

Arnold Interview

In your estimation, are there any "soft spots" on the team needing special attention?

● The two soft spots that I felt were somewhat of a problem for us last year were overall ball handling, primarily passing, and our half-court defense. With concerted effort toward our ball-handling skills and with the addition of some new and very talented players, I feel that the passing on this team has improve remarkably over the same period of time last year. We have dedicated ourselves this year and our players have accepted the challenge to play a more aggressive denial brand of half-court defense. If things continue as they have progressed in practice, I feel that our defense will be significantly better over the season.

What do you consider to be the team's strengths?

● I would have to say that the strength of this year's team will be in the overall size and experience of our front line men with Jay Cheesman and Verne Thompson, two All-Conference players returning. Mark Handy will be in his fourth year as a starter for BYU (who missed the last seven games of the season last

year because of his surgery for a detached eye retina). Misho Ostarcevic is playing significantly better than last year and the addition of a couple of new players will make us reasonably strong.

Were you satisfied with your recruiting?

● We are extremely satisfied with our recruiting efforts this past year. We were able to land players who we sincerely feel were the two outstanding guards in the state of Utah last year, Scott Runia and Greg Anderson. In observing them play these past few weeks, we are even more confident now that our decision to invite these two young men was a very wise one indeed. There is little doubt in my mind that in time they could be two outstanding collegiate guards. The young man who perhaps will help us the most in the immediate future is Mike May, a junior college transfer from Pierce JC, who will play for us at the guard position. Mike is the type of player we did not have in our program last year—an excellent passer and floor leader. We are confident the addition of Mike will solidify our team play considerably. In addition, we signed the number one big man in southern California last year, Alan Taylor. He was

voted the Most Valuable Player in the Los Angeles City Schools AAA Division. Alan is a very hard working, dedicated young man who learns quickly. The final addition of forward Nick Nakic from Zagreb, Yugoslavia, was exactly what we needed to give us an outstanding recruiting year. As soon as Nick is able to learn our style of play in America, particularly defensively, I think the Cougar fans will find him to be a valuable asset.

To what extent will the new personnel change, or modify your style of ball?

● The addition of our quick ball-handling guards will enable us to fast break a little more effectively and strike offensively a little quicker. In addition, I believe we will be able to "over play" and be a bit more aggressive in our halfcourt defensive play.

What's the toughest challenge on the schedule this year?

● The biggest challenge on our schedule this year is, of course, the conference play itself. I feel that every team in our conference, without exception, has improved and in some cases the improvement has been significant. There is little question in my mind that the caliber of basketball played in the WAC is among the finest in the nation. In addition to the conference play, the toughest challenge that we will have this year is our travel schedule during the month of December. On Dec. 17, we will leave for the East Coast where we will play Davidson, the University of North Carolina (ranked second in the nation in pre-season polls) and Wichita State before returning to Provo for the Christmas holidays. Because of the timing of our return trip, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and then Sunday, we will have to go for four full days without a practice and then leave the next day for a three-game tournament in Oklahoma City. The schedule will give us a total of six games in less than 14 days, four of which we will be traveling virtually all day and another four which we will not be able to practice. That scheduling in itself will be a very strong challenge for our squad.

Which players have the best potential for special honors this year?

● It is very difficult for me to say which players will have the best potential for special honors this season, as I feel that we have several who could be capable and deserving of WAC All-Conference honors. Last year, of course, we had Jay Cheesman and Verne Thompson who we hope will repeat. In addition, we have Mark Handy who missed the entire last half of the conference season who I think has been playing brilliantly in our preseason practices. These three young men along with two or three others, both returning and new players, have a chance to make all-conference honors, but I fully realize that it is very

unlikely that more than two players from any single team will be given such honors. Obviously, there are many fine players from other institutions within our conference who are justly deserving of these honors as well.

Which teams in the WAC would you rank as the top contenders?

● On paper, the teams that should be considered as the top contenders would have to be the University of Arizona and Arizona State University, but I learned a long time ago that basketball teams do not win conference championships based on their "on paper potential." We certainly are not conceding anything to these fine teams. In addition to Arizona and ASU, as I mentioned previously, every team in our conference has improved, so it appears to me as though our conference race will be as close and as exciting as ever.

What is your goal this season?

● Our goal for this season is a very simple one—to be in playing in the NCAA playoffs at the Marriott Center in March. In order to do this, of course, we will have to be the conference champions and we are setting our sights on that goal, one which I feel will not be an easy one to obtain, but it is within reach.

What is your thinking looking back at your first year at BYU?

● In retrospect, I find it to be a most rewarding and enjoyable experience. I was obviously quite disappointed in our four conference losses by a total of five points. As I look back on our schedule, I found that we played a total of 14 games inside of five points. That's enough to make any man grow old in a hurry. I felt the biggest challenge that we had last year as a coaching staff was to reestablish the winning tradition and the positive mental attitude that Brigham Young University has had in past years. We felt that early in the season many of our players did not really realize how good they were. As the season progressed, however, I felt that our players began to believe in themselves and were convinced that they could be as good as anybody in our conference. I find that positive mental attitude prevalent in today's practices. I am convinced that our players now realize that they can win and win big in this conference. I hope that I am correct in this assessment because if our players do not strongly feel this way within themselves, then, frankly, they have no business being a part of our program because we will not be satisfied for a second-rate effort. We have a continuing goal in mind and that is to be year in and year out a contender for the conference championship. We think that we have taken a major step in this direction in just one short year and we feel that the future is indeed bright for the BYU Basketball Program.

