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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.

BYU'S LATE GAME HEROICS MAKE FOR HAPPY HOLIDAY SEASON

It's Christmas. How can you say anything bad about BYU, especially when they just pulled off another miraculous win?

This time it was a totally unsuspected block of a UCLA field goal with no time left on the clock for a 17-16 victory in the Las Vegas Bowl. It allowed BYU to avenge one of its two losses this season by outlasting the Bruins.

As BYU coaches and players are fond of saying, they made one more play than their opponent when the game was on the line.

The game-deciding play was turned in by freshman defensive tackle Eathyn Manumaleuna when he blocked a 28-yard chip shot attempt by UCLA kicker Kai Forbath. Had it been successful, it would have given the Bruins the win.

Forbath has previously hit two 50-plus yard field goals in the game.

Not Alone

Manumaleuna wasn't alone in making plays. His was the most spectacular and special, but Max Hall and Austin Collie made their share of plays during the game to allow Manumaleuna's to mean something.

Collie was named the MVP of the Las Vegas Bowl. He deserved it. The sophomore wide receiver had six catches for 107 yards, including a 14-yard touchdown reception.

Collie also gave the Cougars outstanding field position during most of the game with solid kickoff returns.

Max Hall completed 21-of-35 passes for 231 yards. He had no interceptions and in addition to the TD

pass to Collie, he also threw a nice 13-yard scoring strike to Michael Reed.

With the win, BYU will likely finish in the top 15 in the national rankings and set the scenario for a serious BCS run next season.

You can't have a happier holiday than that.

BYU NEEDS MOUNTAIN WEST CONFERENCE MORE THAN MWC NEEDS BYU

Let's get this straight. The resurgence in BYU football is remarkable. The tenor and tone of the program is to be commended.

In less than three years, BYU has gone from losing seasons to talking about making BCS bowl appearances.

We actually believe it can happen for the Cougars, but only if they remain in the Mountain West Conference.

For more than 25 years we have pushed for BYU to somehow, somewhere get into a more prestigious BCS conference.

We used to think the sooner the Cougars could leave the WAC or MWC, the better it would be for BYU football.

We don't think that way anymore, especially after watching Saturday's Las Vegas Bowl.

The only way BYU can ever make a BCS appearance is if they are in the WAC or MWC.

Mike Bellotti was right. He was just a year too late in saying that BYU wouldn't be able to consistently compete with the middle of the pack teams of the Pac 10.

Not Enough

BYU simply doesn't have enough quality football players with the speed and athleticism to compete at the upper level of the Pac 10. And while BYU has some great leadership at the helm of the program, they don't have enough good solid football coaches to compete. We don't have to explain that one if you watched the BYU-UCLA game.

Great leaders and great examples don't always translate into sharp and bright coaching. That is what it takes, along with better athletes, to compete at the next level of the college game.

BYU was extremely lucky to beat a middle of the pack UCLA who had to use a temp agency to find a quarterback to play against the Cougars.

Sure BYU would occasionally ring up a win against the top teams of the Pac 10. Stanford even beat USC this year, but they were never a contender. For BYU, unless there was a serious upgrade in athletes, they couldn't do it week in and week out.

Forget the SEC

Forget the SEC. It would even be worse. The only BCS conference right now where BYU might be competitive is the Big East.

BYU, in our opinion, is never going to a BCS game if they are in one of the BCS leagues.

What most BYU fans have spurned for years, BYU's affiliation with the WAC or MWC, is now the only chance the Cougars have.

The BCS is now set up to throw a bone to the MWC or WAC on a yearly basis. It is their way of keeping Congress out of the mix.

The formula is set for BYU. Utah, Boise State and Hawaii have made the mold and BCS powers have been more than happy to fill that mold with a token payday in order to keep the status quo and the rest of the money for themselves.

We know the theory that states that if BYU was a BCS member, the extra money and prestige would give recruiting a boost. We no longer buy that theory. With the new model and mantras for BYU football, membership in the Pac 10 will still not significantly increase the recruiting pool or speed and athleticism needed for the Cougars. It could give them two or three more Pac 10 big bodies, but still not enough speed and athleticism. For years we have had the BYU elitist attitude of other fans. BYU was doing the WAC and MWC a favor. We no longer feel that way.

