

HB Arnett's
COUGAR SPORTSLINE

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Utah Next

BYU TAKES TWO GAME LEAD IN MWC RACE

BYU took another big step towards repeating as Mountain West Conference basketball champs this last Saturday when they trounced UNLV in Provo 74-48.

The win puts BYU at a 9-1 record in conference play and a 20-5 mark on the overall season.

The victory also avenged BYU's most embarrassing loss of the season, a 70-4 setback to the Rebels in Las Vegas in early January.

UNLV is still in second place in the league standings, but now is two full games back with an 8-3 record.

BYU's big two of Trent Plaisted and Lee Cummond led the Cougars in avenging the previous loss to the Rebels.

Plaisted had 22 points and Cummond added 18.

Jimmer Fredette came off the bench to play 24 minutes and add 9 points.

The Cougars now will get a chance to all but put the league title on ice this Wednesday when Utah comes to Provo for a key game.

The Utes are on a roll with four straight wins under their belt and a 6-4 conference record. They are 15-8 overall.

The Utes will try and make this a half court game and get the ball down low to their 7-foot post man Luke Nevill.

If BYU has to double the big Australian, the outside shooting of Utes Johnnie Bryant and Lawrence Borha could become a factor.

BYU's 53-50 win in Salt Lake City was a grind it out affair for the Cougars and we expect more of the same this time around.

If the Cougars get by the Utes, it would give them a 10-1 conference mark with just 5 games remaining.

After the Utes, BYU will have little time to catch their breath. The Cougars hit the road for a game with San Diego State on Saturday night, Feb. 23 and then stay on the road to face New Mexico in Albuquerque on Tuesday, Feb 26.

IT'S BOISE STATE, FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE

That's the phrase we used to describe our disappointment with BYU's 73-70 loss to Boise State in Idaho late last December.

How could BYU blow a double digit halftime lead to the Broncos?

It's Boise State, for heaven's sake.

Don't look now, but the Broncos are currently 19-6 on the year and, as of this weekend, hold down first place in the WAC with a half game lead.

Big deal. It's still Boise State, for heaven's sake.

What is a big deal, however, is as of Monday of this week, ESPN's Joe Lunardi, he of bracketology notoriety, had the Broncos in his brackets as a NCAA tournament invite and a 14 seed.

A complete perusal of Lunardi's latest projections, showed that of the five teams that BYU has lost to during this season, all but one are projected as Big Dance participants.

North Carolina will be a 2 seed, according to Lunardi. He currently has Michigan State as a 6 seed. UNLV is pegged as a 10 seed, and as we mentioned, BSU is at a 14 seed.

He currently doesn't have Wake Forest as an invitee, but based on their defeat of No. 2 Duke this past week, don't count the Deamon Deacons out of the dance just yet.

Lunardi also has a couple of teams that BYU has defeated as dancers. He has Louisville as a 4 seed and Lamar currently squeaking in as a 16 seed.

What about BYU? Glad you asked. Lunardi in his latest projection has BYU as a 7 seed and matched up against Ohio State as a 10 seed in an opening round game at Anaheim.

Get Out Your Map

NCAA selections and seedings will be officially made March 16, but sites and dates for the tourney have already been set in stone.

Because of BYU's "No Sunday Play" stance, the available sites and dates in which BYU can play are automatically constricted. BYU's opening round game can only be played at "Thursday-Saturday" sites that feed into the only two "Thursday-Saturday Regional sites at either Phoenix or Charlotte, NC.

Anaheim, Denver, Omaha and Washington DC are the four opening round sites that play on Thursday-Saturday.

Blood Pressure Going Up, But RPI Coming Down

You can bet that Dave Rose and his assistant coaches' blood pressure is going up as the season winds down and games become more critical and intense as league teams jockey for seeding in the upcoming MWC post season tournament in Las Vegas.

While the blood pressure may be rising, BYU's RPI rating is lowering.

