

HB Arnett's

COUGAR SPORTSLINE

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UPON FURTHER REVIEW

After seven days of fall camp, here is what we have seen and our revised review of the BYU football team

FROM COWER AND CRINGE TO ACTUALLY COVERING...It's early, we know, but it looks like BYU has at least four corner backs that are significantly better than anyone that saw the field last season for the Cougars.

You remember last season, don't you? That was when BYU went on defense, you tended to cower and cringe, especially against good passing teams.

Robbie Buckner, a redshirt freshman and returned missionary, is a player. He missed most of last week with a tweaked hamstring. The three juco transfers are all better than anything BYU had last season. We especially like Brian Logan and Corby Eason. Lee Aguire isn't bad either.

Honest to goodness, this is a major step up for BYU. But, before we get too giddy, all that means is that BYU corners are now MWC caliber. None of these guys could play in the Pac 10, Big 12 or SEC and none would see much of the field at either Utah or TCU, but they are now comparable to the rest of the league.

Still, MWC quality is a major step forward for BYU.

PACKING SOME SMACK...BYU now has two safeties that can bring some pop and pain to opposing receivers and running backs. Andrew Rich is a hitter. So is true freshman Craig Bills. He will play this season. Scott Johnson is better than anybody that played safety for the Cougars last season. Jray Galea'i is another true freshman who has a very bright future. This is a definite upgrade in talent and skill over last season for Bronco Mendenhall and his defense.

LEADERSHIP NOT LACKING IN LINEBACKERS...Team leadership is not lacking in BYU's stable of linebackers. Some of the most dependable, trustworthy and hardest working BYU football players can be found on the Cougar linebacker roster. We have seen nothing after one week to change our mind. This is a pretty generic group.

FLAK AND FINDING THE TRUTH...We took some flak last week because we said there were no play-makers on BYU's defensive line. We had lots of people remind us that Jan Jorgensen was a sack machine the last two seasons.

We like him. He has a big motor and has nice stats, including sacks, but in our opinion, he is not a disruptive force on defense and neither is any other Cougar defensive lineman. No one has to be double teamed by opponents.

The good news is that this group has performed well in the first week of fall camp.

The bad news is that we don't know what that means. They have looked good against the BYU offensive line and nobody knows, as yet, if they are any good.

A better barometer will be BYU's defensive line play against Oklahoma and Florida State.

We hope we are flooded with flak after those games. It will mean that we were wrong and BYU's line play on both sides of the ball is vastly improved.

PASS THE ROGAINE...With a slug of returned missionaries manning the offensive line, thinning hair-lines are not unusual at BYU. What is a more pressing matter after one week of fall camp, however, is the thinning of the offensive line roster.

BYU is running out of bodies.

Jesse Taufi has not been able to practice as yet while he tends to academic issues. Matt Reynolds, BYU's best offensive lineman, broke his hand just days into fall camp.

He had surgery, but is expected back for the Oklahoma game. His injury leaves the Cougars short-handed in practice.

His brother Houston, is nursing a hamstring injury.

Jason Speredon, a projected starter at guard, is gone for the year with a torn rotator cuff.

Forget finding starters and getting them ready for the opening game, BYU needs bodies on the offensive line just to be able to practice effectively.

We like the talent in this group. There are enough good players to have a good offensive line, but how it is handled, managed and made to last through the remainder of fall camp will be extremely crucial.

WE ARE EXPECTING MUCH LESS FROM MAX HALL THIS SEASON...When it comes to interceptions thrown, less is better. Hall's touchdown to interception ratio should be very good.

He is having an exceptional fall camp.

We expect an exceptional senior season and Hall's first week of practice seems to back up that optimism.

Most of the early reviews of Riley Nelson have been mixed. Some are good and some aren't. Our review and expectations for this playmaker haven't changed. He will be good and will be the backup to Hall this season.

SPIELBERG IS PLANNING A REMAKE OF HARVEY, THE MOVIE (about an imaginary rabbit)...BYU can expect a remake of Harvey, the running back, as he was as a freshman. Harvey Unga was hurt for most of last season and didn't play at 100 percent.

We expect a rerun and remake of his freshman year production.

While J.J. DiLuigi has had a nice fall camp and is listed as the backup to Unga, the Cougars also need a rerun and remake of Manase Tonga at fullback.

Coaches will find out early this coming week if he will be academically eligible to play this year.

Right now all we have are the trailers from Tonga's performance of two seasons ago. If he is good to go, Tonga and Unga together on the same bill could give the BYU a blockbuster hit at running back this season.

