

HB Arnett's



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BYU Football and Keeping the Faith

Keeping the faith may be something we are encouraged to do this coming weekend during General Conference.

As spring football wraps up this week and glowing reports keep coming from coaches and players and media about how good this team will be next fall, faith and keeping it may be far from the minds of Cougar football faithful. But in my opinion, faith, hope and health should be the buzz words on the back burner of the coming Cougar football summer.

The 2015 season is all about faith and the fate of Taysom Hill. Right now the senior signal caller looks to be back in Captain America form after coming off his injury of last season.

Coaches and trainers say he is farther along in his return to action than they expected. Even better, they are touting his throwing velocity, accuracy and timely delivery of the football in non-contact drills.

Based on his BYU football injury history, however, Cougar fans will still need plenty of faith that his fibula, tibia and tarsus can take the beating of another season. If they do, there is no telling where Taysom can take the Cougars in 2016.

Based on karma and the calendar, things look good for Hill. BYU won't face Utah State on the schedule this coming season until November 28, which happens to be the last game of the regular season for the Cougars. In case you forgot, Hill's last two season ending injuries were incurred in contests against the Aggies.

Here now, after the conclusion of spring football, is my Faith Forecast for BYU football by position.

Quarterback... I personally am in the process of losing twenty pounds before the fall. I also am also getting a face lift and lifts for my shoes. I checked and I still have one year of eligibility. Now, if I can get a release from the federal witness protection program, you might see my name on the official program at the first game against Nebraska.

The other option is for Christian Stewart to gain twenty pounds, get plastic surgery and enter the witness protection program to get a new name. With my witness protection connections, I was sure I could get Kurt Warner or John Elway as new names for Stewart. Turns out those were already taken.

That sadly explains the depth chart for BYU at quarterback for next fall. If Hill stays healthy, all is well. If he can't, then BYU may actually have to go to the witness protection well for help.

Actually, the BYU offensive coaching staff will go to the returned missionary well if Hill can't make it through the season again. That would be Tanner Mangum. He gets back from his LDS mission in June and by midseason he should be in good enough shape to take over if needed.

Who knew that the Idaho quarterback aquifer ran so deep or the state's moniker of the Gem State was so applicable to BYU football?

Wide Receivers... It is business as usual at this position. Every spring and fall we get inundated with reports of how good this group of players is performing. That is true. The receivers this spring have looked good. Mitch Mathews was singled out by Bronco Mendenhall as having the best spring of any receiver he has had in his ten years as a coach. Devon Blackmon also had a nice spring and showed improvement.

Good and improved is relative, however. In my opinion, there is still no receiver on the roster who will be drafted by the NFL anytime soon. You don't have to have NFL caliber receivers on your squad to be good, but those teams playing in the New Year's Six Bowl Games all had receivers that will be drafted next month.

My description of this group is that they will be good and productive, but not game changers. That said, they are good enough to score plenty of points this fall until they face elite type defenses.

Running Backs... Who knows what's on the docket for this position. Jamaal Williams will be returning in the fall from knee surgery. BYU was counting on Charles West to make a contribution as a freshman. His future is now literally on the docket of the court.

Even if all legal issues are resolved before the summer is over, the earliest I see him being in school at BYU, if ever, would be next January. Don't count on him for this season.

Algie Brown is having a great spring. But his health history is marginal at best. He also is a bruiser and fullback. He is not a threat to take it to the house. If Williams is back and healthy, this will be a decent backfield.

Offensive Line... The battle cry from coaches at this position is that they need more depth and stability and that they are probably a couple of more recruiting classes away from making that a reality.

Since Garrett Tujague showed up, this group has improved each year. That should hold true this season. They just can't afford any serious injuries and have to hope that two of the linemen recruited from Texas, Jacob Jimenez and JJ Nwigwe, are as good as advertised.

Offensive Bottom Line... This offense will go as far as Taysom Hill can take them. He is a special athlete. When BYU has had special seasons, it has always been with special quarterbacks. Hill has broad shoulders and he will need them to carry this team beyond their 8-5 seasons of the past three years.

Defense... Let me make this short and quick. With Bronco Mendenhall back with his hands on approach to this side of the football, the Cougar defense will be much better and more productive. Just how much better will be determined by the play of linebackers. As they go, so goes the defense.

Let's be real. The defensive line and defensive backs are ordinary. There is nothing special at either position. These guys will play hard and be assignment sound, which is what Mendenhall requires. A good defense requires play makers and offensive disrupters.

If there are any on the team, they will be playing linebacker, either on the outside or inside. My best bets for meeting that description would be Fred Warner and Sione Takitaki. Runner up for that honor would be Harvey Langi in the middle. Warner and Langi did not participate in spring drills due to injury and academic reasons.

Defensive Bottom Line... We are banking on Bronco to work his magic. In, my opinion, if he is going to pull a rabbit out of the hat this season on the defensive side of the ball, he will have to come up with a run stopping nose guard and a shutdown corner he can count on. There were no sightings of either this spring, but Abra Katabra is not ever out of the possibility with Mendenhall and defense.

