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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.

TULSA TATTOOS BYU'S DEFENSE IN 55-47 WIN

Three and a half years ago when former Cougar coach Gary Crowton was ran out of town, one of the raps put on him by Cougar fans and BYU administrators was that he was not disciplined enough to get the program where it needed to be.

The Crowton critics pointed to his teams and their penchant for constantly committing unnecessary and untimely penalties. Okay, we will buy that. But if we are going to purchase that Crowton paradigm, we also have to pin the lack of discipline tail on the donkey that Bronco Mendenhall has been riding the last two games.

In case you missed it, the BYU Cougars have been flagged 25 times in their last two contests for a total of 222 yards.

If there is a glimpse of hope here, it is that Mendenhall admits there is a flaw and has accepted responsibility for it happening and pledged to fix it.

As Tulsa pointed out so poignantly in their 55-47 shredding of BYU's defense Saturday night, that isn't all Mendenhall has on his plate to fix.

Were we the only ones to notice that Mendenhall, in his role as defensive coordinator, was lit up by Tulsa's offensive coordinator, who is just one year removed from the Arkansas high school coaching ranks?

Domination

The total Tulsa domination of BYU's defense with their 595 yards of total offense and Paul Smith's shredding of the BYU pass defense, definitely put a dent in the Mendenhall mantra of maniacal effort, exactness of execution and assignment mastery.

After Saturday's debacle, he needs to add a fourth defensive criterion; athletic acquisition in the defensive secondary.

We admit that after the Las Vegas Bowl last year, we were a believer in the BYU scheme. There had to be something to the fact that Oregon, with its big-time athletes, and UCLA and Arizona with their speed, couldn't vertically attack the BYU defense with their passing games. Apparently, the Tulsa offensive coordinator didn't get the memo.

Just how bad did the defense play?

The BYU offense had 694 yards of total offense and Max Hall passed for 537 yards. The Cougar defense couldn't make that stand up for a win.

The only thing worse than the BYU defense, was the BYU kicking game.

If you can never have too many good quarterbacks in your program (see below), can't you have at least one semi-dependable kicker on the roster? How does an organized program with smart coaches, let that happen?

Not All Bad

Not all of the kicking game was bad. C.J. Santiago, the beleaguered punter, made substantial progress in that area against Tulsa.

When an offense puts up almost 700 yards of total offense and scores 47 points, you would be hard pressed to find much fault with that side of the ball.

Let's start with four turnovers, one of which, for the second time in the last two games, resulted in a gimme score for the opposition.

Until the BYU offensive line figures out a way to more effectively block the outside speed rush of the rest of the opponents on their schedule, that problem will likely continue.

Even a solid rushing game to go along with the gaudy numbers of Max Hall wasn't enough to compensate for the excessive turnovers and the penalties piled up by the Cougars.

Harvey Unga led all BYU runners with 100 yards on 21 carries as the Cougars totaled 157 yards on the ground.

Now that we have thoroughly trashed the Cougars, we have to admit that while the Tulsa loss was definitely demoralizing, it was not devastating.

Birthright

Tulsa sold their birthright for a mess of pottage and a pummeling of the Cougars.

They shot their wad on this one. With two weeks to prepare, they were able to exploit what they saw on BYU's game films and had enough time to perfect that game plan.

This was a big deal to first year Tulsa coach Todd Graham. It was his first home game and coincided with the dedication of a brand new football facility the night before.

Trust us, they showed everything they had in this game. Now that it is on tape, they won't be able to do that again against anyone else on their schedule.

They definitely deserved to win, but will have a big mortgage to pay off during the rest of the season for this one-shot, one-time purchase and pummeling.

Now for a little reality. The BYU ship is still sailing in the right direction with Bronco Mendenhall at the helm.

They just happened to encounter a Tulsa tsunami on Saturday.

While it wasn't pretty, it wasn't a shipwreck for the program.

There was a reason we offered our 2-for-1 special in August. We didn't see anyway that BYU could equal or better their record from last season. We still see a few more losses this season on the horizon. This is not the same team from last year that was tough enough to win on the road.

Stepping Stone

This will be a very successful season, but it is still just a stepping stone for much, much better seasons ahead.

The BYU offense returns the entire unit for next season, with the exception of Sete Aulai.

As bad as the BYU secondary looked against Tulsa, the bright spot was the play of Brandon Howard after he came in for Kayle Buchanan.

He is athletic enough to make a difference. There are at least three or four other athletic defensive backs already on the roster that will make a difference next season. They just need to learn how to play.

The Tulsa whipping simply was evidence that there is another installment payment due on the investment to which Mendenhall is constantly referring.