BCS Aspirations

Based on BCS aspirations, it is now exactly the opposite. The MWC conference and its aggregation of very average teams, is the only realistic way BYU has of obtaining a BCS bowl bid.

Even then, the current future schedules are such that it will still require BYU to beat some of the middle of the pack Pac 10 teams.

Next year BYU will again have to beat UCLA. This time they will have a quarterback and we better hope they don't have DeWayne Walker as a coach. Washington is also on the menu.

The following year it will be ASU and Florida State. Then it will be Washington and Florida State.

As Saturday showed in Las Vegas, those games are certainly no lock, unless lots of luck is on your side.

Merry Christmas and let's not make the MWC too mad with demands for better TV contracts or else. Or else would mean bye bye to the BCS for BYU.

Merry Christmas from someone who now loves the MWC!

CLOSING THE 2007 BYU BOOKS IN MWC COMPETITION

Based on the Mountain West Conference results for the 2007 calendar year, BYU is still the big boy and big girl of the league.

From January 1, 2007 until this last week of the year, there have been 19 Mountain West Conference champions crowned. BYU athletic teams have taken home 12 of those crowns.

Here is the break down of the MWC champions for 2007:

Men's Swimming and Diving...BYU

Women's Swimming and Diving...Utah, But BYU captured the regional crown

Men's Indoor Track and Field...BYU

Women's Indoor Track and Field...BYU

Women's Basketball...BYU

Men's Basketball...BYU

Women's Golf...TCU

Men's Golf...BYU

Men's Tennis...SDSU

Women's Tennis...BYU

Men's Outdoor Track...BYU

Women's Outdoor Track...BYU

Baseball...TCU

Softball...BYU

Men's Cross Country...BYU

Women's Cross Country...CSU

Women's Soccer...UNLV, But BYU won MWC Tournament

Women's Volleyball...UNLV, But BYU had at large NCAA berth and made it to Elite Eight finish

CONCURRING WITH COLLIE

Most Utah fans will never forget Austin Collie and his recent post game comment on the fourth and 18 conversion against the Utes.

In case you did, here is what he said: "I wouldn't say it was lucky. We executed the play well. We should have had another one. Obviously, if you do what's right on and off the field, I think the Lord steps in and plays a part in it. Magic happens."

That raised some ire locally, especially with Ute fans. That same ire has not surfaced with what DeWayne Walker, the current interim coach of UCLA, had to say about BYU as quoted in a Salt Lake newspaper a few days ago.

He said, "I just know how these guys are raised and they are raised right and they live right and I think when you do things right, good things happen."

BYU SIGNS THREE MID-YEAR JUCO TRANSFERS

Bronco Mendenhall and his staff signed three new junior college defensive players to letters of intent last week.

Tevita Hola, Magnum Mauga and Coleby Clawson, all inked with BYU.

Hola and Clawson are from Snow College and Mauga is from Grossmont JC in the San Diego area.

All three will be enrolled in school in January and can participate in spring drills in March.

Two of the three will be essential in shoring up the depth and talent of BYU's defensive line for next season. Mauga is a 6-1, 290 pound defensive lineman who committed to BYU a year ago, but had to resolve academic deficiencies this past year at Grossmont in order to be able to move on the the D-1 level. Mauga prepped at Helix HS in La Mesa, Ca.

Hola is 6-1, 310 pounds and prepped at Granger HS in Salt Lake. He has served an LDS mission. He committed to BYU before the season began.

He was named to the all WSFL first team as a defensive lineman.

His teammate, 6-3, 225 pound linebacker, Coleby Clawson, was also selected to the All WSFL first team. In addition, he was named the defensive player of the year for the league. He is an LDS returned missionary and prepped at North Sanpete HS in Mt. Pleasant, UT.

Two other junior college players have given a commitment to sign with the Cougars, but have to get AA degrees from their respective schools and cannot sign until February.

That would be offensive lineman Jessie Taufi and linebacker Tolu Moala.

