Mountain Time

TV: Mtn

BYU vs. Air Force

Saturday, Nov 15 at Colorado Springs

Kickoff: 1:30 pm Mountain Time

TV: CBS C

BYU vs. Utah

Saturday, Nov 22 at Salt Lake

Kickoff: 4:00 pm Mountain Time

TV: Mtn