

HB Arnett's
COUGAR SPORTSLINE

801 372 0819

hbarnett@fiber.net and hbarnett@xmission.com

PO Box 50424 Provo, Utah 84605

Vol. 29, Issue 16 – November 17, 2008

[Click Here To Order Or Renew Your Subscriptions](#)

COUGAR OFFENSE TOO MUCH FOR FALCONS IN 38-24 WIN

It was too much Austin Collie, Dennis Pitta and Max Hall and just enough Cougar defense in just the right spots.

That formula gave BYU its 10th win of the season, a 38-24 victory over the Air Force Falcons.

It also was the Cougars first win of the year against a team with a winning record. More importantly, it was a win on the road and a nice tune up for what to expect this week against Utah in Salt Lake City.

With one regular season game left, BYU is now 10-1 on the year and 6-1 in MWC play.

This game looked a lot like the last few games.

It saw plenty of Hall to Collie and Pitta and just enough of Harvey Unga to swamp a gutsy and gritty, but not great, Air Force defense.

Collie continued his torrid streak as a receiver. He had 7 catches for 130 yards and two touchdowns. His final was a 45-yard TD clincher for the Cougars late in the fourth quarter.

Nine Games

Collie now has nine consecutive games of 100 plus yards in receptions and is the new single season record holder with 1185 yards this year.

Pitta also had another big day with nine catches for 113 yards. Unga had 19 carries for 88 yards and also scored two touchdowns on short bursts of 1 and 2 yards.

Hall had two turnovers with a pick that came off a deflected pass and a fumble trying to get a first down.

Other than those two miscues and a couple of could-have-been interceptions that were dropped by Air Force defenders, Hall completed 28-of 37 passes for 354 yards and two touchdowns.

The BYU defense didn't look good on the stat sheet giving up 421 yards of offense to the Falcons, but they picked their spots and made some key defensive stops early in the third quarter that allowed the Cougars to come back from a 14-10 halftime deficit and basically win the game in the third quarter with a 21-point outburst. The Cougars amassed 480 yards of total offense.

Injuries

BYU lost three key players to injury in the game. Ray Feinga, the outstanding guard, left early in the first half with a back strain. Andrew Rich had his bell run early in the second half and never returned, and on BYU's last drive, Dennis Pitta suffered a MCL sprain of his knee.

With Utah up next, it will be an all-hands-on-board game. If a player can walk and breathe and is in no danger of exacerbating an existing bump, bruise or broken bone, he will play against the Utes.

UTAH GAME WILL BE DECIDED AT THREE POSITIONS

The best objective minds in college football think Utah will win the upcoming game between the Utes and BYU.

Las Vegas odds makers make a living being accurate and objective. They have made the Utes a 6-point opening-line favorite.

We have our point spread also and it is at three.

We see this game being determined by three key positions.

It starts at quarterback.

If Max Hall can get decent protection and continue his productive passing, BYU has a shot.

Hall has been superlative this season and is the reason that BYU is 10-1.

He certainly has some nice offensive weapons to complement him in receiver Austin Collie, tight end Dennis Pitta and running back Harvey Unga, but let's be honest; without Hall BYU would be lucky to have six or seven wins.

BYU can't out defense Utah. If the Cougars win, it will have to be with a big offensive outing from Hall.

The Ute defense is very good, but it is not in the same league as the defense of TCU. We also think that you can throw the ball on the Utes, if you can give Hall some protection.

Interesting

Here is where it gets interesting.

In the Hall versus Brian Johnson match up, both have demonstrated abilities to deliver touchdowns when the game is on the line.

Johnson's two signature wins came when he had game-winning drives against Oregon State and TCU.

Hall had to deliver touchdowns to seal the deal against UNLV, CSU and Air Force.

Hall has the edge in passing. He has completed 279-of-390 passes for 3424 yards. He has thrown 34 touchdowns and been picked off 8 times.

Johnson has completed 211-of-317 passes for 2333 yards and 20 touchdowns with 9 picks.

If this was a seven-on-seven passing league game, we would make Hall a prohibitive favorite. Of course, it is a real football game where BYU defenders have to make real tackles in the open field against Johnson who can tuck the ball and go.

Here is what we see happening.

We actually see the BYU defense playing one of their better games. We expect them to keep the ball in front of them and bend but not break.

