

Tuesday, September 2, 2014

Red, Blue And Pigskin

Well thankfully that's over, maybe now we can actually get to something resembling actual competition.
The Less Said The Better

I really don't get the point of these games.

Except for the cases where you are playing an actual 1-AA power house, like say one that is on a 5 game win streak against 1-A teams, there is nothing you can learn about your team from playing such crappy competition. Every bright spot is tempered with "but consider the competition." Even the negatives have to take the competition into account because teams play very vanilla, and players take the opponent too lightly. You can only hope you come away from the game without major injuries.

Well, that's not entire accurate. I do understand the point of these games. It's the easy purchased victory. Which for a team like Utah could be the difference between a bowl and not.

With the aforementioned "consider the competition" caveat in place, here are a few thoughts on last weeks game.

So That's What The Kaelin Clay Hype Was About

For those who don't follow recruitment very closely, you probably hadn't heard much about Kaelin Clay until a couple weeks ago.

Kaelin Clay is a Junior College Transfer who comes into this season with one year of eligibility, and a slight, extremely slight, Jim Carrey like chance at earning a second year. It's unusual for teams to bring in JuCo guys who will only be here for a year, because it takes a while to get rid of bad habits earned in the JuCo ranks.

When Clay committed to Utah many thought this was a great pickup, as Clay had the speed to be a difference maker, but then class issues cropped up, and Clay had one more class to finish, and was unable to make it for Spring Ball.

As fall camp approached, there was some question about whether his grade would post in time for him to come up. Finally it did, and Clay was on campus in time to start fall camp.

If you only have a single year to make an impact and try to work your way into the heads of NFL's scouts, scoring a punt return on your first ever 1-A college touch is a good way to start it. Taking a kickoff back 100 yards for another TD would also qualify as helpful.

If Clay can be that dynamic for Utah all season long, it will give them quite a formidable return weapon.

The Play Of The Night

One thing that was really missing from this team the last couple years was strong leadership from the Upperclassmen. Most of last Thursday night's game is completely forgettable, but one moment stood out to me above all others.

With under 2:00 to go in the first half, and Utah driving down to the Idaho State 25 yard line, redshirt Freshman Troy McCormick, someone who the coaches have high hopes for this season, fumbled the ball, resulting in the only turnover of the game.

It's easy for a youngster to get down on himself at this point, but instead Jr Kenneth Scott immediately went over to McCormick. Scott could be seen the entire time from the field to the sideline encouraging McCormick, and letting him know it'll be okay.

It's a small thing, but it's the kind of thing that can help a young player, and it's the kind of leadership that has been missing.

A Slightly Tougher Test

Despite their result from opening weekend it's safe to say that the Fresno State Bulldogs will be a tougher test for the Utes than the one they faced to start the season. The Bulldogs are the defending Mountain West Champions, who came into the season with a few questions they were in search of answers for.

It's safe to say after a 52-13 shellacking by the USC Trojans, they are still searching for answers to their questions, and probably more.

The big question for the Bulldogs is obviously how do you replace 2nd round draft pick, turned opening day starting QB for the Oakland Raiders Derek Carr, as well as Carr's best target from last year, fellow 2nd round pick WR Davante Adams? Follow up question being, since Fresno wasn't exactly a defensive power house last year, if their offense does suffer and they aren't able to put up the large points of the past few years, how will they cope?

The offense, and defense both failed their first test during the USC Contest.

Fresno State offensive coordinator Dave Schramm, who was the first, of many many offensive coordinators to replace Andy Ludwig after 2008, might have some extra incentive to get his offense going in the right direction this week.

A Weekend Not Devoid Of Knowledge

While Utah and Byu both played opponents that were completely and totally inept, as to make anything gleaned from the game almost worthless, there was one bit of knowledge that came out of the weekend.

I never knew, until this weekend, that it was possible to make the kicking team, re kick the ball, when they send a kickoff out of bounds. In my defense, I never knew this, because no one ever does it. Instead they simply take the ball at the 40 (35 in Nfl) yard line and start their drive.

But thanks to Bronco Mendenhall I now know it's possible to make the other team re kick, when he opted to do just that after UConn kicked a 4th quarter kickoff out of bounds. Of course we learned why it's best to take the yardage when a holding penalty caused the Cougars to start the next drive at the 20.

