

HB Arnett's
COUGAR SPORTSLINE

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NAMES AND GAMES

LAS VEGAS BOWL MATCHUP IS A GAME OF PLAYMAKERS...Odds makers have established Arizona as a three-point favorite over BYU in Saturday's Las Vegas Bowl matchup between the Cougars and Wildcats.

Evidently, they haven't been reading the press releases from Denver about how the Mountain West Conference has dominated the Pac 10 this season.

What the professionals who evaluate games for a living are saying is that both teams have good quarterbacks with experience that know how to get the ball to the playmakers on their respective teams.

They are also saying that they think Arizona's playmakers are better than BYU's playmakers.

Yeah, we know, how could anyone in their right mind think Arizona has better playmakers on offense than Austin Collie, Dennis Pitta and Harvey Unga?

Try these names on for size.

Nic Grigsby is a legitimate Pac 10 running back. Rob Gronkowski will be playing in the NFL as a tight end and Mike Thomas, like Austin Collie, just makes big catches and big plays.

We actually think that Max Hall is a better passer than Arizona's Willie Tuitama and certainly should be motivated to redeem himself after his worst outing as a Cougar a few weeks back against Utah.

Still, statistically speaking, both offenses are a wash. They both can move the ball and score plenty of points.

Where the difference will be is on the defensive side of the ball.

We don't expect the Wildcats to shut down BYU, but we still have major reservations about BYU's defense.

Odds makers apparently feel the same way by making Arizona the favorite in this game.

BYU's season long deficiencies up the middle don't bode well for the Cougars. To stop the run game of Arizona, you need linebackers who can make plays. To take a big tight end like Gronkowski out of the game, you need good safeties.

In our opinion, Max Hall isn't the only guy who needs to try and redeem himself for a lackluster showing in the season finale against Utah.

BYU's offensive coaches need to run the ball against Arizona. New Mexico, a team that beat the Wildcats, did it by running the ball down UA's throat.

Arizona allowed 221 yards rushing against the Lobos.

If BYU wants to beat the odds makers and beat the Wildcats, in our opinion, they will have to pound the ball on the ground.

If they can establish a run game, then Max Hall and the passing game will also flourish.

If the Cougars don't have the patience to run the ball even when it may not be working early in the game and return to strictly throwing the ball, then they will rack up a lot of nice statistics, but not a win.

We expect to see BYU running the ball. We also expect the Cougars to have learned their lesson from the Utah debacle.

The wild card will be the BYU defense. If they allow a couple of early and cheap Arizona scores, which is entirely possible, BYU will find itself in a catch-up mode and this could end up being a 50-plus throw game for the Cougars.

We like the BYU chances in this game, but only if they remain balanced offensively.

We call it BYU 35 Arizona 31.

COUGARS ADD TWO MORE WINS IN BASKETBALL...BYU remained undefeated on the season this past week with wins over Boise State and Portland.

The Cougars rode a scoring surge in the second half against BSU to capture a 94-56 win.

After nursing a meager 4-point lead at the intermission, BYU exploded for 61 second half points.

Sophomore point guard Jimmer Fredette led all scorers with 23 points. Lee Cummond had 20, despite appearing to struggle against the Broncos offensively.

It is a sign of just how good Cummond really is when despite an apparent off night, he still managed to score 20, pull down 7 rebounds, have 4 assists and one blocked shot.

Portland is the best team the Cougars have played to date this year. It didn't matter. BYU bested the Pilots 91-76 to run their record to an impressive 10-0.

The strength of BYU is that they don't have just one horse they need to ride every time out of the gate.

Against Portland, the horse with the high powered scoring game was Jonathan Tavernari. He poured in 25 for BYU. Jimmer Fredette concluded a nice week of work by chipping in 17 points.

The Cougars now will travel to Arizona to take on the ASU Sun Devils on Saturday.

The game will be played in Glendale at the University of Phoenix Football stadium and is part of a double header with Minnesota and Louisville matching up in the other contest.

The Cougars will face a team that is currently 7-1, but had to eke out a 59-58 overtime win over IUPUI in their last outing.

The Sun Devils have one of the best, if not the best player in college this year in James Harden. BYU won't be able to stop him, but they have to control him from going off for 30-plus points if they hope to win.

