

HB Arnett's
COUGAR SPORTSLINE

801 372 0819

hbarnett@fiber.net and hbarnett@xmission.com

PO Box 50424 Provo, Utah 84605

Vol. 28, Issue 33 March 17, 2008

[Click Here To Order Or Renew Your Subscriptions](#)

HOSPITALITY, HOST AND HOUSE

In theory, UNLV serves as the host of the MWC post season basketball tournament.

In theory, acting as a host implies that hospitality will be extended to invited guests.

In theory, hospitality implies that the host will be hospitable.

According to our dictionary, here is the definition of hospitable: 1. given to generous and cordial reception of guests 2. promising or suggesting a generous and cordial welcome 3. offering a pleasant and sustaining environment.

BYU was beaten and bloodied (literally in post-game melees between UNLV and BYU fans) 76-61 by UNLV in the conference tournament championship game last Saturday in Las Vegas.

That would seem to lend some credence to the contention of BYU fan's that UNLV is really not hosting the tournament, but simply housing it.

Housing seems like an appropriate term to use, especially in Las Vegas where you simply can't beat the built-in odds of the house.

Las Vegas house experts knew what would happen before the game even tipped off. BYU was a 1-point underdog on the boards of sports books across the city.

Another Term

Using another Las Vegas term, with UNLV hosting the tournament at home with house odds, the fix is in and will be for the next two years.

The Mountain West Conference prides itself on having each member school read a statement before all conference contents espousing good sportsmanship and fairness.

Those lofty concepts and virtues were sold for money by the when deciding to do away with a fair and honest tournament in favor of a three-day UNLV exhibition.

Speaking of definitions, when a league sells its espoused beliefs of fair play and sportsmanship for a little extra money for the league office and member institutions, that seems to smack of another Las Vegas product. At least that is what it said in our dictionary when we looked up the definition of one of the world's oldest professions.

Speaking of another definition, that fact that the MWC has opted for more money instead of a fair fight for all in their post season basketball, really does define the league as an ultimate mid-major conference.

Weekend

If the MWC wants to host a Las Vegas weekend for MWC basketball fans, we think it is a great idea. Arrange for discounted hotels, shows, golf etc, and invite all MWC fans to come and enjoy themselves.

To help attendees be able to write off the weekend as a business expense, MWC officials and league Presidents could offer a seminar on their business model for negotiating television contracts. Just leave a basketball tournament housed, but not hosted, by UNLV out of the equation.

While the MWC has defined themselves as a mid-major conference with their present post-season basketball tournament arrangements, they could take a few tips from a conference at an even lower level of the food chain.

In the Big Sky Conference, they like to use the model that is so fondly used by bracketology broadcasters when pontificating on who will make or has made the NCAA Tournament. We are sure you have heard it before. "They were rewarded for their body of work".

That is how the Big Sky does it. They reward teams for their body of work during the regular and real season.

The teams are seeded and bracketed just like any other tournament. The difference is that the quarterfinals are hosted by the team with the higher seed.

The semi-finals and championship game are hosted by the regular league champion.

In Place

If that scenario was in place for the MWC bracket this year, BYU would have hosted CSU in Provo, UNLV would have hosted TCU, New Mexico would have hosted Utah and SDSU would have hosted Air Force in the quarterfinals.

The semi-finals and championship game would have all moved to Provo.

If you don't like going to the home of the regular season conference champion for the semis and finals, teams can do something about it.

Get better and win the conference championship and as they say, reward yourself for your own body of work.

And remember, you can still get in on our proposed MWC weekend in Las Vegas deal.

TURNING OVER A NEW LEAF WITH TEXAS A&M

I am about to turn over a new leaf and practice what I preached about hospitality when referring to UNLV hosting the MWC basketball tournament.

I am going to be more hospitable and promote a more pleasant and sustaining environment in the newsletter as I discuss BYU basketball and football.

No more cranky, cantankerous and crotchety observations about the Cougars. At least until they are ousted from the NCAA tournament.

Instead, I am going to write about all the reasons that BYU can advance to the Sweet Sixteen or beyond in this tournament.