Taufi is a highly touted 6-5, 320 pound jc offensive lineman from Long Beach City College and Moala, a 6-1, 235 pound linebacker, is one of at least 12 Division I players from El Camino JC in Torrance, CA.

Taufi prepped at Carson High School in Southern California and high school and Moala is from Hawthorne HS. Both are returned LDS missionaries.

Hola and Mauga will add some much-needed talent and depth to the BYU defensive line next season.

The Cougars return some outstanding players at defensive end in Jan Jorgensen and Brett Denney. Depending on Ian Dulan's missionary plans, they could even be stronger if he returns for another season.

BYU will be suspect, however, in the middle with the departure of Eathyn Manumaleuna to an LDS mission in January. He has been called to the Oklahoma City Mission.

Russell Tialavea should be back from his torn ACL knee injury, but it is always a toss up as to whether

he returns at full strength from such an injury.

That is why Mauga and Hola are needed in the middle.

THE KAVIENGA BOWL

Technically it is called the Pioneer Las Vegas Bowl, but for BYU and UCLA coaches, it could also be called the Uona Kavienga Bowl.

He is a 6-0, 225 pound linebacker from Leuzinger High School in Los Angeles, who committed to UCLA early this past spring.

Kavienga is one of the top 15 prospects in California and a big time recruit.

BYU tried early and often on this LDS athlete, and is still trying.

There are some reports that Kavienga is having second thoughts about his commitment to UCLA and that BYU is back on the radar.

He will be making an official visit to BYU Jan. 11.

You can bet that he will be fully focused on this BYU-UCLA match up.

BYU BEATING SUU 70-55 MAKES FOR A NICE CHRISTMAS LETTER

BYU's 70-55 win over Southern Utah would make for a nice Christmas letter instead of a sports report. We will give it a try.

Jonathan Tavernari had his parents fly in from Brazil for Christmas. It was a nice Holiday reunion for the family. The sophomore also had a nice reunion with his shooting touch against the Thunderbirds. He led all scorers with 19 points on 9-of-15 shooting.

Wedding bells are ringing for Chris Miles. After seeing limited action for the Cougars against SUU, he was married the following day. While Miles' mind was probably on matrimony, the SUU coaching staff was thinking of match ups.

They had none defensively to contest the huge size advantage BYU had in the post.

The T-birds were going with 6-6 Geoff Payne in the post and BYU countered with 6-11 Trent Plaisted, 6-10 Vuk Ivanovic and 6-11 Miles.

Even with the huge size advantage, BYU did not dominate the boards. The only had a 34-33 margin in the rebounding department.

Plaisted only played 24 minutes and scored just 11 points. That kept his streak of scoring in double figures in all games this season intact.

There was a nice parting gift bestowed on former BYU coach Roger Reid. The gift was a little belated and came 11 years after BYU fired him.

Reid is still an outstanding coach and can still execute an offense to get the ball in the low post whenever he wants and against all comers.

His problem was that his coaching persona didn't fit BYU's public relations persona that the school wanted to portray.

He will be very successful at SUU where coaching and not talent will be the predominant issue in winning.

BYU is now 10-2 on the year and will face Boise State on Saturday, Dec. 29.

That game will be televised live on BYUTV and KBYU. Tipoff is set for 7:00 pm local time.

The Broncos are currently 8-3 on the year. They have defeated Utah Valley twice and SUU once.

Their three losses were to Washington State, Montana State and Loyola Marymount. Their eight wins were against UVSC twice, SUU, Montana Tech, San Diego, San Francisco, Idaho State and Albany.

TELEVISION TIMETABLE

BYU vs. Boise State

Saturday, Dec. 29 at Boise

Tipoff: 7:00 pm Mountain Time

TV: KBYU and BYUTV

BYU vs. Loyola Marymount

Thursday, Jan. 2 at Provo

Tipoff: 7:00 pm Mountain Time

TV: Mtn

BYU vs. Wake Forest

Tuesday, Jan. 8 at Winston-Salem

Tipoff: 5:00 pm Mountain Time

TV: TBA

BYU vs. Colorado State

Saturday, Jan. 12 at Provo

Tipoff: 4:00 pm Mountain Time

TV: Mtn