

Outlook: Youthful Enthusiasm

Youth and enthusiasm nearly always go together. But youth also connotes inexperience, and therein lies the dilemma of Brigham Young University's basketball team. Can you do it with youth and energy, or over the long haul will experience win out?

Coach Frank Arnold will enter his fourth year at the helm with a club that bears his brand; a combination of skill, intensity and motivation. The mix is now a little richer than what he had last year, a 12-18 club that the local fans loved for its spunk and spontaneity, its grit and go-for-it. It was the kind of club that had the fans cheering, even in defeat.

The challenge now seems to be to keep the momentum at that same pitch. With nine lettermen from last year's club returning, that seems possible. And the five newcomers—two returned missionaries and three new freshman recruits—look like they will blend in nicely. In fact, some of the '78 starters may have to give ground to the new talent pushing from behind. Or it may develop that the "best five" may change from game to game.

Every team should have a star, and the Cougars have a built-in producer in Danny Ainge, the 6-4 sophomore from Eugene, Ore., who set a new school scoring record and won honorable mention All-America as a freshman last year. If Ainge runs true to form, he will get the Cougars an average of 20 points a game, not to mention a healthy number of assists and steals.

Working from the other position on the guard line is Scott Runia, a 6-1 junior from Salt Lake City, who will be starting his third year as a regular. On the average, Scott scores in double figures and is a

genuine craftsman on the court. Add to this guard twosome a third candidate, Steve Craig, a 6-3 sophomore who recently returned from a mission. Craig won a starting position as a freshman (8.5 scoring average) before he answered a church call.

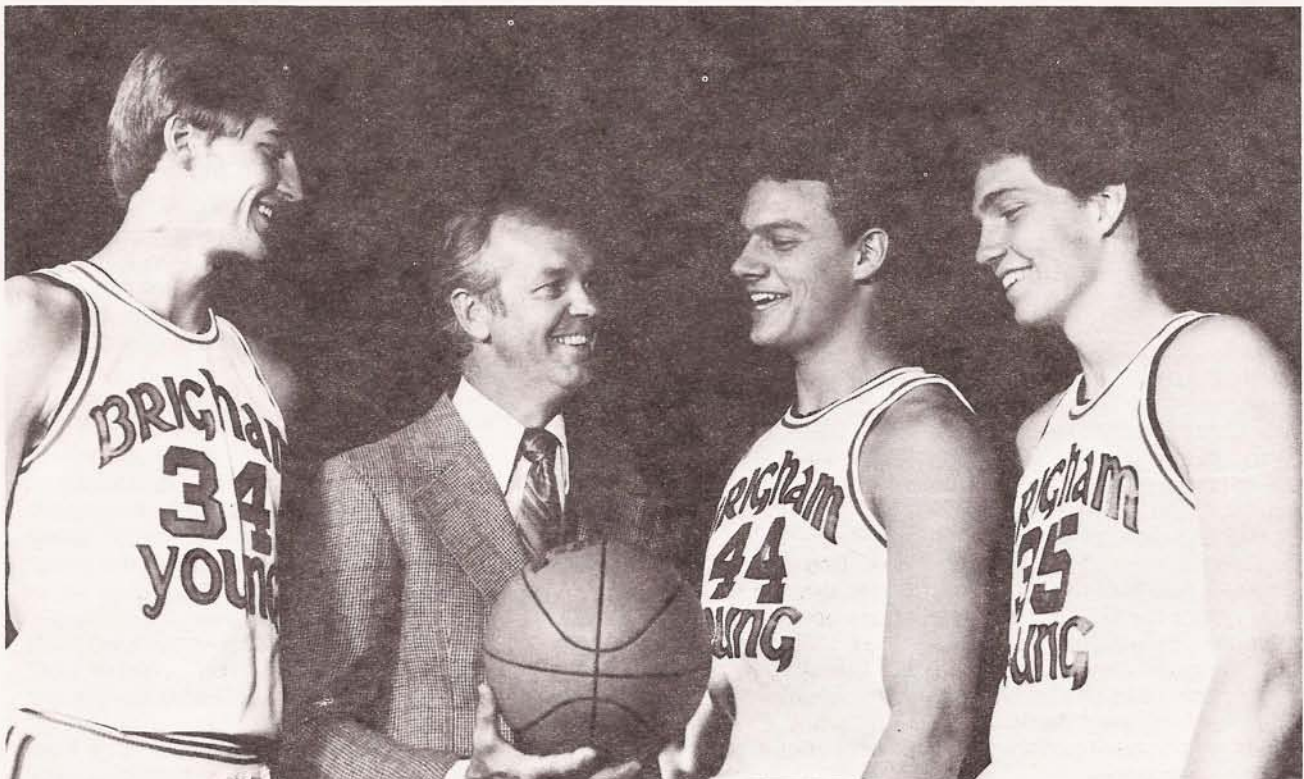
Another battle of sorts may take place at center, where two-year letterman Alan Taylor (6-10) and sophomore Dave McGuire (7-0) are vying for the post. Certainly the Cougars should be as good at this position as they were last year.

