

HB Arnett's ***COUGAR SPORTSLINE***

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HERE'S OUR OCTANE OBSERVATIONS OF BYU SPRING FOOTBALL

We've filled up a couple of times this spring from the BYU football gas pump and here are our octane ratings on performance and projections for the fall.

There are three classifications. Regular, High Octane and Supreme. The higher the octane levels the less chance of pinging and poor performance in the fall.

Based on this spring, not all positions are running on the same grade of gas.

Here are our octane observations.

Quarterbacks...Supreme

Under controlled track conditions, this position is definitely running on the highest octane. What we don't know is how Riley Nelson or Jake Heaps will perform when they leave the test track of this spring and actually have to drive the Cougar car in real game traffic.

There is no question that this position will have the highest octane in talent. What remains to be seen is how Bronco Mendenhall wants to fill the Cougar quarterback tank.

Does he want to fill it up with just one grade and go on throwing ability only? Or does he want to fill half the tank with a thrower and the other half with a more mobile quarterback?

Mendenhall has always said that he admires the way LaVell Edwards ran the BYU program and looks to the venerable coach for advice when he can.

This in one of those times. It was Edwards who had to make a very hard decision with Jim McMahon and Marc Wilson. He chose to redshirt McMahon and go with Wilson in an effort to get the most mileage, talent and seasons possible with a talented quarterback at the helm.

McMahon wasn't happy, but BYU fans got the best of both worlds and significant more mileage out of

the quarterback position with the two first-round NFL selections. It only happened because Edwards chose to put some space and eligibility between the two talented quarterbacks.

BYU pays Mendenhall the big bucks. They provide him with a nice car. He probably has a gas card to go along with his company furnished vehicle. It will be very, very interesting to see how he chooses to use that gas card in August.

Somebody isn't going to be happy, but the BYU offense will still be high octane, regardless of the choice Mendenhall makes.

Running Backs...High Octane or Regular

It depends on the context. If you are comparing BYU's backs to backs at big time BCS schools, this group is regular. If you are comparing this group to previous Cougar running backs, it is Supreme.

This is the best and deepest running back roster we have seen in a long, long time. It starts with Harvey Unga. He opted not to leave early for the NFL and is now playing for a degree and a future paycheck.

He is one of the better BYU football players to ever come through the program according to his position coach Lance Reynolds. The beauty and bonus for the running back spot this coming season is that Unga won't have to take the pounding he has the last two seasons.

He has help. Josh Quezada is the real deal. He can bruise like Unga and punish defenders like Unga. Others in the mix are a seasoned J.J. DiLuigi and veteran and reliable Bryan Kariya.

If the Cougars can find a suitable fullback to block for these guys, this will be a position running at the highest octane possible (pun intended).

Wide Receivers...Regular

There are no high octane or supreme octane players in this group. That means there is nobody that will be moving on to the NFL.

Regular octane has been pretty good for BYU over the years at wide receiver and we don't expect anything different in the fall.

Tight End...Regular

Expect some pinging early on from this group. You don't go from Dennis Pitta and Andrew George to Mike Muehlman, Devin Mahina, Richard Wilson and Marcus Mathews without some early loss of octane. None of these guys has ever set foot on the field in a real Division I game.

They may be good eventually, but BYU has stepped down in octane and grade for the immediate future.

Offensive Line...High Octane

Regardless of whether the quarterback will be Riley Nelson or Jake Heaps, BYU will miss Max Hall, especially early in the fall.

It will be this offensive line that softens the homesickness for Hall. This is a very talented group. It includes five guys who all started at one time last season. They are Matt Reynolds, Braden Hansen, Terence Brown, Nick Alletto and Braden Hansen.

Defensive Line...Regular

BYU has just two proven defensive linemen that have shown they can play consistently in Romney Fuga and Eathyn Manumaleuna. Only Fuga is playing this spring. Manumaleuna will be available in the fall.

There are bodies manning spots this spring like Vic S'oto, Matt Putnam and Thomas Bryson, a freshman, but they are unproven. When coaches are saying that they are looking forward to the fall when an influx of defensive lineman will arrive from the prep ranks, we spell that r-e-g-u-l-a-r, in lower case.

The hope for higher octane on the defensive line will fall upon the shoulders of the incoming freshman class of Jordan Afo, 6-4, 300, Cottonwood HS, UT; Tayo Fabuluje, 6-6, 255, The Oakridge School, TX; Alani Fua, 6-5, 215, Oaks Christian HS, CA; Graham Rowley, 6-4, 270, Waialua HS, HI and Travis Tuiloma, 6-3, 290, Washburn Rural HS, KS.

Bronson Kaufusi, 6-6, 220 Timpview HS, UT also signed, but will head on an LDS mission before enrolling. We hear he already has a call and is headed to New Zealand.

Linebackers...Regular

Only one proven linebacker returns for the fall in Jordan Pendleton. He has missed spring practice after shoulder surgery. Brandon Ogletree looks like he can play and USC transfer Uona Kavienga can play, but not for another year after having to sit out the NCAA mandated year for transferring from another school.