CATCHING COLLIE WON'T BE EASY...The BYU receiver had 100-plus catches last season. That won't be duplicated by any Cougar wide out this season, but overall, the receiving corp will be much better and more productive than what Max Hall had to throw to last year.

McKay Jacobson is the real deal. O'Neill Chambers is improved and there is a boatload of legitimate receivers from returning lettermen and incoming freshman to make this a very deep and capable

group.

Jacobson is having a great fall camp.

YIN AND YANG...We like what we have seen of BYU this fall. They are going to be better than most people anticipate and even better than we thought they would be. We attribute it to the optimism of the first week of fall camp and a Yin and Yang moment.

Optimism aside, when it comes to opening game against Oklahoma, we still don't think BYU can Yin, but after watching Y.E. Yang win the PGA Championship yesterday, anything is possible.

If Tiger Woods can ying and yank almost all of his putts in a major, then in theory, Sam Bradford, OU's returning Heisman Trophy winner and quarterback, can throw seven or eight interceptions against the improved BYU secondary.

Optimism is good, but so is Oklahoma. There is a reason the Sooners are a 21-point favorite in this game.

The Sooners are in another league when it comes to college football and web sites.

In the first head-to-head matchup of this year between Oklahoma and BYU, the Sooners have already beaten the Cougars in the preseason battle of web sites.

Both schools have professional looking web sites that promote their programs. Both programs offer professional quality video on their sites.

BYU's site looks nice, but compared to Oklahoma's, lacks content. BYU has fluff and OU has football.

Case in point. Last Saturday, both Oklahoma and BYU held closed scrimmages in their respective stadiums.

BYU's video for Saturday showed some nice, but fluffy interviews with coaches and some nice shots of players warming up before the scrimmage started.

The Sooners, despite the closed scrimmage to the public, showed highlights of that closed scrimmage on their web site.

In our opinion, it would be so easy for BYU to be doing what Oklahoma does. The video acumen and resources are the same.

When it comes to their respective fan bases, BYU appears to be more paranoid than proactive in promoting and growing its essential fan base. Oklahoma and BYU fans know fluff and they know football. They prefer football.

If Bob Stoops thought showing videos of actual practices and scrimmages was a detriment to his program, it wouldn't be on the OU web site. It appears that at Oklahoma, it is more about promotion than paranoia. Maybe the Sooners are so good that they just don't think a few snippets of video is a big deal.

In the web site video matchup between BYU and Oklahoma, in our opinion, the Sooners are already running up the score.

Here are the two sites.

www.soonersports.com/ot/2009_preseason_practice.html

www.byucougars.com/football/

THERE IS NO RECESSION IN RECRUITING

BYU is having a big year in football recruiting.

You have to like the quantity and quality of the Cougars' early commitments for the class of 2010.

As of last week, Bronco Mendenhall and coaching crew have 24 early verbals that say they will sign with BYU next February.

We don't think the Cougars are done.

There will be some senior sleepers in BYU's LDS recruiting base that will have breakout years and there will be some immediate needs exposed somewhere on the team this season. That usually results from unexpected injuries or lack of talent.

BYU needs to stay on top of the juco scene to help fill those needs.

BYU is doing a very nice job recruiting to its strength and base, which is the LDS athlete. They sign some good ones and do so in great abundance.

That said, in our opinion, the only difference between the LDS players BYU signs and the LDS players Utah signs is in volume. The Cougars sign more of them.

Over the last decade, you could take the core of LDS players from both the Utes and Cougars and swap them or interchange them without any noticeable difference.

BYU's LDS prospects are usually more publicized and promoted, but the results on the field would indicate that they are basically the same caliber of players at both schools.

That speaks to the increase in LDS prospects over the years.

There are exceptions, of course. BYU has proven that they have a corner on the LDS quarterback market. The good ones seldom go to Utah.

Each team has their exceptional LDS athletes. Last year, BYU had Austin Collie and Utah had Paul Kruger, but overall, if you look at it objectively based on what actually has happened on the field, the LDS core players for both schools are interchangeable.

Utah has participated in two BCS Bowl games in the last 5 years. They did it with a core group of LDS players and with an experienced and good quarterback. They also did it with speed.

In our opinion, the difference between the BYU and Utah recruiting models, is that while both rely on LDS recruits, the Utes still can go out and get speed from outside the LDS market.

We don't like Utah, but we can't dismiss them and the success they have had with their current recruiting model.

BYU has a bigger pool of LDS players from which to form their core and they have an exceptional track record with LDS quarterbacks. BYU's model isn't made for speed, but there are very encouraging signs that speed is getting better from within the current model.

That seems especially encouraging from the most recent list of commitments the Cougars have lined up for the 2010 class.

