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As a subscriber, you are allowed to access our new blog. You can view it by going to www.cougar-sportsline.blogspot.com

Just a reminder that we are now sending the newsletter via two separate email accounts to help solve distribution issues that many subscribers experienced last year. That means you may receive two identical letters. If that is the case, please just discard the extra.

HERE'S A TAKE ON BYU'S SECOND HALF TAIL-SPINS

We received this note from a long-time subscriber with some of his musings on BYU basketball. We found it interesting and are passing it along.

Subject: Data doesn't lie. If BYU doesn't fix its second-half collapse problems it will continue to lose road games versus good teams and continue to go "one and out" in NCAA and NIT tournaments.

Look at the first half versus second half point differentials between BYU and top teams during the regular-season and post- season tournaments over the past two years.

2007

Louisville...1st half +4 2nd half -2

North Carolina...1st half -7 2nd half -3

Michigan State...1st half +10 2nd half -17

Boise State...1st half +11 2nd half -14

2006-07

UCLA...1st half +3 2nd half -10

Michigan State...1st half -6 2nd half -9

Wyoming (MWC Tourn)...1st half +19 2nd half -7

UNLV (MWC Tourn)...1st half +11 2nd half -19

Xavier...1st half +6 2nd half -8

+ indicates BYU outscores opponent

The only game listed where BYU did better in the second half than the first half was against North Carolina, but here is what UNC coach Roy Williams said about the game.

"I think our depth was important. I think they missed some threes late in the game because their legs were tired, but at the same time our players were tired at the end of the game too."

BYU didn't run out of gas in the North Carolina game until about the last five minutes of the game.

This is not a new problem. BYU has always run an up-tempo game designed to take advantage of the altitude at their home court. But, the last time BYU won a major post-season tournament was the '65-'66 season when they had the bench strength to play up-tempo anywhere versus anybody.

BYU had some of the best seniors and juniors in its history. And the '65-'66 Cougars added the five fabulous sophomores from the previous year's best freshman team in BYU history.

BYU never would have made it to the NIT finals if Stan Watts had not inserted sophomore guard Jim Jimas at the most critical point in BYU's game against Army.

Army led favored BYU with the last seconds ticking off the clock. "Why in the world did Stan Watts put an inexperienced sophomore in the game at that critical moment?" I wondered. Just at that moment, the well-rested Jimas stole the ball from the Army guard, dribbled the length of the court, and put the game into overtime with his lay up. The rest, as they say, is history.

Since that season, BYU's NCAA and NIT history has, with rare exception, been a series of second half collapses and "one and out" tournament appearances. One by one, Kresimir Cosic, Mekeli Wesley, Rafael Araujo and Trent Plaisted have been run into the ground in critical NIT and NCAA games, leading to a span of "one and out" appearances most of my adult life.

This year there is a chance for something different. Thanks to the great recruiting and coaching job done by Dave Rose and his staff, the '07-'08 Cougars have as talented a bench as they are ever going to have. But, if the coaches don't get their rotations right, BYU will miss the opportunity to do something special in post-season play this year.

The fact is, BYU is not losing to freshman mistakes. BYU wins when the young kids play. BYU loses when the out-of-gas starters are in the game. The starters don't make glaring mistakes like the bench players sometimes make. The out-of-gas starters just get beat on defense and clang their shots on offense. Whether you make a glaring mistake or just get beat, the opposition still gets only two points.

I live in Maryland. a friend of mine who follows ACC basketball said he used to be surprised when Roy Williams would go to his bench late in a game when North Carolina most needed to make a run. But, Roy Williams approach is tournament proven. The fact is, you are most likely to make a winning run going with the five players with the most energy than with the five best players. If you get your rotation right, the five best and the five most rested can be the same.

Obviously, Roy Williams' approach only works if you do it in every game. The bench players play better when they get accustomed to the feel of the game, the opponent, and pressure situations. The starters play better when they have energy. Until BYU starts pulling away from tough opponents in the second half, you will know that the rotation is not right and BYU is not ready for tournament play.

Respectfully,
A subscriber in Maryland

We buy most of the concepts on rest and rotation and think there is validity to them. Comparing BYU's substitution patterns to North Carolina, however, is a stretch for us. UNC's backups are better than BYU's backups and consequently you don't have as much slippage from them as you do from a less talented bunch like BYU's backups.

We actually think Rose's rotation is pretty decent except in the post where you can't rotate what you don't have.

