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You Won't Like November

If you are reading this newsletter, the demographics of ***Cougar Sportsline*** indicate that the chances are about 95 percent that you are a BYU football fan, will vote for Mitt Romney and know who Jabari Parker is.

Brace yourself. You aren't going to like November.

Come November, BYU should already have at least 4 losses and be out of any BCS consideration. Mitt Romney won't be President of the United States and Jabari Parker won't be signing with BYU.

That's a tough triumvirate to swallow.

In an effort to make it go down more smoothly, gulp down this. I have been wrong before and am hoping I will be wrong again.

A year ago, almost to the day, I wrote in this same newsletter that the 2011BYU team would be "Stupid Good" and was on track to have a truly spectacular football season. The only thing that was close in that statement was the word stupid. It applied not to BYU being stupid good, but to my preseason football IQ and intellect.

Calling four losses before November almost guarantees that BYU will finally back me up and really be “Stupid Good” this season. On the other hand, road games at Utah, Boise State, Georgia Tech and Notre Dame will make or break BYU.

Win those games and a BCS sunrise is possible. Lose the first two road games at Boise and Salt Lake City, and the sun will set early on this BYU football season.

Almost a month ago, I followed my political conscience and again didn’t vote for Orin Hatch. Regardless of party, I refuse to vote for anybody who has served two or more terms in any office. Needless to say, my track record in picking political winners is abysmal. Mitt is probably safe.

The smart money in recruiting circles nationally says that Jabari Parker will sign with either Duke or Michigan State. My money is still on BYU in the Parker sweepstakes. I put that money on the line in June offering a free subscription if Parker didn’t sign with the Cougars. Of the three projections, Parker not signing with BYU in November is the most likely to happen.

The word from his camp now, i.e. his dad, is that he could wait until next April, and the spring signing period before making his college choice.

The Jabari Parker story has evolved into a made for television mini-series. It never ends.

What is just starting, however, is BYU fall camp, so let’s talk football.

If it’s fall camp, that means there is nothing new happening, just new names.

When you have experienced as many of these deals as we have, nothing changes.

There are no shows, injuries, discipline issues, promising prospects and an ever increasing horde of media asking the same questions they have asked for decades.

Media: Coach, how does player x look to you?

Coach: He has a chance to be a good player.

Media: Coach, what are your expectations for this season?

Coach: I’m optimistic. The players came back in good shape and this could be a good year.

Not once in thirty plus years has a coach ever said that the player with all the press clippings and recruiting hype is a wasted scholarship or that he has a sub-par team. They save that analysis for the coaches’ only meetings.

That said, the scenario may be the same, but as mentioned, the names are different.

Here are names and games that make this fall interesting.

Riley Nelson...Let the revival begin. If Nelson was an evangelical preacher, he would almost have me converted. He is the heart and soul of this current football team. If games were won on guts, glory and grit, sign him up for Heisman consideration.

Last time I checked, Elmer Gantry never won the Heisman so let's get real. BYU's running game will definitely be better this season, but it is not SEC or even Big East caliber. To win big games on the road, the Cougars are going to have to do it the old fashioned BYU way.

Nelson is going to have to have a completion rate of at least 65 percent or better and at least a 3-to-1 touchdown to interception ratio for the Cougars to have a big season.

Last year, Nelson completed just 57.4 percent of his passes and he had 7 interceptions compared to 19 touchdowns thrown.

Max Hall in his 11-2 senior season, which included a season opening win over Oklahoma, completed 67.2 percent of his passes and threw 33 touchdown passes with 14 picks.

For BYU to also be as successful as they want this year, Nelson will have to hover around the 90 percent rate in another category: Games played.

Nelson's ability to extend a play and make something out of nothing is what makes him exciting and a great leader. It also makes him vulnerable to injury as was proven last season. Grit, Guts and Glory are good things when used in context with this quarter back axiom: Get Down Dude.

If Nelson can find some common ground between those two things, this really could be an uncommonly good season.

Nelson said recently in a Spanish language interview that he has aspirations of playing in the NFL. His statement was that NFL coaches will have to drag him away from a camp because he won't be going away quietly.

Again, this is our opinion, but the NFL is definitely a long shot for Nelson. A more realistic landing place for the senior signal caller would be the BYU Athletic Hall of Fame.

He can secure a spot on that wall during a five day period next month. BYU plays at Utah on Sept. 15 and then in Boise on Sept. 20.

Two wins in those five days will insure Nelson's place in fame and in the hearts of BYU fans forever.

