

HB Arnett's
COUGAR SPORTSLINE

801 372 0819

hbarnett@fiber.net and hbarnett@xmission.com

PO Box 50424 Provo, Utah 84605

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COUGARS ESTABLISH RESIDENCY IN LAS VEGAS...CAN VOTING AND A NEVADA DRIVERS LICENSE BE FAR BEHIND?

In cowboy parlance, this isn't BYU's first Las Vegas rodeo. In teen talk, BYU still has its original tuxedo from its parade of Pioneer Bowl proms. Just spray the arm pits with a little Febreze and it will be good for another go.

In movie talk, first there was Rocky I, II, III and IV and now we get Bronco Mendenhall again standing stoically amid showgirls (who aren't wearing prom dresses) for his fourth sequel. Talk about taking one for the team.

And since the last t-shirt slogan of "Quest for Perfection" turned out to have less than stellar public relations ramifications for the program, here's a suggestion for a more sanguine and politically correct 2009 pre-season t-shirt mantra: "One More Vegas Bowl and We Will Be Eligible To Vote In Nevada".

It's all a matter of perspective.

Remember how excited BYU and Cougar fans were in 2005?

It was Bronco's first year as head coach and after barely becoming bowl eligible with a 6-5 record, BYU was bonkers and beside themselves for garnering a bowl bid to Las Vegas.

Blasé or Bonkers?

Three years later, it is more blasé than bonkers.

Thank goodness for Arizona. They are now starring in their own version of the BYU bowl story.

After years of mediocrity, the Wildcats finally became bowl eligible with a 7-5 record this season and are booking hotel rooms faster than Mike Stoops can say, "I can't believe I saved my job."

Both BYU and Arizona should be happy that they will be facing each other in Las Vegas and not making appearances at more dangerous bowl locations.

For UA, their bowl eligibility can be traced to a slate of early patsies and the Pac 10 having a horrible year.

The Wildcats have seven wins and were 4-1 after their first five games. They beat Idaho, Toledo, UCLA and Washington. The one loss in the early going was to New Mexico.

The Cats limped home, losing four of their next six before bombing their rival Arizona State last week. You can put the Sun Devils on the same Pac 10 patsie list as UCLA and UW this year.

Happy To Be There

Arizona is just happy to be in Las Vegas and BYU should feel the same way.

Cougar fans should be absolutely ecstatic that they are not facing Alabama or Boise State.

Leave those teams to Utah and TCU. BYU's flawed defense wouldn't stand a chance against BCS caliber teams such as the Broncos and Crimson Tide.

Before you get too hot under the collar, the evidence certainly supports our claim. In case you forgot, Utah and TCU both manhandled the Cougars and they are BCS caliber teams. BYU only had two wins against teams with a winning record (Air Force at 8-4 and Northern Iowa at 10-2). The rest of the teams that BYU beat had a combined record of 28-67.

Arizona didn't fare any better in their wins. They only had one win (Cal, 8-4) against a team with a winning record. Their other six wins came against teams with a combined record of 16-56.

Perfect Matchup

This is a perfect matchup for both Arizona and BYU. Despite both teams' flaws, they can have some all-expenses-paid, but no profit, fun in Las Vegas and try and fix their self esteem for what both clubs hope will be more productive runs next season.

This matchup will be the third in three years between the two teams.

In 2006, Nick Folk, now with the Dallas Cowboys, kicked a 48-yard field goal with 6 seconds remaining to give the Wildcats a 16-13 win over the Cougars. That contest was played in Tucson.

Fast forward to the following year and BYU beat Arizona 20-7 in the season opener for both teams.

Overall, UA leads the all-time series 11-9-1.

CAN YOU HAVE YOUR COUGAR BOWL CAKE AND BASKETBALL TOO?

BYU, at 8-0, is off to their best start in basketball since the 1987-88 season.

It doesn't take any special powers of deduction to figure out that the Cougars will be 10-0 before they face their first real test of the season against Arizona State on the road on Dec 20.

The 10-0 mark assumes that Dave Rose and his team will take care of their home-court business this week with games against Boise State and Portland in Provo.

For those with access to a calendar, it also won't take any special powers of deduction to figure out that the ASU game is on the same day as the BYU-Arizona Las Vegas Bowl matchup.

Can a die-hard Cougar fan see both contests in person?

It is highly unlikely, unless you have access to a private jet and know how to use a parachute.

The BYU-ASU basketball game tips in Glendale at 2:30 pm Arizona time. The football game in Las Vegas kicks off at 5:00 pm Nevada time which is 6:00 pm Arizona time.