Lamar, who was soundly trounced by BYU had a rotation against the Cougars that saw 10 players average 20 minutes of playing time.

Where we are in total agreement with the observations of this particular subscriber is that with BYU the data doesn't lie when it comes to BYU's less than spectacular late game performances against good teams.

Whether it is lack of rest and rotations, poor coaching, not enough talent, or any other reason, the late game meltdowns against decent to good competition is indeed real for the Cougars.

We also agree that until a solution is found, whatever it may be, BYU and "one and done" will continue to find its way into stories chronicling the Cougar's post season early exits in NCAA play.

NAMES AND GAMES

NAME TAGS NOTHING NEW

Name tags are nothing new for most BYU football players. In LaVell Edwards Stadium they wear the tag on the back of their uniform. As LDS missionaries, it is found on the front of the uniform.

The revolving door and player pipeline of BYU football as it relates to missionaries leaving and coming back continues this year.

From last year's recruiting class, Famika Anae, Braden Brown, Aveni Leung Wai, Devin Mahina, Marcus Matthews and Houston Reynolds all chose to serve LDS missions before enrolling at BYU.

There will be others.

Eathyn Manumaleuna, the starting nose guard for the Cougars, already has a mission call. We expect to see one or two more leave before next season.

Returning to the roster from missionary service are Stephen Covey, QB; Luke Ashworth, WR; Spencer Hafoka, WR; Rhen Brown, DB; Terrance Brown, OL.

BIG RECRUITING WEEKEND

BYU's football recruiting signing list should be finalized this coming weekend.

Bronco Mendenhall and his staff will be hosting a handful of recruits that still have yet to make a choice on where they want to go to school.

This will be BYU's big chance to try and impress these few final players. All have been offered scholarships by the Cougars.

Here are the three big names remaining in play.

O'Neil Chambers, WR, 6-3, 205, Harmony HS, St. Cloud, Florida...He is not LDS, but the connection here is his high school coach. Tyler Anderson is a former BYU receiver. Chambers made a visit to Provo this summer during one of the Cougar camps. He will be Provo this week and then make an official visit to Florida next week. He has already visited Purdue in September. Iowa State, Houston, Maryland, Purdue, South Carolina, Mississippi State and BYU have all offered. As of the first of December, Chambers said that his top three are BYU, Purdue and Florida. The interest in the Cougars and Boilermakers is early playing time.

Uona Kavienga, LB, 6-0, 225, Leuzinger HS, Lawndale, CA...This big-time playmaker has it down to UCLA, USC and BYU. This guy is the marquee LDS recruit. He has offers from UCLA, USC, Arizona, Georgia Tech, Oklahoma, Utah and BYU. With UCLA retaining DeWayne Walker as their defensive coordinator, BYU's job just became a little tougher. Walker is the key recruiting cog for the Bruins.

Hamani Stevens, OL, 6-2, 280, Hemet HS, CA...This top-rated LDS center, like Kavienga, was a UCLA commit early, but is no longer interested in UCLA. He has already made four official visits. They include trips to Michigan State, ASU, Colorado and most recently, Oregon. He would like to get a recruiting parlay for his twin brother, but so far, San Diego State is the only school that has said it would take the two as a package deal. As of right now, he has three finalist for his choice of a college. That would be ASU, Oregon and BYU.

Here is the current commitment list for BYU Football. Letter of Intent can be signed in early February.

Michael Alisa, LB, 6-2, 225, Timpview HS, UT
Kevan Bills, LB, 6-3, 235, Timpview HS, UT
Atem Bol, WR, 6-2, 205, Bell HS, TX
Jerry Bruner, LB, 6-3, 225, Evergreen HS, WA
Coleby Clawson, LB, 6-3, 225, Snow College, UT (already signed)
Cameron Comer, DB, 6-1, 180, Springville HS, UT
Spencer Hadley, DB, 6-2, 210, Connell HS, WA
Tevita Hola, DL, 6-1, 310, Snow College, UT (already signed)
Austin Holt, TE, 6-5, 235, Bingham HS, UT
Magnum Mauga, DL, 6-1, 290, Grossmont JC, CA (already signed)
Tolu Moala, LB, 6-1, 230, El Camino CC, CA
Jake Murphy, WR, 6-5, 215, American Fork HS, UT
Garrett Nicholson, DB, 5-10, 180, West HS, UT
Seta Pohahau, RB, 6-0, 200, Aragon HS, CA
Iona Pritchard, LB, 6-1, 225, Bingham HS, UT
Brock Stringham, OL, 6-6, 280, Mountain Vista HS, CO
Jessie Taufi, OL, 6-5, 320, Long Beach CC, CA
Shiloah Te'o, DB, 5-11, 190, Kahuku HS, HI
Masi Tuitama, LB, 6-2, 205, Pacifica HS, CA
Daniel Sorensen, DB, 6-1, 200, Colton HS, CA
Justin Sorensen, K, 6-2, 215, Bingham HS, UT
Michael Yeck, OL, 6-8, 265, Keller HS, TX

