

Thursday, September 28, 2017

Red, Blue And Pigskin

Four letter word #1, four letter word #2, four letter word #3, four letter word #1 again preceded by a six letter word.

I hate playing Arizona more than any team out there right now. Since joining the Pac-12, and since they hired Rich Rod to be their coach, the Arizona wildcats are the thorn in the paw for the Utes. Even when Utah wins, Arizona screws them up. I am so glad to be done with that game. Litmus Test Results

I said last week that this Arizona game was going to be a Litmus test for the kind of year Utah would end up. Well the results are in. Utah is a very talented, very undisciplined team. It's going to cost them in a few games.

If Huntley is out long term, they might struggle to win 7 games. There is just a huge difference in the offense with Huntley back there, versus when Williams is back there.

Huntley is just quicker on his reads, and is more dynamic of a playmaker. Williams may have a better arm, but he's takes too long to make a decision and get it out. Plus with Williams back there, the Utes lose 1/4 of their gameplan because the zone read just isn't a threat.

Also can someone please tell me why Arizona is such a troublesome foe for the Utes. Look at the history

2012 - Eliminated from bowl contention

2013 - Eliminated from bowl contention

2014 - Eliminated from Pac-12 south contention.

2015 - Devontae Booker injures meniscus and is done for the season.

2016 - Utes win, but 11 first half penalties. Armand Shyne and Jordan Howard both injure there knees done for the year.

2017 - Utes win, but Tyler Huntley, Kylie Fitts, Bradlee Anae, and Kavika Luafatasanga all suffer injuries.

Seriously I hate playing Arizona.

Thankfully the Utes have a bye week this week, so they can either heal up, or give Troy Taylor a week to tailor an offense to Troy Williams' strengths.

A Conference Rivalry Showdown

Okay so it's not a conference game, but it is Conference weekend, which means it's time for the Friday night rivalry game between Byu and Utah State.

Only issue is, neither team is any good.

For Byu this is a nice change of pace, as prior to last week's bye, they had spent the previous 3 weeks getting beat up.

Byu ranks near the bottom in the country in most offensive categories, while Utah state is 103rd in the nation in scoring defense.

Utah state did manage 10 points against Wisconsin versus only 6 for Byu. Conversely Byu held Wisconsin to only 40 points compared the 59 they put up on the Aggies.

This is a match up of the movable object against a resistible force.

Short One This Week

Sorry don't have more to say this week, but With Utah on bye, and the matchup to not be the worst team in the state. I just don't have it this week.

Kickoffs and Tv Time

Blog Export: Annals of the Homestarmy, <http://www.thehomestarmy.com/s9y/>

The kickoff for Utah's game against Stanford on October has been announced. It will be an 8:15 kick.

This week's game Between Byu and Utah State kicks off at 6:00 p.m. and will be broadcast on CBS Sports Network.

Posted by Sideshow in Red, Blue And Pigskin at 10:54

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

Wednesday, September 13, 2017

Red, Blue And Pigskin

This must be how Phil Connors felt. Every year, different pieces, same story. No matter how dominant one team is, and no matter how hapless the other team is, when it comes to the end, the game is always on the line, waiting for something strange, and crazy to happen.

Of course, I'd rather suffer through this kind of Groundhog's Day than the one Byu fans are living through.

Note: In this analogy, 2011 is the suicide montage from the movie.

The Holy War has come and gone, and while it won't be back until next November, there still enough time to look back at the good, the bad, and the ugly for both teams and see what we can learn about both teams after the rivalry clash.

But first...There's Ugly, And Then There's Horrifically, Misfigured, Better To Stay Hidden Under The Stairs, Fugly

Before we get to what happened with the two teams, I'm sure anyone who watched that broadcast can agree on one thing. The worst part of the night was that broadcast duo. I know Utah and Byu isn't usually an ESPN announcer's prime choice for assignment, and there has been plenty of time were announcers weren't fully prepared, but the duo of Mike Patrick and Tommy Tuberville took incompetence to an entirely new level. Jake Heaps aspires to be as bad at his job as they were.

Wrong names, Faulty information, flat out false information, going multiple plays without saying anything. A general lack of understanding the rules of football. It was terrible.

I knew ESPN was suffering, as evident by all those layoffs, but judging by the production quality of the telecast, and this announce team, they must have been really really hurting. I think we all heard why Tuberville is no longer a coach.

I'm also sorry to say Byu fans, that you have to suffer through that again next week. I'm sure Utah will get them again soon as well, which is a fate that shouldn't be bestowed upon anybody.