That is a very good thing.

As of early this week, heading into the Utah game on Wednesday, the Cougars had an RPI of 29.

RPI is an acronym for Ratings Percentage Index and is a formula used by the NCAA Tournament selection committee to help them rate teams. The lower the RPI, the better the team.

The formula is a little convoluted, but basically 1/4 of the rating is determined by a team's winning percentage, 1/2 of the equation includes a team's opponent's winning percentage and another 1/4 of the formula is made up of an opponents' opponents' winning percentage.

Just look it up on the internet and save yourself the math.

BASKETBALL NAMES AND GAMES

Noah Hartsock...It depends on the kind of shape he can get in by next fall and the start of the 2008-09 season, but BYU will be getting a major offensive force added to the roster when Noah Hartsock,

the 6-8 forward from Bartlesville, Oklahoma enrolls as a freshman.

He will be coming off a two-year LDS Spanish speaking mission in Sandy.

We can make this assessment with more qualification than most BYU fans.

We have actually seen Hartsock play at least 7 games two summers ago in Las Vegas.

The game that impressed us the most was a quarterfinal game against EBO, a loaded AAU team from Fresno.

This team was stacked with talent. Stanford's twin 7-foot towers, Robin and Brook Lopez were on the roster along with Quincy Pondexter, who is currently at Washington.

Hartsock was on a team from Oklahoma that had some nice high school players, but no other Division prospect on its roster.

Hartsock was a scoring machine. He would post up low on the block against the Lopez twins and do a couple of nice up and unders. When EBO started to double him down low, he would use the Jonathan Tavernari step-back fade and nail jumpers over their heads. He has legitimate range out to 20 feet.

Point Guard Pool...Jimmer Fredette is seeing more time at the point because he is the best current option that BYU has to create off the dribble and get to the basket.

Even when he isn't at the point, Fredette still provides the option of taking a defender off the dribble.

BYU is still looking at the juco ranks for a point. If they can find one that they think is significantly better than Morgan or Fredette, we expect them to try and sign him.

Jeremy Olsen...BYU has reportedly offered Jeremy Olsen a scholarship. He is 6-10 and is a junior out of Collin Hills HS in Suwannee, GA. He is LDS, but our opinion is that BYU will have an uphill battle with Utah on this kid.

We watched him play three games this past summer in Las Vegas. He was hard to evaluate because in those three games, he probably only had 15 total touches.

He has a body to be a banger, but he was on a team called the Worldwide Renegades out of Georgia that featured 10 other players who wanted to get out and run and throw it up and rebound.

Olsen isn't athletic enough to play that way.

We also observed in Vegas that he had family in attendance, one of which was wearing a t-shirt that prominently stated, "Friends don't let friends go to BYU"

We aren't holding our breath on this one.

Comparing The Two...While we are talking about players that we have watched at AAU tourneys in Las Vegas this past summer, we were able to get some good looks at two local prospects that were on the same team.

Jace Tevita is a 6-3 guard from Brighton HS who has signed with Utah. He will be a very nice and serviceable player for the Utes.

Charles Abouo is 6-5, and much, much more athletic with a huge upside. He signed with BYU in November and will join the team in the fall. He prepped at Logan HS a year ago.

Abouo has a body like Lorenzo Wade of San Diego State and enough natural athleticism to be a major contributor somewhere down the road for BYU. If he can be more consistent with his outside shooting, he has a chance to be very good for the Cougars after a couple of seasons in the program.

He is making strides in improving his outside shooting this year while playing at Brewster Prep in New Hampshire.

BYU MVP...If we had to pick a team MVP right now, our choice would be Lee Cummond. He has done it all for the Cougars, but the stat that sealed the deal for us was one we heard last week.

Cummond is currently scoring at a 16.2 points per game average in league play. More importantly, Cummond is currently averaging 19.6 points in conference road games. As you know, Mountain West Conference basketball championships are won on the road. That is where Cummond has been need-

ed the most and been at his best.

