

# THE DAILY UNIVERSE

## MAGAZINE



## BYU FOOTBALL'S 1996 BLUEPRINT FOR BIG 12 SUCCESS

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# THE DAILY UNIVERSE

## MAGAZINE

November 2021  
Volume 75, number 3

universe.byu.edu



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THE DAILY UNIVERSE MAGAZINE is a product of The Daily Universe, the journalism lab of the BYU School of Communications. This is an official publication of Brigham Young University and is produced as a cooperative enterprise of students and faculty. It is published by the College of Fine Arts and Communications and the School of Communications under the direction of a professional management staff.

The magazine is published monthly during fall and winter semesters. The journalism lab website, [universe.byu.edu](http://universe.byu.edu), is updated constantly during the academic year.

The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of the student body, faculty, university administration, Board of Trustees or The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

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# Faith Q&A

## KENZIE KOERBER

Interviewed by Cassidy Wixom

BYU senior Kenzie Koerber is a right side hitter and #4 for BYU's women's volleyball team. Koerber graduated from Chino Hills High School in her hometown of Chino Hills, California. She was a four-year starter for the women's volleyball team at the University of Utah where she graduated with a bachelor's degree in communications. Because of COVID-19, the NCAA granted athletes an extra year of eligibility and Koerber elected to use her extra year to transfer to BYU. She is a three-time All-American for the American Volleyball Coaches Association and a two-time All-Pac-12 Team honoree. Although proud of her athletic accomplishments, Koerber said her faith has helped her realize she is more than just a volleyball player.



MELISSA COLLADO

**Women's volleyball player #4, Kenzie Koerber, shared how her faith interacts with her athletics at BYU.**

**Q** *Why did you decide to play volleyball here at BYU?*

**A** I played four years at Utah. I transferred here for my fifth year, for the COVID year. I am also a convert, so getting baptized up at Utah I just realized that it probably wasn't the best place for me to continue to try to progress as a person and I wanted to be around more people that had the same values and same beliefs as me and same standards. I love Heather (Olmstead, the women's volleyball head coach) and I love what she does with her program and I love being by my family, so I thought there's no better place to go than BYU. It's been awesome to just see the difference and how it truly feels like a family down here and that everyone is just so kind all the time and it's just a much different vibe than what I'm used to so it's been a good experience so far.

**Q** *Why did you start investigating the Church and what led to you eventually join?*

**A** It's kind of a long story, but in a shorter tense, I went through a few experiences at Utah, like a pretty bad relationship I'd say. It was pretty hard and I was rock bottom in a lot of areas in my life and I was pretty depressed. Once I finally got out of that relationship, I felt like I am at my absolute low and I need something, someone, to save me. I grew up nondenominational Christian but I was never super into it. I have a ton of family here who are members and so seeing their life and seeing their marriages, and how they interact and how they live and how much peace I felt when I was with them, made me long for that feeling. That is when I started asking questions about why do you seem to have your life together and why do you seem so at peace? And that's where the questions started and from there, the process continued.

**Q** *How does your faith affect or interact with your athletics?*

**A** It's actually been really cool to be down here and see how much the gospel ties into what we do as a program. Every Monday, we come in and we take a volunteer for prayer, and we pray before every game and we have devotionals on the road. It's just awesome that the coaches really place an emphasis on our journey as disciples of Christ, and trying to progress as people and not just volleyball players. I think it's really cool what they do on their end, and making sure that we are always tying the gospel into what we are trying to do and personally I think being here has helped me realize that I am more than just a volleyball player.

Especially in the kinds of classes I am in here versus at a public school like at Utah, you're not in religion classes, you're not in classes that talk about the gospel. It's helped me realize I am very blessed to be able to play volleyball here. But it's not who I was made to be here and I am more than a volleyball player. I think just keeping that in the back of my mind whenever I play of knowing if I have a bad game or I don't perform as well as I maybe hoped I did, that doesn't make me any less of a child of God. I think it's so important to remember that and being here has really helped open my eyes to that, and help me identify less as a volleyball player and more as a child of God.

**Q** *What does your faith mean to you and how does it affect your daily life?*

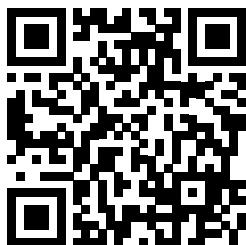
**A** It's the biggest aspect of my life for sure. I start and end every day with a prayer and between the busy life you live as an athlete, I try my best to have the Spirit with me all the time, and try to really continue to be spiritually strong and keep my relationship with God at the forefront of my life.

Another reason I love being here (at BYU) is we don't play on Sundays. I played four years at a university that plays Friday and Sunday and it was really hard to feel anything during my seasons in the past because I wasn't getting the spirituality, that "oomph" that I need every week. I was having to do a lot more work on my own, and go to institute on Wednesdays or whatever day I could go and go to the temple before we travel. That was a blessing to see the work I could put in on the side without going to Church but it definitely has been awesome to be here and be able to go to Church and really give a full day in all my focus to God. To not worry about volleyball for a day and not worry about school and the busy life I live because I know when Monday starts, I'm going

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## THE DAILY UNIVERSE

to hit the ground running.

It's at the forefront of my life always, it always will be. Obviously in season it's a grind, you are really focused on volleyball but I feel that I have done a really good job of doing what I'm supposed to do, and doing what helps me feel the Spirit and helps me feel spiritually strengthened. And that's been awesome — to compartmentalize that between busy life and volleyball.

**Q** *What is your biggest accomplishment? It could be as an athlete, it could be in your personal life or anything else.*

**A** My goal coming into college was always to be an All-American and to see that I've been able to accomplish that three times in my career so far, and hopefully going for a fourth this year, is something that I am really proud of.

I know that those honors come from God and it's always the most humbling thing when the past three years, when I've been named an All-American, my first instinct is to thank the man upstairs because I know the talents come from him. It is such an honor and a great accomplishment and something I am really proud of, but I know that those come from team success and they come from God, and it's a blessing for sure.



BYU PHOTO

BYU football head coach LaVell Edwards walks the sideline during a game in 1996.

# BACK TO THE FUTURE

## HOW BYU'S 1996 FOOTBALL TEAM PROVIDED THE BLUEPRINT FOR UPCOMING SUCCESS IN THE BIG 12

By Tanner Lewis and Jackson Payne

At halftime of BYU football's matchup with Arizona State on Sept. 18, 2021, the 1996 edition of gridiron Cougars were honored on the field at LaVell Edwards Stadium. As a tribute video displayed notable moments from the magical season, a white-out sea of fans roared in appreciation.

It's been 25 years since this group of athletes played on the same field where they were being honored — not to mention in a stadium that now carries the name of their beloved coach. The 1996 team capped its tremendous and historic campaign by defeating Kansas State in the Cotton Bowl, which is still the only New Year's Day bowl appearance in BYU history. Now, in two short years, the Cougars and Wildcats will reunite in the Big 12 as new conference foes.

Much has changed for BYU football in the past quarter century. Long gone are their days in the Western Athletic Conference, jumping

ship to the Mountain West in 1999, shuffling through independence in the 2010's and now preparing for their new Big 12 digs to finally place the Cougars in the major conference position they have long sought after. Former 1996 players Aaron Roderick and Ed Lamb now find themselves on BYU's coaching staff, and a few of their teammates now have sons suiting up for the Cougars.

While the 1996 halftime recognition was about remembering and honoring the past, in many ways it was also a glance ahead. In reality, the 1996 football squad offers the program a blueprint for future success when BYU joins the Big 12 and beyond, making the 1996 legacy stronger and more relevant than ever before.