Rise And Shout

It wasn't a good game for Byu. We're starting to get enough data that we can get a feel for exactly what this year's Byu team is. It's not good overall, but there was still some good takeaways from their 7th consecutive Holy War defeat.

The Good

Red Zone Defense - There's more later on about defense between the twenties, but for the 2nd straight week, the defense did a great job of not breaking in the most important part of the field.

Byu might have finally found their running back. Ula Tolutau provided a much needed spark for an otherwise dead offense, and was the driving force for Byu's first TD. He rushed 5 times for 25 yards, and a TD. Utah struggled to adjust to his entry into the game. The big question mark is whether Tolutau can stay healthy. He's already nursing a camp injury, which is why he was limited to only 5 yards rushing.

For all his faults, one thing remains true about Mangum, he remains calm under pressure, but.....

No fake punts.

Jonah Trinnaman gave Byu a spark on their first scoring drive by breaking a long TD return, only to be taken down by a diving Mitch Wishnowsky.

Byu's run defense. They keyed on Zack Moss all night, and were not going to let Huntley give him the ball.

The Bad

We're starting to see who the real Mangum is. He may be calm under pressure, but he's struggling in this system. Even Detmer made a reference to it this week, that since he no longer has the 6'5" WR to just throw it up to, it's hurt his production.

The Offense as a whole is terrible. Outside of Tolutau, and when Utah went zone late in the game, Byu just could not sustain any forward momentum.

The WR's are unable to get separation.

Between the 20's, for the 2nd straight week, Byu defense was exposed. It's a good thing they've been able to tighten up in the red zone, but I'm not sure they want to keep playing with fire.

The Ugly

Again the Offense....

Not to pick on a player but Aleva Hifo had a night to forget. His early offensive pass interference call was one of the most obvious and blatant offensive picks I've ever seen, and it erased a TD that would have given Byu an early lead. He also dropped a gimme pass on the first play of the last drive when Byu was angling for a miracle drive to win.

Moving On

Byu is struggling right now. Things won't be any easier this week as they welcome the Wisconsin Badgers into town. They'll be doing it without Tanner Mangum who after being beaten up the last couple weeks suffered a high ankle sprain last week and is gone for 4-6 weeks. In his place will be Beau Hoge, a sophomore, and son of former NFL running back Merrill Hoge.

Wisconsin has to be extremely giddy as they watch tape of the LSU game, because they are very much a power run game type of offense, who is currently ranked 13th in the nation in rushing yards with 295.5 yards per game. That said, Byu's defense will be better than that Fighting Lane Kiffins of FAU, and Utah State who the Badgers destroyed in week 1 by the score of 59-10

With Mangum out, and Hoge starting, this game looks to be a continuation of the previous two game, where the Offense is going to struggle to find it's footing, while the Bend but don't break mentality of the defense is going to get really, really, tested.

Who Am I, Sir

Much like with Byu, there is some things to take away from a lackluster Utah performance in the Holy War.

The Good

Tyler Huntley..... He's dynamic, he doesn't make a lot of bad decisions passing the ball. As we saw with the deep pass in the middle, he has quite the arm. This offense is made for him. It's early, obviously, but if this kid can continue to develop, continue to get comfortable, he could develop into a star in a few years. Against Byu he had nearly 400 yards of offense.

The defense did what the defense does. It smothered the Byu WR's making it impossible for them to get any room. Shut down the Byu running game, and harassed and tortured Mangum into 3 interceptions and many other rushed passes and poor decisions. It seemed that Utah could get a guy in the back field whenever they wanted.

The offense as a whole is definitely far improved from what we've seen the last few years. This offense is dynamic. Utah is using more of the field than they have in year's past and was doing a good job of getting WR's open in space. Carrington especially always seemed to find a whole in between defenders whenever Utah needed a first down.

The Defensive Backfield especially had a great night. Julian Blackmon and Jayce Johnson were locking down the BYU WR's all night long.

The Bad

Running game. Byu was keying on Moss all night, forcing Huntley to keep it on the reads, but the non QB running game

was bad this week. Utah will need more of week 1 and less of week 2, especially to help keep Huntley healthy.

Red Zone scoring. Utah officially went scoreless on 2 red zone trips, but one of those was the very end of the game when they went into victory formation. Outside of the 2 scoreless trips, the Utes had to settle for Field Goals way too many times. Utah has got to start converting red zone trips into 7 points instead of 3.