GET A LOOK...If you want to get a glimpse of BYU and Utah basketball coaches next week, take a trip to Ogden during the 5A and 4A state basketball tournaments.

Just check out the brackets and game schedules. Look for games involving Lone Peak and Pleasant Grove in the 5A division and Provo HS in the 4A ranks.

Lone Peak is where BYU's top recruiting target plays. In case you forgot, that would be Tyler Haws. Pleasant Grove sports C.J Wilcox and Provo has sophomore Kyle Collinsworth and junior Brandon Davies.

The state tourney kicks off Monday, Feb. 25 for the 5A bracket and begins Tuesday, Feb. 26 in 4A.

State title games for both brackets will be played on Saturday, Mar. 1.

2008-09 BYU BASKETBALL ROSTER...Here's a look at a preliminary BYU Basketball roster for next season.

Charles Abouo, 6-5, 215, Wing, freshman
James Anderson, 6-11, 220, Center, redshirt freshman
Lee Cumard, 6-7, 190, Wing, senior
Jackson Emery, 6-3, 180, Guard, sophomore
Noah Hartsock, 6-8, 205, Forward, freshman
Jimmer Fredette, 6-2, 190, Guard, sophomore
Michael Loyd, Jr., 6-1, 175, Guard, sophomore
Gavin MacGregor, 6-10, 235, Center, junior
Chris Miles, 6-11, 235, Center, junior
Lamont Morgan, Jr., 5-10, 170, Guard, junior
Matt Pinegar, 6-0, 185, Guard, redshirt freshman
Trent Plaisted, 6-11, 245, Center, senior
Archie Rose, 6-5, 205, Wing, senior
Jonathan Tavernari, 6-6, 215, Wing, junior

It still wouldn't surprise us to see BYU add maybe one more recruit to their roster for next year. Dave Rose and his staff are always looking at the juco ranks in hopes of improving the talent on the team. At this point, we don't see any signs of BYU adding a high school player during the April signing period.

OTHER SPORTS

The BYU baseball season kicks off this week with a three-game series for the Cougars against University of Portland beginning on Friday, Feb. 22 with a single game. A doubleheader will follow on Saturday.

Coach Vance Law expects to have an explosive offensive team this season, but he will be hard pressed to come up with the same quality of pitching which he had last season.

In Men's volleyball, the Cougars remain undefeated after defeating UC Irvine twice last week in California.

The Cougars defeated the defending National Champions 3-2 and 3-1 to run their season record to 11-0.

TELEVISION TIMETABLE

BYU vs. Utah

Wednesday, Feb. 20 at Provo
Tipoff: 8:00 pm Mountain Time
TV: Mtn

BYU vs. San Diego State

Saturday, Feb. 23 at San Diego
Tipoff: 9:00 pm Mountain Time
TV: CSTV

BYU vs. New Mexico

Tuesday, Feb. 26 at Albuquerque
Tipoff: 8:00 pm Mountain Time
TV: Mtn

BYU vs. Air Force

Saturday, Mar. 1 at Provo
Tipoff: 7:00 pm Mountain Time
TV: none

BYU vs. Wyoming

Wednesday, Mar. 5 at Provo
Tipoff: 8:00 pm Mountain Time
TV: Mtn

BYU vs TCU

Saturday, Mar. 8 at Fort Worth
Tipoff: 6:00 pm Mountain Time
TV: Mtn

Rebroadcasts

Here is a list of games that will be rebroadcast in the Utah Market only on KBYU:

BYU-Utah: Saturday, Feb. 23, 10:00 pm
BYU-New Mexico: Saturday, Mar. 1, 11:00 pm
BYU-Wyoming: Saturday, Mar 8, 11:30 pm
BYU-TCU: Wednesday, Mar. 12, 10:30 pm