"I would say that what they brought was that standard of excellence, showing what the BYU football program could be," 1996 defensive lineman Matt Peel said. "Now you see that we're

going to the Big 12, to continue that legacy with all the teams that we've had. I think (the 1996 team) is one of the best teams that we've ever had and put BYU on the map."

The 1996 Cougars stand alone from other units because of who they played and, more importantly, how they played. After taking down No. 13 Texas A&M in the opening Pigskin Classic, the Cougars went undefeated at home en route to a then-NCAA record 14 victories on the season and finishing No. 5 in the country. They swept their rivals with road wins over Utah, Utah State and a dramatic overtime victory over No. 20 Wyoming in the WAC conference title game.

Going undefeated at home, sweeping rivals, ranking in the Top 25 and playing on New Year's comprise quite the resume for the 1996 team, and those same standards are being pursued by the current crop of Cougars. A sign hanging in



BYU PHOTO

**Ryan Rehkow punts the ball against Arizona State in 2021.**

BYU's meeting room details the goals of every BYU football team going forward, reading "We will be bowl eligible, protect LaVell's house, win the rivalries, (have a) Top-25 ranking and make a NY6 bowl."

Entering the Big 12 will add the target of winning a conference championship to that list, and the 1996 team offers the perfect blueprint to achieve each of those goals.

The 1996 team was a perfect example of balance in all aspects of the game, excelling on

offense, defense and special teams. Today, head coach Kalani Sitake has continued to stress the same principles on both sides of the ball.

Led by the Sammy Baugh Trophy winner Steve Sarkisian, the 1996 offense was one of the most explosive units in BYU history — quite impressive for a school with such an existing tradition of scoring prowess. Sarkisian continued the legacy of great BYU quarterbacks, distributing the ball to many different playmakers and setting an NCAA record for the most yards

of total offense in two seasons with 6,996.

"Steve was the field general," running back James Dye said. "He was the architect. He was the coach/player on the field."

A dynamic quarterback like Sarkisian is critical to BYU's success in the Big 12. Sitake developed Zach Wilson into the No. 2 overall pick and this year Jaren Hall has filled in well. Quarterback play has always been one of the foundations for BYU's success. With names like Jim McMahon, Steve Young, Robbie Bosco, Ty Detmer and John Beck, it's easy to see why people call BYU "QBU." That will have to continue for BYU to have success in the Big 12.

Sarkisian's many targets featured the two-headed backfield monster of Brian McKenzie and Ronney Jenkins. McKenzie and Jenkins both ran for more than 700 yards in 1996, adding a strong rushing element to an offense traditionally dominated by passing.

"We're gonna change it up. We're not gonna throw the ball, we're gonna run the ball," Jenkins said, quoting Edwards after beating Utah in 1996.

McKenzie and Jenkins each racked up more than 150 yards on the ground against the Utes, prompting legendary former Cougar quarterback Jim McMahon to quip, "What is this? This is not BYU Football. What's with all this running?"

Having a power running game will be essential for BYU's success in the Big 12. The ability to win games on the ground is a blueprint the 1996 team helped establish. Luckily for BYU, that blueprint is alive and well.

Since 1996, BYU has had its four best running backs in program history run through the door: Doak Walker Award Winner Luke Staley and all-time leading rushers Jamaal Williams, Harvey Unga and Curtis Brown. Today, Sitake implements that blueprint with a two-headed running attack in Tyler Allgeier and Lopini Katoa.

Don't be fooled by the rushing attack, however, as the 1996 Cougars could still hurt opponents through the air. A plethora of pass-catchers, including K.O. Kealaluhi, Aaron Roderick, James Dye, Kaipo McGuire, Dustin Johnson, Itula Mili and Chad Lewis propelled Sarkisian to throw for more than 4,000 yards. It was a deep, talented group of receivers and tight ends, with Lewis even reaching All-Pro status in the NFL with the Philadelphia Eagles.

BYU's current receiving corps, led by Neil Pau'u, Gunner Romney and the Nacua brothers, is similarly explosive. Add tight ends Isaac Rex and Dallin Holker to the mix, and the air raid is truly alive and well, and fan-favorite full-back Masen Wake has even become a master of the hurdle just as Lewis was years ago. The swagger, attitude and skill of today's receivers



BYU PHOTO

**Quarterback Steve Sarkisian lets a pass fly at Cougar Stadium.**

emulates the 1996 team, and while their scoring numbers may not be as earth-shattering, the group remains dangerously potent following the same 1996 blueprint.

Special teams often make or break a team's performance, and 1996 was no different. James Dye — arguably the greatest return man in school history — averaged around 26 yards per kick return, 20 yards on punt returns and scored three return touchdowns in 1996. Fans even coined the phrase "you punt, you Dye" in response to Dye's dominance.

"You punt, you die" remains true at BYU today, but for a different reason. Punter Ryan Rehkow has broken out as one of the best punters in the nation. Rehkow, just minutes prior to the 1996 halftime ceremony, set a school record by blasting an 83-yard punt against Arizona State, just one of 22 beautiful boots averaging more than 50 yards on the season. Rehkow isn't the only Cougar with a powerful leg, as kicker Jake Oldroyd recently broke a record of his own with his 16th consecutive made field goal. Both Rehkow and Oldroyd are clear NFL talents, making this year's specialist squad nearly as special as the 1996 model.

On defense, the 1996 Cougars were fierce, physical and full of attitude, led by linebacker Shay Muirbrook and defensive backs Tim McTyer and Omarr Morgan.

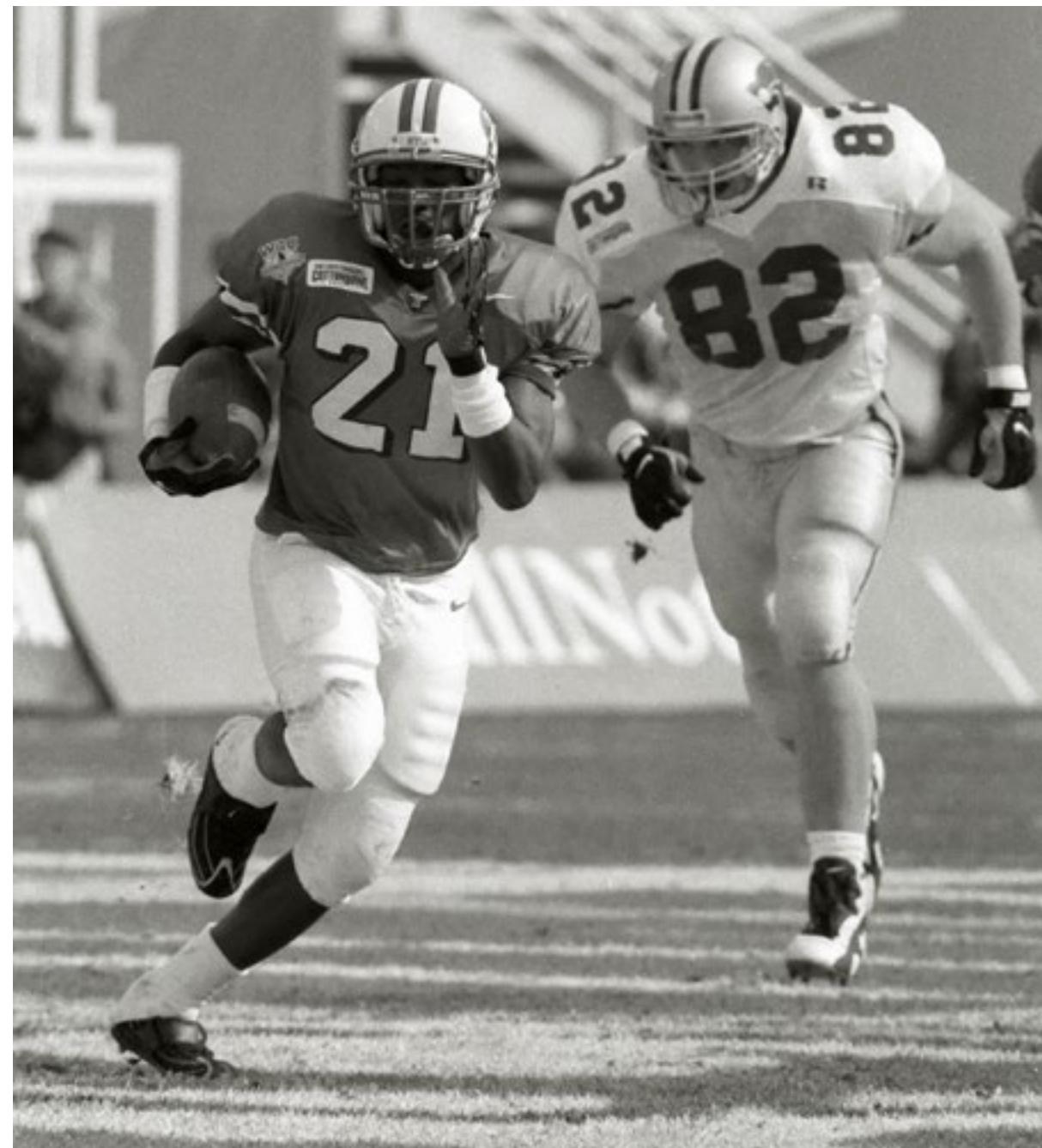
"We wanted to be recognized and we wanted to be talked about the same way they talk about BYU offenses," Muirbrook told KSL. "We wanted people to know...regardless of the outcome they were going to walk off the field knowing that they got beat physically."