In the end, it's nothing more than an interesting footnote to an unremarkable game, but I did learn something new.

A Comfort Enigma

One thing I didn't fully learn though is how improved is Taysom Hill as a passer. Now to be quite clear, Taysom had a good night passing the ball, and it's clear he is no longer just a one trick pony. He's actually improved enough that I can't just refer to him as a Running Back playing the QB position. And with the schedule, and the opposing defenses that he will go against this year, it's clear that Hill is primed for a very very good season.

That doesn't mean it's all good though. First and foremost, I noticed Taysom tends to lock onto a single reception. Though it's only one game, it does seem like Mitch Matthews is going to be the primary beneficiary of this, as he and Hill seemed to have good chemistry, and Matthews is tall enough to present some matchup problems. Plus Matthews seems like he'll be the intermediate route option, which works right into Hill's wheelhouse.

Secondly, Hill was slow in making his reads. Against the majority of the defenses Hill will face this season, it won't be an issue, but should a defense actually manage to get pressure, Hill very well could resort back to his legs (again, a very useful weapon.)

What I found most intriguing about Hill, is how uncomfortable he looks staying in the pocket. On plays where he had to sit in the pocket to make his reads, Hill seemed extremely uncomfortable, and seemed to struggle with making his reads, and it felt like he was just waiting for a reason to bolt. On the same note though, whenever Hill was forced out of the pocket he was always poised, and calm, he kept his eyes down field and looked for a target.

Maybe Hill just likes chaos.

Speaking of chaos though, it's only a matter of time before one of his rocketed overarm "laterals" bounce off of a runner.

Remembering A Whooping

This week is the toughest game remaining for the Cougars. Not just because Texas is arguably the best team left on

their schedule, but because Texas is also extremely motivated. In the past, we've seen Bronco's teams at times fail to match the intensity of an extremely motivated opponent, and this may be the most motivated opponent they've faced since 2008.

Of course, we all remember why the Longhorns are extremely focused on this game, but that doesn't mean it's going to be an easy victory for them, especially with the news that their starting QB David Ash will be out for this game with a concussion.

Of course the object of the Texas' affection this weekend will be Taysom Hill, who absolutely shredded the Longhorn defense a year ago, which means Byu will be glad to see Jamaal Williams back in the lineup this week, so that Texas can't just crash down on Taysom.

This will also be a good test of Hill's to see if he truly has improved as a passing threat.

Offensively, it is unknown exactly what David Ash's replacement will bring to the table, but it's not exactly like Ash was ever the kind to light it up in the first place. I would expect Texas to put the ball in the hands of their two running backs who are both looking to add to their greater than 5 yards per carry average.

Ultimately this game will be won in the trenches. The biggest issue last year was a lack of fire by anyone in the trenches for the Longhorns. They seemed to think they could go into Provo and just manhandle the Byu OL and DL's, and when they couldn't they refused to adjust.

Charlie Strong is a good coach, and has already set the expectation for this season lower than most Longhorn fans would like, but this is the first real test of his tenure. Of course there is always the worry of putting too much on this game.

One Man Against The World

So in the comments last week, Rhett wondered why I didn't give much love to Chucky Keeton. Truth is, I think he's going to have a very difficult year.

As we all know Keeton is coming back off of a serious knee injury. On top of that, he's coming to a team missing it's running threat from last year. He's playing behind a rebuilt offensive line, and he has no real receiving weapons to help him out. It's going to be a tough year for Keeton.

This kind of played out against Tennessee on opening weekend when the Volunteers, with a true freshman heavy squad, playing 16 of them to be exact, absolutely took it to the Aggies.

Even Keeton himself looked quite rusty.

Keeton is a remarkable athlete, and if he were playing in a different conference would get insane amounts of hype. Heck he started the season as someone's Heisman pick, and that's while playing in Logan, Utah. He just can't do it by himself, and based off of early returns, he'll need to.

Broadcast Info

After this weekend, we get to start playing the waiting game for Utah Kickoff times. This week's game kicks off at 1:00 p.m. MST, and will be broadcast on Pac-12 Network.

Byu meanwhile will kickoff at 5:30 MST and will be seen on Fox Sports 1.

Posted by Sideshow in Red, Blue And Pigskin at 13:17