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No Kicking Curtain Call

Cougars Lose Three-Act Comedy of Errors

The plot of this comedy of errors included BYU and Utah both scoring three touchdowns each, all as a result of mistakes from the opposing defenses and special teams.

There were plenty of twists and turns leading to the climax and conclusion to this game, but the bottom line was that Utah's field goal kicker was 1-of-2 on the night and BYU's kickers were 0-3.

Game over. Utah 24 BYU 21.

The Mormon Church is renowned for many things such as their welfare program, their humanitarian aid programs, the missionary effort and rapid world wide growth.

What Mormons are not known for is producing kickers.

The only LDS kicker I know of that got a cup of Postum in the NFL was Owen Pochman. He was on the BYU roster from 1997-2000. He kicked two years for the New York

Giants and one season for San Francisco. If there has been another LDS kicker in the NFL, I missed the news.

There have been a few punters, (Lee Johnson) and a few deep snappers, but kickers good enough to make it to the NFL or even make a few clutch Cougar field goals, don't seem to be part of the LDS DNA.

What I haven't missed is the number of times that BYU kickers fail at game winning or clutch field goals. Maybe it's a perception problem on my part, but more often than not it is a wide right, wide left or blocked problem.

Winning Field Goals?

There have surely been a few game winning field goal blocks by BYU in the history of Cougar football, but the last game winning field goal I can recall was made by Ethan Pochman (Owen's older brother) at the 1996 WAC Championship game in Las Vegas against Wyoming in overtime.

Before that it was Jason Chaffetz hitting the game winner in 1988 in the Freedom Bowl for a 20-17 win over Colorado. He wasn't LDS at the time. He now is and is currently a congressman from Utah.

BYU blocked a field goal against UCLA a few years ago in the Las Vegas bowl, but kicking game winning field goals for the Cougars have been few and very far between.

BYU isn't the only team with kicking problems this year. Penn State has them. Utah State has them. The list of schools with sketchy kickers this season is long. It is just that BYU's problem seems to be a multi-season malady.

And BYU isn't the only team to go on the road and lose last week. Arizona State was undefeated before losing on the road to Missouri. USC supposedly was invincible, especially at home. They found life harder on the road at Stanford and lost to the Cardinal.

The Cougars won the statistical battle against the Utes. BYU had 25 first downs to just 14 for Utah. BYU threw for 206 yards and rushed for 106. Utah threw for 196 and rushed for 49 yards.

BYU did lose the turnover battle. The Cougars had two, both of which led to eventual Utah scores. And they lost the kicking game battle. Both teams were poor in that department, but BYU's efforts were poorer than Utah's.

Nelson threw an interception in the third quarter which led to Utah's only field goal and eventual difference in the score. Later in the third quarter, there was a botched shotgun snap from Blair Tushaus to Nelson who wasn't expecting the ball. That ball was picked up by Utah and taken in for a 47-yard recovered fumble returned for a touchdown.

Bye Bye BCS

BYU, with the loss, is now officially out of any BCS possibilities. They are also 2-1 on the year and likely to be 2-2 on the season unless they play much better at Boise State this coming Thursday.

The Broncos replaced the Cougars in the latest AP rankings and are listed in the No. 24 spot.

The game is slated for ESPN and will kick off at 7 p.m. Mountain Time.

Boise State has been on a ten-year roll, but they may be the only team with a comparable, if not worse, field goal kicking problem than BYU.

If this game comes down to a field goal for either team for a win, it might be best to turn your head and not watch. At least that has been the kicking history for both squads recently.

This game will likely be decided by which team runs the ball successfully. Neither Boise State nor BYU currently have overwhelming passing attacks. BSU lost Kellen Moore to the NFL and Riley Nelson is hit and miss with his throwing game this season.

Objective observers would have to say that Nelson's passing proficiency has been less than stellar so far this year.

Look for Boise State to force him to throw the ball and take their chances with him through the air.

Boise is almost unbeatable on the blue turf. Since 1999, the Broncos have lost just two games at home.

Washington State beat BSU early in the 2001 season. The final was WSU 41 BSU 20. Last year the Broncos lost to TCU in Boise 36-35. Between those two losses, BSU had a 35 home-game winning streak.

