

outlook

by Glenn Potter, Head Basketball Coach

After being in the thick of the conference race three years in a row, last year was a building year for BYU. The Cougars finished 11-15 on the year going 6-8 in the conference for a sixth place finish. This year it appears we could be more competitive in light of the added experience of our front line and a more favorable home schedule.

The problems we are faced with this year seem to be just the opposite of last year's. Last season it was necessary to replace all three front line players. This year we must find replacements for both starting guards while the front line remains intact. Last year's guard duo of Doug Richards and Bill Anderson represented 44 percent of the BYU offense as they were the only players averaging in double figures. Between the two of them they were the top scorers in 22 of our 26 games.

Our team this year has two immediate goals in mind. 1) We must improve our defensive play, and 2) would like to speed up our play and fastbreak more than we did last year. In order to meet these criteria we felt we had to have more speed and quickness in our program and concentrated our efforts along this line in our recruiting last spring. Two new faces, both junior college transfers, Gary Batiste, 6'1" and Brian Frishman, 6'6" appear to have the ingredients we were looking for.

It is also our hope that we can feature a more balanced offensive attack. We want to get a more balanced scoring effort from all positions. We are changing our offensive set and going back to a 2-3 alignment in hopes that this will better accomplish what we want. This will necessitate a full transition to forward for sophomores Mark Handy, 6'8" and Jay Cheesman, 6'8" who played closer to the basket last year in our double post set up.

The Guard Position

The only proven returning player at guard is Grig Clawson. Grig was a part-time starter in the backcourt early last season when we were running a three-guard offense but was relegated to a reserve role when we felt we needed a better team rebounding effort. Other players vying for a starting guard spot are Veryl Law, 6'2" who is a hard-nosed competitor; Gary Batiste, 6'1" J.C. transfer from Feather River Community College in California; Lyn Dasso, a 6'2" freshman from Sunnyside, Washington; and Reed Noble, 6'5" up from last year's junior varsity team. The major problems at this position appear to be lack of experience and lack of proven leadership under fire. The strongpoint looks to be in quickness compared to last year.

The Forward Position

This position could be the area where we show the biggest improvement in comparison to last year's team and also is probably the most heated in terms of competition for a starting berth. Mark Handy, 6'8" sophomore, was the team's third leading scorer (9.8) and the top rebounder (8.7) on last year's club but spent considerable time in the post and may be called upon to play that position again some this year. Jay Cheesman, 6'8" sophomore, hopes to get off to a quicker start this year since he was hobbled at the start of last season with a severe ankle sprain. It is also a strong possibility that Jay will spend some time in the post area. Greg Snow, 6'7" part-time starter last year, returns for his senior year. He is one of the better shooters but must improve his board play. Two

other part-time starters, Chris Williams, 6'7" and Gifford Nieson, 6'5", appear to have improved. Gifford is reporting earlier this year since it was decided to redshirt him in football. One other new face is J.C. transfer Brian Frishman. Brian will add needed speed and outside shooting—something which was lacking last year from our front line.

Centers

Last season Troy Jones averaged 8.1 ppg and 4.9 rebounds. Troy has the size and is very strong physically. He also possesses a good hook shot but needs to improve his rebounding. Stu Walkenhorst, 6'10" is up from the junior varsity squad. Handy and Cheesman could also be called upon to back up this position.

Conference Race

It appears to be a wide open affair. All of the teams lost outstanding players either due to graduation or to the NBA hardship draft. I also feel that the teams in the lower half of the conference race strengthened themselves with incoming freshmen and junior college transfers. Off hand, it looks like there could be very little difference between the last place team and the first place club.

New Mexico, who won it all last year, lost four starters, but they had more depth than any team in the conference. Based upon this, I feel they should be a contender. Arizona State, who represented our conference in the CCA Tournament, lost their front line but they have Scott Lloyd and a number of red shirts with size waiting to pick up the slack. Arizona suffered due to the hardship draft, but as was the case with New Mexico, they were deep in reserves and had another good recruiting year. Utah, who was the runner-up in the NIT, lost the leading rebounder in the conference and some speed in Medley and Jones, but they appear to have recruited well. UTEP and Colorado State could be sleepers with the addition of a number of junior college transfers. Wyoming should be much improved with a new transfer in the post and some fine freshman guards.

If I were to pick a potential champion today, I would go with Arizona State. I also feel New Mexico and Arizona are in the best position to challenge the Sun Devils. I would have to place UTEP, Utah, Colorado State, Wyoming, and BYU in the dark horse class.

Non-Conference Opponents

Our schedule is just about opposite of last year's. We have 16 home games which includes an encounter with the Brazilian National Team and 11 games on the road. For the first time in years we will not participate in a Christmas Tournament but instead will play three games in four nights at home between Christmas and New Year's Day.

We open our season up with the University of Texas who was the Southwest Conference champions last year. Weber State feels they may have the best team in the history of their school. Wichita is improved. San Francisco and Seattle finished 1-2 in the WCAC. Utah State is one of the top independent schools in the West. Bradley is a co-favorite in the MVC and Davidson is a pre-season pick in the Southern Conference.

Summary

In summary, I do feel we have some real question marks. We should be a much quicker team, but we also must find a leader for our backcourt and our front line must increase their scoring and rebounding performances. We are still a young team, and therefore we must hope that all of the pieces fit together by the time the conference starts.