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As a subscriber, you are allowed to access our new blog. You can view it by going to www.cougar-sportsline.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.

BOISE STATE BURSTS BYU'S BUBBLE

BYU is a very good basketball team...at home. The Cougars have won 38 straight games in Provo. They are now 0-2 in Boise.

BYU's 73-70 loss to the Broncos of Boise State last Saturday was the second consecutive loss to BSU in the last two years. Due to a scheduling quirk, both of those games were played on the road in Boise.

Championship basketball and NCAA bids are still all about winning on the road.

Despite a nice 10-3 record, it remains to be seen if this BYU team has the toughness to win away from home. They have the talent, but it means nothing without the toughness.

That toughness certainly wasn't there for the Cougars against BSU. Using Cougars and choke in the same sentence isn't a pleasant phrase, but with an 11-point halftime lead, Cougars choking seems pretty appropriate to us.

Boise State

Despite a nice 9-3 record, which includes the win over BYU, it's still Boise State, for heaven's sake.

It is the same Boise State that had to go to overtime to beat UVSC in Boise. It is the same Boise State that had to go to overtime to beat Southern Utah in Cedar City. It is the same Boise State that got beat at home by a 3-10 Loyola Marymount.

Of course it is also the same Boise State that burst the BYU bubble the Cougars have been floating in since beating a Louisville team that turned out to be not as good as everyone thought.

After watching the second-half meltdown of the Cougars in Boise, we can use that same evaluation on BYU. Maybe they aren't as good as everyone, including us, thought.

Lee Cummard led all scorers with 26 points. For BYU to win on the road, he needs help, especially

from Trent Plaisted.

Not-So-Great Outing

It was a not-so-great outing by the 6-11 sophomore. He was just 4-11 from the field and 4-9 from the free throw line.

Missing shots is part of basketball, but the story on Plaisted was where he was missing his shots. Almost all of his attempts were from eight feet in.

Plaisted didn't have the BYU monopoly on missing.

Jonathan Tavernari came off the bench and played 21 minutes. He had as many misses as Plaisted with a 1-8 shooting performance. Most of Tavernari's misses were from the three-point line. He was 0-6 from the arc.

Ben Murdock was also missing shots. He was 0-5 from the field, including 0-2 from three-point range.

Jimmer Fredette had 11 points, but still was only 3-8 from long distance.

Despite Cummond's nice scoring game, he also was just a meager 2-7 from the arc.

3-Point Line

BYU was just 8-27 from the three-point line.

Maybe the loss wasn't as much about toughness as it was about touch. BYU didn't have any when it came to three-point attempts.

The Cougars now return home for a feel-good shot of confidence against Loyola Marymount on Thursday, Jan. 3.

The Lions are just 3-11, with their latest loss coming at home and at the hands of Sam Houston State.

While LMU should sooth BYU's Boise State wounds, they will also add some salt to those wounds because they did what BYU couldn't. Yes, this is the same team that beat Boise State in Boise earlier this year.

BYU'S REALITY WILL BE DETERMINED ON THE ROAD

As stated earlier, league championships and NCAA bids are determined on the road and how you play away from the comfort of your home court.

So far this season, BYU is just 2-1 in true road games. We consider the loss to Michigan State as a home game because it was a BYU crowd.

The Cougars dominated overmatched Long Beach State and Portland teams, and swallowed the olive against a decent, but not great, Boise State squad.

The Cougars are now 10-3 on the year. A year ago this time, they were 10-4. All four of those losses were on the road.

The question that was unanswered a year ago and unanswered this season remains the same. Can BYU win on the road?

Dave Rose and his crew will have one more road game on the docket before embarking on their Mountain West Schedule. The last non-conference road test for the Cougars will be in ACC country against Wake Forest on Tuesday, Jan. 8.

MWC Play

With the start of Mountain West Conference basketball play just around the corner, it might be a good

time to take a look at the “road” map of the league to see who the contenders and pretenders will be. Based strictly on overall records, it appears that this will be a highly competitive league free-for-all. Seven of the nine teams have winning preseason records.

New Mexico.....12-2
San Diego State...10-2
BYU.....10-3
UNLV.....10-3
Utah..... 7-3
TCU..... 7-4
Air Force.....8-5
Colorado State.....6-6
Wyoming..... 5-5

We still think BYU will be contending for the title when March rolls around, but as always, despite several teams with glossy records, BYU included, the way to win the Mountain West Conference championship is by winning road games.

That is why we prefer to judge MWC conference teams on how they have done on the road instead of what their overall record is.

Using the preseason road records as a barometer, there appears to be no clear cut favorite.

Here is a glance at how MWC teams have fared on the road and we think it is a good indicator of how they will fare in MWC play.

2007-08 Road Records

New Mexico...2-2, UNM has wins on the road at Colorado and Hawaii and road losses at Mississippi and New Mexico State.

San Diego State....5-3...The Aztecs have wins over Liberty, Portland and Fresno State. All games were part of a tourney played in Fresno. They also have wins over San Diego and Loyola Marymount. Their road losses were to Arizona at Tucson and to Saint Mary’s on a neutral site in Anaheim.

BYU...2-1, The Cougars’ road wins are against Long Beach State and Portland. The road loss was to Boise State. They have a 1-1 neutral court record with a win over Louisville and a loss to North Carolina. State.

UNLV.....2-1, The Rebel’s only road loss was to UC Santa Barbara. They have wins on the road against San Diego and Northern Arizona.

Utah...2-2, The Utes have wins against Weber State and Cal on the road. Their road losses are to Oregon and Washington.

TCU...0-3, The Frogs have lost to Texas Tech, Rice and SMU on the road.