Regulars on the forward line of last season, seniors Keith Rice (6-5) and Glen Roberts (6-5) are both returning. Four other players—freshman forward-center Fred Roberts (6-9), freshman guard-forward Devin Durrant (6-7), freshman Steve Trumbo (6-7), and sophomore Steve Anderson (6-6)—all figure in the plans at forward.

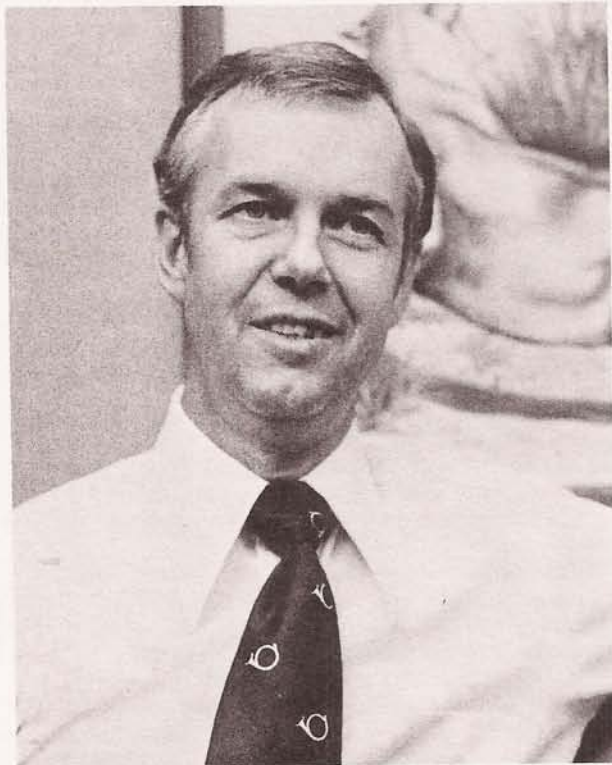
Arnold would like to see greater rebounding and scoring power on the forward line, and recruited with that in mind. The coaching staff, no doubt, will be scrutinizing the forward positions very carefully as the season progresses. The player response may be a key factor in the season's success.

While some adjustments seem certain, Arnold and his assistants won't be faced with a re-building program. With all due respect to some able and dedicated reserves (which Arnold regards as a vital part of his program), the losses from last year's team were minimal; roughly six percent of last year's scoring power was lost through graduation, missions, etc.

For Coach Arnold's own assessment of the season, see his interview on the following page.



Coach Frank Arnold is pictured with three top freshman recruits of 1978, Fred Roberts (34), Steve Trumbo (44) and Devin Durrant (35).



Arnold Interview:

Arnold Answers Questions on 1978-79 Team

First, Coach, what do you regard as the strengths and weaknesses of the team?

