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COUGARS' COMPLIANCE QUESTIONABLE AFTER 42-35 WIN OVER UNLV

The BYU compliance office will be busy this coming week checking on the NCAA eligibility of Cougar defenders who participated in BYU's 42-35 win over UNLV last Saturday afternoon in LaVell Edwards Stadium.

You may remember there was some question on Harvey Unga's eligibility before the TCU game a week ago because of his participation in a family flag football game.

Flag football is the best way to describe what was shown by the BYU defense against UNLV.

If playing flag football is a no-no, expect the plane to Fort Collins to be half empty when it departs this coming Friday.

If BYU is going to brag loudly about their two consecutive shutouts of UCLA and Wyoming earlier in the year, then they need to at least mutter something under their breath about the two most recent games where they gave up 67 points to TCU and UNLV.

In fairness to the BYU defense, they have played hard in all 8 games this season. It wasn't until they faced a couple of quarterbacks that could actually complete passes that they have been exposed.

Muttering

We will do the muttering for BYU when it comes to defense. For the second consecutive week, the Cougars have given up 400 plus yards. It was 410 against TCU and 463 against UNLV.

Against TCU, the Frog defense was too good for the BYU to counter and keep the Cougars in the game. That is what the best defense in the Mountain West Conference will do to teams.

The UNLV defense looks to be in a dead head for dead last in the league alongside BYU.

That explains the Cougar offense being able to move up and down the field as easily as UNLV did against BYU.

How about these flag football numbers?

BYU totaled 454 yards of total offense with 209 yards rushing and 245 yards passing.

As previously mentioned, UNLV had 463 total yards with 112 on the ground and 351 in the air.

Max Hall completed 34-31 passes and threw for four touchdowns. They included an eight-yard toss to Andrew George, a 20-yard scoring throw to O'Neill Chambers, a 1-yard connection to Fui Vakapuna, and a 6-yard pitch and catch to Dennis Pitta.

Austin Collie didn't catch a touchdown pass, but once again, he led the Cougars in receiving with 7 catches for 113 yards. He also ran the opening kickoff back 75 yards to set up BYU's first score.

Ground

On the ground, Unga led the Cougars with 84 yards rushing on 19 carries. Vakapuna also had his best day rushing the ball this season with 71 yards on just 9 tries.

Just like baseball, a bloop single looks just like a line drive in the box score and BYU's defensive deficiencies don't show up in the conference standings.

BYU is now 7-1 on the year and 3-1 in conference play.

This week presents a good news, bad news scenario for the Cougars when they travel to Fort Collins to take on the Rams of CSU.

The good news is that CSU doesn't throw the ball with the same proficiency that Omar Clayton did for UNLV. CSU's quarterback, Billy Farris, is only averaging 201 yards passing per game. He is also not a serious run threat.

BYU will have to load up to stop the run in general and Gartre Johnson in particular. Johnson is averaging 4.6 yards per carry for 88 yards per game.

The Rams are coming off a 38-34 road win over San Diego State Saturday night.

That makes them 4-4 overall and 2-2 in MWC play.

Bad News

The bad news for BYU in facing the Rams is that this game is on the road.

BYU has been very average to date in their three road games. They barely beat a pathetic Washington Husky team, looked lethargic against another pathetic team in Utah State and were thoroughly thrashed at TCU.

The Rams' three wins have all been at home, where they had little trouble in beating UNLV and made a game of it with TCU before falling 13-7.

We expect to see actual tackle football in this contest and call it BYU 24 CSU 21.

LEAKING OIL AND DEFENSIVE DIMINISHING RETURNS

Years ago I had a car that used oil. I didn't care. It ran and it only took a quart of oil every time I filled up.

Gas was cheap enough in those days that it didn't matter.

When it started to take two quarts per fill up I became a little concerned. When oil cost as much as gas, I got rid of the car. It was the law of diminishing returns.

BYU has sprung an oil leak defensively and so far the Cougar offense is still able compensate for the leaks and liability with some high octane gas. That has kept the Cougar car and win column filled up with more wins than losses.

If those leaks and losses start to get worse, then it is time to admit that there are some serious diminishing returns taking place with BYU's defense.

Here are a few observations we see when it comes to the Cougars' defense:

1. Bronco Mendenhall was hired by Gary Crowton to rejuvenate the defense that Crowton inherited and that was run by Ken Schmidt.

What we originally saw was a 3-3-5 defensive that liked to try and pressure and confuse offenses.

What we see now is a defense that has gone 360 degrees and retuned to the same defense that Schmidt ran. It is designed to keep everything in front of them and hope the opposing offense will eventually make a mistake.

