

HB Arnett's
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801 372 0819

hbarnett@fiber.net and hbarnett@xmission.com

PO Box 50424 Provo, Utah 84605

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BYU OPENS 2008 SEASON AGAINST NORTHERN IOWA

When a team is coming off a 12-1 season, regardless of its college football classification, they must be doing something right.

Northern Iowa was a very good football team last year. They finished fourth in the FCS (I-AA) rankings. They had an outstanding running back, an outstanding wide receiver and a very good offensive line. Two of those linemen were drafted into the NFL and as of today are still on NFL rosters.

Somebody must think the Panthers will be good again this season. They are ranked fourth in the pre-season FCS rankings to begin the year.

Bronco Mendenhall and BYU are showing a lot of respect for Northern Iowa. Appalachian State apparently got everyone's attention with their win over Michigan last year.

We are paying attention also. We made a special effort to go back and look at the results of BYU's game with Eastern Washington last season.

Similar

EWU and NIU are two similar teams. Northern Iowa's only loss of last year was to Delaware in the quarter-finals of the FCS championship.

Eastern Washington, despite getting whipped 42-7 by the Cougars a year ago, made it all the way to the quarter-finals also. They lost 35-38 to Appalachian State. Delaware and App State eventually played for the FCS championship.

The Panthers of UNI are a very good FCS team. They are better than Weber State and most likely better than some Division I teams. Last year they beat Iowa State.

Respect and reality eventually have to meet, however.

They will do just that this Saturday at 4 pm in LaVell Edwards Stadium.

UNI has some very good skill players. For example, running back Corey Lewis returns for his senior season. He rushed for 1,513 yards last season and has 2,689 career rushing yards. Some consider him an NFL prospect.

Johnny Gray is a playmaker deluxe. Think Steve Smith when he was at Utah. Last year Gray had 70 catches for 910 yards and 5 td receptions. He is also an outstanding punt returner. BYU will have to know where he lines up.

Respect and Reality

That covers the respect part of this BYU-UNI game.

Here's the reality of the match up.

While Lewis and Gray had big years last season, they both did it with the help of a very good offensive line and a seasoned quarterback.

Here are the key numbers that tell us all we need to know about this game. UNI lost 4 starting offensive linemen and their starting quarterback from their 12-1 team.

Breaking in a new quarterback and 4 new offensive linemen isn't the way to duplicate what Appalachian State did last year to Michigan.

Lewis can run the ball, but we don't see how he can be nearly as effective as he was last season behind an unproven line.

Gray can be great with the ball in his hand, but again, we question how a quarterback making his first start of his college career will be able to get the ball into Gray's hands.

This is not good news for Northern Iowa fans.

It is good news, however, for the back seven of BYU's defense.

This is a group, that except for David Nixon at outside linebacker and Kellen Fowler at safety, will be breaking in a bunch of unproven and untested linebackers and defensive backs.

Wet Feet

This will be a very good opportunity for these new starting defenders to stick their toes in the water and get wet.

Consider it a dress rehearsal. These guys can still get burned on a few plays against UNI, but it shouldn't single the season goals of getting to a BCS game.

Defensively, UNI returns 7 defensive starters.

This was a very good unit last year. They only gave up an average of 13 points a game in the regular season.

In the FCS playoffs, they didn't fare as well, surrendering 35 points to New Hampshire (win) and 39 to Delaware (loss).

Delaware has a potential Vice President of the United States in Joe Biden. We don't know if Biden will be elected to that office, but we do know that the only way the UNI defense can contain the BYU offense is if Biden was quarterbacking the Cougars instead of Max Hall.

Unlike Northern Iowa, BYU is returning a veteran quarterback in Max Hall, 4 starting offensive linemen, a starting tight end, wide receiver and running back.

Only Suspense

The only suspense in this game will be who will kick and from what distance and how will the new defensive backs fare in their first starting assignments.

BYU is a 21 point favorite, but that is not enough. We call it BYU 45 UNI 10.

NAMES AND GAMES

USC Running Backs...It was a year and a half ago when we first started writing about Adam Timo.

That was when, as a sophomore at Snow Canyon HS in St. George, UT, Timo was compared to Reggie Bush.