Even though everyone knew Matt Bushman was Mangum's favorite target, he still was able to get enough room to make a few plays.

The Ugly

Penalties. Far too many penalties. The Utes have been called for 11 penalties each game so far. The only thing that seemed able to stop Utah was their own stupid penalties last week. Penalties are what kept them from being a 2 or even 3 score game. Utah must get those under control.

Sunia Tauteoli. It doesn't matter if you started your tackle before the QB Slides. The second you drop your head you're being dumb.

Avoiding A Hangover

Last season, the Utes beat Byu in a tight holy war matchup. The week after they played San Jose and came out looking extremely flat for the first half, even trailing 10-6 midway through the 2nd quarter before the Utes finally put the Byu game behind them, and pulled away, eventually sacking San Jose State 10 times in 34-17 win.

San Jose State isn't a good team, but they already showed once this year they can be frisky if the opponent isn't mentally ready. The opponent that Utah is really going up against this week is Byu. For whatever reason, Utah has had a very hard time shaking off the Byu game. Since joining the Pac-12, when the game got moved from the last week of the season Utah is 1-3 in the weeks following the Byu game.

This is the last week for Utah to sharpen up their game before entering Pac-12 play.

Nice Lid

This is also the annual Ute Proud game. The game where Utah wears a uniform and/or helmet designed with the Ute Indian tribe in mind. (It's also the game where in the past the tribe has come out to perform at halftime, which is really cool.)

This year they've redesigned the helmet, to incorporate the Indian logos within the U, and I must say, Me Likey.

Honestly, I really like what the Utes, and Under Armour have done with their helmets the last few years. We've gotten some really nice designs and alternate lids.

For Your Viewing Pleasure

The Wisconsin/Byu matchup will be the early afternoon network game, kicking off at 1:30 p.m. Mountain Time, and being broadcast on ABC. This of course means a much larger audience will get to feel the pain of Mike Patrick and Tommy Tuberville. Really Byu fans, I'm sorry.

Utah vs San Jose will be a late game, kicking off at 8:00 p.m. and will be broadcast on Espn 2.

Posted by Sideshow in Red, Blue And Pigskin at 13:58

Wednesday, September 6, 2017

Red, Blue And Pigskin

Well.....

I've got nothing. There's really not anything of value that can come from last week. Utes played a lesser opponent, while Byu was involved in a game so horrifically and historically one sided, that it would be impossible to extrapolate anything of value from it. Let's just move on shall we.

Besides. It's Holy War week, and while my thoughts about whether this game should be played on a yearly basis has changed over the last 6 years (it shouldn't), my enjoyment of the game when it's actually here hasn't changed.

So let's get to the Holy War Breakdown. But First A Reminder

I will say this about the rivalry. People are what make or break it. When you've got good neighbors and friends who can give and take a joke, it makes it real fun. As we go about this week, let's remember that the majority of people, jokes, trash talk, ribbing, and pranks are all of this variety. Not all Ute fans are the moron in suspenders or the dude with the sacrament tray. Not all Byu fans are the inhabitants of Cougarboard. I know that none of the people who read this blog fall into those 10% outliers, but I still wanted to put it out there.

That's not to say that I don't think a rivalry should be totally devoid of hate. Truthfully, as bad and as ugly as the Holy War gets at times it's still timid compared to some other rivalries like Auburn/Alabama, or even Georgia/Georgia Tech. The latter of which has a rivalry nickname of "Good Ole Fashioned Hate" and in order to get access to some of the fraternities the pass phrase is "F&*# Georgia/Georgia Tech" depending on which campus you're on.

In the end though let's just keep it fun and clean.

Who's Who

A lot has changed on both sides of this game in the last year. So let's see who the participants are.

Quarterback

Byu - Junior Tanner Mangum is now the man calling the shots at QB for the Cougars. Mangum played in 2015 when Tayson Hill went down with injury, and was the backup for all of last year except during the Bowl Game when Hill once again got hurt. Mangum has been a bit inconsistent in the time we've got to see him. We all remember the back to back Hail Mary plays to beat Nebraska and Boise State, but we also remember the lame duck performances like Michigan, Utah in the Vegas Bowl, Wyoming, and most recently LSU. Mangum has struggled early on in this young season as he's still trying to find his footing in Detmer's West Coast offense.