2. In baseball, teams are not very good if they are weak up the middle. The same holds true for BYU and its defense. BYU is not very good because they are very ordinary up the middle.

In Mendenhall's first three years, he had middle linebackers in Cameron Jensen and Kelly Poppinga that could make plays.

That is not the case now. Middle linebackers are now whiffing on tackles.

As weak as the Cougars are in the middle with their linebacker play, they are even weaker in the middle with their safeties.

Despite some fans expressing concern with BYU cornerbacks, a bigger concern should be the play of the safeties.

BYU's corners are ordinary, but they always have been and always will be in the future.

There will be no corners that can press receivers and cover one-on-one.

The problem is accentuated when BYU has safeties that can't cover either. Now teams spread the field and extreme mismatches are readily apparent.

That is the case now and why Quinn Gooch is sorely missed.

Until BYU can strengthen itself up the middle, they will continue to have problems.

3. The defensive line is playing well.

4. When will the middle of BYU's back eight improve?

Based on the returning roster for 2009, it doesn't look like it will be anytime soon.

If there were players that could make it better now, you would think they would already be on the field.

At safety, we expect to see more of Andrew Rich this season.

With both David Tafuna and Kellen Fowler graduating, Rich should be one of the safeties next year.

If BYU's history of having ordinary corners stays the course, then look for coaches to move Scott Johnson to safety next year and plug in anybody else at corner.

We expect that somebody to be Brandon Bradley.

From our perspective, it is the safeties and not the corners that should concern Cougar fans the most.

5. Here is a look at the returning 2009 roster of defensive backs, returning missionaries and recent db recruiting commits. Again, if it could be fixed from these players, it would have already have happened.

Brandon Howard, Brandon Bradley, Garrett Nicholson, Brannon Brooks, G Pittman, Cameron Comer, Lolo Tenifa, Scott Johnson, Andrew Rich, Steven Thomas, Gary Nagy, Ryan Love, Jordan Pendleton, Tana Uyema, Byron Putnam, Travis Uale, Shiloah Te'o, Blake Morgan. Missionaries who might help include Rhen Brown, Robbie Buckner, Mike Hague. Commits include Craig Bills, Trevor Bateman, Jray Galea'i.

6. Here is a look at the returning 2009 roster and missionaries and potential recruits that BYU can look to try and shore up the middle linebacker spot.

Matt Bauman, Shawn Doman, Matt Ah You, Terrance Hooks, Brandon Ogletree (returning from mission) Iona Pritchard and Spencer Hadley will likely leave on missions after this season. Other linebacker missionaries who could help down the road include, Tyler Beck, Austen Jorgensen, Aveni Leung-Wai. BYU has no middle linebacker commits, but obviously, if they could land Manti Te'o, it would be an immediate upgrade for this position.

STUFF AND FLUFF

BCS Flame Is Still Flickering, But Barely...After TCU threw gallons of cold water on BYU's BCS

flame, it appeared to be all but extinguished.

As they say in baseball, however, BYU is still not mathematically eliminated from BCS contention.

Currently ranked No. 20 in the most recent BCS standings, all the Cougars have to do is advance to at least a No. 12 ranking and have no other non-BCS teams in front of them in that same sorting system and they are in a BCS bowl game.

Mathematically speaking, it is still possible, but not very probable.

There currently are five non-BCS teams ahead of the Cougars. They include Utah at No. 10, Boise State at No. 11, TCU at No. 13, Ball State at No. 16 and Tulsa at No. 17.

If Utah defeats TCU in Salt Lake City and the Cougars win out and then beat the Utes on Nov. 22, that will put BYU ahead of both the Utes and Frogs in the BCS standings.

What the Cougars still need, however, is for some help in finding teams that can beat unbeaten Boise State, Ball State and Tulsa.

Ball State has four games remaining against Northern Illinois, Miami of Ohio, Central Michigan and Western Michigan. They also would have a MAC championship game to play.

Tulsa has Arkansas, Houston, Tulane and Marshall remaining on their schedule. Only Tulane is at home. The Golden Hurricane also will have a Conference-USA championship game to play.

Boise State will be the most difficult team for BYU to overtake. The Broncos have no WAC conference championship game to deal with and only have gimme games remaining against New Mexico State, Utah State, Idaho, Nevada and Fresno State.

BYU ONLY CONCERNED ABOUT THEMSELVES...When it comes to game preparation for opponents, the BYU mantra is that they don't worry about their opponents, but only are concerned about themselves and their own execution.

BYU even admits that their offense is not very complex or challenging, but believes that if they execute the few plays they have, they will be successful.