Season Record Bottom Line... It's all about the quarterback. BYU will have a great one returning and if he can stay healthy, this will be an outstanding year for the Cougars. While BYU has a proven guy under center, Nebraska, Michigan and UCLA will be looking to find one.

As tough as those games will be on the road, they are all early in the year against unproven quarterbacks. Even with a difficult schedule, if Hill can go the distance this season, this will definitely be a year with more than 8 wins.

Rose Revered and Revisted

Last week BYU put out a nice complimentary article detailing the success of Dave Rose, the BYU basketball coach, during his first ten years at the helm of the Cougar program.

If you missed it, here it is. <http://byucougars.com/m-basketball/dave-rose-decade-excellence>

Not everyone felt warm and fuzzy about the Rose write-up.

Here is a response I received from a subscriber, whom I have come to respect for his thoughtful and differing viewpoints. As always, I will spare him the hate mail by keeping him anonymous.

This is all nice: But here's the other side: Every single postseason under Dave Rose has been a disappointment. Every single one, for a decade. That's his other legacy. So BYU fans need to ask themselves: Are all the statistics enough? Or do we want to compete on a national scale, every once in a while?

If I were writing for one of the Utah papers, I'd produce some reasonable expectations for the BYU basketball team. A Sweet 16 finish once every four years, maybe, and a Final 8 or better finish once a decade? A finish in the Top 25 two years out of five, maybe? Those aren't unreasonable expectations for a school with the resources of BYU. At thirty other schools in America, results like that are expected, and failure to meet them will get you fired if you're the coach. (Just ask Rick Barnes and Texas)

Utah has been horrible for most of the last ten years, but it's been to the final 16 twice during that time. Major programs do that. BYU basketball has been better than Utah basketball by most measures, historically, and BYU has been way better than Utah for the past decade. But everyone in the world thinks that Utah has a better basketball program because it makes national noise, at least once in a while, and BYU never does.

It's a column. Maybe it's a whole week of columns. No need for it to be negative, or overly critical of Rose, either. It should be constructive. It would draw the usual inane comments from BYU fans ("how dare you criticize our wonderful program") and Utah fans ("you'll always be in second place you stupid -----"). Those comments seem to be unavoidable.

The point is that BYU still has enormous upside; it has the resources to achieve that upside; and it needs to get going and stop congratulating itself for things that would be unacceptable at most major programs.

Spring Slumps

Volleyball...Six matches and counting. That is the current losing streak for BYU men's volleyball. The Cougars dropped two matches on the road against Stanford and Pepperdine, but also lost consecutive matches in Provo this past weekend against UC Irvine.

With Hawaii, the top team in the MPSF coming to Provo for two matches later this month, BYU volleyball might be hovering just above the "Mendoza" line at season's end. They are currently 13-9 overall and 10-8 in MPSF play. In case you aren't familiar with the Mendoza line, it is defined in our assessment of BYU baseball below.

Baseball...The Mendoza Line is an expression in baseball in the United States, deriving from the name of shortstop Mario Mendoza, whose mediocre batting average is taken to define the threshold of incompetent hitting. The cutoff point is most often said to be .200 (although Mendoza's career average was .215) and, when a position player's batting average falls below that level, the player is said to be "below the Mendoza Line". This is often thought of as the offensive threshold below which a player's presence in Major League Baseball cannot be justified, regardless of his defensive abilities. Pitchers are not judged by this standard, since their specialized work and infrequent batting does not require as much hitting competence.

In BYU's recent performances by pitchers, maybe the Mendoza Line should be used in reverse to measure how many walks, hit batters and earned runs are given up. BYU's ERA against San Diego last week in a three-game sweep by the Toreros was 7.88, 15.75 and 14.43. That is an Earned Run threshold that might question a player's presence on the current BYU pitching staff.

To say pitching has let Mike Littlewood down is an understatement. The Cougars will need to make a better statement on the mound this week against Portland in Provo. The Cougars are now 11-16 on the year and 4-5 in WCC play.

After 26 games the BYU pitching staff has recorded just one shutout of an opponent. That is one less than the BYU Rugby team pitched this past week. See below.

BYU Rugby...The BYU Cougars reached triple digits for the second time in one week. Following BYU's 109-0 win over the UVU Wolverines on Wednesday, BYU beat Utah State 100-0 to end the regular season before the Varsity Cup playoffs.

“Consistency has been key for our team as we look forward to the Varsity Cup playoffs. We played hard against the Wolverines and we played hard again today,” said BYU rugby head coach David Smyth.

TELEVISION TIMETABLE

BYU vs. Portland

Thursday, April 2 at Provo

First Pitch: 6 pm MDT

TV: BYUtv

Radio: KOVO - ESPN 960 Provo (streaming audio)

BYU vs. Portland

Friday, April 3 at Provo

First Pitch: 6 pm MDT

TV: BYUtv

Radio: KOVO - ESPN 960 Provo (streaming audio)

TV: theW.tv

Radio: Radio: KOVO - ESPN 960 Provo (streaming audio)

BYU vs. San Diego State

Monday, March 30 at San Diego

First Pitch: 4 pm MDT

TV: none

Radio: Radio: KOVO - ESPN 960 Provo (streaming audio)