

HB Arnett's

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COUGARS SET TO DANCE THE TEXAS TWO STEP IN NCAA TOURNEY

BYU is going dancing and they will be doing the Texas Two Step.

Step one was last year in the NCAA basketball tournament when the Cougars were paired with the Aggies of Texas A&M in Anaheim.

Step two also involves the Aggies.

The Aggies and Cougars will be facing each other again this year.

Both drew the same seeds as last season. BYU is an eighth seed and the Aggies are rated as a ninth seed.

The teams are pretty much the same. The big difference is the venue of the game.

It will be in Philadelphia and tips off at 10:30 am Mountain time on Thursday, March 19

Here is how the matchup played out last year.

Texas A&M beat BYU 67-62. They did it with Josh Carter, a 6-7 Aggie wing, torching the Cougars with 26 points. He did it on 6-of-7 three-point shooting in the first half of the game.

In case you forgot about Carter, here is a scary reminder from last week in the Mountain West Conference tournament in Las Vegas.

That was where San Diego State ousted the Cougars from the tourney in the semi-finals 64-62.

Bigger

Think Lorenzo Wade, only bigger.

Just like Carter, Wade lit up BYU with 24 points and BYU never recovered.

We look for BYU to defend the talented Carter better this time around, but make no mistake; he is a major mismatch for BYU and Dave Rose and his staff.

The other area where the Cougars will have to improve dramatically in this rematch is in rebounding.

Texas A&M dominated the boards last year by a 37-25 margin.

For BYU to improve in this department, it will mean that Chris Miles will have to improve.

Last year, Miles played just 11 minutes against the Aggies. He had zero rebounds.

Here is how bad the rebounding was. Jimmer Fredette, along with Trent Plaisted, led the Cougars in rebounds with 5 apiece.

Here is another area in need of improvement the second time around.

BYU needs to find a way to get to the free throw line.

Last year BYU only shot 14 free throws against Texas A&M. To exacerbate those dismal numbers, they made just 50 percent of those attempts.

Line and Ledger

On the other side of the ledger and line, A&M shot just 17 free throws. That means it was a jump shooting game with the Aggies in general, and Josh Carter in particular, hitting a higher percentage of shots than the Cougars.

A&M shot 50 percent from the field and the Cougars could only manage 31.8 percent from the floor. That can't happen again. If it does, BYU will lose again.

Chris Miles and Noah Hartsock have both made some significant improvement in the late stages of the season, but BYU is still not strong enough in the post to pose any serious danger to opponents in the NCAA tourney.

That means for BYU to win, they will have to do so with their outside shooting.

While we still consider Lee Cummond as BYU's best player, we don't expect him to be a big scorer in this game.

His history in big games is one of hiding in the scorebook.

The scoring load will have to come from Jimmer Fredette and Jonathan Tavernari.

Both guys will have to have good shooting and scoring nights. If they don't, BYU will again go down in defeat.

As the jump shots go, so go the Cougars.

Shooting Clip

BYU currently sports a 25-7 record. For the season, BYU is shooting at a .487 clip from the floor and .380 from beyond the arc.

In the seven losses, BYU has shot just .437 from the floor and only .339 from the three point line.

To win, BYU will need to have one of its better shooting games against Texas A&M.

They need to knock down outside shots to keep from getting knocked out of the tournament early.

BYU is an outside shooting team. If they can't do that, they can't win.

BYU's tournament history is not awe inspiring. The last time BYU won an NCAA game was in 1993 when they defeated SMU.

BYU's overall NCAA tournament play record is 11-26. They have lost their last 6 NCAA first round games, losing to Tulane, Cincinnati, Connecticut, Syracuse, Xavier and Texas A&M.

The Aggies finished with a 23-9 record and tied for fourth place in the Big XII conference race.

Common Opponents

BYU and Texas A&M have played two common opponents in Rice and Tulsa. A&M defeated Rice 72-60 at Rice and lost to Tulsa 67-56 in a preseason tournament at South Padre Island in Texas.

BYU beat Rice 83-52 in Provo and defeated Tulsa 74-68 at Tulsa.

Here are what the opposing coaches, Dave Rose and Mark Turgeon of Texas A&M had to say about the matchup.