• In listing our strengths—or potential strengths—I would say we have more experience, size, quickness and shooting ability at every position than we have had since I've been here. Our guard line could be one of the finest in the nation, and we have a legitimate All-American in Danny Ainge. Scott Runia is playing better now than ever. In Greg Ballif we have one of the most dedicated players in the game. And Steve Craig, who just came off a mission, is an exceptional athlete. (The fact that Steve contracted hepatitis and a parasitical condition in his intestines while in El Salvador has us concerned, and only time will tell how rapidly he can recover from these ailments.) Craig Christensen, who is also returning to us from the mission field, has more physical strength and maturity than when he played for us as a freshman.

Looking at the forwards, our two starters of last year, Glen Roberts and Keith Rice, have been working harder this summer than ever before. Both must give us more rebounding and also shoot better percentages than last year, in order to retain their starting positions. They will be pushed by returning players from 1978 (Kevin Nielsen, Steve Anderson), plus three incoming freshmen: Devin Durrant, Fred Roberts and Steve Trumbo. Our depth is better than ever at forward.

As for the centers, I feel very positive about the position. Alan Taylor is beginning to realize how

good he can be, and Dave McGuire is also sensing his potential. The two may end up battling for the starting position.

As a result, the competition is going to be intense. No player can afford to rest on his laurels.

Will the talent you've recruited make this year's squad top-heavy?

• Although we've had some good recruiting years, I wouldn't say we are top-heavy. But I do feel comfortable in the belief that we have more talent on our club than at any time since I've been here, and we are capable of playing any team in the country and represent the University well.

What, then, do you see as the team's major obstacles?

• Probably youth and togetherness. Regardless of our talent, we are still very young. Only two of our 14 team members are seniors, and only four of the 14 are upper-classmen. But to me, that is the beauty of the program we now have. The future looks bright, indeed.

I say togetherness is a concern, because we must function as a team. Last year's "New Breed of Cat" was a unique group of young men who caught the fancy of our fans with their enthusiasm and zest for the game. Now, with two players returning from missions and three new freshmen, it becomes very important that we retain that feeling of cohesiveness, that conscious effort to pull as a team.

In terms of experience, how do you rate this year's team?

• We were a very young club last year, it is true. We had virtually no experience, and this year we are still young. But we are at least a year ahead of where we were last year. We will have nine players returning from last year, five of whom started for us the entire season, plus one other player (Steve Craig) who was a starter before he left on his mission.

Last year the Cougars played a total of 30 games. What areas of the 1978-79 season concern you the most?

• According to one study, last year we played the ninth most difficult schedule of all the NCAA schools in America: perhaps our record showed it. But this year's may be the best we've had in the four years I've been here. It's not an easy schedule, and it's tough enough to be ranked among the top 20 once again. More importantly, from the view of the local fan, we will play more home games (14) than away-from-home games (13).

Take a look at what we've got. Texas (NIT champions of last year), Rhode Island and St. John's, all on the road in the first part of the season. We will also play in the Pillsbury Classic, which includes Minnesota, Houston and Georgia Tech. At home in our Cougar Classic we'll have Purdue, Santa Clara and St. Joseph's. Then there's Harvard and Oral Roberts, as well as our regular conference opponents.

By the time WAC play begins, do you believe you'll be considered a legitimate contender for the title?

• Frankly, I can't answer that at this time, since it would be folly to predict how we'll do in the WAC. But this will be one of the best teams we've had at BYU in recent years.

You have to remember that other schools have been improving, too. New Mexico has recruited five outstanding junior college players. Utah has three starters returning, and has recruited very well. And other schools have new, good talent. Every school in the league has recruited well again this season.

Now that San Diego State has been added to the WAC, how will the Aztecs affect the race?

• Their addition will be a positive one, indeed. They've always had a strong athletic program, and they will undoubtedly be getting stronger. You may remember that last year they really gave us a beating (104-88). During the first ten minutes of that game, they played as well as, or better than, any team we faced the entire season, including UCLA and North Carolina. With many of their players returning, they could be a title contender their very first year in the league.

