

HB Arnett's
COUGAR SPORTSLINE

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BAD NEWS, GOOD NEWS FROM FALL CAMP

Here's the bad news from BYU football camp.

It consists of four grueling weeks for players and four long weeks of anticipation for fans.

The good news for fans and players alike is that the first week is over and there are just three more left.

After one week of fall camp, here is our bad news, good news report.

Offensive Line

Bad News: BYU has the second best offensive line in the Mountain West Conference.

Good News: That second best offensive line just happens to be BYU's second unit. The best offensive line in the league is BYU's first unit.

Utah is getting unbelievable preseason hype as a contender for conference and country wide honors. They are a very good football team.

Unfortunately for the Utes, BYU is a better team because they have a better offensive line. The Cougars will control the line of scrimmage between the two teams and consequently control the conference.

Quite frankly, BYU's talent and depth on the offensive line is almost an embarrassment of riches.

It was disappointing when Tom Sorensen, the projected starter at center and transfer from Vanderbilt, suffered shoulder problems that will likely keep off the field for 4-6 weeks.

Referring to the Utes again, it was also disappointing a few years back when starting quarterback Bret Elliot went down in the first game with a broken foot, only to see Alex Smith show up and then show off.

That same scenario could be taking place at BYU. Sorensen can play and would have, and still might, but his injury has facilitated an easy transition of movement for Cougar coaches. They switched Dallas Reynolds from left tackle and shifted him to center.

That has opened up a spot for redshirt freshman Matt Reynolds to take the field at the left tackle spot. This is the point of the Bret Elliot-Alex Smith Utah reference.

Sorensen and Elliott are good legitimate Division I players, but Smith, and in our opinion, Matt Reynolds are special.

There is still some battling taking place between Reynolds and R.J Willing for that left tackle spot and a smaller battle between Willing and Dallas Reynolds for the center duties.

Regardless, the bottom line is that BYU has at least 8-9 legitimate linemen with which to work. Give it another two months for a jc transfer, a returned missionary and a new incoming freshman to get in shape physically and mentally and the glut of quality offensive linemen becomes ridiculous.

Christmas never came this early for Cougar offensive line coach Mark Weber.

Here's how the offensive line should look for the opener against Northern Iowa. It will include Dallas Reynolds at center, Ray Feinga and Travis Bright at guards and David Oswald and Matt Reynolds at tackle.

That ladies and gentlemen will be the best offensive line in the Mountain West Conference and one of the top offensive lines west of the Mississippi.

What about that second-best offensive line in the conference? Let's start with R.J. Willing and Garrett Reden. Willing could easily slip in as a starter at center, guard or tackle. He has loads of experience and plenty of talent. Reden saw plenty of action last year until he was injured.

Allow jc transfer Jesse Taufi to adjust to the new schemes and speed of the game at this level and Terrence Brown to try and get somewhat back into playing shape after returning from his mission (Brown started 7 games as a freshman before leaving for two years).

Sorensen will just add to the depth when he finally returns from his injury. In a pinch, you could also use true freshman Brock Stringham and you have the makings of a second unit that other conference coaches would be drooling about.

Defensive Line

Bad News: If this was Olympic swimming, this unit has absolutely no buoyancy. They would sink right to the bottom of the pool. The only thing aquatic about this group are a few nice pass rushing swim moves. BYU's only chance of a medal would be the one they already received from Bronco Mendenhall just before the start of fall camp.

Good News: Football is played on a field and not in a pool. This is one of the better defensive lines we have seen at BYU since the Cotton Bowl.

Almost everybody knows about returning starters Ian Dulan and Jan Jorgensen. They both can play. Jorgensen is a returning all-league player and considered one of the top defenders in the conference.

Not many outside of BYU know that the premier defensive player in the league could be playing between the two returning Cougar starters.

Russell Tialavea, likely won't get the accolades he will deserve by the media and fans, but he will certainly get rave reviews from coaches who have to block him and use special blocking schemes to slow him down.

The junior is back from his knee injury of a year ago and will have an instant impact on opposing offenses. You really won't notice him unless you pay attention, but his presence will be felt at nose guard for BYU.

BYU's second unit defensive line won't be the second best in the league, but there are some good players that can provide depth and even a decent pass rush.

Bernard Afutiti, the jc transfer from California, finally got his paperwork in order and showed up late last week. He has missed the first week of camp and needs to learn the system and assignments, but one thing he won't have to learn is how to pass rush.

Matt Putnam, the 6-7, 240 pounder, has been moved back from linebacker to defensive end and could be used as a designated outside speed rusher.