Utah - Utah nabbed true Sophomore Tyler Huntley to be their starter this year. Against North Dakota, Huntley struggled on the first drive but eventually settled in. Huntley looks to be a dual threat type of QB, who can hurt you with his arm and his leg. In what little we have to work off of this year, Huntley did a good job of keeping his eyes downfield when forced to scramble. However he did miss a few open routes. Last year's starter Troy Williams is the backup. Williams isn't as dynamic a runner, but having survived the Holy War last year, in which he was at times poised, and at times dreadful, he's a solid #2.

Advantage - If it were Williams #1 with Huntley as the backup, this would be a Utah advantage as Williams and Mangum are roughly equal, but the lack of experience with Huntley starting gives this edge barely to Byu.

Running Back

Byu - It's hard to replace your all time leading rusher, and through two games, Byu still isn't sure what they're going to do. So far Squally Canada has been the main guy, and against Portland State had 98 yards on the ground. However against a team with a pulse Canada was only able to get 8 yards rushing against LSU. An inability to run will really hinder the offense and Mangum this season. During the LSU game Byu lost two of their runningbacks in KJ Hall and Kaviko Fonua, so Trey Dye will probably be the secondary back.

Utah - Utah had wanted to do a running back by committee approach this season but when they lost Armand Shyne for

the year with a broken arm, it became clear that true sophomore Zack Moss would be the guy. Moss had a good opening performance getting 128 yards on the ground. For a change of pace, the Utes also employ Troy McCormick Jr as a speedster, out of the backfield threat. Also wouldn't be surprised to see true freshman T.J. Green get some playing time.

Advantage - Utah

Wide Receiver

Byu - So far no position has been a bigger disappointment for the Cougars than the Wide Receivers. They've really been non-existent so far. On the year 10 different Cougars have caught passes, but of those 10 only 5 of them are WR's. WR's struggled severely to get separation in both games played so far this year.

Utah - Even taking away the addition of Darren Carrington the WR position at Utah was a position that was poised for a breakout year with Raelon Singleton, and Demari Simpkins looking to take advantage of the style of offense that Troy Taylor likes to run. Adding in Darren Carrington though takes it to another level. Carrington is a dynamic playmaker at the WR position who is just on another level from the rest of the team. In week 1 he and Huntley had great chemistry. It's clear who opposing teams will be focusing on which will open up the rest of the field for Singleton and Simpkins.

Advantage - Utah

Tight End

Byu - Where the WR's have been an utter disappointment, Matt Bushman has found a niche as Mangum go to guy. He leads the team in receiving yards, and was about the only one who could do anything against LSU. It won't take long for teams to start doubling him to take away the option, but for now the chemistry between he and Mangum is a bright spot on the offense.

Utah - Every year we hear that Utah is going to feature the Tight End. Every year they start the season looking like that's exactly what's going to happen, and every year they eventually forget all about it. Talent wise the Utes have the advantage with Harrison Handley, and Siale Faikaloatonga. But Siale is coming back from back to back knee injuries.

Advantage - In this case, the advantage goes to the team that seems to actually use the position. Byu

Offensive Line

Byu - The OL has long been an under-performing bunch for the Cougars. Center Tejan Koroma is the anchor of the line, and is often regarded as one of the best Centers in the country. The rest of the OL is still trying to gel in order to keep Mangum clean, and open up running lanes for the Running Backs. Despite struggling against LSU, it's early to really tell how well this group will do this year. The good news for them, is that not all defensive lines will be as stout as LSU. The bad news, is that their next two opponents just might be.

Utah - A lot has been made that Utah lost 4 players from the offensive line to the draft last year. Although it's usually incorrectly reported that the Utes are only bringing back 1 starter. Truthfully they're bringing back 3 players with starting experience. The most experienced is Salesi Uhatafe who started all last year. In addition Lo Falemaka started at center after one of the many injuries the Utes suffered at that position last year, and LT Jackson Barton has earned a few starts throughout his career playing both Right and Left tackle. Overall the group is light on experience, and doesn't have much time playing together, so they'll need to gel quickly.

Advantage - Push

Defensive Line

Byu - When Byu hired Kalani Sitake as head coach, he brought with him a change in defense. Gone were the 3-4 days of Bronco, and instead he's switching to more of a 4-3 defensive scheme similar to what he learned at Utah. The anchor of his defensive line is oft-trouble Sione Takitaki who is back after missing last season with disciplinary issue. While Takitaki is supposed to be the disruptor in the middle, the Cougars are hoping Corbin Kaufusi can be the same force outside that his brother Bronson was. Outside of these two the Cougars are really hoping Handsome Tanielu can give them the production they've yet to receive from him. There is a lot of undergraduate potential with the recruits from the last two years, but the Cougars really need some of that potential to start coming through on the field.

