

1991-92 Season Outlook

Things worked out so well a year ago with only one starter back, Coach Roger Reid and his staff decided to try the same thing again.

With only Steve Schreiner returning for last season, BYU was runner-up to nationally ranked Utah in the Western Athletic Conference and went on to beat the Utes in winning the WAC Tournament for the first time ever. The Cougars proved they were for real with a 13-point victory over Virginia the NCAA first round.

That makes a conference championship and a tournament title for Coach Reid's first two teams--both picked to finish in the second division of the league. His staff's winning percentage in WAC games is the best ever in the league.

This time around, point guard Nathan Call is the only starter returning. Shawn Bradley, the 7-6 center who set a freshman record for blocked shots (5.2), is in Australia on a church mission.

Kenneth Roberts also is in Australia on an LDS mission while Schreiner, an All-WAC first teamer, and Scott Moon graduated. Jeff Campbell went on a mission to East Germany.

So the bench is back but not the starting experience.

"It goes without saying the jobs are wide open," says Coach Reid, who has lost 35 pounds while recovering from double hip replacement surgery in April of 1990.

"We've got our hands full to get a team ready for the conference season. This is a hungry team--one with lofty goals. But it's not a veteran club. With our multiple offensive and defensive system, it takes awhile to get adapted.

"Still, we're hoping there's some carry over for players returning from a team which went to the NCAA Tournament. This could be a good team as the season progresses. But we're definitely a group of unknown qualities."

To fill the void, the Cougars need help from junior college transfers Nick Sanderson, a 6-4 guard from College of the Canyons, and from Kevin Nixon, a 6-8 forward with uncanny three-point shooting ability.

Last year he played for Roger's brother, Duke, at Utah Valley Community College in nearby Orem after seeing a lot of playing time as a freshman at Northwestern.

The other obvious bright spot is 6-4 senior guard Mark Heslop, also an excellent shooter from outside. Another guard, 6-1 senior Mark

Santiago, averaged 10 minutes a game last year in spelling Call.

Inside, the logical starter is Gary Trost, who made the All-WAC Tournament Team, and who was playing as well as anyone at the end of the season when Bradley got in foul trouble.

"But he'll be in a different role this time," says Reid of his 6-10 junior center. "It remains to be seen how he'll play as a starter versus coming off the bench."

The other forward spot is up for grabs. Junior Jared Miller, 6-8, played well last year before undergoing knee surgery midway through the season. Robert Jones, a 6-6 senior, and David Astle, a 6-9 junior, return but saw only limited action a year ago.

And waiting in the wings are three freshmen hoping for things to work out like they did for Roberts last year. Shane Knight is a 6-9 redshirt with a good shooting touch.

Russell Larson is 6-10 but is experiencing college ball for the first time after going on a mission right out of high school. And Justin Weidauer, 6-7, was Utah's top prep player a year ago.

Conference-wise, Coach Reid calls Utah "a legitimate top 10 team" and Wyoming a "top 20 team." Top to bottom he sees the WAC as strong as ever with San Diego State rating a "darkhorse" designation.

"Schedule-wise, we're similar to last year. We have a challenge with the first three games on the road and have another nationally ranked team (Michigan) in a prestigious holiday tournament (the Red Lobster in Orlando with Florida and Virginia Tech)."

On paper, it's a tough road for the Cougars but Reid is quietly confident about the trip. Two years ago, he won a share of the title without a starter over 6-7 and last year started two freshmen in placing second.

Coach Reid also believes strongly in a direct correlation between winning on the floor and academics. In that regard, this team could carry on the first two years' success with Andy Toolson, GTE Academic All-America, and Academic All-WAC players Schreiner, Heslop, Moon, Toolson and Kevin Santiago.

Schreiner also won an NCAA post-graduate scholarship. The two-year grade point average for all players is close to 3.0.