We actually posted the audio clip from the Snow Canyon-Logan HS game, in which the announcers referenced what Logan Head coach, Mike Favero, had told them before the game.

Favero said that he compared Timo to Bush when Bush was a sophomore at Helix HS in San Diego.

Favero has a little credibility because he is probably the best offensive high school coach in the state.

It didn't hurt that he also is from Helix HS and has major connections with that program.

In case you forgot, Timo committed to BYU and the Cougars as a sophomore.

We think Favero may have been a little off in his comparison of Timo and Bush.

Timo doesn't have Bush's breakaway speed.

We think a comparison to another USC running back is more appropriate. We think Timo resembles Marcus Allen instead of Reggie Bush.

From our perspective, we still think Timo will be the best recruit in the incoming 2009 class. There has been lots of hype for other prospects that have committed and for others that BYU is still trying to land. For our money, the spotlight on Timo dimmed after his early commitment 18 months ago, but his talent is still burning bright.

How is this for some lighter fuel to pour on your Cougar coals?

In his first game of the year last Friday, all Timo did was rush for 198 yards and three touchdowns on 27 carries. He had td runs of 1, 35 and 60 yards.

For BYU football fans, a Timo in hand that looks an awful like Marcus Allen to us is better than any other running back in the bush that we have seen recently.

Timo played quarterback, running back and punted for Snow Canyon last week in a 26-29 loss to East HS.

His next outing will be Friday in Orem against the Tigers of Orem HS.

Speaking of Orem, St. George, and BYU running backs, Anthony Heimuli, another BYU commit, had a pretty impressive opening game against Pine View HS of St. George.

Heimuli and his Mountain View HS teammates were on the short end of a 28-6 loss.

Despite making five trips inside the 20-yard line, Mountain View could only punch in one touchdown.

Heimuli had 184 yards rushing in the game on just 14 carries.

The logical question is why didn't he get more touches? He missed most of the second half with cramps.

The next chance to see Heimuli will be this Friday when Mountain View hosts West Jordan.

Cougars Trade in Compacts for SUVs...BYU is bucking the national trend. While drivers are trading in their SUVs for smaller and more compact cars and an increase in gas mileage, BYU is trading in their normal smallish compact receivers for the bigger SUV models.

The latest evidence is the most recent verbal commitment from Brett Thompson, a 6-3, 210 pound wide out from Oak Ridge HS in the Sacramento area.

Thompson has been on BYU's recruiting radar since he was a sophomore. That is when Bronco Mendenhall and company first offered a scholarship.

Last season, Thompson had 35 receptions for 570 yards and six touchdowns. As a sophomore, he had 53 catches for 894 yards and scored 11 touchdowns.

You don't have to be very observant to see the trend for BYU when recruiting receivers.

Since Bronco Mendenhall took over, here are the receivers he has signed and those that he has offered this year. The trend towards big receivers is obvious.

2006...McKay Jacobson, 5-11, 185, Southlake Carroll HS, TX; Rhen Brown, 5-11, 175, Longe Peak HS.

2007...Scotty Ebert, 6-0, 180, Jordan HS, UT; Marcus Matthews, 6-4, 200, Southridge HS, OR; Jordan Smith, 6-4, 190, Spanish Fork HS.

2008...Atem Bol, 6-2, 200, Bell HS, TX; O'Neill Chambers, 6-3, 210, Harmony HS, FL; Jake Murphy, 6-5, 215, American Fork HS, UT.

2009...Brett Thompson, 6-3, 210, Oak Ridge HS, CA (verbal comittment); Mitch Mathews, 6-5, 200,

Southridge HS, OR (verbal commitment)

Bait and Switch - BYU Style...A couple of players made some position switches last week. Most notable was the move of Daniel Sorensen, the true freshman, from safety to outside linebacker.

The switch for Sorensen wasn't without some bait. The lure was playing time this season.

Sorensen was likely to see very limited time on the field as a safety this season. Before last week, his best bet for getting grass stains on his uniform would have been as on special teams.

BYU coaches noticed, however, that Sorensen, at 6-1, 210 pounds, is very talented and very physical and could help them replace Grant Nelson as a backup to David Nixon, the starting outside linebacker.

Nelson, you may remember is gone for the year after having surgery to remedy a renal problem.