This group was ordinary last season and looks on track to repeat that assessment this coming fall. It will have to get some incoming help from freshmen.

Defensive Backs...Regular

For as long as we have been covering BYU football, the Cougar defensive back tank only holds regular gas.

There have been a few exceptions with some safeties that have been journeyman players in the NFL, but they have been few and far between.

We don't expect anything different this fall. This group will play hard, and like most other seasons, if all goes well and injuries are at a minimum, this group will be serviceable, but not special or spectacular.

Sniffing the Fumes

It took a many years to get real about spring football. For years we used to sniff the fumes of new players and new names that popped up on spring rosters, stat sheets and news reports.

We learned that you will never see half of those names on the field in the fall.

We expect to see another good football team in the fall. What we don't know and neither does anybody else, is how the quarterback situation will shake out and how the defense will hold up against real competition.

History says it will be fine. Say what you want about Bronco Mendenhall, but since he has been in charge, he seems to always find a way to take regular gas on defense and boost it up a few octane levels to perform at a decent level.

BYU has had a nice run at quarterback with Max Hall and John Beck the most recent guys manning that spot.

We don't see why it should be any different this coming season. We just don't know who it will be.

BASKETBALL BRIEFS

As posted recently on our blog, Dave Rose and his staff are putting a recruiting rush on Stephen Rogers, the 6-8, 185 pound wing from Mesa Community College in Arizona.

So is every other school in the state. Rogers has already made an official visit to Utah State. Jim Boylen, who is in the middle of a house cleaning of his offensive-challenged roster of last season, is also pursuing hard.

Rose will reportedly be making an in-home visit this week. Rogers is a talent, but the fact that he is now at the top of BYU's spring recruiting list, seems to indicate that the Cougars have struck out in their attempts to land any juco big men.

Rogers has narrowed his college choices to BYU, Utah, Utah State, Colorado State and New Mexico. He is scheduled to make an official visit to Albuquerque this weekend and then make a decision. The spring letter of intent signing period begins Wednesday, April 14 and runs through the middle of May.

We mentioned that UTEP, Fresno State and Arizona will be returning games with BYU this coming season. The Arizona game will be played in Salt Lake. We forgot to mention that Hawaii will also be back in Provo this coming basketball season.

They will be bringing a new head coach and a former BYU assistant coach with them.

Gib Arnold was recently named the new coach with the Warriors. He has also reportedly hired former BYU assistant coach Walter Roese as his top assistant. Roese coached last year at Nebraska.

Arnold is the son of former BYU coach, Frank Arnold. Gib Arnold's coaching resume is an interesting read with stops at Provo HS, Utah Valley, Loyola Marymount, Vanderbilt, Pepperdine, College of Southern Idaho and USC. All but the stint at CSI were assistant jobs. He was the head guy for the Eagles of Twin Falls for two seasons.

We have had a lot of recent feedback about BYU basketball and post players.

It has been interesting to see the observations. Some have said that the problem lays with a juco oriented coaching staff. Others say that the Cougar post players should all enroll in ballet and country line dancing classes to improve their footwork.

Still others say that good post players won't come to BYU because they don't get enough touches.

The only thing we do know is that touches in the paint is a relative thing. Either you are getting too many or not enough.

It all depends on what you do with those touches. If they aren't productive, you are getting too many. We use Trent Plaisted as our prime example. He was a talented athletic player, but never was a serious threat in the low block or on the foul line.

Those who say the BYU big men should have more touches, and we include our self in that assessment, used to cringe when the ball went in low to Plaisted.

We can't have it both ways. It can't be not enough or too many touches in the post. What is has to be is a post player that can do something with those touches.

That eventually, in our opinion, comes down to more and better talent recruited or better big man coaching of the existing talent.

2010 BYU FOOTBALL SCHEDULE

BYU recently released it 2010 football schedule. For those of you that have inquired in order to make travel and ticket plans, here it is.

Sat, Sept 4, Washington at Provo, 5 pm MT, CBS-C
Sat, Sept 11, Air Force at USAFA, 2 pm MT, Versus
Sat, Sept 18, Florida State at Tallahassee, TBD, TBD
Sat. Sept 25, Nevada at Provo, TBD, TBD
Fri, Oct 1, Utah State at Logan, TBD, ESPN or ESPN2
Sat, Oct 9, San Deigo State at Provo, 4 pm MT, The Mtn
Sat, Oct 16, TCU at Fort Worth, 2 pm MT, Versus
Sat, Oct 23, Wyoming at Provo, Noon MT, The Mtn
Sat, Nov 6, UNLV at Provo, Noon MT, The Mtn
Sat, Nov 13, Colorado State at Fort Collins, Noon MT, The Mtn
Sat, Nov 20, New Mexico at Provo, 4 pm MT, The Mtn
Sat, Nov 27, Utah at Salt Lake, 1:30 pm MT, The Mtn