A physical defense will be critical for success in the Big 12. A strong, physical defensive line matched with playmakers in the linebacker corps will provide a strong foundation. Sitake has already established a track record for developing speedy, physical linebackers including Fred Warner and Sione Takitaki, both now playing in the NFL. Signing and developing NFL caliber defensive linemen such as Khyiris Tonga, now with the Chicago Bears, will be needed to stop the high-octane offensive style of play in the Big 12.

"Many of us patterned our style of play after that dominating 1996 team. The way they played the game was physical, entertaining, and dominant. I'm seeing glimpses of that in this next generation of (Cougars)," former BYU running back Manase Tonga tweeted during this year's Arizona State game.

The 1996 team wasn't just a group of guys who played football together, it was a family. They came together when it mattered most and had a coach who forged a bond between every player on the roster.

"Our team was just really tight it seemed



BYU PHOTO

### Defensive back Tim McTyer runs with the ball during the 1996 Cotton Bowl.

like. It was just a great experience to have a real team all season long that battled through things," tight end Dustin Johnson said. "We had some great experiences, we achieved a lot in sports and friendships that are going to last a lifetime."

McTyer added that the team's family mentality in 1996 is clearly evident in today's Cougars. "We left what they're talking about now: team, unity, family. We were that in 1996 in all phases. We were a team. We had unity, it was a family."

There's been no better example of the current unity than following the win over Utah this season, where Hall led the postgame locker room speech to give Sitake some appreciation,

a scene that reignited the sense of love and gratitude of Edwards' time as head coach.

"We know Coach always teaches us to be humble and love our families," Hall said. "He's brought us into this program and made us into the team that played out there today because of the things we learned off the field."

Although the brief halftime shoutout was but a moment in time, the legacy of the 1996 team will clearly live on for years to come. Their footprint has never been more important and visible within the program than it is today.

The Cougars may be entering uncharted territory in the Big 12 in 2023, but 1996 will always be the example to follow. It was, is and will be the blueprint for success.

# THE LEGACY OF LEAPIN' LEWIS

*How one player's heroic hurdles left a mark on BYU football that endures 25 years later*

By Emme Franks

Chad Lewis grew up jumping on the trampoline and cliff jumping at local lakes. He jumped over shopping carts and over cars. In high school, he was a high jumper for the track team.

But 25 years ago he wasn't digging his cleats into the rubbery surface of a track, staring down a bar suspended over a crash mat.

This time Lewis stared down into the eyes of a safety who was dead set on stopping him in his tracks. His cleats didn't dig into the surface of a track but sunk into the wet grass of Cougar Stadium. And no, Lewis wasn't at the track, where he had jumped so many times before; he was on the football field at Brigham Young University, where he had walked on to the team just months before. He wasn't meant to jump here on the football field, and he knew it. But he also knew this: if the ball came his way, he was taking it up the field. And he didn't care if the way he got those yards was a little non-traditional.

Though this was the first time he would jump in a football game, it was far from the first time the idea had crossed his mind.

"I probably thought every day about jumping over someone. It got to be an illness. I wanted to jump over someone so bad. My dream was to jump over someone."

It was the last home game of Lewis' freshman season at BYU and the Cougars were playing UTEP. BYU's quarterback John Walsh slung a pass to Lewis up the middle of the field which he caught before beginning to run up the sideline. UTEP's safety came barreling in low to make the tackle but Lewis took a step in-stride, propelled himself into the air, and hurdled right over the top of him.

"It was the greatest moment of my football life by a magnitude of a million ... and I ran around the field going crazy."

Just like that, "Leaping Lewis," was born. It wasn't college football's first hurdle, but when Lewis hurdled that day in 1993 he launched a legacy of hurdling at Brigham Young University that continues to this very day.

"I started in high school because I didn't make the basketball team and I had to do something, so I started high jumping. In the first meet I jumped six feet and four inches. I had good hops but I didn't have great form. I did that my senior year and I really enjoyed it,"

Lewis said.

After graduating from Orem High School, Lewis was admitted to Brigham Young University. Admission to the university was no small feat, but Lewis needed to achieve something else to pursue his degree: he needed a scholarship. Shortly before he left to serve a mission for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1990, his father suffered a stroke and, as a result, the Lewis family had no money to help support him in school. Lewis was already working to put himself through school, but money was still going to be tight. In hopes of eventually earning a scholarship, Lewis approached the track and field coach and walked on to the team as a high jumper. However, after only a few weeks, several of his friends encouraged him to walk on to the football team as well.

"I was built more for a high jumper than I was a tight end at the time. It was really my mission companion who was on the team who came and told me, 'You need to come and play football. I'll stop bugging you if you just pray about it.'

Lewis agreed to pray about the decision. "I took about a week and a half to pray about it and I prayed about it like my life depended on it. That's when I received my divine answer to play football at BYU. So, I went and talked to Coach Chow and Coach LaVell and they let me walk on to the team."

After a successful spring as a walk-on, Lewis was offered a scholarship at the beginning of his freshman season. "Coach Edwards changed my life. He gave me a scholarship. That meant everything to me. I was not paying for school anymore, and my parents didn't have to worry."

With a scholarship in hand, and a determination to win football games at any cost, Lewis' dreams of hurdling defenders on the football field were finally brought to life, and after that first hurdle in 1993, the floodgates opened and he hurdled just about everyone who got in his way.

Not satisfied with just one hurdle against

UTEP, later in the fourth quarter of the same game, Lewis caught the ball again and proceeded to run up the sideline. Again, the same safety came in on the attack. "I tried to jump him again, but this time he caught me and he



BYU PHOTO

**Tight end Chad Lewis caught mid-air jumping a UTEP Miner.**



**Chad Lewis hurdles**

tackled me in the air." A photo taken of this moment later dubbed "Bronco Rider" was named the 1993 national photo of the year.