Corporate Jet

You could probably get from the basketball game in Arizona if you had a corporate jet and access to a north Phoenix airport and still make the kickoff in Las Vegas, but only if you could parachute into Sam Boyd Stadium.

If you had to land at McCarren or North Las Vegas, you are still a good hour or more away trying to fight traffic and getting to the stadium and trying to park.

If you are going to be in Las Vegas, you can watch the basketball game at your hotel on Fox Sports, but you will be cutting it close if you want to make it for the opening kickoff.

The b-ball game tips at 1:30 Vegas time. If you allow two hours for the game, that makes it 3:30 and kickoff is set for 5:00 pm Vegas time.

As you know, getting to the stadium from your hotel can be a nightmare. Just hope there is no over-

time or that the contest is not close in the closing minutes, which means that both teams will be using all of their timeouts.

Big Crowd

You can expect a big crowd from Arizona which means even more traffic from probably the same hotel where you are staying. Arizona fans will use their entire allotment of 12,000 tickets and then some.

This is their first bowl game in 10 years. They, like Cougar fans, can easily drive to Vegas. The Wildcats also have a conflicting basketball game to go along with the bowl matchup.

Wildcats fans, however, get to watch both games in person, if they choose.

Arizona will be facing UNLV at the Thomas and Mack on Dec 20. That game is set to tip at noon Vegas time.

OKLAHOMA MAKES A NICE MUSICAL, BUT NOT MUCH SENSE

I can hum at least three tunes from the musical Oklahoma.

I can only see one reason why BYU will be playing the Sooners in September next season.

It isn't to refresh their musical memories, but for money. Cold hard cash.

All things we hear tell us that the OU-BYU matchup is still a very real possibility.

The game would be played next September in Texas at the new Dallas Cowboys Stadium.

On second thought, I can think of at least one other reason BYU would agreed to play Oklahoma.

There is no question that BCS buzz was the talk of the town in Provo early this season.

It took until TCU in Texas in October to quell that distraction.

Maybe BYU wants to get rid of BCS expectations earlier in September this coming season so they can concentrate on trying to get back to the top of the MWC.

Playing Oklahoma certainly looks good on paper and will look exceptionally good on the BYU athletic balance sheet, but it does absolutely nothing for the win-loss record and automatically takes the Cougars out of any BCS possibilities for next season.

It also might take BYU back to 1991 when they opened with three straight losses to Florida State, UCLA and Penn State.

The Cougars' non conference schedule for 2009 now reads: Oklahoma, Florida State, Arizona State and Utah State.

Utah State will be a win, but we don't think you can count on ASU rolling over.

Dennis Erickson, the head coach at ASU, knows how to get a quick fix with jucos. He did it at Oregon State and he will do it again in Tempe.

A BCS birth is never out of the question before the Cougars have even played a game in 2009, but somehow, scheduling Oklahoma, in our opinion, brings a new meaning to the BCS acronym: Bring Cash Soon.

BYU BEATS UTAH STATE 66-63

BYU ran their basketball record to 8-0 with a 68-63 win over Utah State last Saturday in Salt Lake City.

The Cougars did it without their best player, Lee Cummond, showing up.

The slender senior has been BYU's most productive player this year, but that production was missing against the Aggies.

Cummond played just 27 minutes because of foul trouble and only scored six points and grabbed one rebound. He eventually fouled out.

This is the second consecutive game that Cummond has played at Energy Solutions Arena where he

has had an off night.

Last year against Michigan State, Cumward also fouled out of the game and played just 20 minutes against the Spartans. He was able to add nine points and never missed a shot, but foul trouble kept him at bay.

It probably is a sign of just how good BYU can be this season that they were able to beat a competent team like USU without Cumward.

Tavernari

The Cougars rode the back of Jonathan Tavernari who had 24 points and also used a very solid performance from Jimmer Fredette and his 16 points to nail down the win.

BYU also had a nice boost off the bench from Gavin MacGregor, who saw 20 minutes of action and added 7 points in relief of Chris Miles.

Miles, the starting post for the Cougars, was also hampered by early fouls and saw just 20 minutes of time on the court.

This was the first time that an opponent has been able to control the tempo against BYU and it almost cost the Cougars the game.

Somewhere and sometime soon, BYU is going to need an inside scoring presence from the post if they hope to contend for a MWC title and make any noise at all in the post season.

They also need some better rebounding.

Again, it might be the curse of the Energy Solutions Arena, but a year ago against Michigan State, BYU was out rebounded 37-29 by the Spartans and it cost the Cougars the game.

This year, USU pounded BYU on the glass by a 39-27 margin, but BYU was able to come up with the win.