SHOWCASING IN SAN ANTONIO

Two BYU commitments, Austin Holt and Justin Sorensen, both of whom are from Bingham HS in South Jordan, UT, played in the prestigious Army All American Bowl this past Saturday.

Two other BYU football recruits for next season also were in San Antonio for the combine for top national junior prospect.

Both just made BYU's recruiting job much more difficult because of their outstanding showings.

BYU has already offered scholarships to both Xavier Su'a Filo and John Martinez.

Martinez is a 6-4, 275 pound offensive lineman at Cottonwood HS in Salt Lake City. He already has offers from the Cougars, Oregon State, Utah and Oklahoma State.

Su'a Filo is 6-4, 270 pounds and an offensive and defensive lineman from Timpview HS in Provo. He already has offers from BYU and Utah and has made an unofficial trip to LSU.

HEAD TO HEAD

When it comes to any kind of competition between BYU and Utah, fans are interested.

We have had several subscribers ask us recently what we think about Utah's recruiting in the state

versus BYU's recruiting?

Based on hype and notoriety, we think Utah will have a better recruiting class than BYU's class in the local high school ranks.

Based on the marquee names in Utah prep circles this year, Utah will sign four big-name recruits and BYU will land only one.

The Utes are taking Sausan Shakerin, David Kruger, Sealver Siliaga and Derek Tuimauga.

BYU's lone local big name is Austin Holt.

That is a pretty big advantage to Utah.

Now to make everybody feel better, nobody knows if any of these guys will actually be players who can perform at the next level.

And of course, there is a story to make BYU fans feel better about each of the recruits that Utah took from the Cougars.

Shakerin isn't LDS. Kruger has family ties to Utah. Siliaga changed his mind because he wanted to play with his buddy. Tuimauga was never offered by BYU.

Do you feel better yet?

A story to soften the blow is what we are all looking for. If you are a UCLA fan, you believe it was pure luck that BYU beat the Bruins in Las Vegas. If you are a Ute fan, you believe that the last two years it has taken two extremely unlikely and unlucky plays for BYU to beat you.

The bottom line, however, is that it is all about scoreboard. Years down the road, nobody will ever ask about the story. They will just want the score.

This what Utah has this year. BYU has the story, but the Utes have the score.

This wasn't BYU's best year in recruiting local marquee names.

LOYOLA A LAUGHER, BUT WAKE FOREST MORE FORMIDABLE

BYU found its way back on the winning track last week with a 91-62 pummeling of Loyola Marymount.

The win moves the Cougars to 11-3 on the year with one more non-conference game remaining before the start of league play.

That will be against Wake Forest on Tuesday, Jan. 8 in Winston-Salem.

Against the Lions of Loyola Lee Cummond led all Cougars with 18 points. Jonathan Tavernari came off the bench to add 17.

The Deamon Deacons of Wake Forest will be a much tougher test for BYU. They currently are 10-3, but have not had a particularly challenging schedule. They also have not lost at home this season.

Freshman forward James Johnson leads the team in both scoring and rebounding. He is one of two freshman that start. The other three starters are just sophomore.

TELEVISION TIMETABLE

BYU vs. Wake Forest

Tuesday, Jan. 8 at Winston-Salem

Tipoff: 5:00 pm Mountain Time

TV: none

BYU vs. Colorado State

Saturday, Jan. 12 at Provo

Tipoff: 4:00 pm Mountain Time

TV: Mtn

BYU vs. UNLV

Tuesday, Jan. 15 at Las Vegas

Tipoff: 9:00 pm Mountain Time

TV: Mtn

BYU vs. Utah

Saturday, Jan. 19 at Salt Lake

Tipoff: 2:00 pm Mountain Time

TV: Versus