Harden's poorest outing of the year was against IUPUI when he was held to just 9 points. In his previous outings he had scored 18, 33, 15, 32, 40, 22 and 20 points.

FIXING THE FLAT...There was no question that BYU had some defensive deficiencies this past season in football.

Up the middle, the Cougars were like a flat tire and that made it difficult to keep other teams from moving the ball and scoring points.

In an effort to try and fix the flat, Bronco Mendenhall and company are trying to use the juco jack to raise the car and get a better tire on the ground for next year. BYU has three junior college offers on the table to three players who can qualify as early mid year juco signees.

BYU needs a quick fix at linebacker and some spares in the defensive backfield.

With all four true freshmen linebackers that signed last February ticketed for LDS missionary duty after the season, BYU has offered two juco linebackers.

Both were on campus this past week for official visits.

Aaron Gress is a 6-2, 225 pound linebacker from College of the Sequoias in Visalia, Calif.

He was a safety in high school and started his juco career as a safety at COS.

He had 70 tackles and one interception this past season. He could probably play either outside or inside at the next level.

Gress has narrowed it down to three schools. He will choose between Marshall, BYU and Illinois. Nevada is a late comer to the recruiting party, but it will be the first three that will get Gress's signature this week.

He prepped at Exeter HS just south of Visalia and he is not LDS.

Because he was a qualifier coming out of high school, Gress can sign an early juco letter on December 15 and be enrolled at the school of his choice in January.

That is the same signing scenario for Jordan Atkinson, a 6-3, 235 pound linebacker from Diablo Valley College in Northern California.

Atkinson has some BYU connections. His dad, Dave Atkinson, was a former cornerback for LaVell Edwards.

We mentioned that Atkinson tripped to Provo this past week and was at Colorado State this past weekend.

It will come down to the Rams or Cougars and our money is on BYU.

Atkinson is also a qualifier out of Alhambra HS and can sign this week and be enrolled in January.

The third offer has been extended to Lee Aguirre, a 5-10, 180 pound corner from Fullerton College in California.

He too has a BYU offer and tripped to Provo this past week. He also has made a recruiting stop at Hawaii and it will be a choice of schools between those two. He also has offers from Akron and Idaho State.

Aguirre prepped at South El Monte HS and is also academically eligible to be a mid-year transfer.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS CAN BE WRONG...It was either 2004 or 2005 and I was there in the auxiliary gym at Foothill HS in Henderson for my annual summer AAU basketball pilgrimage to Las Vegas to watch future BYU recruits.

I was there to see James Anderson, who at the time was going to be a senior at Page HS in Northern Arizona.

I was totally unimpressed. A lot of that had to do with his teammates on his Arizona Magic AAU club.

It was a team loaded with quick, athletic players who could get up and down the court and score.

It was a team that had Lawrence Hill of Stanford, Joey Shaw, who signed with Indiana, left with the departure of Kelvin Sampson, played a year at College of Southern Idaho and now is at Nevada.

The best player on that squad was Jerryd Bayless. He lasted just a year with the Wildcats of Arizona and then declared for the NBA. He is currently on the roster for the Portland Trailblazers.

Anderson barely touched the ball and when he did, he didn't do anything with it.

I came away thinking this guy had some size, but would be just another BYU big guy stiff.

My opinion didn't change until this year.

Anderson is still raw, but he has shown this year that he just may develop into a legitimate player.

He always could run the floor and has always had a great defensive wing span, but we certainly now can see his potential.

It took a couple of years for Luke Nevill, Utah's current big man and future NBA draft pick, to grow on us and realize that despite his lack of athleticism, he could play.

Could it be that Anderson is the closest thing BYU has to Nevill?

As a redshirt freshman, with a couple of more seasons, this kid could eventually develop into a legitimate post player and defender.

We should have known that Andersen would be a player because he was signed by Dave Rose. After four years, it appears to us that the BYU head coach has proved himself to be a very good evaluator of talent that can qualify and fit at BYU.

Sometimes it takes a while, but they all seem to eventually contribute.

Lamont Morgan is a prime example. He didn't look like he could score a lick in junior college, but he has been a player for the Cougars. With Jimmer Fredette and Morgan, BYU has seen a major upgrade at the point guard position.

There were many who thought Archie Rose, the juco transfer from Texas, by way of the Bahamas, was a wasted scholarship last year.