Control Tempo and Boards

USU was able to control the tempo and get the game at a pace they wanted and also beat BYU badly on the boards. That normally would get a team a win.

Not this time. BYU still had enough offensive firepower without Cumward and also played enough defense to seal the deal.

The Cougars now return to Provo for home games this week against Boise State on Wed, Dec 10 and against Portland on Sat, Dec 13.

The Broncos are currently 5-1 on the year and have wins against common opponents Idaho State, Wyoming and Colorado State.

All five BSU wins have been at home. The lone loss came on the road at Siena where the Broncos were pounded 82-52.

Portland is 5-2 on the year and holds wins at home against Washington and Nevada. Their two losses were to Portland State on the road and against Eastern Washington at home.

Both games will be televised live on the Mtn.

FLUFF AND STUFF

A TWO COACH GAME...We watched a good high school basketball game last week when Provo HS defeated Lone Peak HS 57-52 in double overtime. The game was played on Provo's court.

It was a two coach game. BYU had assistant coaches John Wardenburg and Dave Rice in attendance.

They saw plenty of good players, three of whom have already signed with the Cougars and a fourth that BYU is recruiting heavily.

Tyler Haws of Lone Peak has already signed with BYU. He led all scorers with 28 points. Kyle Collinworth, who is just a junior, is a prospect the Cougars would love to sign next year. He scored 26 for Provo.

BYU also had two post men that have signed with the program in this game. Brandon Davies had 13 points for Provo, but was in foul trouble most of the night. Nate Austin of Lone Peak had 12 points for the Knights.

Both big men are good athletes and will be able to play at the next level.

From our vantage point, however, neither are good consistent low-post scorers. They can both run the floor and rebound, but, at least in this game, neither showed any consistent low post scoring ability that they could go to the bank on.

We have heard Dave Rose say many times that the most difficult recruit to find is a proven low-post scorer.

BYU has had some nice post players, but we can't think of any of those players in the last decade that would be considered a dependable low post scorer.

Trent Plaisted and Rafael Araujo both were drafted by the NBA, but we wouldn't say either can post up low and score consistently.

The last dependable low post scorer we can remember for BYU was Mekeli Wesley. He was lucky to be listed at 6-9, but was more like 6-6 or 6-7.

We think Noah Hartsock, after a year in the program, can be a dependable low post scorer, but the puzzle for us is that Utah State now has two consistent low post scorers in Tai Wesley and Gary Wilkinson and BYU has none.

As Dave Rose has said repeatedly, finding a good low post scorer is difficult, but somehow the Aggies were able to hit the mother lode right in BYU's backyard with Wilkinson and Wesley.

RECRUITING UPDATE...In case you missed it, Steve Sarkisian, the former BYU quarterback and most recently, a USC offensive assistant coach, was named the new head coach at Washington.

That instantly made UW a more serious player in the recruiting sweepstakes for LDS qb Jake Heaps.

Heaps, whom many consider the top qb prospect for next year coming out of high school, is looking for a pro style offensive scheme. That is what Sarkisian will bring to the Husky program.

BYU has apparently changed its mind about recruiting junior college help.

The Cougars are shopping in bulk in hopes of finding at least one or two juco corners to help them next season.

We mentioned Deivon Tate from Yuba JC in California in a previous newsletter. Here's another name. Lee Aguirre. He is a smallish, but talented corner from Fullerton College, also in California. Both will be making visits to campus.

BYU won't stop with those two. They will trip several other juco defensive backs and hope they can find one that meets the BYU conduct parameters and also can measure up athletically in order to help BYU immediately.

Oh yeah, the third criteria is also important. The prospect actually has to have interest in BYU.

In the missed category, BYU had a scholarship on the table for Steven Fanua, an LDS linebacker out of Northern California. He has told the Cougars no and will be signing with Cal.

Bronco Mendenhall reportedly made the trip to Hawaii last week to have an in home visit with the Cougar's number one remaining recruiting priority, Manti Te'o. He is also a linebacker and we still think it will come down to a battle between BYU and USC.

The Cougars have a lot of ground to make up with the Trojans from previous battles USC has won.

TELEVISION TIMETABLE

BYU vs. Boise State

Wednesday, Dec 10 at Provo

Tipoff: 8:00 pm Mountain Time

TV: Mtn

BYU vs. Portland

Saturday, Dec 13 at Provo

Tipoff: 8:00 pm Mountain Time

TV: Mtn

BYU vs. Arizona State

Saturday, Dec 20 at Glendale

Tipoff: 2:30 pm Mountain Time

TV: Fox Sports

BYU vs. Arizona

Saturday, Dec 20 at Las Vegas

Kickoff: 6:00 pm Mountain Time

TV: ESPN