Sorensen is still green and needs to learn what he is supposed to do and when, but he has ability.

His biggest current asset as a Cougar is that he is not intimidated by anyone and is not afraid to pop and punish anyone on the other side of the line of scrimmage.

Speaking of pop and punish, it wasn't quite punishment for the backup quarterbacks behind Max Hall, but when Austin Collie took reps late last week at quarterback, you have to assume that those quarterbacks in waiting got the message.

The message from Mendenhall was that he wasn't pleased with their recent production.

It also lends credence to our conclusion that we stated last week in the newsletter that we don't expect either Brenden Gaskins or Kurt McEuen to be backups to Max Hall next season.

As we stated in the last edition, we expect the backup battle to be waged between Riley Nelson and Stephen Covey.

If Collie sees more than ten plays as a quarterback, BYU will either be extremely desperate or dauntingly dazzling offensively. Our bet leans towards desperate.

Dealing With Depth...BYU will release an official depth chart for the season opener early this week.

It will show at least two names for every position and look very nice on paper, but it won't match what actually happens on the field.

What you see on the field is the "real" depth chart. This is what you should see:

Offense

Quarterback: Max Hall, Jr., Brenden Gaskins, Jr. - Despite Austin Collie getting reps, Gaskins will still get the first call. We all better hope that the call comes late in the game in mop up action and not early because of an injury to Hall.

Tailback: Harvey Unga, So, J.J. DiLuigi, Fr

Fullback: Fui Vakapuna, Sr, Kaneakua Friel, Fr

Tight End: Dennis Pitta, Jr, Andrew George, Jr

Wide Receivers: Austin Collie, Jr, Michael Reed, Sr, Luke Ashworth, So, O'Neill Chambers, Fr. These are the top four who should see the most time in the receiver rotations.

Center: Dallas Reynolds, Sr, R.J. Willing, Jr

Left Guard: Ray Feinga, Sr, Jesse Taufi, Jr

Left Tackle: Matt Reynolds, Fr, R.J. Willing, Jr

Right Guard: Travis Bright, Sr, R.J. Willing, Jr

Right Tackle: David Oswald, Sr, R.J. Willing, Jr

Willing is obviously BYU's sixth lineman and is versatile enough to play all spots. Taufi is a big-time talent who just needs time to make the adjustment from juco to Division I.

Defense

Left End: Ian Dulan, Jr, Brett Denney, Jr

Nose Tackle: Russell Tialavea, Jr, Mosese Foketi, Sr

Right Tackle: Jan Jorgensen, Jr, Bernard Afutiti, Jr

(These are the first six defensive linemen. Look for Afutiti, Denney and Foketi to be mixed and matched as needed and where needed.)

Middle Linebackers: Matt Bauman, Jr, Matt Ah You, Jr, Shawn Doman, Jr. These are the top three that will mix and match the two inside spots. If BYU has to go beyond these three early in the season, look out.

Outside Linebackers: David Nixon, Sr, Vic So'oto, Jr, Coleby Clawson Jr. The same applies here. There are just three to play two spots. This is why Daniel Sorensen, Fr, was moved from safety to line-backer.

Field Corner: Brandon Howard, Jr, G Pittman, Fr

Boundary Corner: Scott Johnson, Jr, Brandon Bradley, So

Safeties: Again, another three to play two spots. Kellen Fowler, Sr, David Tafuna, Sr, and Andrew Rich, So.

Kicker: Mitch Payne, So, Justin Sorensen, Fr. Sorensen will kick off and Payne will get first shot at field goals.

Punter: C.J. Santiago, Sr, Justin Sorensen, Fr

Punt Returner: Reed White, Sr, O'Neill Chambers, Fr, or Luke Ashworth, So

Kick Returner: Luke Ashworth, So, O'Neill Chambers, Fr, and if healthy and he can catch his breath from his duties as receiver and quarterback, maybe Austin Collie, Jr.

Deep Snapper and Holder: There are plenty of able bodies here, but nobody cares who they are until BYU botches a field goal or extra point due to a bad snap or bad hold. For the sake of parents and an error-free kicking game - knock on wood - here are the names we hope we never have to hear again. Snapper: Chris Muehlmann, Sr, John Pace, So, Holder: Bryce Mahuika, Sr.

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