"At the end of that game I was sitting home thinking 'I can't believe it.' I mean, I wanted to do that for so long, I'd been thinking about it, I'd been dreaming about it, and I realized during the game I didn't even think about jumping over that player: it just happened. And I just said to myself, 'OK, from now on I'm jumping over everybody.'

And so he did.

Lewis' teammate, defensive back Tim McTyer

recalls that "There weren't too many guys that were hurdling guys like that you know? It kind of started here. You might have seen it a little bit just like instincts, but Chad, Chad was jumping over everybody already back then."

In the Cougars' very next game against Ohio State in the Holiday Bowl, Lewis caught a pass, saw the defensive back angle right, and hurdled over him. He didn't, however, see the Ohio State linebacker come from the inside. The linebacker hit Lewis in mid-air and he landed on his shoulder, separating it. After the game, concerned about the risk of injury, Coach LaVell Edwards told Lewis to stop hurdling players



BYU PHOTO

an Arkansas State defender during the 1996 season.

in-game. Lewis agreed to stop hurdling and didn't jump over a single player his entire sophomore season. After the 1994 season, BYU's offensive line coach, Coach Roger French, pointed out to Lewis that now that he wasn't hurdling players, he was only playing "good, but not great."

Lewis remembers that "when he said that, I made a pact with myself going into my junior year that this is how I play the game ... I'm going to jump over every person that comes in front of me if I can. I start jumping over everyone and had a great year and my senior year, same

thing. I knew that if I was jumping over someone that I was playing with my heart and soul."

Lewis' decision to play with his "heart and soul" through hurdling led to a chain of leaping on the football field from BYU players. Itula Mili and Mark Atuaia, both of the 1996 team, started jumping over players. Taysom Hill hurdled players from Texas, West Virginia, and Utah State. Zach Wilson hurdled a Northern Illinois defender in 2018. Even today, sophomore full-back Masen Wake hurdles in seemingly every game he plays in since he first did so in 2020. And you'd never guess who inspired him to do so ....

"I've known (Lewis) most of my life and I always heard about him hurdling. I looked him up because I knew he was a big name. It's cool because the first ever hurdle I watched was probably him. Watching him as I grew up, I thought, 'that's something I need to add to my game.'"

At 6'1", 250 pounds, Wake, not unlike Lewis, is no small guy. But Lewis says that being a bigger guy is to their advantage because the defender has to come at them lower to make a tackle which makes it easier to hurdle.

"When you're going off one foot, you're able to go in stride like a hurdler instead of like a power jam. Because of that, you're able to keep that defender guessing, because if you're going full-speed you can cut either way, run them over, or hurdle. There's not a lot of time to make a decision and typically they're just shooting low. A lot of times their head is down and they're catching nothing but air because Masen is over the top of them."

Wake agrees that being a big guy helps, but he confessed he doesn't think about any part of the hurdle all that much: "I don't even think about it; my brain just goes, 'Oh! Hurdle, hurdle, hurdle, hurdle!' I don't even think about it at all. It's a guessing game because you have to guess that they're going low, but with my body they're mostly always going to go low so I'm usually right most of the time .... If I see (a defender) full speed coming at me and he's ducking his head, it's just instinct."

Wake's hurdling instincts kicked in for the first time in his collegiate career last season during BYU's game at Navy. "I actually got the ball against Navy and I broke a tackle and turned and I had no momentum and it was a weak hurdle. I kind of just jumped over but everyone was freaking out. Everyone was hyping me up and then I get to the sideline and

Coach Lamb came up to me and said, 'Oh let's not do that ever again.' But then Kalani came up to me he said it was pretty awesome."

BYU fans, and college football fans in general, agree with the head coach that hurdles are "pretty awesome." This is apparent in the roar of the crowd after one of Wake's hurdles, as well as in the praise that follows on social media. Wake loves to hurdle defenders because it adds an element of surprise to his game and opens the door to extra yardage on a given play, but Lewis believes the fans love it for a completely different reason: "It's because there's an element of danger. That was why LaVell said 'Don't do that, you're going to get hurt.' When you go up in the air like that, you're doing something that a normal person would not even think about doing. You're in the air so you're completely exposed to a lot of danger and so it's a reckless way of playing football, but for those who do it, it's intentional not reckless. But when that happens, the response is always the same: the crowd goes crazy, and your teammates go crazy."

Wake's ability to bring energy to the BYU football team meant more than anyone could have ever predicted when during the 2020 season the team played the majority of their games without any fans present. After playing Louisiana Tech in an empty LaVell Edwards Stadium last season, Wake recalls, "It was super fun to be able to create that energy because we didn't have any fans, so we just had to create our own energy and my teammates went wild." And Lewis agrees that a bonus of the hurdle is the burst of energy it creates: "What's cool about Masen is he knows that he's bringing energy to his team and the crowd every time it does it. That's pretty cool that that's your legacy as a player, that when you catch the ball people are sitting up in their seats."

Just like Wake today, Lewis got people sitting up in their seats throughout his football career. After reviewing his college film over the years, he found he'd hurdled 17 times as a BYU Cougar and several more times in his NFL career. And it's these spontaneous, instinctual hurdles on the football field, not his tactically rehearsed high jumps, that he remembers most.

"I've forgotten most plays in my life, but those ones, I think because of the fear factor, I think because of the energy they bring to a team, they are just burned into my hard drive. I can still feel them."

Even now, years removed from his playing days, he hurdles obstacles as an associate athletic director at BYU. From hurdling the challenges of the 2020 football season, to leaping into an invitation to the Big 12 conference, one thing you can say for sure is Lewis has been hurdling his whole life.

# THE COTTON BOWL FALLOUT

By Cameron Muh

On Dec. 7, 1996, No. 6 (12-1) BYU and No. 20 (10-1) Wyoming squared off at Sam Boyd Stadium in Las Vegas in the Western Athletic Conference (WAC) Championship game.

Both the WAC and the Big 12 debuted conference championship games that season, joining the SEC, whose championship game had begun four seasons prior. All three conferences held championship games that Saturday, giving BYU and the WAC the nation's undivided attention.

On a national stage and with representatives from each of the major bowls in attendance, BYU took a 13-0 lead into the half and would eventually win in overtime, 28-25, improving to 13-1 on the season.

The Cougars moved up to No. 5 in the AP Poll the next day but were ultimately denied the opportunity to play in a Bowl Alliance bowl game, the 1996 equivalent of a New Year's Six bowl game. BYU's exclusion sparked a debate between those who believed they deserved a shot and those who knew they'd never be given that chance.

## The case for BYU

With a No. 5 AP ranking and 13-1 record, BYU certainly looked like it was in a good place heading into Sunday. Winners of 11-straight games, WAC champions and with an impressive win over then No. 13 Texas A&M to open the season, the Cougars' only blemish was a 12-point loss at Washington in week three.

"I don't think anybody had to make a case. It was an easy case, they were 12-1 and ranked number six in the country going into the WAC championship game," WAC commissioner Karl Benson said. "Everyone expected that if they beat Wyoming, they would certainly be into the game (Fiesta Bowl). That was the promotion of the WAC championship game. If BYU wins, they're a lock for the Fiesta Bowl."

Having taken care of business on the field against Wyoming, BYU's fate was left in the hands of the Bowl Alliance decision makers off the field.