The TCU loss was especially heartbreaking because BSU's Dan Goodale missed a 39-yard field goal for the win as time expired.

BYU Will Have to Win in the Air

TCU got the unusual win at Boise last year because Casey Pachall threw for 473 yards and 4 touchdowns.

For BYU to replicate that win, the Cougars would also have to throw for 400 yards or better. We just don't see it and call it Boise State 27 BYU 24.

Perception is Reality

Three Failed Field Goals Away from Owning Utah

When you look at the big picture of BYU football since Bronco Mendenhall arrived on campus a decade ago, the portrait looks positive. That's a very good thing

When you focus on Mendenhall and games against Utah in that same decade, in that particular quadrant of the portrait, the pixilation appears to be poor. That is a very bad thing. At least that seems to be the public perception of Bronco Mendenhall when facing Utah.

In the eight years that Bronco Mendenhall has been the head coach at BYU, he has hung his hat on consistency. He is always telling fans and the public that his program is one of high performance and consistency.

He has the record and overall performance to back up those claims. Beginning in 2005, when he took over a program that was in shambles, he turned in an inaugural season of 6-6 and earned a bowl bid. He subsequently produced an 11-2 record in 2006, went 11-2 in 2007, and followed that up with a 10-3 mark in 2008. 2009 was great at 11-2. There was a 7-6 hiccup in 2010, and a nice 10-3 rebound last year in 2011.

We wouldn't bet against him going 10-3 again this season.

Sensational Sombrero

That is a pretty sensational sombrero that he has hung on the BYU football coaching hat rack in the last eight years. It is good enough that there is now a new book out detailing how Mendenhall has arrived at this point in his career. The book is called *"Running into the Wind. 5 Strategies for Building a Successful Team"*.

Now comes the perception problem; at least my personal perception problem. I haven't yet read the book, but based on my personal perception problem with Mendenhall when facing Utah, I would bet money that there is not a chapter in the book on how he has dealt with the University of Utah when it comes to football games.

If there was a chapter devoted to the eight years of games against Utah, it would have been written and owned by Kyle Whittingham. That chapter would likely be titled, *"Running into the Utes. 5 losses (three in a row) in 8 tries and counting"*. Again, as former BYU athletic director Rondo Fehlberg was fond of saying when dealing with the public perception problems he had with a former BYU basketball coach, "Perception is reality".

Now Tom Holmoe has the same problem when it comes to the perception of Bronco Mendenhall against Utah.

Bragging about Mendenhall's consistency as a successful football coach overall is warranted. So is his perception problem of being a poor coach in rivalry games against Utah.

Poor Perception

He is perceived as a coach who can't prepare, motivate, adjust or inspire his team to beat the Utes. At least that appears to be the public perception as I see it.

In my opinion, the public perception of Mendenhall seems to be that he is claiming that his overall consistency and record trumps the disappointments and defeats against Utah in the big picture.

But...the reality of Mendenhall's perceived performance against his biggest rival would all be dramatically different if not for four failed field goals.

BYU lost to Utah in 2010 in Salt Lake City when a late game field goal was blocked by the Utes. Make that field goal and Bronco would be .500 against the Utes in 8 games.

Make two out of the three field goals attempted by BYU last Saturday, in SLC and BYU wins and Mendenhall would be 5-3 against Utah and be perceived as the dominant coach in the rivalry between he and Kyle Whittingham. Instead it is Whittingham that is perceived as the alpha dog in this fight.

There are always plenty of excuses for the losses. This year it was Utah's defensive line calling out BYU signals and shifting at the line of scrimmage. Who cares? Regardless of the rationales and explanations, Harry Truman said, "The buck stops here". I say, when it comes to Utah, one loss is a fluke. Two losses can be explained. Three losses are puzzling, but eventually, the buck has to stop at Bronco and with the lack of a kicking game.

Cooper and Buck Stopping

Ask John Cooper about rival buck stopping versus a glossy overall resume.

Cooper, you may remember, was at one time the head coach at Ohio State from 1988 – 2000. He compiled a fabulous 111-43-4 record in 13 years. That got him inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame as a coach in 2008.

