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BYU GOES QUICKLY AND QUIETLY

We were sure we would not have to use the tired and worn phrase “one and done” when referring to BYU and their latest NCAA basketball tournament invite.

We still don't want to use it, so how about this?

“Quickly and quietly”. What about “early and easily”?

That pretty much sums up how BYU fared in its NCAA opening game matchup with Texas A&M in Philadelphia last Thursday.

The Aggies handled the Cougars early and easily. Consequently, BYU left the city of brotherly love quickly and quietly.

The final score was A&M 79 BYU 66.

We had hoped, however, to be able to use the well-worn phrase, “make some noise” when describing the Cougars' post-season experience.

That didn't fly, so how about this?

Aural absence.

It has now been 16 years since there has been any NCAA Cougar cacophony generated by the BYU basketball team.

Despite a glossy record of 25-8 this season and a three-peat in capturing a piece of the MWC basketball crown, BYU's NCAA history is like a library; extremely quiet.

First Round

The Cougars have now lost their last seven first-round games in the national tournament. They are 7-17 historically in first round play. The overall BYU record in NCAA play is 11-27.

Jimmer Fredette and Lee Cummond led the Cougars in scoring. Fredette had 18 and Cummond posted 17 points.

Despite having decent scoring outings, neither player had great games, especially in the outside shooting department.

While the Aggies came out on fire and made their first 11 shots from the field, BYU struggled shooting the ball.

While Texas A&M shot 57.7% for the game, BYU could only manage 39% from the floor. Cummond was just 6-of-14 and Fredette was only 5-of-13.

The Cougars were also dominated inside.

They got zero production from the post. Chris Miles was 2-of-8 shooting and pulled down just 4 rebounds.

In contrast, Aggie big man Bryan Davies torched the Cougars inside with 21 points and 9 boards. Texas A&M outrebounded the Cougars 35-26.

Go To the Bank

Another phrase we wanted to use was “go to the bank” in reference to Cumward and Jonathan Tavernari.

Both will be “going to the bank” next season, but they will be cashing their checks somewhere in Turkey or Greece.

Neither player did themselves or their NBA aspirations any favors with their play in the tourney.

Tavernari is now evaluating his options for professional play and may not return for his senior campaign as a Cougar.

A phrase we had hoped to avoid for at least a couple of weeks was “wait until next year”.

It came earlier than expected, thanks to Texas A&M, but here it is.

BYU will be set at the guard line. They return starters Jimmer Fredette and Jackson Emery. Reserve Lamont Morgan also returns. Add Michael Loyd, Jr. to the mix and BYU will have added open court speed.

Cumward is gone, but you can look for Charles Abouo and incoming frosh Tyler Haws to fill those minutes.

Hartsock

If Tavernari also goes, Noah Hartsock will take over the four spot.

Hartsock basically was BYU's post player in the last ten games. BYU will need dramatically improved production from Chris Miles next season or Hartsock will be the post player again for BYU.

It is not like Cougar coaches don't know they need help in the post. Three of their four signees in November were high school post players. We still think Brandon Davies has a huge upside in college as a dependable post player, but also hate to use that “upside” phrase.

Finding good juco post men is difficult, but we would not be surprised if BYU is looking juco right now to see if they can find somebody that could help them next year.

In hind sight, BYU made two major evaluation and recruiting gaffes when they passed on Gary Wilkinson and Tai Wesley of Utah State. They could have had both, but passed for various reasons.

We think with either of them on the BYU roster this year, the Cougars could have been a better team.

GOOD COACHES MAKE ADJUSTMENTS, NOW IT'S TIME FOR FANS TO DO THE SAME

When BYU fans are evaluating coaches of their favorite team, they like to point out that good coaches can make adjustments in personnel and strategy during games.

Making adjustments seems to be a good thing.

Now the shoe is on the other foot.

You won't hear BYU coaches evaluating fans and telling them that Cougar boosters need to make adjustments, so we will do it for them.

It's time to downsize our dreams.

The current recruiting and admission standards of BYU assure that Cougar basketball and football teams will be populated primarily by LDS players.

Those standards are what we love about BYU.

They are also what will require us to adjust our expectations for athletic success at the highest levels of collegiate competition in football and basketball.

By design or default, BYU has basically limited its supply of athletic talent in football and basketball to LDS student athletes. There simply are not currently enough national caliber type LDS players at BYU, in either program, to compete at the highest levels in those two sports.

Less Exclusive

Until recruiting at BYU becomes more inclusive outside of the LDS talent pool, or that same LDS talent pool produces significantly more and better players, Cougar fans will need to make adjustments in their aspirations for BYU athletics.

We are well aware of the facts that BYU has been ranked in national polls as one of the top 25 teams in both of those sports over the years, but those BYU rankings very seldom hold up when the Cougars are forced to face teams also listed in those same ratings.

We have seen several theatrical productions locally and regionally over the years. They were entertaining and good.

We have also seen theatrical productions on Broadway and in London.

They were much better.

That doesn't diminish the entertainment we experienced on the local level, but it does parallel the perspective and provincialism of BYU athletics.

On a local and regional level, BYU football and basketball are both very entertaining, enjoyable and good.

Big Stage

On the big stage, however, there is still a wide gap and gulf to be bridged.

That is why, in our opinion, it is time for BYU sports fans to make adjustments in their hopes and dreams for Cougar teams.