## Selection show

Set to air on CBS at 5:30 p.m. EST the following day, the selection show would announce all the bowl matchups, concluding with the three Alliance bowls: the Nokia Sugar Bowl, Tostitos

Fiesta Bowl and FedEx Orange Bowl.

Four of the six Bowl Alliance bids would go to the conference champions, which were Florida State (ACC), Virginia Tech (Big East), Texas (Big 12) and Florida (SEC). The remaining two bids would be for at-large teams, BYU's presumed way in.

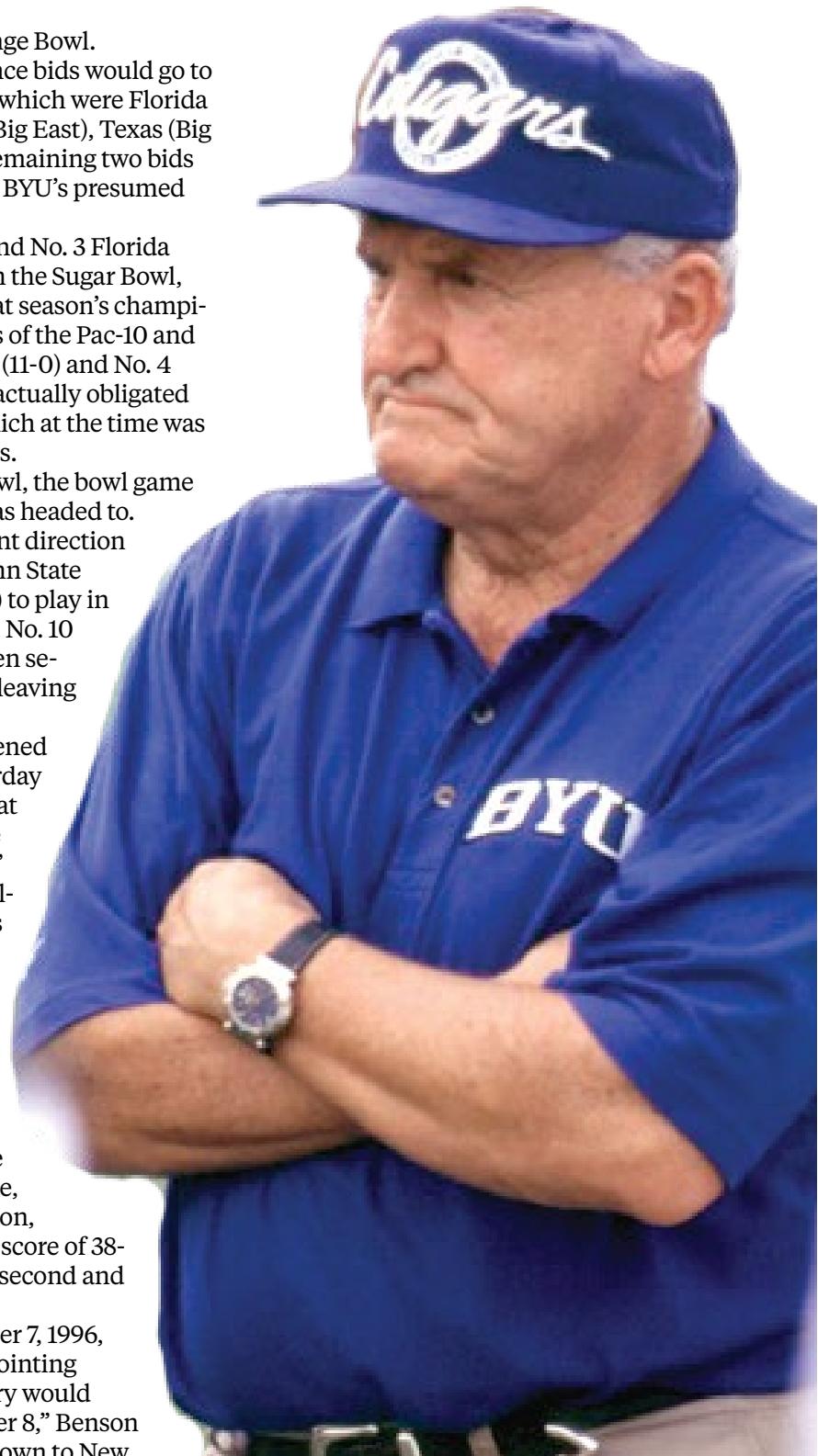
No. 1 Florida State (11-0) and No. 3 Florida (11-1) were selected to play in the Sugar Bowl, which was designated as that season's championship game. As champions of the Pac-10 and Big Ten, No. 2 Arizona State (11-0) and No. 4 Ohio State (10-1) were contractually obligated to play in the Rose Bowl, which at the time was not one of the Alliance bowls.

Up next was the Fiesta Bowl, the bowl game everybody assumed BYU was headed to. Bowl officials went a different direction however, choosing No. 7 Penn State (10-2) and No. 20 Texas (8-4) to play in it. No. 6 Nebraska (10-2) and No. 10 Virginia Tech (10-1) were then selected for the Orange Bowl, leaving BYU out.

"The one thing that happened on that championship Saturday that was unexpected was that Texas upset Nebraska in the Big 12 championship game," Benson said. "That's what ultimately allowed the powers to leave out BYU."

Nebraska, ranked No. 3 heading into its Big 12 championship game against Texas, suffered a 10-point loss to Texas, its only loss of the season. The Cornhuskers took one of the at-large spots, but Penn State, who had lost twice that season, including to Ohio State by a score of 38-7, somehow scooped up the second and final at-large bid.

"As good a day as December 7, 1996, was, one of the most disappointing days in BYU and WAC history would have been Sunday, December 8," Benson said. "Coach Edwards was flown to New York, taken to the studios for the selection show and sat there while



BYU PHOTO

**BYU head coach LaVell Edwards looks on during a game.**

he heard that BYU didn't get selected. He went out of the studios and had to take a cab because nobody was there to take him to his hotel. It was a disappointing, disappointing day."

### Aftermath

BYU director of athletics at the time, Rondo Fehlberg, echoed Benson's sentiment. "The feeling was disappointment," he said. "These people were sure we were going to be there; sure we were going to be admitted. For some it was anger, for others it was sorrow. We all have different ways of dealing with unmet expectations. The great challenge for the athletic director is you're going to have a lot of people reaching out to you with the entire range of those emotions anytime these big disappointments happen, especially when those disappointments seem either unfair or unjustified."

BYU tight end Chad Lewis shared his feelings following the team's exclusion that year and his beliefs on the bowl system that was in place.

"If the Alliance bowl was set up to pair the best teams against each other," Lewis said, "then why are you taking two-loss teams? We were a good team, we felt like we deserved to have the chance to fight for a national championship or one of the top bowls. The system felt a little rigged."

He continued, "They created a system to try and have more justice in the college football system. That justice was trying to boil it down to who were the best teams this year. I felt like we were one of those best teams that year. And that system which should have put us in one of those games did not do that."

Fehlberg recalled there being an upsetting feeling around Provo. He was convinced that BYU had everything in terms of logic and substance, but it still didn't happen. This feeling didn't just exist amongst Cougar faithful.

"There were so many people who viewed it as a complete and unfair conspiracy," Fehlberg said. "Up to that time, there were a lot of people who were not BYU fans that became almost overnight supporters of BYU because they felt BYU was treated so unfairly."

Deseret News sports columnist Dick Harmon recounted how when the Alliance bowls were announced, the Orange Bowl president said, "what better thing would you want than two 10-win teams to play in a bowl game."

