

Thursday, September 21, 2017

Red, Blue And Pigskin

Forget the football for a moment, the biggest thing that happened this weekend was #Rhett.

To paraphrase Rhett himself in the midst of all this, we may have peaked.#Rhett

After the results of this weekend Utah moved up in the polls. From 24-21 in the Coaches, and from unranked to 23 in the AP. Early season polls are stupid and meaningless, but they're always fun to watch as everyone tries to figure what the heck is going on.

With that in mind I sent a tweet commenting on the weirdness, with no idea what all was about to happen.

Knowing my current feelings on the rivalry and how it really shouldn't be played every year anymore, Rhett was a bit triggered and started a Rant. I responded to a few of his tweets, and for roughly the next hour we went back and forth. Not the first time we've done it on the subject. Won't be the last. That's it, we were done. So we thought.

Later that evening I had noticed that my timeline notifications were going crazy (I can only imagine how Rhett's were.) Apparently Ute Nation had found the rant, and decided to jump in. Some to continue discourse, many to remind Rhett just how delusional and crazy he is, and some to be just stupid idiots. This of course started a new round of back and forth with multiple people. The topic even veered off into the recent sideshow that was Mayweather predictably dominating McGregor.

The next day, notifications were still going crazy, and then it happened, sometime Sunday evening Rhett became #Rhett.

It really was weird to watch. It was a good example of the fun, and stupidity of social media.

Also Rhett, you're still a jerk, because I'm still getting notifications.

Onto The Football

So onto the games that were actually played. They weren't very good. We'll start with Byu. Unsurprisingly they were completely trounced by Wisconsin. Unlike the past couple weeks, Byu's bend but don't break in the red zone defense, completely snapped. Wisconsin put up 40 on their way to a 40-6 victory, which is Byu's worst defeat since Jake Heaps went derp. QB Beau Hoge even had a mini derp moment of his own to score the 40th point for Wisconsin.

It's not surprising that Wisconsin rushed for 235 yards on the ground. In fact many might be thinking that number seems really low. It's because Byu also couldn't do anything to stop the Passing game, as they allowed Badger QB Alex Hornibrook to set a new Wisconsin record for completion percentage as he completed a ridiculous 94.7% of his passes, going 18 out of 19.

It wasn't all disastrous for Byu. Ula Tolutau continues to grasp the main RB job as he rushed 13 times for 58 yards. In his first start Beau Hoge even looked semi competent. After a first pass interception, Hoge led Byu on a 6 minute drive to tie the game at 3. Throughout the game he had some decent downfield passes (although his WR's still just can't get any separation.) Byu offensive coordinator Ty Detmer even did a good job of working in some zone read into the gameplan to take advantage of his legs.

Of course it says a lot about Byu's early season when 11/20 for 111 yards and 2 Int's is considered decent.

Bye Weeks Suck, But.....

No team needs a bye this early in the season more than Byu does. It won't change the long term outcome of this season, and the Cougars still have that soft back half of the schedule to make the end result look better than it's been, but for right now Byu just needs a break.

This will give Tolutau more time to continue healing his ankle so that maybe he can be in the game long enough to really

be featured. This will also give Hoge an extra week of reps, to get comfortable, and let Detmer devise a temporary system to match him.

Plus Byu has just been hammered early on. They've gone up against 3 straight teams that play hard, pounding, beat your up style of football.

After the bye week, the Cougars get some more of a break against Utah State, before their schedule picks up again with Boise State, and Mississippi State.

When 54-16 Is Worse Than 19-13

The Utes completed their 5th consecutive undefeated non conference schedule last Saturday manhandling the San Jose State Spartans 54-16. Since joining in 2011 the Utes are a Pac-12 best 24-1 in games against non conference foes.

That doesn't mean all was well this past weekend. Utes are still adjusting to the new scheme of offensive coordinator Troy Taylor, and it showed with sloppy play, and some poor decisions by QB Tyler Huntley. Utes also had some problems holding onto the ball as they committed 3 turnovers, two of them by the QB.

Utes did manage to cut down on penalties, but still committed 5 of them (technically 6, but I'm not counting the delay of game to move back for a punt, as that was a coaching decision penalty, not a mistake penalty.) Utes also managed to start the game by struggling in the red zone, and at the end of the first quarter, despite once again racking up yardage against their foe, they couldn't finish drives and led only 9-6.