Air Force...1-4, Falcons’ only road win was against Mississippi Valley State and it technically was a neutral court win that came in a tournament in Spokane.

Colorado State...3-5, The Rams won the Top of the World Tournament in Fairbanks, Alaska with wins over Oregon State, Portland State and Tennessee State. They have road losses to Montana, Stanford, Northern Colorado, Minnesota, North Dakota State and Nevada.

Wyoming...2-5, The Pokes have lost to Denver, Wichita State, UTEP and Akron on the road. They have a win at Lamar and and a neutral court win over Buffalo.

The way we read the records, if you hope to be in contention for the league basketball title, you can't lose at home and you will need a minimum of 4 road wins.

Last season, BYU won the MWC title with a 5-3 road record in conference play. The year before, they tied with Air Force for second place with a 4-4 league road record. San Diego State won the title with a 5-3 road record.

In the 2004-05 season, Utah took the championship with a 6-1 road record. Before that, Air Force won the title with a 5-2 road record.

In the 2002-03 season, Utah finished first and had a 5-2 road record. The 2001-02 season saw Wyoming capture the crown. The Pokes also had a 5-2 record on the road.

Anomaly

The anomaly year was 2000-01 in the MWC when Utah, BYU and Wyoming finished in a three-way tie. Wyoming had the best road record in the league with a 4-3 mark. Utah and BYU had 3-4 road records, but were both undefeated at home. Wyoming had one home loss that year.

In the inaugural year for the MWC, UNLV and Utah tied for the title in 1999-2000 season. UNLV had a 4-3 road record.

From our vantage point and based on what we have seen so far this season, for BYU to get a piece of the title, the key will be getting at least two road wins at either San Diego State, New Mexico, Utah or UNLV.

FOOTBALL FLUFF AND STUFF

Despite the fact that UCLA hired Rick Neuheisel as their new football coach, BYU is more than likely going to get another dose of DeWayne Walker and his defense next season.

Walker was the interim coach at UCLA and was responsible for throttling down the BYU offense in the Las Vegas Bowl.

The word we keep hearing is that while Neuheisel would like to retain Walker as his defensive coordinator, Walker is likely to resurface at Washington.

He has already interviewed with Tyrone Willingham and the Huskies. BYU and UW will meet in Seattle on September 6.

Speaking of Washington, how about Washington State playing BYU next season in Provo?

We don't know how it will happen when you look at the schedules of both schools, but there has been internet chat that references a WSU player telling his father in Utah that players for the Pullman school have been told that they will play in Provo this coming season.

We will wait and see on that one. BYU is still trying to find a replacement for Nevada to open the year, but we doubt that will be WSU.

There was some talk about trying to move UCLA off the schedule in order that keep both teams playing three games in a 12 month period.

Who knows how the schedule will work out, but it should be interesting.

It now looks like Jacob Bower, the 6-5, 225 pound quarterback that left BYU for Bakersfield JC in California, will be playing at Tulsa next season. He will have three years of eligibility left.

BYU is still waiting on a few key recruits to tell them yes or no, but for all intents and purposes, the 2008 class is all wrapped up and done. Official letters of intent can be signed in the first week of February.

Meanwhile, Bronco Mendenhall and his staff already have a leg up on the 2009 recruiting class.

They have offered several top LDS juniors and have four commitments already in hand.

They include Adam Timo, a 6-1, 175 pound running back from Snow Canyon HS in St. George, UT; Terry Alletto, a 6-3, 260 pound offensive lineman from Ponderosa HS in Parker, CO.; Craig Bills, a 6-2, 200 pound safety from Timpview HS in Provo and Jray Galea'i, a 6-0 185 pound safety from Kahuku HS in Hawaii.

In addition, BYU also has offers on the table for Manti Te'o, a 6-2, 230 pound linebacker from Punahou HS in Hawaii, John Martinez, a 6-4, 275 pound offensive lineman from Cottonwood HS in Salt Lake City and Brett Thompson, a 6-3, 210 pound wide receiver from Oak Ridge HS in El Dorado Hills, CA. All of these recruits are LDS.

BASKETBALL BRIEFS

C.J. Wilcox, the 6-5 wing from Pleasant Grove HS, had a big Desert Heat Tournament this past week at Palm Springs. Wilcox has been offered by BYU and the junior showed why with his play. He scored 28 against Foothill HS of Henderson, NV. He had 23 against Canyon Springs of California, 36 against Harvard HS of Westlake, California and finished with 19 points against Mercer Island HS of Washington.

Tyler Haws has been on BYU's radar and recruiting chart for several years now. He is BYU's number one priority for next season. The junior from Lone Peak HS in Highland, UT finished a two-game showing at the prestigious T-Mobile Tournament in Albuquerque last week.

Haws scored 26 points against Centennial HS of Roswell, GA. and then added 16 points against St. Anthony of New Jersey.

Both games were televised live nationally on Versus. If you missed them, you can view those games online by going to www.t-mobileinvitational.com.

TELEVISION TIMETABLE

BYU vs. Loyola Marymount

Thursday, Jan. 3 at Provo

Tipoff: 7:00 pm Mountain Time

TV: Mtn

BYU vs. Wake Forest

Tuesday, Jan. 8 at Winston-Salem

Tipoff: 5:00 pm Mountain Time

TV: TBA

BYU vs. Colorado State

Saturday, Jan. 12 at Provo

Tipoff: 4:00 pm Mountain Time

TV: Mtn

BYU vs. UNLV

Tuesday, Jan. 15 at Las Vegas

Tipoff: 9:00 pm Mountain Time

TV: Mtn