"Well, how about a 13-1 team that's ranked number five?" Harmon said. "So you can see the stupidity of what that kind of statement and attitude of blue blood arrogance was back then."

Harmon also shared what the feeling around smaller conferences like the WAC was like at the time. "There was a big uprising in the non-power conferences. They were just being cheated. It

just was such a big hypocritical thing by college football that they did this."

The national media shared a similar feeling as well. Benson made the trip to New York for the annual National Football Foundation awards banquet two days after the selection show.

"When I arrived, I was met by members of the media who were appalled," he said. Newsday's Ivan Maisel, who has since written for Sports Illustrated and ESPN, "wrote that it was one of the most egregious outcomes he'd ever seen covering sports."

Speaking on BYU's exclusion, Benson concluded, "Not just in the WAC and BYU, throughout college sports and throughout sports in general, it's one of the biggest injustices that's ever occurred."

### Root of the problem

Historically, the "Power 5" conferences, as they're known today, have always ruled the college football scene. Typically dominating on the field, these same teams have competed for national championships or appearances in big bowl games, allowing the money that came with those appearances to remain in-house.



BYU PHOTO

**James Dye returns a punt during the 1996 season.**

"It looked like a big conspiracy, it looked like an antitrust situation, because it was all about money," Harmon said. "The bowl tie-ins that they had back then, they were not going to let that money leave the big power conferences. The Southeastern Conference (SEC), the Big Ten, the Big 12, they were not going to let the money leave that arena. It was just nothing but a money grab."

In 1996, teams selected to play in Alliance bowl games were slated to share around \$8 million with their conference. In contrast, BYU was given roughly \$2.1 million for participation in the Cotton Bowl, and that money was distributed amongst all the WAC teams.

"It ended up being unfortunately politics that got in the way of them (BYU) not playing in the Fiesta Bowl and not being included in that," Benson said. "Nobody to this day will own up as to why Penn State was selected over BYU."

Fehlberg alluded to the real reason why the Nittany Lions were selected over the Cougars. "In the end, the golden rule is always going to be the last word," he said. "He who has the gold rules. So it's about the money."

### Hearings and lawsuits

What ensued in the spring of 1997 was a call to action from the WAC, the premier non-Power 5 conference at the time, to college football: a demand for change in bowl representation.

The WAC attempted to engage in a compromise on how to keep such an exclusion from happening again and to create a way for the WAC to get an automatic bid into the Alliance bowl games.

"When those talks didn't materialize into anything, then there was the threat of the lawsuit," Benson said. "Ultimately, Senator Hatch and Senator Bennett called for the Judiciary Committee to review college football and assess whether there were antitrust violations."

A Senate Judiciary Committee hearing was held in May 1997. Among those called upon to testify were U.S. senators, conference commissioners, coaches and players, including BYU's Lewis.

"It was a great opportunity to go back and speak in front of the Senate Judiciary Committee and realize that they were taking a good look at that, because they wanted to see if the Bowl Alliance was in violation of U.S. antitrust laws," Lewis said. "My involvement in that was a character witness or personal perspective of being someone in that situation."

In his statement, Lewis explained that BYU gave him a fair chance to showcase his talents at BYU and eventually earn a scholarship. A fair shot is all that he would've hoped for his team that season.

"We thought we deserved the chance to play



BYU PHOTO

### Quarterback Steve Sarkisian surveys the field as he prepares to throw.

in one of the Alliance bowls, which were set up to match the nation's best teams to play for a national championship," Lewis said. "However, it seemed clear to us that it was money and not fairness that was driving the Alliance. We feel like we've proven that we can compete with the very best. As a team we just wanted what we thought was a fair shot. That's what I received as a walk on, and that's what we wanted to receive as the fifth ranked team in the nation."

Lewis compared the excitement of sports to Cinderella and beating the odds. He urged the Alliance not to "crush the glass slipper before everyone has a chance to try it on."

"My only question is the fairness of the Bowl Alliance. Is it fair that a proven team like BYU was not invited to play in a Bowl Alliance game? Is it fair not to afford every team in the nation an equal opportunity to excel and shoot for a national championship? Is it fair to allow certain conferences to receive guaranteed millions even though they might not be the highest ranked teams? The only thing athletes want is a fair chance to compete for the championship."

Many senators were also present, testifying for and against the Bowl Alliance and the system that was in place.

Kentucky Senator Mitch McConnell commented on the purpose of the hearing being not for the Power 5 teams, but rather for the non-Power 5 teams and giving them a chance to compete.

McConnell continued, "The basic message is

that if David wants to slay Goliath, he better do it during basketball season. He won't be allowed to play Goliath when the football postseason rolls around. College football has no room for the underdog. In fact, as evidenced by the 1997 New Year's bowls, college football doesn't even have room for the top ranked teams, unless those teams are members of the exclusive Bowl Alliance."

Hammering home his points, McConnell said that the Alliance had the opportunity to prove the value of its system in the 1996 season but didn't.

"The Alliance established what were supposed to be new rules. BYU and Wyoming played by the new Alliance rules, and just as they were about to score, the Alliance moved the goalpost... BYU is the perfect test case for open competition, the Alliance plain and simple failed the test. This issue is about more than just football, apple pie and alma mater, this is about big money."

Also pointing to money being a key problem, Utah Senator Robert Bennett said, "The real issue here is money, not prestige for alma mater or praise for the home school."

Bennett, a graduate of University of Utah, quoted a Washington Post sports reporter that commented on BYU's exclusion.

"The Bowl Alliance messed up the assignments. I don't blame BYU for wanting to file a lawsuit, which the school considered, but decided against. You finished 13-1 and in the

top-five, somebody ought to find a spot for you in one of these bowl games. The bowl people and the TV execs will tell you all this mumbo jumbo about BYU not drawing the big TV numbers, but guess what? The BYU-Wyoming WAC Championship attracted a bigger TV audience than did Nebraska-Texas and Florida-Alabama. Who would you rather watch any day of the week, Alabama, or BYU? BYU is made for TV, the way it plays. And how about Wyoming, which was 10-2 but still isn't going anywhere, while 6-5 teams that will put you stone cold asleep, aren't going bowling. That's embarrassing to college football or ought to be."

While BYU was snubbed from the Bowl Alliance games, Wyoming wasn't invited to any bowl games that season.

Wyoming senator Mike Enzi added, "The current Alliance, whether true or not, gives the perception that they have stifled genuine competition and placed college football at the mercy of a coalition that appears to be more interested in money and power than in the best interest of the players or the fans or the colleges that they represent."

Benson, as part of his statement in the hearing said, "The Alliance and postseason football is flawed. The WAC desires a system that allows its student athletes the same opportunities as other conferences to compete and a system that allows WAC schools a fair chance to compete for the enormous revenues that have been created. There has to be a better way to operate

postseason football."

### Change

As a result, "there was some justice served," Benson said. "They changed the access rules to provide an automatic if you finished the season ranked in the top 6, which was called 'the BYU rule'. The system was changed to provide access to keep a team ranked in the top six from not getting in."

Lewis believes that BYU's exclusion in the 1996 Alliance bowls played a big role in influencing change in college football.

"If they're going to hold Senate Judiciary committees over it, then they put everyone on notice," Lewis said. "Here's your system, is your system rigged? That was really the question. Is your system fair? You just put a system together that the whole country is looking at and expecting to be fair. Is it? Well, it was changed. It was thrown out the window. The Bowl Alliance system out, a new system was put in place."

The Bowl Championship Series (BCS) replaced the Bowl Alliance in the 1998-99 season until it too was replaced by the College Football Playoff (CFP), the current college football bowl organization, in 2014-15.

