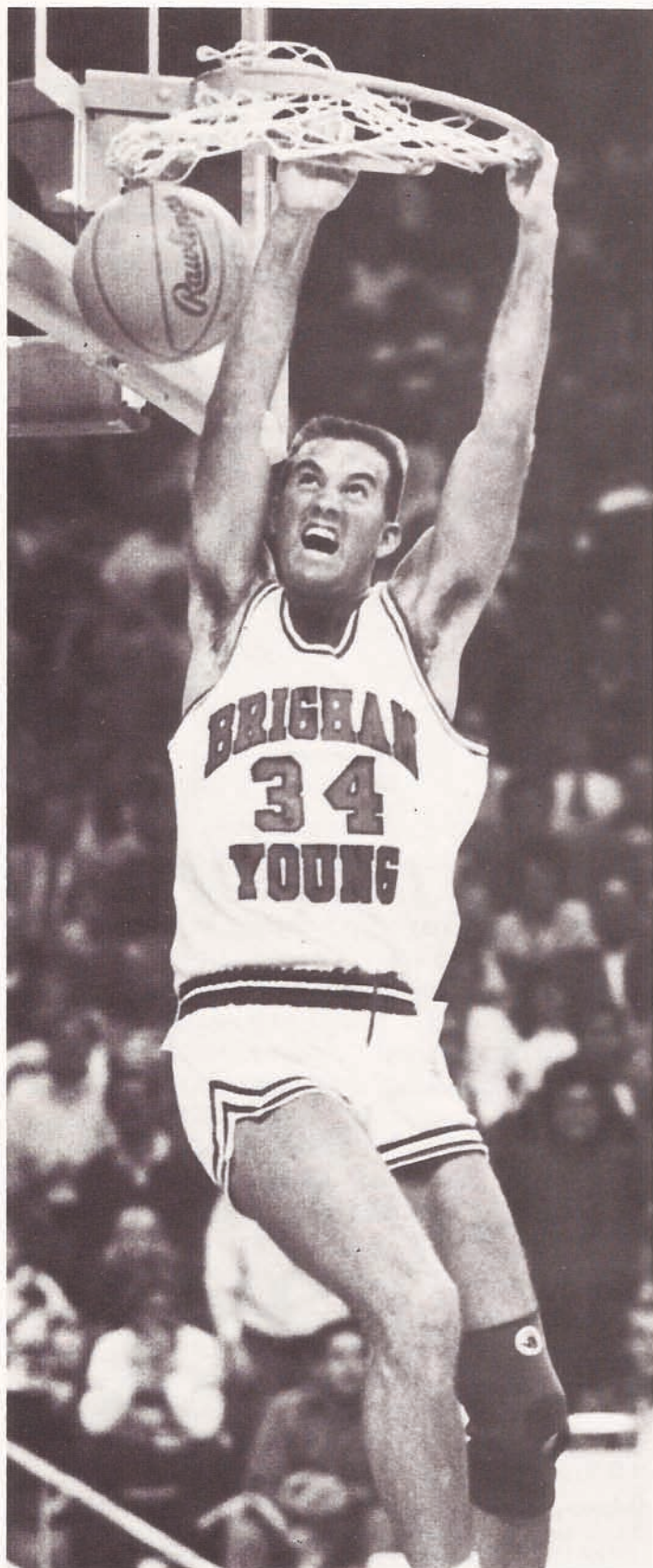


Season Outlook



Michael Smith: new number (4), same intensity.

BYU opens the 1987–1988 basketball season with its leading scorer (20.1) from last year, 6-9 junior Michael Smith, a unanimous All-WAC first-teamer. The other forward is 6-6 senior leaper Jeff Chatman (16.9 points), the only player who has been at BYU all four years of Ladell Andersen's career with the Cougars.

The offense rests on their capable shoulders but the Cougars will have to do without a 6-10 center (Tom Gneiting) who had the best field goal percentage (.631) in school history. Also departed is team leader Bob Capener, whose 12 points per game was as much as the other guards combined.

However, Coach Andersen and his staff have the best winning percentage in WAC history, causing him to modestly say, "I think our labors have been productive." Andersen goes on to say, "Barring injury, I feel this is one of the top teams I've had the privilege of coaching."

Why all the optimism?

It might well be BYU's unique category of "former player"—the returned missionary. Last year there were five. This year, the welcome mat was rolled out for Andy Toolson, a 6-6 sophomore, who averaged 8.5 points as a freshman starter.

"Andy is one of the few missionaries I've seen come back in good shape," Andersen says. "His mission president (in Chile) let him go running everyday." Toolson will probably run more time on the front line than in backcourt since the only reserve back is 6-6 junior Alan Astle, who played sparingly last year.

Jim Usevitch, a 6-9 senior, will take over for Gneiting at center but there is no Greg Humphreys or Brent Stephenson available for backup duty.

The guard line features 6-5 senior Brian Taylor, who averaged nearly eight points a game, and the crowd-pleasing super frosh of a year ago—6-0 Nathan Call and 6-2 Marty Haws.

Call, the consummate playmaker type, will be asked to shoot more and speedster Haws probably will see action as both the point guard and shooting guard.

Beyond those eight is anyone's guess. Steve Schreiner, a 6-7 sophomore, played well at Dixie College but has been away from basketball two years. Three freshmen—Mark Clausen, Gary Trost and David Wolfe—are 6-9. Vince Bryan is 6-7 while Chris Lynch and Mike Herring are 6-5.

Others who could help in the future are missionaries David Astle, Mark Heslop, Chris Rasmussen, Alan Frampton, Todd Gentry and David Reeves.

But for now, the Cougars take the floor with excellent depth in the backcourt as opposed to last year's good depth on the front line, which produced a second-place WAC finish.

A lot will have to go right for the Cougars to challenge Wyoming and New Mexico for one of the top spots. But the motivation of the WAC Tournament in Provo could make the Cougars a darkhorse contender.

Coach Andersen keeps saying, "This team has a chance [to be good]. You always hope everything will fall into place and it doesn't happen often enough. But there's something about this team I like. I think it has a chance."