



'77 Review: Mountains, Valleys

It was "one of those years" for the Cougars in 1976-77. The season overall record was 12-15, and BYU had to settle for 4-10 record in Conference play. The closest the Cougars could come to honors was to serve as hosts of the NCAA Western Regional championships.

Personnel-wise, the Cougars lost Jay Cheesman, Mark Handy, Verne Thompson, and Veryl Law to graduation. Three other players went in other directions; Vance Law decided to stick with baseball, and Misho Ostarcevic and Nick Nakic returned home to Yugoslavia. Misho had planned to be around for the 1977-78 season, but left unexpectedly last summer following the death of his father.

Mike May led the team in assists and Taylor got better and better as the season progressed. Runia and Anderson were crowd pleasers with their hustle during the second half of the season.

Roberts, also a baseball player, contributed some key rebounds in a reserve role and is expected to play both sports against next year.

The 1976-77 season started very well for the Cougars with an 18-point victory over Big Sky champ (and regional finalist) Idaho State. Even with two starters sidelined BYU won its own Cougar Classic with impressive wins over Seattle and Niagara. Vance Law was the MVP and joined May, Cheesman, and Ostarcevic on the all-tournament team.

BYU placed third in the All-College Tournament

and returned to defeat in-state rival Utah State. But the up-and-down nature of the Western Athletic Conference season became evident in the opening game when the Cougars were surprised at home by Colorado State.

A 33-point victory over Wyoming seemed to have BYU on the move again with a 9-6 record but a five-game losing streak at midseason ruined the Cougars' chances for a first division finish.

The highlights of the remainder of the season included another triumph over Wyoming and wins at New Mexico and Texas-El Paso. The UNM victory knocked the Lobos out of a chance to tie for the league title and the UTEP triumph pushed the Miners into last place in the WAC.

For the first time ever, BYU won more league games (3) on the road than at home (1). But, in spite of the frustrations, Marriott Center attendance was up 3.8 percent for an average of 14,632, second best in the league.

BYU was second in the WAC in free throw percentage.

Individually, Thompson was fourth in free throw percentage, Handy was sixth in field goal percentage, and Cheesman was ninth in scoring.

Cheesman averaged 15.9 points and 8.3 rebounds. Thompson averaged 15.2 and .816 from the charity stripe and Handy made .545 of his shots from the field.