You can't argue with success. A 29-5 record over the last two and a half years is the epitome of success.

We still wonder how it would be if the Cougars actually put in a few new wrinkles offensively on occasion to see how opposing defenses handle it.

The last three games, New Mexico, TCU and UNLV all showed a change-of-pace look offensively with direct snaps to some of their best athletes.

Utah has had that approach for the last few years with the ball going directly to Matt Asiata in the power running game and to backup qb Corbin Louks for a nice option look.

We think the same thing could benefit BYU offensively and cause opponents some preparation headaches.

Just a thought, but why not use Stephen Covey with a few direct snaps in a game with some kind of option look? Let him run and then show a pass occasionally. He is as fast or faster than any current BYU running back and has an option background.

It's not like you would burn any eligibility for a few plays because Covey has already redshirted.

If BYU is not going to take advantage of his offensive skills, then the sooner they get him to the defensive backfield, the better off the Cougars will be.

Just a thought, but wouldn't it occasionally be nice for BYU to show something new to opponents to make them think?

CHAMPS AND CHALLENGED...BYU's women soccer team captured its first outright regular season championship since 2002 this past Saturday with a 3-0 win over Air Force.

The Cougars are 13-5 overall on the season and 6-0 in MWC play.

They have just two games remaining on the schedule before heading to MWC tournament action, and hopefully to an NCAA invite.

BYU will host Weber State Oct 28 and then travel to Wyoming on Sat, Nov 1 against the Cowgirls.

While BYU women's soccer are champs, championship challenged would be a more apt description of the women's volleyball team this season.

It hasn't been pretty, especially for a team that has had a history of so much success.

BYU is currently 10-9 overall and a disappointing 3-6 in MWC action.

THERE COULD BE A "WEISS GUY" IN BYU'S RECRUITING PICTURE...Charlie Weiss, the head coach at Notre Dame, has made two in-person stops at high school games the past two weeks.

Both times he was there to watch and woo recruits that are at the top of BYU's recruiting wish list.

During a bye week, Weiss made the flight from South Bend to Hawaii to see Manti Te'o, the big time linebacker from Punahou HS.

This past week, he stopped in to see Jake Heaps in action. Heaps is the junior quarterback from Skyline HS in Seattle.

Logistically, the Heaps game visit was much easier because the Irish were already in town for their game against Washington.

Notre Dame has offers on the table right now for both Te'o and Heaps.

In other recruiting news, Brad Wilcox, a 6-7, 265 pound LDS offensive lineman from Edmond North HS in Oklahoma, has had an offer on the table from BYU since this past summer.

He now has two other offers from Oregon State and Iowa State. Wilcox will trip to BYU in January and should commit to the Cougars then.

In a look at recruiting in the rear view mirror, BYU football fans were certainly disappointed when Stanley Havili, the talented LDS running back from Salt Lake City, spurned BYU and signed with USC.

The usual cry when the Cougars lose a top LDS prospect to a BCS powerhouse is that the recruit made a mistake and will never see any action at the school because they are loaded with talent.

Havili is certainly seeing action for the Trojans and is a key component to the powerful USC offense as a multi-talented fullback.

MORE BYU BASKETBALL ON TV...Since we published the BYU basketball schedule for this coming season last week and listed the games scheduled to be televised, BYUTV has stepped to the plate and added several more games that can be seen nationally.

Here is the latest update on what BYUTV will show, according to the official BYU athletic website.

Cougar Tipoff, Wed, Oct 29, 7:00 pm

Concordia University, Thu, Nov 6, 7:00 pm

Georgetown College, Tue, Nov 11, 7:30 pm

North Florida, Thu, Nov 20, 7:30 pm

Rice, Fri, Nov 21, 8:30 pm

Cal Poly, Sat, Nov 22, 8:30 pm

Weber State, Wed, Dec 3, 7:00 pm (also shown locally on KJZZ)

Utah State, Sat Dec 6, 5:00 pm (also shown locally on KJZZ)

TELEVISION TIMETABLE

BYU BASKETBALL COUGAR TIPOFF

Wednesday, Oct 29 at Provo

Tipoff: 7:00 pm Mountain Time

TV: BYUTV

BYU vs. Colorado State

Saturday, Nov 1 at Fort Collins

Kickoff: 4:00 pm Mountain Time

TV: Mtn

BYU vs. San Diego State

Saturday, Nov 8 at Provo

Kickoff: Noon Mountain Time

TV: Mtn

BYU vs. Air Force

Saturday, Nov 15 at Colorado Springs

Kickoff: 1:30 pm Mountain Time

TV: CBS C