Utah's Strength

Unfortunately, that bend, but not break, philosophy plays right into Utah's biggest strength.

The Utes are hands down the better team when it comes to kicking.

They have an NFL kicker in Louie Sakoda. Even if the Cougars can manufacture some key stops, anything from the BYU's 30-40 yard line and in will still result in points for Utah.

Sakoda is 19-of-21 in field goals made. His only two misses came against Air Force and were from 48 and 54 yards out.

He is perfect from 47 yards in.

To his credit, Mitch Payne has also had a good year kicking for the Cougars. He has only missed 2

field goals and is 9-of-11 on the year.

Payne has been good, but Sakoda has been great.

The key match up, in our opinion, is between Justin Sorensen of BYU and Ben Vroman of Utah.

They both handle kickoffs for their respective teams.

Sorensen has been unable to consistently kick the ball into the endzone on kickoffs for the Cougars. He was touted for his strong leg and recruited to give the Cougars favorable field position in games.

Hasn't Happened

Frankly, that hasn't happened...yet.

Vroman, on the other hand is money at putting the ball in and out of the end zone for the Utes, especially in Salt Lake.

What's the big deal with kickoffs and field position?

Even with a touchback and the ball brought out to the twenty, the Utes only have to drive the ball 50-yards to the opponents' 30 yard line to almost be guaranteed a score from Sakoda.

Any runbacks, beyond the 20, on short kickoffs is a big bonus for Utah.

On paper and on the field, Utah is a much better defensive team. On paper and on the field, BYU is a better offensive team.

We can definitely see why the Utes are a six-point pick.

What we can't see and nobody else can either, is how this game will play out.

Despite what they say publicly, the pressure has to be enormous for the Utes. They are playing for \$4.5 million dollars, even after having to share a BCS fistful of money.

Move The Ball

As good as the Ute defense is and has been, both TCU and Oregon State had little trouble moving the ball. They just couldn't score.

As good as Brian Johnson has been this season, he still can be erratic with his throwing.

Nobody likes to mention the "choke" word at Utah, but despite public utterances to the contrary, Utah coaches and players both know that a loss to BYU would certainly fit that description.

Speaking of coaches, since Bronco Mendenhall took over the BYU program, Utah coaches have seemed to be more intense and innovative in game plans and strategy.

BYU was better in players. That is why the Cougars are now 2-1 against the Utes under Mendenhall.

This season is different. For the first time in four years, Mendenhall has finally admitted that the Utah game is not just another game on the schedule.

It will be interesting to see how a declared "big game" by Mendenhall, finally plays out.

Here is how we see it.

The Utes have not allowed any team to score 30 plus points against them this season. Oregon State came close with 28.

For the Cougars to win, they have to get to at least 30.

We don't see it. We call it Utah 34 BYU 27.

The Utes are currently 11-0 on the year and ranked No. 8 in the AP poll and No. 7 in the latest BCS rankings

Kickoff is set for 4 pm local time and the game will only be seen on the Mtn.

FLUFF AND STUFF

BCS BOUNCING...You need a GPS tracking system to follow BYU in the BCS rankings since they were first released on Oct 19.

The Cougars have been all over the map.

They started at No. 21, move a notch down to No. 20, then jumped dramatically to No. 15 in week three of the rankings.

That was followed by a slip to No. 17 a week ago and just this week with BYU's first win over a winning team, they were rewarded with a three spot bump to No. 14.

We still hold to our scenario that a win over Utah and a Boise State loss to Nevada in Reno this week, will get the Cougars in a BCS bowl.

A year ago, BYU finished No. 17 in the BCS standings during their final release in early December before bowl games.

THIS WAS MWC TEAMS CHANCE...If the other teams in the MWC didn't take down the Cougars this year, they missed their best chance for a long time to come.

This was a year when the defense was vulnerable and BYU had to face all the upper tier league teams on the road. That would be Utah, Air Force and TCU.

Next year, with an offense that returns locked and loaded and with a defense that will have nine months to find answers at middle linebacker and safety, the Cougars' MWC window of vulnerability is closing fast.

As we mentioned last week, most BYU fans, after the TCU game, started feel like this is a rebuilding year. Depending on what happens this week, BYU will be either 11-1 or 10-2 in a "down" season.