Also in the Spanish interview, Nelson fluently said that the game he is most looking forward to this season is the matchup with the Utes in Salt Lake City.

For those non-Spanish speakers, let me translate. “I hate Utah”. Actually it was Max Hall that said those famous words. Speaking of Hall...

Max Hall...The fiery former quarterback at BYU is back. He wasn't picked up and invited to any NFL camp this summer and will be enrolled in school in Provo to finish his undergraduate degree.

As a non graduate, he can serve, as per NCAA rules, as a student assistant on the staff. He will help Brandon Doman with a specific responsibility of tutoring the Cougar quarterbacks. This deal has been in the works for some time.

Taysom Hill...Don't you hate it when we are already talking about the next season and this one hasn't even kicked off?

With the exceptional athletic ability of Hill, it is unavoidable. He will play this year, but where and how much is to be determined.

James Lark is a journeyman backup at best. BYU can't win on the road against Utah, Boise State, Georgia Tech and Notre Dame with him at the helm.

That's not the coaches speaking, that's me stating an opinion.

Hill's playing time at quarterback this season will not be determined by the schedule this year, but what is on the plate for next year.

Texas, Wisconsin, Notre Dame, Houston, Georgia Tech, Boise State and Washington State in Pullman next season, is not a manageable matrix for a new BYU quarterback with no experience.

Hence Hill will see action at quarterback this season.

Lingo, Lane and 15 Cow Wives...Who would have thought Johnny Lingo and Lane Kiffin, the current USC head coach, would ever be linked?

Lingo got our attention years ago with his 8-cow wooing of a wife. Kiffin got our attention last week with his 15-scholarship quarterback.

You may remember that USC was assessed a 15-scholarship penalty by the NCAA for beating around the (Reggie) Bush, among other infractions.

Yet, down 15 scholarships, USC has a legitimate chance this year of playing for the national title in January.

Asked how that can happen, Kiffin told an ESPN reporter last week that a big-time quarterback is worth at least 15 other scholarship players.

Apparently, Matt Barkley is a 15-cow quarterback. Baylor and Stanford may find out this year how many cows are out of their barns this season when they have to line up and play without Robert Griffin III and Andrew Luck.

If you are wondering why the first three items above were all about BYU quarterbacks, it is because BYU's football fortunes always have and always will be about how "Lingoed" up the Cougars are at quarterback.

As the "cow factor" at quarterback at BYU rises, the losses in any particular season lessen.

Last year Riley Nelson was probably three cows better than Jake Heaps in Lingo lexicon. He will need to have beefed up his bovine resume by at least another two cows if BYU is to get through the tough road schedule ahead of them.

O'Neill Chambers and Joshua Quezada...The news that O'Neill Chambers and Josh Quezada wouldn't be back on the BYU team this fall hit me like a ton of clothes dryer lint.

Quezada's exit from the team was his decision. Chamber's latest attempt to rejoin the team was nixed by Bronco Mendenhall, who said that Chambers was not currently in good standing with the program.

Neither was going to play or make an impact. I saw each play enough for at least two seasons. They were both victims of recruiting hype.

They came into the program proclaimed as the next Jerry Rice and Walter Payton. They left, at best, as two journeymen squad members.

Jamaal Williams...Welcome Walter Payton. See, we can roll out the recruiting hype with the best of them.

Williams is the latest can't miss BYU prospect. He signed out of Summit HS in Fontana, Calif. The connection was Tony Crutchfield, the former BYU defensive back who is now an assistant coach for the Skyhawks.

Based on the excitement of BYU offensive coaches and video we have seen of him, Williams is the real deal.

Walter Payton he isn't and won't be. If he stays healthy, Williams, at 6-2, 200 plus pounds, could be a Pac 10 caliber feature back that BYU hasn't had since Luke Staley.

Get, Got and Gut... If you continue to do what you have always done, you will always get what you always got.

That describes my love affair with Dr. Pepper and Doritos. The two have always been at the top of my basic food groups. Consequently, what I got and still have is a gut.

For years, I rationalized my gut with the fact that I resembled a BYU offensive lineman.

Those days are over. Not the Dr. Pepper and Doritos, but the gut. Not mine, but those of BYU linemen.

BYU has hired a nutritionist, contracted with a cutting edge strength and conditioning group and gone gutless this season.

BYU linemen in particular and BYU football players in general, have lowered their body fat significantly since Bronco Mendenhall instituted this new program over the summer.

Lean is good, but we still are wondering who will be able to block Star Lotulelei of Utah..