No more one-and-done talk from me. I don't care that BYU's guard play is not the quality you normally see in NCAA tournament play. I don't care that BYU will need Trent Plaisted to show up and put up against Texas A&M's big front line.

I am filled with Anaheim amour for the Cougars. Anaheim is where the Cougars will be facing the Aggies of Texas A&M on Thursday, March 20.

Tipoff is set for 5:25 pm Mountain time and the game will be broadcast on CBS. You need to check your local listings to see if you will be getting the game in your region of the country.

Not Alone

I am not alone in my optimism for BYU to win its first NCAA tournament game since 1993.

Even the NCAA Selection committee agrees with me. They gave BYU an 8 seed and Texas A&M a 9 seed.

That means that those seasoned and shrewd basketball minds of the committee think BYU is better than the Aggies.

An even more positive vibe comes from the fact that BYU finished first in the Mountain West Conference and all Texas A&M could muster was a sixth-place finish in the Big 12 Conference.

The fact that BYU is seeded higher than the Aggies says that the committee thinks Texas A&M's wins over conference foes and NCAA tournament participants Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas State and Baylor are not as impressive as BYU conference wins against UNLV, SDSU and New Mexico.

Evidently, BYU's win over Louisville on a neutral court trumps Texas A&M's NIT Season Tip-Off Championship. The Aggies defeated Oral Roberts (another NCAA participant), UTEP, Washington and Ohio State to take home the hardware. The UW and OSU games were played at Madison Square Garden.

Tickets

In the tale of tickets, BYU is also better than Texas A&M, unless you are a student.

The Aggies are charging \$51, the NCAA mandated price, plus a \$20 processing fee to their 12th Man booster group. Students at A&M aren't charged the processing fee.

BYU is charging Cougar Club Legacy Members, the NCAA fee of \$51 per ticket, but only a \$10 processing fee. BYU students will also be charged \$51 per ticket and a \$10 processing fee.

We watched A&M play in the Big 12 Tournament against Kansas. They looked a lot like the way BYU players described UNLV after losing to the Rebels in the MWC championship game on Saturday.

The quote from at least one Cougar player was that "UNLV threw it up and went and got it."

That describes the Aggies, but with bigger and more athletic personnel.

In our new and more positive frame of mind, quickness, size, and defensive pressure, doesn't worry us. What does worry us is that the Aggies are a lot like San Diego State, but with more size and better guards.

What also worries us is that Trent Plaisted has to score at least 15-17 points for the Cougars to be successful.

When he scores 10 or less points per outing, BYU almost always loses.

Help

Plaisted will need some help from Chris Miles and Chris Collinsworth in defending the Aggie front line. Texas A&M has five players over 6-foot-nine.

Even as our cantankerous and cranky self, we still like the Cougars in this match up. We think our evaluation will be backed up by the odds makers when they come out with their first lines later this week.

Even at our most Pollyannaish and Positive level, if the Cougars get by the Aggies, we don't see any way they can beat UCLA in the next round.

That is who the Cougars would face if they beat A&M.

UCLA has a better post man in freshman Kevin Love and they have a bevy of guards that are just too quick, fast and experienced for BYU's set of back court players. BYU saw all they wanted of Darren Collison last season when they lost to the Bruins at Pauley Pavillion.

We will settle for a first round win. That is something that BYU hasn't done in 15 years.

HAWS AND HORSE'S MOUTH

We happened to catch a radio interview last week with Tyler Haws, BYU's top basketball recruiting priority for next year. Most of the talk had to do with Haw's performance in the recently completed state tournament, but eventually got around to his recruitment.

Haws said that his criteria for selecting a school where he would continue his basketball career centered around basically three things.

Those three included his relationship with the coaching staff of the school, academics, and style of play.

When asked to name the schools which he was considering and that were recruiting him, he responded with the names of BYU, Utah, Stanford, Harvard and Wake Forest.

In our opinion, when push comes to shove, we expect it to finally boil down to a decision between the Cougars and Stanford.

BASKETBALL AWARDS

Lee Cumard and J.R. Giddens of New Mexico were named MWC Co-Players of the Year last week.

Cumard and Trent Plaisted both were named to the First Team All Conference Squad.

Jonathan Tavernari was selected to the MWC third team.