Here they are alphabetically.

Ross Apo...WR, 6-4, 195, The Oakridge School, TX
Jordan Black, OL 6-7, 235, Alta HS, UT
Algernon Brown, RB, 6-1, 205, Skyline HS, UT
Tayo Fabuluje, OT, 6-5, 255, The Oakridge School, TX
Alani Fua, LB 6-5, 210, Oaks Christian HS, CA
Kori Gaines, DB, 5-9, 170, Grayson HS, GA
Jake Heaps...QB, 6-2, 195, Skyline HS, WA
Hauoli Jamora, DL, 6-2, 230, Kahuku HS, UT
Jordan Johnson, DB, 5-10, 175, Brooks School, MA
Tuni Kanuch...DL, 6-1, 285, Bingham HS, UT
Bronson Kaufusi, DL, 6-6, 225, Timpview HS, UT
Teu Kautai, LB, 6-1, 200, The Oakridge School, TX
Collin Keoshian, LB, 6-2, 225, Santa Clarita Christian, CA
A.J. Moore...RB, 5-10, 190, Murrieta Valley HS, CA
Manu Mulitalo, OL, 6-3, 305, Granger HS, UT
Joey Owens, LB, 6-2, 215, Pleasant Grove HS, UT
Drew Phillips, RB, 6-0, 185, Boaz HS, AL
Graham Rowley, OL, 6-4, 270, Waialua HS, HI

Bryan Sampson, TE, 6-4, 210, Pleasant Grove HS, UT
Kona Schwenke, DL, 6-5, 210, Kahuku HS, HI
Zac Stout...LB, 6-2, 220, Oaks Christian HS, CA
Sae Tautu, LB, 6-3, 215, Lone Peak HS, UT
Travis Tuiloma, DL, 6-3, 290, Washburn Rural HS, KS
Blair Tushaus, OL, 6-2, 270, Notre Dame Prep, AZ

In the recruiting classes of the last two years, BYU signed only three non-LDS high school players. They signed O'Neill Chambers and Garrett Nicholson in 2008 and Cody Hoffman from the 2009 class.

In the current list of commits, there are already 5 non-LDS prospects. They include Tayo Fabuluje, Kori Gaines, Jordan Johnson, Drew Phillips and Blair Tushaus.

The top headliners of this prospective class remain the same. Jake Heaps is a human headline. If there is a quarterback accolade, he has it, or soon will, when it comes to high school football.

Bronson Kaufusi has emerged as a national-caliber recruit and has the talent to qualify for that assessment.

He will get a chance to show his stuff this Friday when his Timpview Thunderbirds take on Pleasant Grove HS. The Vikings have at least 8 Division I recruits, including two that have said they will sign with the Cougars in Bryan Sampson and Joey Owens.

We still maintain that the commit for the coming class that will have the most immediate impact on the field will be Ross Apo. He can and will play right away.

TELEVISION TIMETABLE

BYU vs. Oklahoma

Saturday, Sept 5 at Arlington
Kickoff: 5:00 pm Mountain Time
TV: ESPN

BYU vs. Tulane

Saturday, Sept 12 at New Orleans
Kickoff: 1:30 pm Mountain Time
TV: ESPN2

BYU vs. Florida State

Saturday, Sept 19 at Provo
Kickoff: 5:00 pm Mountain Time
TV: Versus

BYU vs. Colorado State

Saturday, Sept 26 at Provo
Kickoff: 4:00 pm Mountain Time
TV: The Mtn

BYU vs. Utah State

Friday, Oct 2 at Provo
Kickoff: 7:00 pm Mountain Time
TV: The Mtn

BYU vs. UNLV

Saturday, Oct 10 at Las Vegas
Kickoff: 8:00 pm Mountain Time
TV: The Mtn

BYU vs. San Diego State

Saturday, Oct 17 at San Diego

Kickoff: 4:00 pm Mountain Time

TV: The Mtn

BYU vs. TCU

Saturday, Oct 24 at Provo

Kickoff: 5:30 pm Mountain Time

TV: Versus

BYU vs. Wyoming

Saturday, Nov 7 at Laramie

Kickoff: Noon Mountain Time

TV: The Mtn

BYU vs. New Mexico

Saturday, Nov 14 at Albuquerque

Kickoff: Noon Mountain Time

TV: The Mtn

BYU vs. Air Force

Saturday, Nov 21 at Provo

Kickoff: 1:30 pm Mountain Time

TV: CBS C

BYU vs. Utah

Saturday, Nov 28 at Provo

Kickoff: 3:00 pm Mountain Time

TV: CBS C and The Mtn