Utah - Defensive Line has been the bread and butter of the Whittingham defense for almost 25 years now. This year, the defensive line is once again stacked. In the middle Senior Lowell Lotulelei is getting the same kind of all-american talk his brother got a few years ago, and next to him his Filipino Mokofisi. With Hunter Dimick gone to the NFL, Kylie Fitts

is return from an injury in 2016 to try and stake his claim as the next mayor of Sack Lake City. Utah likes to rotate a lot of bodies on the defensive line to keep them fresh. Some of the back ups who can still cause major issues are Leki Fotu and Maxs Tupai.

Advantage - Utah

Linebacker

Byu - This was a position that going into the season was expected to be an good advantage for the Cougars, but all that changed with the year long suspension of Francis Bernard. With Bernard gone for the year the Cougars will be relying on Fred Warner, and Butch Pau'u, both of whom have shown to have a good nose for the ball. Although Butch was suspended for the first game, so we haven't really been able to see much of him yet this year. Warner was one of the few names you kept hearing make plays against LSU.

Utah - With Bernard out for Byu, Utah looked like they might be able to swing this position to their advantage, but an injury to Kavika Luafatasanga has left it as a question mark. Utah doesn't talk about injuries unless they're season ending. They haven't said anything about Kavika's injury, but that just means he could be back sometime between this week and week 12. The other starting linebacker is Sunia Tauteoli. Tauteoli was a bit disruptive in 10 games last year proving adept both in the run and the pass. The Utes have been using less and less of a 3 linebacker set the past few years, opting instead for a 5th DB that they may sneak up to the line. Most likely Chase Hansen

Advantage - This is a close one, but just barely, because they're a little more trustworthy it goes to Byu

Defensive Backs

Byu - A position that will be weakened for the first half of the game as Micah Hannemann will be serving his 2nd targeting related suspension of the young season, after being called for a blatant targeting in the 2nd half against LSU. Hannemann is the Cougars best known commodity in the defensive backfield, and with him out the Cougars will be relying on Austin McChesney, Troy Warner, and Dayan Ghanwoloku (nee Lake). The Cougars struggle to keep up speed wise so expect them to play a lot of Cover Zone formations keeping the WR's in front of them, and the coming up to make a tackle.

Utah - Another position hit by NFL departures for the Utes, as last year's starting Free Safety, and both starting Cornerbacks are now on NFL rosters. The lone returner is Chase Hansen who after moving over from Quarterback near the end of the 2015 season has show a real adeptness at his new position, and is considered one of the best Safeties in the Pac-12. To replace all the lost talent, the Utes have a mix of highly recruited freshmen Like Jaylon Johnson, and Junior College transfers like Corrión Ballard.

Advantage - This is a hard one. We know what's there at Byu, but we don't know exact what's there for Utah. That said I trust Utah a lot more when it comes to developing defensive backs. Between that and Chase Hansen this is a Push

Kickers

Byu - Byu enters the season having seemingly settled on Junior Rhett Almond. In his career Almond is 19 of 24, but has never made a kick greater than 40 yards going 0-3 lifetime.

Utah - After 4 seasons of Automatic Andy, the Utes entered this season unsettled at the kicking position. Chayden Johnston got the first crack missing a 43 yarder. After that former Soccer player Matt Gay got the nod making all 3 of his attempts including a 49 yarder against North Dakota

Advantage - Let's be honest, no team feels comfortable here. Just go for it on 4th. Push

Punter

Byu - Senior Jonny Linehan is back. Linehan averages around 42 yards per punt in his career. Linehan is also notable for two things. 1 He's a great twitter follower, and overall has a really good personality. Last year at Rice-Eccles he was joking it up with fans on the sideline before the game. 2. He's also not very good at faking it.

Utah - Mitch Wishnowski is the best punter in the country, as last year he won the Ray Guy Award for the 3rd consecutive year by a Utah punter. Last year he averaged over 47 yards per punt, and in his lone attempt this season went 52.

Advantage - Utah

Return Game

Neither team has really shown much of anything yet this year in the return game. So it's a Push.