BYU has some very nice players who are entertaining and good on a regional stage, but the difference in talent from the big boys of Broadway is still night and day.

It is all about players. Those teams that have them in basketball are still playing in the NCAA tournament and those teams that have them in football are making BCS bowl appearances.

Texas A&M, a fourth-place team in the Big 12 conference this year, has more talented players than BYU.

The early-game dominance over the Cougars by the Aggies and the final score of 79-66 painfully made that point.

As further evidence of where BYU really is in the national basketball pecking order, Texas A&M was easily dispatched and dismissed as a non-factor nationally by Connecticut. The final score was UConn 92, A&M 66.

Dave Rose, BYU's head coach, was quick to give Texas A&M credit for being good.

Credit

We want to give the Aggies credit for saving BYU further embarrassment by keeping the Cougars off the same court with UConn.

We can also be grateful that A&M helped BYU fans prepare for what is still coming. We are referring to BYU and Oklahoma meeting in football in Dallas later this fall.

It is all about players and the Sooners will have plenty of them to showcase against BYU.

This assessment of BYU basketball and football is not intended to dissuade Cougar fans from being fans, but sooner than later, rooting and reality have to clash.

Adjusting our expectations, to a smaller instead of a national stage, will soften the embarrassment of last weekend and prevent the pain of similar BYU busts when the Cougars take their act to Broadway against the big boys.

The smaller the BYU dreams of fans, the less likely those aspirations will be kicked as they were last weekend in Philadelphia.

FIRST WEEK OF SPRING PRACTICE IN BOOKS

Four of the 15 allotted spring practices allowed by NCAA rule have been put in the books by BYU during their first week of spring drills.

The week culminated with full pads and a scrimmage on Friday.

As usual, the scrimmages are dotted with no names and reserves trying to make their names more noticeable.

Some of the names we already know had nice outings in the initial padded matchup between BYU's offense and defense.

Max Hall completed 7 of 13 passes for 84 yards in limited action. Harvey Unga carried the ball twice for 50 yards, including a nifty 35-yard touchdown jaunt. J.J. DiLuigi also notched a 12-yard scoring scamper.

BYU will have to find four new starters on the offensive line this spring to help returning left tackle Matt Reynolds.

Those who saw significant action with the first unit offense this week include Jason Speredon, R.J. Willing, Terence Brown and Nick Alletto.

The Cougars will miss Austin Collie. The receiving corp includes Luke Ashworth, O'Neill Chambers, McKay Jacobson and Stephen Covey. Covey has made the switch from quarterback to wideout and hopes to earn some playing time in that rotation.

Jacobson has been hampered by a hamstring injury and will likely not see much live action this spring.

Dennis Pitta and Andrew George are both back at tight end and showing that that spot should be solid, if not spectacular for the BYU offense again.

If you are looking for the next great tight end of the future for BYU, we suggest you keep your eyes on Braden Brown. He is 6-6, 250 pounds and opened coaching eyes with his play as a redshirt freshman last year. He prepped at Highland HS in Salt Lake City.

Defensively, BYU is still looking for linebackers and defensive backs.

With Brandon Howard having returned to California for personal reasons, BYU is still thin at cornerback.

They are going with Brandon Bradley, redshirt freshman Garrett Nicholson and Steve Thomas.

If BYU is going to improve dramatically their defensive backfield for next season, it appears to us that it is imperative that they have help from the two juco corners signed in February.

Brian Logan of Foothill JC in Northern Calif has been in Provo observing spring drills, but he won't be enrolled in school and able to practice and contribute until the fall.

The same scenario applies to the Cougars' other juco cornerback signee, Lee Aguirre. He has some class work to finish up at Fullerton JC in Southern Calif before he can compete for BYU this fall.

It will be extremely important that these two guys are players.

The safety situation this spring for BYU is already improved. Scott Johnson, who was a corner last season, is now teamed with Andrew Rich this spring as starters in that area.

Linebacking still looks weak to us. The Cougars are going with Coleby Clawson, Terrance Hooks, Matt Bauman and Jordan Pendleton to begin with. Brandon Ogletree could help, but he is being held out this spring due to a broken finger.

When BYU has been good defensively, they have had a strong linebacking corp. Right now, we don't see it and will have to hope that something miraculous happens in the fall.

There is a lot of work to accomplish, especially on the offensive line and with the entire defense this spring.

We are optimistic that there will be improvement, but defensively, we just don't see enough athletes on display to be able to expect any major improvement for the coming season.

SPRING SPORTS

BYU took two of three baseball games over the weekend from San Diego State on the road.

With the wins, the Cougars moved into a tie with the Aztecs for the early MWC lead. BYU is currently 13-8 overall and 4-2 in league play.

Thanks to some strong pitching from Jeremy Toole and Blake Torgerson, BYU defeated SDSU 6-2 and 4-2 in the opening two contests of the series.

The Cougars dropped the final game 11-5 to the Aztecs.

BYU has a home game set for Tuesday against Utah Valley and then head back on the road to take on the New Mexico Lobos for three games in Albuquerque.

The Lobos are coming off a three-game sweep of Northwestern of the Big 10 and currently have a 22-3 record. They are the hottest team in the league with a nine-game winning streak.

In volleyball, it appears that BYU is finding its stride.

The Cougars are now 13-8 on the year after taking two five-set wins over No. 5 ranked Long Beach State. Both matches were played in Provo.