### Silver lining

One can't help but wonder what could've been for BYU in 1996. What if they hadn't lost to Washington on the road in week three? What if Nebraska didn't upset Texas in the Big 12 championship game? Would the Cougars have been admitted then?

Despite being snubbed from a berth in the 1996 Fiesta Bowl, BYU football still made history that season. The Cougars played in the school's first and only New Year's Day bowl game, beating No. 14 Kansas State in the Cotton Bowl, 19-15.

Finishing the season 14-1, BYU also became the first team in the modern era (post 1937) to play 15 games in a season, a feat only accomplished two other times since, in 2003 and 2019.

"I wish we would have been given the opportunity to fight to play in one of those top bowl games," Lewis said. "We were really grateful to play in the Cotton Bowl because that was still a big-time bowl and it was New Year's Day. But if you're competitive, which we are as football players, and you feel like you deserve a right to play in what they are saying are the top couple bowls, well we wanted to be there."

The legacy of that 1996 BYU football team lives on—in the 11-1 season and No. 11 final ranking a year ago and this season's strong start—but more importantly by influencing change in college football and helping to give every team a chance: a shot to play on the biggest stages at the end of the season.

# Brad Martin and the high cost of opioid addiction

By Addysen Kerr

The BYU Cougars and Arizona State Sun Devils had just retreated to the locker rooms for halftime amid deafening cheers. BYU was leading 21-7.

Out walked 40 men onto the field. Each dressed in white Nike BYU polos to match the 60,000+ fans in the stadium watching them.

Some of the men waved, some smiled, some pulled their phones out to record the celebration. Each one was a member of the 1996 BYU football team, the first team to win 14 games in a college season. They are considered by many to be the best team in BYU history.

On Sept. 28, 2021, these teammates were honored for the legacy they left at BYU 25 years ago.

"It was a great event and it was a great experience that the school put on for our team," said Derik Stevenson, a former BYU linebacker.

But Stevenson couldn't help but feel that someone was missing.

During the game, the car accident was all but forgotten. The 6-foot-1-inch, 240 pound linebacker made six tackles, and BYU beat Arizona State, 26-6.

But the consequences for that decision came after and haunted Brad Martin for the rest of his life.

Team doctors prescribed Martin opioids in the hopes that it would be enough to get him through the resulting pain from his car accident. They didn't fix his pain, but they did dull it.

"He was a tough kid, real tough kid, pretty no nonsense, you know?" said Shane Magalei, former defensive lineman, and one of Martin's teammates.

Teammates say he was one of the happiest, most positive guys they'd ever played with; one of their all-time favorites. He never wanted to let anyone down.

"You saw how hard he worked and everything that he went through. He hated not being able to be on the field with his teammates and his brothers . . . His personality and his commitment to the team, and his commitment to try and never miss a practice or never miss a game so he could be alongside his brothers. That was what impressed all of us the most about Brad,"

said Stevenson.

Stevenson thinks Martin's commitment to the team and to playing is one of the things that eventually led to his addiction to painkillers. Once he was done with football, the pain didn't just magically disappear.

It was still there.

Harland Ah You, another defensive lineman, works in addiction recovery. "(Martin) was always a team-guy first ... I saw his struggles physically, but I didn't know what they were. But I know what the struggle is after you're done when you're in pain and you can't live a healthy life, the struggles that come from not understanding all the stuff you turn to to help you stop."

At the end of the season, doctors discovered Martin had three herniated discs in his back, most likely stemming from untreated injuries caused by his accident four months prior, and constantly getting hit on the football field.

He continued taking opioids long after he left BYU.

Eventually, his addiction led to an arrest, and a divorce.

Why didn't Martin try to get help?

The shame and guilt that came along with addiction was heavy. Athletes were afraid they'd be kicked out of school for breaking the Honor Code. And there weren't enough resources for them once they left the university.

"There's a pride factor that comes into it too. Brad was really proud, which was a good thing in a lot of ways, but also, former teammates don't like to reach out to the other guys even if they're really close to them, and really admit that you have problems, or challenges, or shortcomings, or issues with things like that ... Because you don't like those guys to see that maybe you are weak in some way and need help," said Stevenson.

When you're praised for being one of the toughest guys around, it can be devastating to shatter that image.

"That's the one thing that Brad never did. He just suffered in silence for a long, long time. He tried to put on a good face ... they never have

enough humility to, to reach out and just say, guys, I'm broken. I need help," said Stevenson.

The Martins sued BYU in 2004. According to an article in the Deseret News, "In the court documents, Brad Martin contended that BYU 'continually allowed me to play football despite my injuries' and 'provided me with an abundance of painkillers ... to allow me to play through the pain in my last football season.'"

Without health insurance, Martin's parents couldn't afford to pay for his rehab. They just needed a little help. The lawsuit was settled outside of court, and BYU ended up paying for two different rehabs. One was 30 days in southern Utah, and the other was 90 days in northern Utah.

"It didn't matter if it was a film session or it's time to be quiet, Brad's loud. Or trying to go to sleep, it's after curfew, Brad's loud. I mean, he just had that where he was like lightning all the time ..." said Issiah Magalei, a former defensive linebacker.

"Whether the coaches were (upset) or you're going to have to run because of it, he just laughed, because that was him, and it was contagious. He definitely had that personality where you wanted to be a part of it."

He remarried after rehab and moved to Salt Lake City. The marriage was very brief.

Martin died alone in May 2006. His landlord found him on the hallway floor in the home he was renting in Sugar House, almost six days after he had passed. He was 30 years old.

As with most things, opioids were developed with the best of intentions. Their purpose was to relieve people of their pain, or, at the very least, allow them the ability to manage it better.

Early research on opioids showed they were only addictive if they were used recreationally — not if they were used to treat pain.

The article, "Tracing the US opioid crisis to its roots" states, "in the United States, the idea that opioids might be safer and less addictive than was previously thought began to take root. A letter to the editor in the New England Journal of Medicine in 1980 reported that of 11,882 hospitalized people who were prescribed opioids, only four became addicted, but the short letter provided no evidence to back up these claims. A widely cited 1986 study, involving only 38 people, advocated using opioids to treat chronic pain unrelated to cancer. The prevailing view is that these studies were over-interpreted."

Big pharmaceutical companies advocated for their usage, claiming they weren't addictive, when in reality, there was no proof of this; companies knew all along that they could cause very extreme addictions. However, doctors and patients weren't aware of this at the time.

Opioids were cheap to produce, and cheap to purchase, ultimately putting more and more money in big pharma's pocket. Doctors didn't get very much training on pain management, so they thought they were being compassionate when they prescribed a patient opioids — to help with the pain.

There were three phases of the opioid epidemic.

First came prescription opioids. A patient needed a doctor to prescribe them in order to obtain them.

Second, heroin. Once doctors realized the addictive nature of opioids, they changed the

regulations, making them much harder to obtain. Users then switched to heroin because it was easier to get.

And finally, synthetic opioids that were even cheaper, and more potent, than heroin. Users that still had opioid prescriptions could now sell their leftover pills at an increased price, which only accelerated the epidemic. More options to use equals more users.

While the epidemic had its start in the '80s and '90s, the crisis got worse around 2017. According to Nature.com, "The death rate from drug overdoses more than tripled between 1999 and 2017, and that from opioid overdoses increased almost sixfold during the same period."

"It wasn't an issue back then, the opioid issue. It was a pretty commonplace thing for people to get some prescriptions. As an athlete, things were readily available because you were in pain," said Ah You.