Lon Kruger of UNLV won the coach of the year award.

VOLLEYBALL ON THE COURT AND LIKELY IN COURT

In case you missed it, the BYU Men's Volleyball program was put on three-year probation by the NCAA for "recruiting improprieties".

That resulted in the termination of former coach, Tom Peterson.

He disagrees with BYU's assertions that he is to blame entirely for the sanctions.

We smell another lawsuit being brought against BYU and their athletic department.

If litigation is in the offing, and we expect it is, it will be interesting to see how it all turns out in court.

This won't be the first lawsuit brought against BYU concerning athletics. Most have to do with injuries sustained while participating as an athlete at BYU.

While most of the outcomes are kept private or settled, let's just say that BYU doesn't have the same win-loss record in court as BYU football had the last two years.

SPRING FOOTBALL STARTS THIS WEEK

BYU and Bronco Mendenhall will begin spring football practice this week.

Drills will start Monday and conclude with the annual Blue and White Exhibition on April 12.

The emphasis will be on finding defensive players and keeping key offensive players healthy.

BYU returns 10 of 11 starters on the offensive side of the ball. Of those 10, Max Hall is the most important. Don't expect Hall to have any live contact work this spring.

BYU simply can't afford to get him hurt.

The coaches will be giving Brenden Gaskins and Stephen Covey plenty of reps this spring to shore up the backup spots to Hall.

As good as Hall is, he is not immune to injury and as with any player, just a hit away from missing the entire season.

If BYU fans are expecting another run through of the MWC conference and another title, it won't hap-

pen without Hall.

As with every spring, several players will be tried at new positions and several players will be held out of action because of injuries suffered last season.

Here is how that shakes out.

With the graduation of Bryan Kehl and Kelly Poppinga, BYU needs some help at linebacker.

Bronco Mendenhall has moved two players from other positions to try and shore up the lack of depth there.

Vic So'oto has moved from tight end to outside linebacker and so has Matt Putnam. He is going from defensive end to outside backer.

Stephen Covey started his career as a Cougar as a defensive back, but after a redshirt year and an LDS mission, he will be a quarterback this spring.

In the injury department, several players will not participate or participate sparingly this spring.

They include Russell Tialevea, the defensive lineman. He is recovering from a torn ACL. Travis Bright will be held out of action after suffering a late season leg break. Offensive line reserves Garrett Reden and Jason Speredon will both miss spring action.

Defensive back David Tafuna could see limited action this spring, but linebacker Jadon Wagner won't be ready to play until the fall.

Here are some guys and groups to watch this spring:

Offensive Line...BYU will return the entire starting line, with the exception of center Sete Aulai. Tom Sorensen will replace Aulai. As experienced and good as the line was, they could be better this season. BYU still needs a tackle that can protect Max Hall from outside speed rushers. Matt Reynolds has the ability to provide that. He will see the field somewhere this fall on the offensive line.

Defensive Line...Jan Jorgensen, Ian Dulan and Brett Denney will provide a nice nucleus, but the Cougars still need at least two more contributors here. We don't expect this to be resolved until the fall.

Defensive Backs...BYU pundits have been gushing about how good BYU's young defensive backs are for the past two years. Now that they will finally see the field, we will see if the gush was warranted.

G Pittman and Brandon Howard are two to watch, but until we actually see more production during spring, nobody knows what will happen here.

Receivers...BYU is loaded at tight end. That is why they moved So'oto to linebacker. They will need at least one new wide receiver to step up to the plate this spring to compliment Austin Collie and Michael Reed this fall.

That most likely candidates waiting to take their cuts are return missionaries Luke Ashworth and Spencer Hafoka.

Running Back...Next to Max Hall, look for Harvey Unga to be the second most protected player this spring. He is the running game. There will be a lot of new and no names getting most of the carries during spring drills. J.J. DiLuigi is not a new name, but we should finally find out if his game matches his press clippings.

Kicking...We won't know anything until new signee Justin Sorensen shows up this fall. That is when the competition will really begin.

TELEVISION TIMETABLE

BYU vs. Texas A&M

Thursday, Mar. 20 at Anaheim
Tipoff: 5:25 pm Mountain Time
TV: CBS