"My initial reaction is I am a little disappointed...for our league. This was a terrific league and it was as good as it has been. To have one at large berth is a little disappointing", said Rose.

Commenting on the No. 8 seed, Rose said, "I think we were really fortunate. We are real fortunate to get ourselves a good spot. We are playing a familiar team. They lost a few players from last year and so have we. But I think that some times when you get in a tournament situation that familiarity helps your confidence. So we will see what happens."

Turgeon of A&M had this to say about playing BYU in the first round for the second year in a row,

“That’s really surprising. One, we’re just really glad we’re in, but to play the same team with the exact same seeds...the NCAA usually doesn’t do that so when I saw their name come up I thought that it wasn’t us because I thought we were right around the 8-9-10 line. It takes a little bit away from it, I’m sure they felt the same way,” said Turgeon.

“We’re a different team, we lost 4 of our top 8 players from that team. I know they lost their big kid in the middle. We know who they got. Cumard was a tough guard for us last year. Fredette had a good game against us and Tavernari will be a tough match up for us. He’s a Singletary type (Mike Singletary scored 43 points in leading Texas Tech to a 88-83 win over A&M in the first round of the Big XII tourney last week), not to bring up any bad memories, but he can really shoot it.”

“I didn’t think the NCAA would have the same first round matchup as last year. They just don’t do that. But, that’s what it is. It’s in a different location, a little further from their home. Philadelphia is a great city. A month ago it didn’t look like we’d be in, so to be in as a 9 shows what we’ve accomplished down the stretch”, concluded Turgeon.

COUGARS MAKE FINAL FOUR

You don’t often hear BYU and the words “Final Four” in the same sentence, but this year appears to be special for the Cougars.

BYU is only one of four non-BCS conference basketball teams to receive an at-large bid to the NCAA basketball tournament.

BYU joins Xavier, Butler and Dayton as one of the privileged few to get an invite to the BCS ball.

The Cougars will get a perfunctory dance with Texas A&M in Philadelphia. They will get some nice photos to take home to their family and fans to prove that they were able to rub shoulders with the elite and effete of college basketball.

They will also get a nice parting-gift check for their appearance at this country club social function, but by no means will they get an invitation of membership to join the club.

BYU being invited is a nice token, and takes a little public relations heat off the BCS boys when they compile the guest list, but you know you are still an outsider.

We don’t claim to be a geneticist, but we know how it works.

Those with similar DNA and dollars take care of their own to make sure those dollars stay in the same gene pool and bottom lines of the BCS country club membership.

Mutant

On a rare occasion a mutant will crop up and spoil the party like George Mason did a few years ago, but it is considered a freakish occurrence and not what the BCS family patriarchs had planned.

Family comes first. They take care of their own.

In football, it is all about the BCS family. In basketball, the nomenclature is nicer, but the same principles apply. Families take care of their own and make sure the money monopoly stays in the BCS bloodlines.

You may think it is totally unfair, but it is factual. If you don’t believe it, check out your will and see if my name appears anywhere in it.

I didn’t think so. Despite the fact that I am a decent dancer and conversationalist, I don’t have the right DNA to deserve any of your family dollars.

That is how it works in life and NCAA football and basketball.

BYU usually has no problem being considered as an invited outsider to the BCS balls, but until they alter their genetic make up and conference alignment, they are never seriously considered to go very deep on the dance card because of their DNA deficiencies.

Partner

Texas A&M is the designated dancing partner for the Cougars from the BCS invitation committee again this year. They will be charged with making the Cougars feel welcome and as if they belong. They will be hospitable and keep BYU faithful hopeful that things have changed, but in the end, it is the Aggies' job to make sure BYU gets its one and done dance and doesn't become another George Mason mutant and stay around long enough to dilute the DNA and dollar pool.

Those are the facts as we see them athletically, genetically and financially. If you disagree, that will make me extremely happy. It means there might be a chance that I could be considered as a beneficiary of your will and family fortune.

I will wait for the call from your attorney to let me know when the reading of that will takes place. Meanwhile, I can't deny my own die-hard DNA as a Cougar fan.