The Offensive line struggled all night to give Huntley time in the pocket, and it seemed to cause him some struggles. Also without Safety Chase Hansen in the lineup, the Utes kept allowing a WR to get behind them.

Eventually the Utes did get it figured out, and started to pour it on. After 3 figgies in their first 4 trips in the Red Zone, the Utes scored TD's on 3 of their last 4.

The Defensive line as usual was just filthy, as they curtailed the Spartan run game all night.

View From The Red Zone

Blowouts, while easier on the heart, really just aren't as much fun as tighter closer games. Especially during a cold night. The stadium half emptied by midway in the 3rd quarter, and was maybe only 20% full by the beginning of the 4th. At least I got to move down a few rows.

I'm not sure if the field was wet from the night before when it rained, or if Utah needs deeper cleats, but they were struggling all night to keep their footing. There were many players who had a hard time, and kept slipping. Huntley many times had a run stopped short because he lost his footing. I saw similar issues from Troy McCormick, Darren Carrington, and especially Samson Nacua. The latter ended up fumbling because of a slip.

I was extremely disappointed by Troy Williams. I get that he's unhappy he lost the starting job, but dude was voted a team captain. He got to come in on the last 3 drives of the game, and while Utah only called running plays, his body language said the field was the last place he wanted to be. In between plays he just stood there, hands in warmers, just wishing the clock would go down. When he'd run the play, he didn't have much effort, never really finished his option fakes, and generally had very poor body language. Very disappointing for someone who's supposed to be a team leader, and is only 1 play away from being the guy. Honestly, if that's how he is, I'd rather see Cooper Bateman.

Finally, Mitch Wishnowsky, we really just aren't worthy. Go find a video of his left footed punt on the run after he avoids a sack. Unbelievable. Maybe the most athletic play of the day.

The Season Really Begins Now

The Utes are really going to need that defensive line this week, as they begin Pac-12 play on Friday with a matchup against the Arizona Wildcats. This will be a matchup of strength against strength as the Utes 4th ranked rushing defense will face off against the nations 6th ranked rushing offense of Arizona.

Granted both teams haven't really gone up against stiff competition, and those rankings might be a bit padded.

Rushing however, has always been the name of this game. Since becoming coach of the Wildcats, Rich Rodriguez has gone 4-1 against the Utes, usually by racking up huge amounts of rushing.

For Utah to succeed they need to be stout on the defensive line. They also need to make sure to contain Arizona QB Brandon Dawkins who accounted for 6 TD's against UTEP last week. If the Utes can contain the Arizona run game, and specifically stay sound when Dawkins attempts to scramble or run, they can stymie the Wildcat offense.

Offensively, the Utes need to continue the growth they've had each of the first 3 weeks. Huntley continues to make solid decisions. One area though that needs to drastically improve is the non qb running game. Zack Moss was better last week, but still struggled for the 2nd straight week. Against a tired worn out defense in garbage time, Sophomore Devontae Henry-Cole came in and looked to have quite a bit of burst at the end of the game. Whit has long said that DHC's issues have been health, and blocking, but it will be interesting to see if he gets some more chances this week.

A Vision Of The Season

Once again, it seems as though the only thing that can really hinder Utah, is Utah themselves. The difference this week, is competition begins to ratchet up, and they are finally facing teams that could take advantage of Utah shooting themselves repeatedly in the foot. It's time for Utah to start getting the quirks figured out, so they can open up the playbook. This week we will find out if they have begun to do that.

In fact, bold prediction time. The outcome of this game, will tell us how the rest of the season will go. If Utah loses this game, I think it's a sign, that they will bottom out at around 6-6, maybe 7-5.

A win, but one that's sloppy, and very similar to the last few weeks, and 8 wins, with an outside shot at 9 is the ceiling.

However, If Utah goes in and beats Arizona, and does so someone convincingly, while being in control. I don't mean a blowout, but a win where Utah was clean, they limited the mistakes, and they control the game from beginning to end. If that happens, I've seen enough from what is a filthy defense, and an offense that looks intriguing, that I think they will win the South.

How To Watch

The Utes game is the only one this week, and it is a Friday game. You know what that means. You get to watch any game you want on Saturday Honey-do list.....

The Utes and Arizona will kick off at 8:30 p.m. mountain time Friday night, and will be broadcast on Fox Sports 1.

Posted by Sideshow at 09:26