The Outlook

Second Time Around

BYU opens the 1976-77 season with four starters and six lettermen from a squad which was 12-14 and lost eight of those contests by five points or less. Of the eight Western Athletic Conference losses four were by a total of five points and two others were lost by four and five points each.

Improvement in reversing the close losses could come in the area of leadership. The Cougars will depend heavily on the playmaking and floor generalship of transfer Mike May. The 6-1 guard demonstrated his ability last season at Pierce College in California where he averaged 18 points and five assists. BYU's coaching staff is convinced the Cougars will have better guard play this time around.

May is being counted on heavily to help fill the void created when frosh sensation Steve Craig chose to serve a church mission for two years in Central America. Craig earned a starting spot midway through the season and averaged 8.5 points and was a crowd pleaser with his hustle and jumping ability.

Even without Craig, the Cougars figure to be stronger in the backcourt. Veryl Law, a starter last year until sidelined by illness, is back for his fourth varsity season and younger brother Vance, who started half of last year, is looking for a very good year.

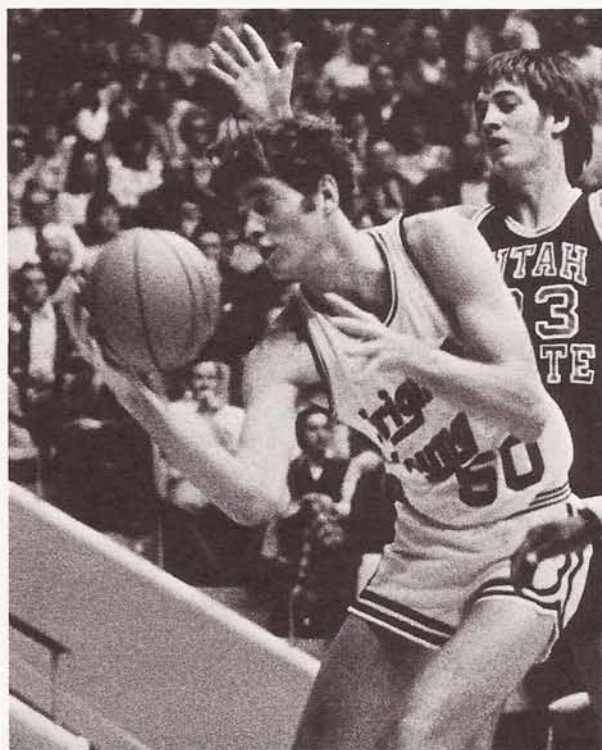
Waiting in the wings are two excellent freshmen from Salt Lake City, Scott Runia and Greg Anderson. Each has played on a high school state championship team and both fit well to the Cougars' fast-break style. Given a little time, they are certain to add a lot to the program.

Up front BYU returns all three starters and the co-captains, Jay Cheesman and Mark Handy, have started since they were freshmen four years ago. Handy was the top rebounder two years ago and Cheesman won that honor last season when Handy was hampered by an eye injury.

The muscular center is healthy again and forward Cheesman should continue the form which made him the leading scorer (17.6) and an all-conference choice. The other forward is Verne Thompson, a transfer last season who led the team in assists and was second in scoring.

Two newcomers and a sophomore will spell relief for the front line and indications are, they will do a good job. Misho Ostarcevic helped the team near the end of his freshman year and is much improved this season. Another Yugoslavian, Nick Nakic, entered BYU as a junior after attending college at home and playing on the European championship team for 19 and under. A freshman, Alan Taylor, should help out quite a bit. He averaged 26 points and 18 rebounds in high school and has above average strength and quickness on his 6-10 frame.

A couple of forwards from the junior varsity squad, Glen Roberts and Larry Cheesman, and a pair



of junior college walk-ons, Jerry Clark and Kris Pollock, also are available for duty during the season in case of injury or foul trouble.

There will not be a separate junior varsity team as in past years but some preliminary games are scheduled for varsity reserve players.

All in all, the guard line looks better, the front line is experienced and the depth is much better than in the last few years. The enthusiasm is high and the Cougars hope to snap a three-year losing skein and be competitive for conference honors.

A 28-game schedule begins Nov. 26 and BYU plays five of its first seven games at home. Included in that batch of games is a Nov. 30 contest against the Yugoslavian National team which doesn't count in the season record.

BYU will participate in two tournaments and then hosts the NCAA Far West Regional in March. In their own Cougar Classic, the Cougars play much-improved Seattle while Xavier (Ohio) battles Niagara. In the All-College Tournament at Oklahoma City, BYU meets St. Joseph's in the first round and then either Ohio or Oklahoma City. The other bracket has Baylor-California and Tulane-VMI.

Besides the 14 Western Athletic Conference game, the Cougars play rival Utah State twice and Big Sky neighbors Idaho State, Weber State and Boise State. A rugged road trip in December finds BYU meeting Davidson, North Carolina and Wichita State in a span of five days.