While he isn't a defensive lineman now, Coleby Clawson, the juco transfer from Snow College, was a defensive end a year ago for the Badgers. He can get up field and into an opponents backfield.

At BYU, he will line up as an outside linebacker. That means he now has more space in which to make his moves and get by a tackle and to the quarterback.

Rushing the passer is something this defensive group should be good at this year.

Others on the defensive line who will see time and play are Brett Denney, Tevita Hola, Rick Wolfley and Mosese Foketi.

Linebackers

Bad News: This group won't be as good as they were last year. In our opinion, there are just too many journeymen type players in the middle and no step up guy to look to inside.

The fact the coaches are talking about how good true freshmen Spencer Hadley and Iona Pritchard are looking, tells us that what is returning in front of them, is a little suspect.

Good News: BYU has a proven player in David Nixon outside and has an extremely talented, but totally inexperienced guy on the other side in Vic So'oto. All he has to do now is prove himself when the "lights go on."

Linebacker play will be a work in progress, but based on the defensive success of the last two seasons, by the time key games against TCU and Utah come around at the end of the season, this should be a competent, but not great unit.

Kicking Game

Bad News: BYU has never had a great kicking game. The Cougars have never had a kicker good enough to carve out more than a cup of coffee on an NFL roster. We don't expect that to change.

When it comes to punting, Lee Johnson actually had a decent NFL career. He is not on the BYU roster this season.

Good News: BYU's kicking and punting games will be better than they were last season.

That isn't saying much. We still expect inconsistency in the field goal department, but we, along with coaches, do expect kickoffs this year to at least be in the same area code as the end zone.

Justin Sorensen is fighting back from a ankle injury on his plant foot that kept the incoming freshman from kicking for five months. He just started kicking again a month ago.

Sorensen and Matt Payne, who is now healthy this season, are dueling for the right to kick field goals. Regardless of who wins that job, we still don't expect to see a great BYU kicking game. It will be better, but it won't be great.

Quarterback

Bad News: Max Hall has just two seasons of eligibility left.

Good News: Max Hall still has two seasons of eligibility left.

Defensive Backs

Bad News: We had a subscriber ask last week what we thought of BYU's defensive backs? We responded that they are the most athletic group as a whole that we have seen at BYU in years.

His retort was, "Based on BYU's defensive back history, that's not saying much."

Good News: We still maintain this is the most athletic defensive back group we have seen at BYU in years.

We also still adhere to our long-time belief that we would rather have talent than experience any day. You can always acquire and develop experience, but you can't coach talent. You have to recruit it.

Our assessment of this group is that it will start off shaky, become solid and before the year is over

be semi-stellar (in comparison with past BYU defensive back standards).

It is good news that when the Cougars take the field against Northern Iowa, there will be only 2 former walkons starting instead of the four that started against UCLA in the Las Vegas Bowl last December.

BYU has already improved by 50% in that regard, in our opinion.

The two former walkons are Kellen Fowler at safety and probably Scott Johnson at boundary corner.

Johnson and Brandon Bradley are still competing for that job, but our money is on Johnson.

Brandon Howard and G Pittman are neck and neck at the other corner, but we expect Howard to get the nod.

David Tafuna is back from his foot injury of last season and he will join Fowler as the other safety.

Andrew Rich is the third guy and will replace and rotate with both Fowler and Tafuna. Rich is a juco transfer from Snow College.

For those who revel in the walkon stories, and we don't, Rich would keep the percentage intact if he replaces Fowler. Rich is playing this season as a walkon.

Running Back

Bad News: Harvey Unga won't have as good of rushing numbers this season as he produced last year.

Good News: Unga will still be a big time player, but last year there was no other reliable tailback to help carry the load. This year, you can add J.J. DiLuigi to the mix and subtract a few yards from Unga's impressive totals of last season.

DiLuigi is a Reno Mahe clone, but stronger and a better inside runner. This could be a very good tailback tandem for the Cougars.

BYU will miss Manase Tonga at fullback. He could block and catch the ball out of the backfield.

After two sub par years, if Fui Vakapuna can finally get back to the form he showed as a freshman and show he can also block and catch out of the backfield, the running game at BYU should still be very good.

Tight End

Bad News: BYU lost a very good tight end that had size, could catch the ball and block. That happened when Vic So'oto switched over from offense to linebacker on defense.

Good News: So'oto won't be missed as a tight end. That says volumes about the talent and depth BYU has at this position.

Dennis Pitta is big and can catch the ball. He can also run with it after the catch. He has enough speed to cause match up nightmares for defensive coordinators.

Andrew George is also a player and will get on the field backing up Pitta and in two tight end-formations.