We have personally seen the two new kickers that BYU has recruited the past two years. The kicking game will improve dramatically beginning next year.

We make a living throwing journalistic tantrums like those the Tulsa game produced. An occasional debacle like that is actually good for business.

Patience

A little patience will be even better for business.

Hang in there. We still maintain that the best of BYU football is just around the corner beginning next season in general, and next week specifically, when Air Force comes to town.

The Falcons, under new coach Troy Calhoun, are 3-0 on the year and coming off an 20-17 overtime win against TCU last Thursday in Colorado Springs.

Throw in the win over Utah the week before in Salt Lake City and Air Force is the current leader in the conference standings.

We expect the BYU defense to rebound and redeem itself.

Our concern is with the BYU offense.

Despite the big numbers they are producing, we don't think this team has an offensive identity.

They can definitely throw the ball, and they appear to have a decent running game.

They just don't seem to have any rhyme or reason for either of them.

It just seems like they are always flying by the seat of their pants and reacting instead of dictating the action on the field.

Granted those pants by which the Cougar offense is flying are on fire based on the numbers being put up.

We think it is about time that BYU stops padding the passing statistics which has been necessary in the last two games in the hopes of trying to come from behind.

Based on the current 1-2 record, passing stats are okay, but pounding into submission an opponent with a ground game would be nice and needed to find that missing identity.

Against Air Force, we I.D. it BYU 31 Air Force 20.

YOU CAN NEVER HAVE TOO MANY GOOD QUARTERBACKS

You can never have too many good quarterbacks on your roster.

We recently started thinking about BYU and the 1992 season. The Cougars started the year with sophomore John Walsh as their qb. He lasted three games until he separated his right throwing shoulder against UCLA.

The next week BYU traveled to Hawaii and started Steve Clements, the talented sophomore transfer from Texas. He lasted just two quarters against the Bows before bowing out with his own separated shoulder.

That left Ryan Hancock to finish the game and the regular season. He lasted until the final game against Utah before tearing his knee.

That left LaVell Edwards with Tom Young, his fourth qb of the year, to start and play against Kansas in the Aloha Bowl.

Which brings us back to our original premise: You can never have too many good quarterbacks on your roster.

It is obvious that with Max Hall, BYU has a very good quarterback on the roster and will continue to have a good quarterback for at least another thirtyfive games or until Hall is out of eligibility.

But what happens if an injury occurs to Hall in the next 30 games? The way UCLA and Tulsa were able to get to Hall with some big-time hits on outside blitzes, it could just be a matter of time before one of those hits puts Hall in hibernation.

Does BYU have any good quarterbacks behind him?

We have our opinion, but let's momentarily defer to BYU quarterback coach Brandon Doman and his thoughts on the subject in a recent article written by Adam Rittenburg for ESPN.com.

Here is an excerpt from that article:

The first phase is recruiting gluttony, an approach Doman learned from longtime BYU assistant Lance Reynolds when he (Doman) became quarterbacks coach in 2005.

"Make sure you have plenty of quarterbacks," Reynolds told Doman. "Even if you've got to stand on a table in the recruiting meetings and even if the head coach doesn't want it, you continue to just beat the door down."

Doman can save his breath with Mendenhall, who doesn't need much prodding. Three of BYU's last four recruiting classes included multiple quarterbacks. Hall, a transfer from Arizona State, was one of three quarterbacks in the 2006 class. (The other two were James Lark and Sam Doman.)

"We sign as many quarterbacks as we see necessary, and that means some quarterbacks are going to transfer and leave," Doman said. "But we'd rather have some quarterbacks transfer and leave and have enough in the cupboard than to be dry. Right now, we have a lot in the cupboard."

Phase 2 involves indentifying the next starting quarterback early. Like really early.

BYU had barely polished off a dominating win in last year's Las Vegas Bowl when Mendenhall's eyes locked on Hall.

"The minute we beat Oregon," Mendenhall said, "our thoughts as a staff were on grooming and preparing Max for his opener and for this year."

We found this part of the article very interesting because it points out the reality of recruiting and the reality of competition.

Bronco Mendenhall and Brandon Doman had Hall crowned as the next BYU quarterback the minute he contacted them after his early exit from his LDS mission.

So far so good. After three games, he is all they thought and hoped he would be.

But even the coaches are aware of injuries and how they can derail a career and season.

We found it just a bit ironic that while Mendenhall was reportedly saying they were grooming and

preparing Max Hall for his opener and this season immediately after the Las Vegas Bowl, they were also telling Cade Cooper, the juco transfer from Snow College, that if he would walk on without a scholarship at BYU and turn down a grant in aid at Arizona, he would be guaranteed a true shot at competing for the starting qb position?.