That is why I have waited patiently for the Cougars to dance deep in the tournament and hope this is the year that BYU becomes a money-making mutant in the NCAA tournament.

This is the year. I can feel it in my die-hard Cougar DNA, but not my dollars.

My DNA tells me the Cougars are a lock for at least a sweet sixteen performance. My dollars and the fact that I have not wagered any of the same, tell me the opposite.

I may be a die-hard, but I am not dumb. I need to save those dollars for my family, just like the BCS boys do.

WOULD YOU TAKE GUARD PLAY OR POST PLAY?

The NCAA tournament axiom says that good guard play is what it takes to win games in the prestigious tourney.

That should bode well for BYU this time around because, in our opinion, BYU has its best guards in years.

Jimmer Fredette has proven that he can create his own shot and is the first Cougar guard in what seems like forever that can penetrate and get to the front of the rim.

He gives Dave Rose and the Cougars a legitimate chance to score when all other sets and options have broken down.

While BYU has made a case for itself that it can win a piece of the conference with good guard play, Utah has proven that one very good post player can also take you to the Promised Land.

Luke Nevill was recently named the MWC offensive and defensive player of the year.

In case you missed it, Lee Cummond and Jimmer Fredette were also selected to the MWC all conference first team.

Nevill simply carried a roster of role players to a piece of the conference regular season crown and MWC post season tourney.

It is a familiar Utah story. When the Utes have a dominant NBA caliber big man in the middle, they win, regardless of who is coaching.

Coaching seems to not be relevant. With Andrew Bogut was playing, Ray Giaccolletti took the Utes to the sweet sixteen.

After Bogut left for the NBA, Giaccolletti was subsequently let go.

Utah has too much pride and face to save with Jim Boylen as their coach, but we can guarantee that Utah will not be nearly as productive or as good next season without Nevill in the post.

While guard play is needed, we still think the game is won inside in the post.

It isn't a coincidence that when Utah had all of its basketball glory, they did it with NBA centers Bogut and Mike Doleac.

We think they will have another fling with good fortune this year with Nevill, another first round NBA center.

Utah was given a 5 seed. The NCAA likes to say they base it on a team's body of work. We think it is just based on one big body; Luke Nevill.

The bottom line? We think that if coaches had to choose between a good post or a good guard, they would take the post a vast majority of the time.

Good guards are plentiful. A good-to-great center and low post scorer and defender are very hard to find.

SPRING FOOTBALL BEGINS THIS WEEK

Football is still the cash cow in BYU's athletic department. Despite the current excitement for Cougar basketball and its NCAA invite, it is football that butters the BYU bread.

Because of BYU basketball, the butter will have to wait a week before we churn it out for spring football drills which begin this week in Provo.

Bronco Mendenhall and his staff will spend the next few weeks looking to re-tool the offensive line and finding some safties and linebackers that can play and contribute.

We will have details and designs on how the Cougars expect to do that this spring beginning with our issue for next week.

SPRING SPORTS

It is still cold in Provo, but the BYU baseball team has heated up since they started playing games in front of the home crown.

The Cougars have gone 8-2 in their recent home stand. That puts BYU at 10-7 overall on the year and at 2-1 in conference play.

The two league wins came over Utah as BYU took two of three games from the Utes this past weekend. BYU defeated the Utes 4-1 in Salt Lake City, lost 15-13 in Provo and closed out the series with an 11-3 win in Provo.

In softball, BYU is still having some early-season inconsistencies as evidenced by their current 16-13 record.

In track, the story is much more upbeat. On the women's side of the oval, the Lady Cougars produced two national champions in the recently completed NCAA Indoor Championship in College Station, Texas.

Freshman Lacey Cramer won the 800-meter race and joined fellow teammate Amy Menlove, who won the pentathlon national championship the day before.

It marked the first time that the BYU women were able to capture two national titles in the same meet.

BYU finished third in the overall championship meet. The Cougars racked up 33 points to trail only Tennessee with 42 points and Texas A&M with 37.

On the men's side, things weren't so rosy. BYU finished No. 41 in the team standings.

TELEVISION TIMETABLE

BYU vs. Texas A&M

Thursday, March 19 at Philadelphia

Tipoff: 10:30 Mountain Time

TV: CBS