Kicking... Last season, BYU's place kicking game, was marginal, at best. Between Justin Sorensen and Riley Stephenson, both of whom are on the roster again this season, BYU converted 15 of 25 attempted field goals. That's a 60 percent conversion rate.

Those numbers in the NFL will get you fired.

Here are the field goal stats for the top 5 ranked teams that ended last year at the top of the AP poll.

Alabama: 23-36, 63%...LSU: 16-18, 89%...Oklahoma State: 22-25, 88%...Oregon: 9-14, 64%...Arkansas: 21-27, 78%.

With a much tougher schedule this season and an almost too tough schedule for 2013, the Cougars will need an improved kicking game if they want to be competitive against a better class of opponents that know how to play defense.

Jordan Johnson... Bronco Mendenhall has a proven track record as a defensive coordinator of stopping the run. That's the good news.

The bad news is that when BYU takes away the ground game, teams have to go to the air.

That means that Jordan Johnson, the sophomore field corner from Massachusetts, will have to live up to his billing as an athletic cover guy that can make things messy for opposing pass games.

Johnson will be tested early against Mike Leach and Washington State in Provo.

2012 Schedule...It's hard to see BYU going undefeated with the following schedule. It's also hard to see them losing 4 games. Make your own call.

Aug 30, Thursday, **Washington State** at Provo
Sep 8, Saturday, **Weber State** at Provo
Sep 15, Saturday, **Utah** at SLC
Sep 20, Thursday, **Boise State** at Boise
Sep 28, Friday, **Hawaii** at Provo
Oct 5, Friday, **Utah State** at Provo
Oct 13, Saturday, **Oregon State** at Provo
Oct 20, Saturday, **Notre Dame** at South Bend
Oct 27, Saturday, **Georgia Tech** at Atlanta
Nov 10, Saturday, **Idaho** at Provo
Nov 17, Saturday, **San Jose State** at San Jose
Nov 24, Saturday, **New Mexico State** at Las Cruces

2013 Schedule...Tom Holmoe said that the November schedule would be getting better after the first two years of independence in football.

He may be biting off more than he can chew, but he certainly has started to make good on his original promise when it comes to scheduling. Here is the 2013 schedule as it sits now. There are still plenty of TBA's to be TBAed in order to complete the schedule.

9/7.....**Texas** in Provo
9/21....**Boise State** in Provo
10/4....**Utah State** at Logan
10/12...**Georgia** Tech at Provo
10/19....**Houston** at Houston
11/9.....**Wisconsin** at Madison
11/23...**Notre Dame** at South Bend
12/7.....**Hawaii** at Honolulu
Washington State at Pullman was set to be played in 2013 when the home and home series was announced. No official date as yet has been announced.

Timpview Twosome...The local high school just north of campus is giving back to BYU two pretty good players.

Craig Bills and Bronson Kaufusi are both back from LDS missions. Kaufusi is a likely candidate to redshirt, but should make an impact next season on the defensive line. He is an extremely gifted athlete.

Bills saw action as a true freshman and will see even more action in the secondary for Bronco Mendenhall this season. He is already making noise in fall camp with his play.

Football Fluff and Stuff... Devin Mahina, the sophomore tight end, will miss at least 3-4 weeks after breaking his hand last week. It must be a BYU tight end thing because

Dennis Pitta, the former great Cougar tight end, also broke his hand last week in the Baltimore Ravens' camp. He is expected to miss 5-6 weeks.

You might remember that Mahina, missed all of last season after cracking a vertebrae in his neck during last fall's camp. What BYU has missed the last two seasons is Pitta himself. With just one good hand, he is still better than any of the five or six tight ends in BYU's fall camp this year.

Cody Hoffman and Joe Sampson, both have missed a couple of days of practice due to "team discipline issues", according to Bronco Mendenhall. That brings up why and what happened. The more salient question should be when. As in when they get back, both will be key guys needed for the Cougars to have a big year.

Television Timetable

BYU vs. Washington State

Thursday, Aug 30 at Provo

Kickoff: 8:15 pm Mountain Time

TV: ESPN

BYU vs. Weber State

Saturday, Sep 8 at Provo

Kickoff: 1:00 pm Mountain Time

TV: BYUtv

BYU vs. Utah

Saturday, Sep 15 at Salt Lake

Kickoff: 8:00 pm Mountain Time

TV: ESPN2

BYU vs. Boise State

Thursday, Sep 20 at Boise

Kickoff: 7:00 pm Mountain Time

TV: ESPN