In the big picture, Cooper would have coached another decade with the overall success he had at Ohio State. It was his 10 losses versus 2 wins and 1 tie against rival Michigan that got him fired.

Mendenhall is safe from the same fate, but his future would be cemented in security if he could find a kicking game for the Utah games.

It would be one thing if Utah was simply a dominant and better team than BYU. There have been a couple of years when they actually were. There were years, however, and we include this season, when BYU was a better team and still couldn't get the job done.

Big Picture

In the big picture, patience and consistency are virtues to be admired. When it comes to playing Utah in football with Bronco Mendenhall, those virtues are starting to wear a little thin thanks to a non-existent kicking game.

So is the public perception of Mendenhall's mantra of preparing for and playing against Utah like any other game. As the saying goes, "*If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you always got.*" Especially in the kicking game.

Until the kick game woes of BYU are solved, it is my opinion and perception that Mendenhall will be perceived as a guy who is constantly outcoached by Kyle Whittingham.

To reiterate Rondo, "perception is reality". Ain't that a kick in the pants?

Names and Games

Identity Crisis?...Is BYU having an offensive identity crisis? Is Brandon Doman, the Cougar offensive coordinator, over his head? Who knows? What we do know and is documented is that under Doman in his first 1 1/3 seasons as the head BYU offensive guy, BYU appears to be floundering and flip flopping in what they want to do offensively.

Doman started with a drop back passing attack. When he discovered he didn't have a drop back passer, he switched mid season to a more mobile qb. Now that defenses are taking away and scheming for BYU's mobile quarterback, they are daring BYU to throw the ball down field.

Ideally, a BYU quarterback would be a proficient passer and mobile. Riley Nelson is one or the other, but he is not both. The hope for the future is that freshman Taysom Hill can fit the bill and be a good dual threat as a proficient downfield thrower and a mobile threat with his feet.

Hopefully Doman is the guy that can make this all happen. Hopefully Hill is the guy that can give Doman the best of a passing game and mobile quarterback that will make defenses pay for what they are trying to take away from BYU.

Meanwhile, history tells us that when BYU is very good offensively, they are good with the drop back passing game. Hill was a quarterback BYU did not expect to be in the program until he unexpectedly showed up as a transfer from Stanford. He is BYU's future when it comes to offense.

That said, the Cougars are still recruiting and stock piling drop back passers that are better throwers than runners.

Ammon Olsen, the current scout team quarterback, Tanner Magnum, currently gray-shirting and then headed on an LDS mission and Billy Green, the most recent QB commit who is not LDS, are primarily drop back throwers. That would seem to indicate that before Doman is done, BYU will be back to a drop back passing offense.

Only time will tell.

What I do know is that BYU's offense and the perception of BYU's offense is only as good as the latest scoreboard. If BYU whips Boise, all is forgiven. Doman is a genius and Nelson returns to hero status, regardless of how many wounded ducks he puts in the air. That is the nature of football. You are only as good as your latest game.

Bielema, Leach, Kush and Counting...At last count, the BYU offensive line had 7 illegal procedure calls flagged against them against Utah. The excuse was that the Utes weren't playing fair with what they were doing with their defensive line.

That will be addressed this week before embarking to Boise. How Bronco Mendenhall addresses it will surely be different than how some other coaches have addressed disappointing line play.

Bret Bielema, the Wisconsin head coach, fired his offensive line coach a week ago after two games and replaced him with a graduate assistant. The move was made when the Badgers' o-line wasn't performing up to previous Wisconsin standards.

Mike Leach, the head coach at Washington State, after two games and multiple holding and illegal procedure penalties called against his offensive line, gave all of his team, with the exception of the offensive line, Sunday off. He required the o-line to come in for some personal conditioning drills while the remainder of the team rested.

Years ago, Frank Kush, the old Arizona State coach, didn't like how his team played in a loss at home. He didn't allow his team to shower after the loss and took them to an adjacent field and proceeded to practice. That wouldn't be allowed now because of the 20-hour practice mandate instituted by the NCAA.