That is the reality of recruiting.

The paradox and reality of college football is that you sometimes have to do one thing while saying something completely different.

BYU did the right thing in getting Hall ready to play. His reps during his redshirt year as a scout team qb, came at the expense of another redshirt, Jacob Bower.

That led him to transfer to Bakersfield JC in California.

Cade Cooper is also gone. He is now at Oregon. The obvious reason is because he injured his foot during the BYU spring game and would have to miss an entire year for it to heal.

The public and private rumblings we hear is that the early anointment of Hall cost BYU two pretty talented quarterbacks on the depth chart.

As long as Hall is healthy, it is a totally moot issue. If he goes down for any serious time, the quarterback roster and depth chart becomes as real as it can get. Our opinion, is that the current quarterback cupboard is not as full as Doman thinks it is

Let us clarify again our point. It is absolutely obvious that Max Hall was going to become the next BYU quarterback the minute he set foot on campus.

It is also absolutely obvious that Hall was the right choice. He has proven it.

Our concern is that while two BYU fairly new offensive coaches were doing the right thing in picking Hall, they also ran off two quarterbacks that, in our opinion, are better than anybody else currently left on the depth chart.

While anointing Hall, the BYU offensive coaches were definitely right, but a bit myopic in the manner in which they did it. They didn't see the bigger picture which includes trying to maintain some quality backups.

A little more experience and effort could have kept both Bower and Cooper in the mix, in our opinion. As long as Hall stays healthy, it won't matter, but if he has to miss any significant time due to injury, it definitely will matter.

BYU coaches were convinced that Bower was better suited to be a linebacker instead of a quarterback. They weren't worried that they would ever need him.

That view was not shared by Bower and apparently other BCS coaches that are now lined up at his door to secure his services for next season.

Bower is now rated the No. 1 jc quarterback prospect in the country after his first three outings at Bakersfield.

In those three games against Reedley, El Camino and LA Southwest, Bower is 56-of-86 for 963 yards and 10 touchdowns. He also has rushed for 78 yards on 18 carries.

We know there are some who question those stats because they are being piled up against junior college competition. Let us remind you that in the Bakersfield vs. El Camino there were at least 20-25 sure fire Division I recruits on both sides of the ball. Two of those recruits at El Camino BYU wanted in the worst way. Tolu Moala, a linebacker for the Warriors, has said he will sign with the Cougars but Simi Kuli, a defensive end on that team, has told BYU he has bigger BCS fish to fry.

The top Cali Jucos are loaded and stashed with Pac 10 caliber players that were put there by Pac 10 teams in hopes that they can resolve the academic issues that prevented them from matriculating in those institutions out of high school.

Again, we don't argue that BYU chose the right guy in Hall. We simply think that with a little more tact, experience and savvy, they could have kept Bower in Provo and on the sideline where, if he ever was needed because of an injury to Hall, BYU really would have something in the cupboard to fall back on.

As it stands now, Brenden Gaskins will be the first option. Behind him you have James Lark, Sam Doman and freshman qb Jason Munns who has already tore his ACL and won't see any practice time

this year.

Lark and Munns both will likely be gone on LDS missions next season.

IF THEY PLAY HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL IN UTAH, THEY CAN'T BE ANY GOOD, CAN THEY?

There were a few raised eyebrows by some recruiting junkies, when Jake Murphy, the 6-5, 210 pound wide receiver from American Fork HS, was not putting up big numbers early in his senior season. Murphy has given a verbal commitment to the Cougars.

We still think before he is done, Murphy will either be an outside linebacker or defensive end, but he didn't have a bad outing this past Friday.

American Fork HS trekked to Orange County to take on national high school power Mater Dei. The Monarchs defeated the Cavemen 50-32, but the news for BYU recruiting fans is that Murphy scored all 32 points for his team.

He had four touchdown receptions of 77, 15, 35 and 28 yards. He also had one interception that he returned for a 24-yard td.

Adam Timo, the junior running back from Snow Canyon HS, had a big day a week ago. He scored six touchdowns and rushed for 145 yards against El Dorado HS of Las Vegas.

Both Murphy and Timo have verbally committed to sign with the Cougars in 2008 and 2009.

TELEVISION TIMETABLE

BYU vs. Air Force

Saturday, Sept. 22 at Provo

Kickoff: 1:00 pm Mountain Time

TV: Mtn Network

BYU vs. New Mexico

Saturday, Sept. 29 at Albuquerque

Kickoff: 6:30 pm Mountain Time

TV: CSTV

October 6 - Bye

BYU vs. UNLV

Saturday, Oct. 13 at Las Vegas

Kickoff: 7:30 pm Mountain Time

TV: Mtn