Coaching

Byu - Kalani Sitake has brought a new energy to the sideline in Provo that had been missing the last few years of Bronco's tenure. With him has also come a lot of excitement over what might be. Sitake had a semi successful first year. Offensive Coordinator Ty Detmer however has been a mixed bag with his offense. It seemed to be a poor match with Taysom last year, and hasn't seemed to take advantage of Tanner skill set yet this year. I know Ty is a beloved figure among those in Cougarland and is expected to be the head guy in 3 or 4 years, but I wonder how long before his dink and dunk west coast offense wears thin. Defensively Iliasi Tuiaki has been a surprise, and his defense is definitely the bright spot of the team early on in the new era. Interesting side note is that this week, Byu hired former Utah OC Aaron Roderick as an offensive consultant. He might have a few nuggets to share. But honestly Utah's defense hasn't changed much from when Sitake ran it.

Utah - Kyle Whittingham will be at Utah as long as he wants to be. And while some grumble about the ever changing Offensive Coordinators, the November meltdowns, the ball control offense, and other things, the truth is he's helped Utah transition from a G5 to a P5 team with minimal side effects. This year he's given the offense to Troy Taylor, and while it's only 1 game, the outcome so far has been nice. Not necessarily in productivity, but mainly in play calling and options shown during the North Dakota game. Defensively the Utes are the Utes. 2nd year defensive coordinator Morgan Scalley will start to put his own spin on things, but in the end it's a Whittingham defense.

Advantage - Utah

X Factors

It's a rivalry game so there will certainly be a lot of x factors involved. Utah of course is trying to get their 7th straight win in the series. It's the first game back at Rice-Eccles SouthLaVell Edwards Stadium since a 2 1 year hiatus after the 2013 game. The crowd will be amped up early as the game goes on, but will they also just be waiting for the next shoe to drop.

After last week's performance by Byu, expect them to come out wanting desperately to prove they aren't the disaster that we saw in the Superdome. There is the old cliché about nothing more dangerous than a wounded animal, and the Cougars will be extremely wounded.

It's also extremely hard in a situation like this to beat a team 7 straight times. But this could go both ways as Utah could just expect to win, especially being the more talented team, and get caught snoozing. The prevailing thought all offseason was that with all Utah lost this had to be the year the Cougars broke through, because if not this year, then when?

Also as history has shown, this game always comes down to something fluky. Harline still open, Magic Happens, Burton's Block. 3 Rushing the fields. Going back even further in history is Kaneshiro doink. LaVell's final miracle. Very rarely is the game just normal.

Advantage - Push

So What About Game Plans

Utah Defense Versus Byu Offense

Byu needs to put out an APB for it's missing run game. Utah will happily force Mangum to try and beat them through the air, feeling that they can matchup 1 on 1 on the outside. The Utes play a Man coverage scheme, and this will be the first semi test of the year for the rebuilt secondary. Look for Chase Hansen to spy Matt Bushman who is Mangum's early favorite target.

It will be key that Byu is able to find some early running room, and take pressure of the WR's . If Byu is able to run the ball, that will make Hansen have to keep his eyes in the backfield a little more, which will open up Bushman as an outlet for Mangum.

Utah Offense Versus Byu Defense

At this point I'm really not all that sure what Utah's gameplan will be. They ran the ball more than I expected in week 1 but when you are getting 5-6 yards per pop that's what you do. In the passing, the Utes seem to favor quick hitting underneath routes and then let their WR's make plays.

For Byu they will must stop Carrington. Carrington will be Huntley's go to guy, and is a player capable of taking over a game. This rivalry has not had a playmaker like Carrington involved offensively since probably Austin Collie, and in all honesty Carrington is a better WR than Collie was. Look for a safety to constantly be cheating over to Carrington's side of the field.

The big key to this game, will be Huntley and his scrambling ability. If Byu can get pressure and make Huntley a runner who can't get comfortable, the Utah offense will struggle. If however Huntley is able to scramble and relocate the pocket, prior to setting up and making passes it will cause the Cougar defense fits, as that will also open up the zone/read run for Huntley.

Finally

I don't have a prediction. Mainly I can't get my heart and my head to come to an agreement. I will say this though, after last week's performance, I am very tempted to see Byu's temperament as they come out. I expect them to come out fast. In fact I wouldn't be surprised to see them get the first score, and maybe even have an early 10-0 lead. The question is whether they can maintain that early emotional storm, or if when they run into some troubles, do they fall back into a "here we go again mentality."

Where To Watch

It's a late one this week with kickoff scheduled for 8:15 p.m. That of course will mean that as the game comes to the end, especially if it's a tight game, you can bet you will hear the ESPN 2 announcers make the "what happens if this game goes into Sunday?" joke that is beyond tired out at this point.

Posted by Sideshow in Red, Blue And Pigskin at 09:47