It will be interesting to see how the BYU staff addresses the offensive line play this week and if it makes a difference in Boise.

Last Week's review and results...Here is a look at a review and results from BYU's football opponents and some results from some of BYU's current crop of football commits.

Washington State: Now 2-1 on year after beating UNLV 35-27 in Las Vegas. WSU gets Colorado this week in Pullman....**Weber State** is currently 0-3 with latest 35-21 loss at home to McNeese State. Next up is Eastern Washington...**Utah** is 2-1 coming off a 24-21 win over BYU. The Utes now head to Tempe to face ASU...**Boise State** evened its record at 1-1 with a 39-12 win in Boise over Miami of Ohio. BYU is up next on Thursday in Idaho...**Hawaii** is now 1-1 after a 54-2 whipping of Lamar. Next up is Nevada in Honolulu...**Utah State** is 2-1 after missing a last second field goal at Wisconsin. The Badgers held on for a 14-16 win. USU now gets Colorado State in Fort Collins...**Oregon State** is still 1-0 with a bye last week. Now they head to Los Angeles to face UCLA...**Notre Dame** is 3-0 on the year coming off a decisive 20-3 win over Michigan State in East Lansing. Michigan is next at South Bend...**Georgia Tech** is 2-1 on the year. They drubbed Virginia last week 56-20 in Atlanta. Next up is Miami at Atlanta... **Idaho** is 0-3 after a 63-14 trouncing at LSU. Wyoming is next at Moscow... **San Jose State** beat CSU 40-20 in San Jose. They are now 2-1. This week it is SDSU at San Diego....**New Mexico State** lost to UTEP in El Paso 41-28. They are now 1-2 with New Mexico up this week in Las Cruces.

Fluff and Stuff...Dave Rose, the BYU basketball coach, and his staff made an official in-home recruiting visit in Chicago last week. They were in the home of Jabari Parker. Nationally, Rose's visit was just an asterisk and after thought by the media. It was Billy Donovan (Florida), Bill Self (Kansas) Roy Williams (North Caroline), Mike Krzyzewski (Duke) and Tom Izzo (Michigan State) making the national recruiting noise with their visits to Parker.

Personally, in my opinion, the less noise BYU makes nationally in their pursuit of Parker, the better their chances. There is a totally different dynamic taking place between BYU, Parker and his family than the normal recruiting hoopla that most major prospects generate. We still like BYU's chances in this fight.

Speaking of noise, it is the BYU women who are currently cacophonous on the national scene in volleyball and soccer.

The BYU women are currently undefeated and ranked No. 15 in volleyball. They swept three matches last week while participating in the George Washington Invitation last week in the nation's capitol.

The Lady Cougars took care of New Hampshire, Princeton and the host Colonials all in three-game sweeps. BYU was dominating in the tournament. Freshman Alexa Gray, the outside hitter from Canada, was named MVP of the tourney.

BYU is now 12-0 on the year and will begin WCC league action this Thursday and Saturday in Provo against Pepperdine and Gonzaga. Both games will be televised live on BYUtv.

Pepperdine is currently ranked No. 18 in the country and is coming off capturing the Flo Hyman Championship Tournament last week in Houston.

In women's soccer, the Lady Cougars continue their hot streak with two more wins last week in Provo. BYU blasted Cal Poly 5-1 on Thursday and then took down No. 23 Washington 3-1.

The Cougars are currently 8-1 on the year and ranked No. 17/8 depending on the poll. They are scoring at an incredible clip with 16 goals in the last 4 games.

Next up for the Cougars will be two road games at Utah State in Logan on Thursday and in Eugene next Monday with a showdown with Oregon.

Television Timetable

BYU vs. Boise State

Thursday, Sep 20 at Boise

Kickoff: 7:00 pm Mountain Time

TV: ESPN

BYU vs. Hawaii

Friday, Sep 28 at Provo

Kickoff: 6:00 pm Mountain Time

TV: ESPN

BYU vs. Utah State

Friday, Oct 5 at Provo

Kickoff: 8:15 pm Mountain Time

TV: ESPN

BYU vs. Oregon State

Saturday, Oct 13 at Provo

Kickoff: TBA

TV: TBA