Wide Receivers

Bad News: BYU took a public relations hit last week when incoming freshman receiver, O'Neil Chambers, popped off on ESPN's web site about Cougar receivers with less talent than he, getting more reps than he was.

His brashness irked some Cougar fans. On the 1 thru 10 "Irked Cougar Fan Public Relations Scale, we gave it a 2. If you want to see what we rate a 6, [click here](#). Something like this would normally rate higher, but, in our opinion, you have to put in the context of BYU-Utah.

Good News: As old time baseball pitcher Dizzy Dean said, “It ain’t braggin’ if you can do it.”

For those younger readers who don’t relate to Dizzy Dean, it was Keyshawn Johnson, the former NFL receiver, who said, “Just give me the ball.”

Chambers can learn BYU football etiquette. He can be taught the BYU and Bronco way, but you can’t teach talent.

He has it.

So does Austin Collie. He still has it, but can’t use it until his stress fracture in his leg heals. If healthy, he will still be the go-to guy.

Michael Reed will be a solid contributor to this receiving corp. Luke Ashworth is making waves with his play while getting reps that normally go to Collie.

This will be a good group and if Collie can get healed and if Chambers can make headlines on the field instead of in the media, Max Hall will have some serious weapons to use.

Recruiting

Bad News: There are still no verbal commitments from top-rated LDS recruits like Manti Teo, Richard Wilson, Latu Heimuli, Brett Thompson, Xavier Su’a Filo, Kyle Van Noy and Steven Fanua.

Good News: While BYU still waits and still recruits the group mentioned above, they continue to add to their commitment list.

The latest was Fono Vakalahi, a 6-4, 320 pound offensive lineman from Bryan HS in Texas.

That brings to 12 the number of commitments the cougars already have on the books for this year’s recruiting campaign.

Vakalahi had an offer on the table from Baylor and was starting to hear from other schools like Texas A&M, UNLV, Hawaii and Virginia Tech.

FOOTBALL FLUFF AND STUFF

Bronco Mendenhall has said that he is implementing a new redshirt policy for the football program.

He will now not make decisions about which players will redshirt until the end of each season.

If a player does not play during one of his early seasons, he now has to prove that he deserves a redshirt year by how hard he works and how he adapts to the team mission statement during the year he doesn’t play.

According to Mendenhall, it is all about earning a redshirt year and it will no longer be a given that a player who doesn’t play early in his career will have a redshirt year to use.

This new philosophy dovetails nicely with all the other principles Mendenhall has inserted into the BYU football program.

In our opinion, it doesn’t hurt either, that if a player doesn’t look like he will ever be a contributor on the field, this also accelerates his passing of eligibility.

The real intent of the new program is to teach accountability and productivity to all players, but, in our opinion, it also helps streamline the normal attrition rate and sifting of non-productive and productive players. This is part of every football program, including BYU and facilitates a continual influx of new talent into the program through the recruiting process.

We are sure that is not the intent of Mendenhall, but it appears to be a nice ancillary product of the new principle.

Adam Timo, the senior star running back from Snow Canyon HS in St. George, will play quarterback for his team this season.

We mentioned last week that the Warriors implemented a spread offense last year. That requires a quarterback who can run. That is what Timo does. It should be interesting, but Timo will be a running

back for the Cougars next year.

TELEVISION TIMETABLE

BYU vs. Northern Iowa

Saturday, Aug 30 at Provo

Kickoff: 4:00 PM Mountain Time

TV: Mtn

BYU vs. Washington

Saturday, Sep 6 at Seattle

Kickoff: 1:00 PM Mountain Time

TV: Fox Sports Northwest and Fox Sports Utah

BYU vs. UCLA

Saturday, Sep 13 at Provo

Kickoff: 1:30 PM Mountain Time

TV: Versus

BYU vs. Wyoming

Saturday, Sep 20 at Provo

Kickoff: 1:00 PM Mountain Time

TV: Mtn

BYU vs. Utah State

Friday, Oct 3 at Logan

Kickoff: TBA

TV: TBA

BYU vs. New Mexico

Saturday, Oct 11 at Provo

Kickoff: 4:00 PM Mountain Time

TV: Mtn

BYU vs. TCU

Thursday, Oct 16 at Fort Worth

Kickoff: 6:00 PM Mountain Time

TV: Versus

BYU vs. UNLV

Saturday, Oct 25 at Provo

Kickoff: Noon Mountain Time

TV: Mtn

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

BYU vs. Utah

Saturday, Nov 22 at Salt Lake
Kickoff: 4:00 PM Mountain Time
TV: Mtn