A season later, it appears that he actually has a role on this current team.

Here's the point. More often than not, if Rose gives them a scholarship, they all seem to eventually prove him right in his assessment that they can play at the Division I level. There have been a few exceptions.

To date, there have only been three Rose signees who have never seen the court for any serious and significant minutes after he signed them.

Jordan Cameron redshirted as a freshman and then left school for non-basketball related reasons.

Luiz de Toledo signed at BYU and then signed a pro contract to play basketball in Brazil.

Jean Carlos Otero signed out of a Florida juco, but never qualified academically.

TROUBLE AHEAD WITH ARIZONA STATE...When BYU travels to Arizona this week to take on ASU in basketball, they could be facing the best player they have played in the past few years.

Remember the problems BYU had last season trying to guard Lorenzo Wade of San Diego State?

He is extremely talented and good.

Now imagine what it would be like to guard another Wade, as in Dwayne Wade of the Miami Heat.

There are some who are comparing James Harden, the 6-5 sophomore from Arizona State to Wade and some who think he could be the first player taken in the upcoming NBA draft next year.

Yes, Harden is that good.

It will be interesting to see how BYU tries to defend him.

COWBOYS GO HAWAIIAN...We have seen a lot of Polynesian college football players who are feted and honored during Senior day at a lot of colleges. They almost all are decorated in festive and colorful leis in honor of their heritage.

We have seen lots of beautiful leis worn by graduating football seniors, but we never thought we would see them worn in Laramie.

The Wyoming Cowboys, under their new head coach Dave Christensen, have said that they are going to go after Polynesian prospects and make some recruiting inroads in Hawaii.

To make that happen, they have hired LDS coach Mike Fanoga. His last football gig was at New Mexico State. He has basically followed Hal Mumme, who was recently fired at NMSU, wherever he has coached from Valdosta State, Kentucky, Western Kentucky and NMSU.

The Cowboys are already bragging about a recruit from Hawaii named Trendt Marsum, a 5-11, 200 pound db from Kaimuki HS. He supposedly had an offer from BYU, but UW and Fanoga have convinced him that Wyoming would be a better place to continue his college football career.

It will be interesting to see how successful the Pokes will be trying to lure prospects from the warmth of Hawaii to the frozen tundra of Laramie.

As long as we are talking about recruiting, BYU may be forced to try and find more athletic and speedy defenders in their narrow niche of prospects.

By our latest count, there will now be at least five MWC teams that will be running some sort of spread offense next year and beyond.

Utah and TCU already exposed BYU's defense with their spread attacks this season. UNLV came close to beating BYU with their spread offense. Now comes Christensen at Wyoming and the new guy at New Mexico, Mike Locksley. Both have said that they will be implementing spread offense at their respective schools.

San Diego State just hired Brady Hoke of Ball State and he ran a spread offense this past season and should bring it with him to the Aztecs.

Speaking of San Diego State and New Mexico State, former BYU assistant coach and current UCLA defensive coordinator, Dwayne Walker, is a candidate for both vacancies.

He has already interviewed with NMSU. The connection to BYU is that if Walker does land a job, we

expect him to try and lure Jaime Hill, BYU's defensive coordinator, to join him on his staff.

NFL CALLING COLLIE?...Austin Collie, the record setting wide receiver and recent first team All America selection by CBS Sports, still officially has one more year of eligibility to play for BYU next season.

There is a strong possibility that he will forgo that last season and head to the NFL next year.

If he can get reliable information that leads him to believe that he will be drafted anywhere above the fourth round, we anticipate he will be gone.

You can't blame him. At a fourth round or above selection, he will get a good signing bonus and make some money.

One more year isn't going to improve his draft stock or status and he is only one hit away from never having an NFL career and having to draw a real paycheck like other BYU graduates.

Depending on the NFL feedback he receives, it is a no brainer.

He will have to make a decision on opting for the draft or staying in school and returning to BYU next month.

TELEVISION TIMETABLE

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

BYU vs. Western Oregon

Tuesday, Dec 23 at Provo

Tipoff: 7:00 pm Mountain Time

TV: None

BYU vs. Tulsa

Tuesday, Dec 30 at Tulsa

Tipoff: 6:00 pm Mountain Time

TV: CBS C