That should tell you all you need to know about where the BYU football program is now.

CACHE VALLEY IS PRODUCING SOME BIG TIME QUARTERBACK CHEESE...BYU hopefully has learned their lesson.

A few years back they locked on early to James Lark and had him pegged and committed as their No. 1 qb guy for that year.

Before that high school football season was over, Riley Nelson, out of Logan HS, turned out to be the better prospect. BYU was late to the party and already had a vested interest in Lark.

Nelson signed with Utah State and will be transferring to BYU for next season after missionary service to Spain.

The point is that BYU went for the athlete and arm instead of production. Lark may well be a big-time qb for the Cougars, but our money is on Nelson. Lark was more athletic and has a stronger arm than Nelson, but the Logan product is more like Max Hall.

As Yogi Berra said, it is déjà vu all over again.

BYU is locked in on Jake Heaps, whom many consider the best qb prospect in next year's national recruiting class. So do we.

BYU needs this kid and will be lucky to get him. He is phenomenal as a junior and should be spectacular next season as a high school senior.

We bring this up because there is another quarterback coming out of Cache Valley that BYU should put on their board and make room for.

We are talking about Alex Kuresa, a sophomore qb at Mountain Crest HS in Hyrum.

Yes, he is the younger and much smaller brother of former Cougar offensive lineman Jake Kuresa.

His athletic bloodlines are not in question. He is also the cousin or recent BYU basketball signee Tyler Haws.

Here is the deal. As a sophomore who looks like he may have trouble spelling puberty, let alone reaching it at this point in his career, his arm is more lollipop than launcher at this stage. Yet, he made every throw and every needed play against a vaunted Timpview defense.

At fifteen, his arm strength and size should have a huge upside.

All we know is that the kid single handedly picked apart a Timpview defense that has at least four or five division I recruits and two of those recruits are in the Timpview secondary and coveted by the Cougars.

The most points any team this season had scored against Timpview was 14 points. Kuresa made the T-Bird defense look silly with his playmaking ability and clutch throws despite his Mountain Crest team being outmanned and outathleted and losing in the closing seconds 35-37 to Timpview.

Kuresa finished with 344 yards passing and 4 touchdowns and also ran for 42 yards and a touch-down on 11 carries.

Here's the deal. Nelson is the real deal. Heaps is the real deal and what we thought was just a nice story last season when Kuresa was the starting qb as a freshman, has, in our opinion, turned into the real deal.

Even with Heaps, BYU needs to find a place for this Kuresa kid and create at least a two year eligibility gap and space between him and Heaps.

A gray shirt, an LDS mission and redshirt year would do the trick, but playmaking LDS quarterbacks only come around every so often. You have to do what you can to make sure your roster is filled with them.

CUMMARD SHOWS A LOT OF VEGAS IN WIN OVER LONG BEACH STATE... If you are long time subscribers to the newsletter, you know that we brashly predicted five years ago, after watching Lee Cumnard in AAU action in Las Vegas summers for two years, that he would be the next Danny Ainge.

It took a while for us to even be in the ball park with the prediction, but we felt a little vindicated last year when he was selected as co-MVP of the Mountain West Conference.

We feel even better now that Cumnard looked Ainge-like by scoring 36 against LBSU in BYU's 75-65 season opening win over the 49ers.

The Cougars will be back in action this week with a game at Pepperdine on Tuesday and three games in three nights in Provo against North Florida on Thursday, Rice on Friday and Cal Poly on Saturday.

It is way early and without the benefit of watching BYU perform on the road, but our assessment is that this will be a very good team.

They are stronger and deeper at the guard line than they were a year ago and will have more front court scoring prowess.

TELEVISION TIMETABLE

BYU vs. North Florida

Thursday, Nov 20 at Provo

Tipoff: 7:30 pm Mountain Time

TV: BYUTV

BYU vs. Rice

Friday, Nov 21 at Provo

Tipoff: 8:30 pm Mountain Time

TV: BYUTV

BYU vs. Cal Poly

Sat, Nov 22 at Provo

Tipoff: 8:30 pm Mountain Time

TV: BYUTV

BYU vs. Utah

Saturday, Nov 22 at Salt Lake

Kickoff: 4:00 pm Mountain Time

TV: Mtn