

'79 Basketball Season Summary

Although it has been judged the finest basketball season at Brigham Young University in many years, the best part of the 1978-79 campaign is the expectation the Cougars' roundball successes should carry over into next season.

For the first time in the period of seven seasons the Cougars were able to post a 20-game season and also pick up a Western Athletic Conference championship.



Fred "Boo" Roberts, international traveler

For all the honors and achievements netted, the most heartening thing in the eyes of Coach Frank Arnold is the fact that all of this year's starters will be returning next fall. BYU's losses off the team will be two fine reserve forwards, and a third team member, a redshirt, has accepted a church mission call.

The balance of the team will be returning intact. There will also be some help in the form of new recruits.

Looking back on the season, the Cougars came very close to having an undefeated season in league play. During one stretch BYU won 10 of 12 games, and the two defeats were a two-point overtime decision against Wyoming in Laramie and a one-pointer to New Mexico in the Pit.

In pre-season play the Cougar losses came against three teams that had very good seasons; Texas, Rhode Island and St. Johns.

Statistically, the Cougars made tremendous improvement over the previous season. In terms of points scored, this was the best offensive team BYU has had since 1966, the year the Cougars won the NIT championship. Over the season haul, which ended in the first round of the NCAA playoffs with a loss to San Francisco, the Cougars averaged 85.0 points per game, an 8.4 edge over opponents.

This was also the best shooting team in BYU history. The Mountain Cats shot a fat .529 from the field, well ahead of the .491 team record set in 1967. In addition, five players ended the season with scoring averages in double figures.

For the second year in a row, guard Danny Ainge led the team in scoring (18.4 per game). Ainge, who now has a total of 1,130 points, has moved up to the top ten in career scoring at BYU with two seasons yet to be played. The sophomore from Eugene, Ore., the only unanimous choice on the all-conference selection, led the team in assists (122), steals (46) and turnovers (100).

As a team, the Cougars led opponents in every phase of the game.

But one of the most significant gains was in attendance, where this year's team drew record crowds. In winning all its home games (14), the Cougars had fans flocking to the Marriott Center in record numbers. A total of 277,920 were on hand for the home games, the highest overall attendance since the facility opened in 1972.

In terms of average attendance, the season mean was 19,851 fans, the highest since the first season in the Marriott Center, 1972. And the Cougars also drew the largest basketball crowd ever in Utah, packing 23,006 into the game with Utah. That topped the previous high by only eight spectators.

Individually, the season's top scoring performance was Danny Ainge's 40 points against Oral Roberts. Best rebounding performance of the year was Alan Taylor's 20 against Utah in Salt Lake City.

The Cougars also claimed the Old Oquirrh Bucket, the in-state trophy which goes to the school with the best record against common Utah opponents in the Beehive State.

In summary, the Cougars were 20-8 overall, 14-0 at home, 6-8 on the road and 10-2 in the final WAC standings.