"I think at the time, the doctors, I don't blame the team doctors or the team because they were all kind of learning at the same time as us players were learning about some of the issues that could really happen when you do take a lot of pills," said Stevenson.

So what can be done when it comes to college athletes and opioids?

"I believe if you give a guy a prescription, they shouldn't be attached to a concept. If you're going to prescribe an individual pain medication for an injury, along with that pain medication you have support around that. And there's no way you can get more or they can talk about more until they've had a chance to visit about what it can do to you and how it can affect you in the future. I think that would be a super solution for a very, very difficult addiction," says Ah You.

"It's hard to balance a culture where you're trying to make kids warriors and make them strong," said Shane. "But at the same time, you're trying to teach them the difference between being hurt and being injured, right? Because being hurt, you just gotta tough it up and suck it up. But if you're injured, you can make things worse."

Shane says football needs to find a way to balance the culture — are you hurt, or are you injured? Are you just trying to get out of running, or are you covering up your pain so you can play in the next game?

Coaches need to be accessible to and vulnerable with their players, and help them realize that although playing is important, and their team is important, their overall health needs to come first.

Stevenson says that programs and universities, and the NCAA, need to recognize the toll, mentally, physically, and emotionally, being



BYU PHOTO

**Max Hall (15) celebrates win the Las Vegas Bowl trophy in 2007.**

a student-athlete can take on a person. They need to be understanding. Student-athletes make money for them and they need resources to help them, not only while they're in school, but also when they come out of it.

"I think something that would have been helpful for Brad, for me and lots of others would be what Kalani does with the guys now. He really prepares them to deal with issues like that. I had no idea at 24 and I don't think Brad did, you know, at 21, I don't think we were prepared or educated."

Martin isn't the only one whose addiction started during his time playing football for BYU.

On Sept. 5, 1998, just a week before Martin's car accident, the team hopped on a plane to return to Provo after their 38-31 loss to Alabama Crimson Tide. Stevenson, the 24 year-old linebacker, boarded the plane in more pain than he'd ever experienced.

Both of his shoulders had been separated.

Team doctors gave him a small manila envelope, pills inside, to take as directed until he could get a doctor's appointment the next day. Instead of taking the pills as instructed, he swallowed a few and sprawled out at the back of the plane to sleep for the long return flight home.

"I just wasn't really prepared to deal with, you know, how the drugs were going to make me feel, how much I would learn to like them throughout the course of the entire season," he said.

There is a lot of shame and guilt that comes along with addiction, says Stevenson, especially while attending BYU.

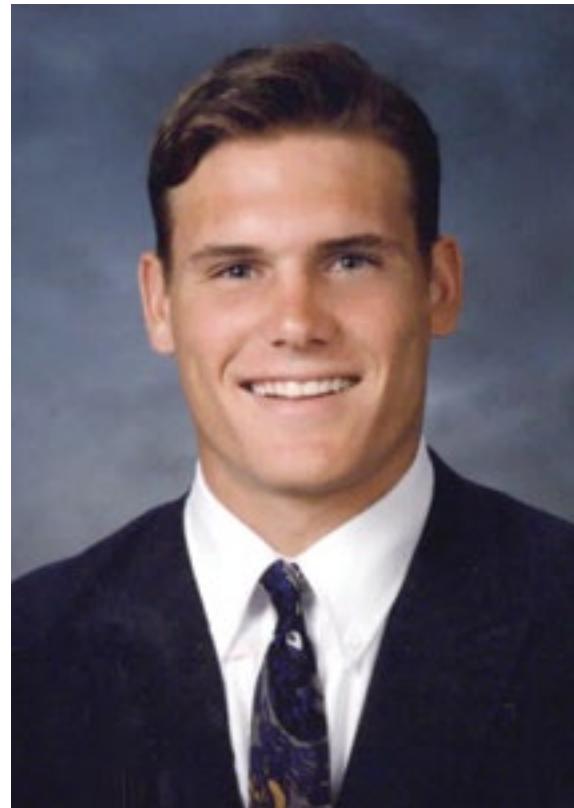
Players that struggled with addiction were afraid to ask for help, not only because they didn't want to be seen as weak, but because they were worried they'd get kicked out of school or lose their scholarships.

"I think now the BYU Honor Code is a lot more willing to give somebody amnesty if they come to them and they say, 'hey, I've got a problem.' For a long time it was like, well, you have a problem, you're no longer a good representative of BYU football," said Stevenson.

Stevenson kept his addiction a secret for fear of getting kicked out of school. There was a stigma attached, not only to addiction, but especially to those that struggled with addiction that were members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, while playing at BYU.

Though Stevenson only took opioids his senior season of football while others took them for all four years, it was more than enough to cause major problems in his life.

He, like Martin, went through a divorce not long after he left BYU. But unlike Martin, he has been clean for the last six years.



BYU PHOTO/Edited to remove physical damage to the photo

### **Brad Martin, BYU linebacker and member of the 1996 Cotton Bowl team.**

Stevenson now advocates for recovery and does his part speaking to current college athletes about his story and the reality of addiction.

"I just decided that I needed to start being more honest and vocal, and not be so ashamed."

Max Hall is BYU's winningest quarterback of all-time with a 32-7 record. He played at BYU from 2006-2009.

He went on to start for the Arizona Cardinals in 2010, but suffered a shoulder injury and multiple concussions within the first few games. He lied to team doctors about how severe his injuries were because he didn't want to lose his starting position.

He was prescribed pain pills to allow him to be able to play. After three days, the bottle was empty. All he could think about was how he was going to get more.

Hall's addiction to opioids continued for years. It all came to light when he was arrested at a Best Buy in 2014 with hundreds of dollars worth of stolen electronics in his backpack. At the time, he'd not only taken oxycontin, but also cocaine.

"One of the hardest things in my life was sitting in the back of the cop car, handcuffed, thinking, it's over. I'm done. This is gonna get out. I've ruined everything. I've lost everything. I've lost my family, my credibility, my character, my reputation. I'm done," Hall said in

episode 262 "Life Lessons with Max Hall" of the *Becoming Your Best* podcast.

"I didn't think I needed help. I thought eventually I could just get through this and I couldn't have been more wrong."

Hall told his wife and dad that he'd been arrested, fearing their reactions. He was terrified that his wife and children would leave him. Instead, his family stuck by him and supported him with the help he needed.

Not only was his family there for him, but former teammates and coaches reached out as well, voicing their encouragement in his recovery. Chad Lewis and Brandon Doman were two of the calls he received.

Hall was in rehab for three months. He realized that he had an addictive personality, and he was given tools and resources that changed his life.

"You're gonna make mistakes. People make big mistakes, make small mistakes. My big mistake just happened to go public because I was a public figure and everybody knew what was going on with me. But what I came to find out is that doesn't matter. What matters most is what you do next, what you do about it, and how you move on."

Part of his rehabilitation journey included the knowledge that he couldn't want to get better for anyone else; he had to want it for himself.

Not long after, Rich Edwards, head coach at American Leadership Academy in Arizona, decided Hall deserved a second chance; after deliberation with the board, Hall was offered the position as the offensive coordinator. The football program believed they could help him just as much as he could help them.

"I didn't think anybody was going to give me the chance to do anything ... it was life changing for me."

Despite his addiction, Hall has completely turned his life around. He now talks to athletes and youth groups about his story and the dangers of addiction and substance abuse.

"I can turn something positive out of something really negative that happened to me and almost ruined my life and use it to help others."

On Sept. 28, 2021, the 1996 football team stood at the 50 yard line. While lights shone down and cameras zoomed in on them, someone from the crowd went from person to person, writing something on each teammate's hand with a black Sharpie.

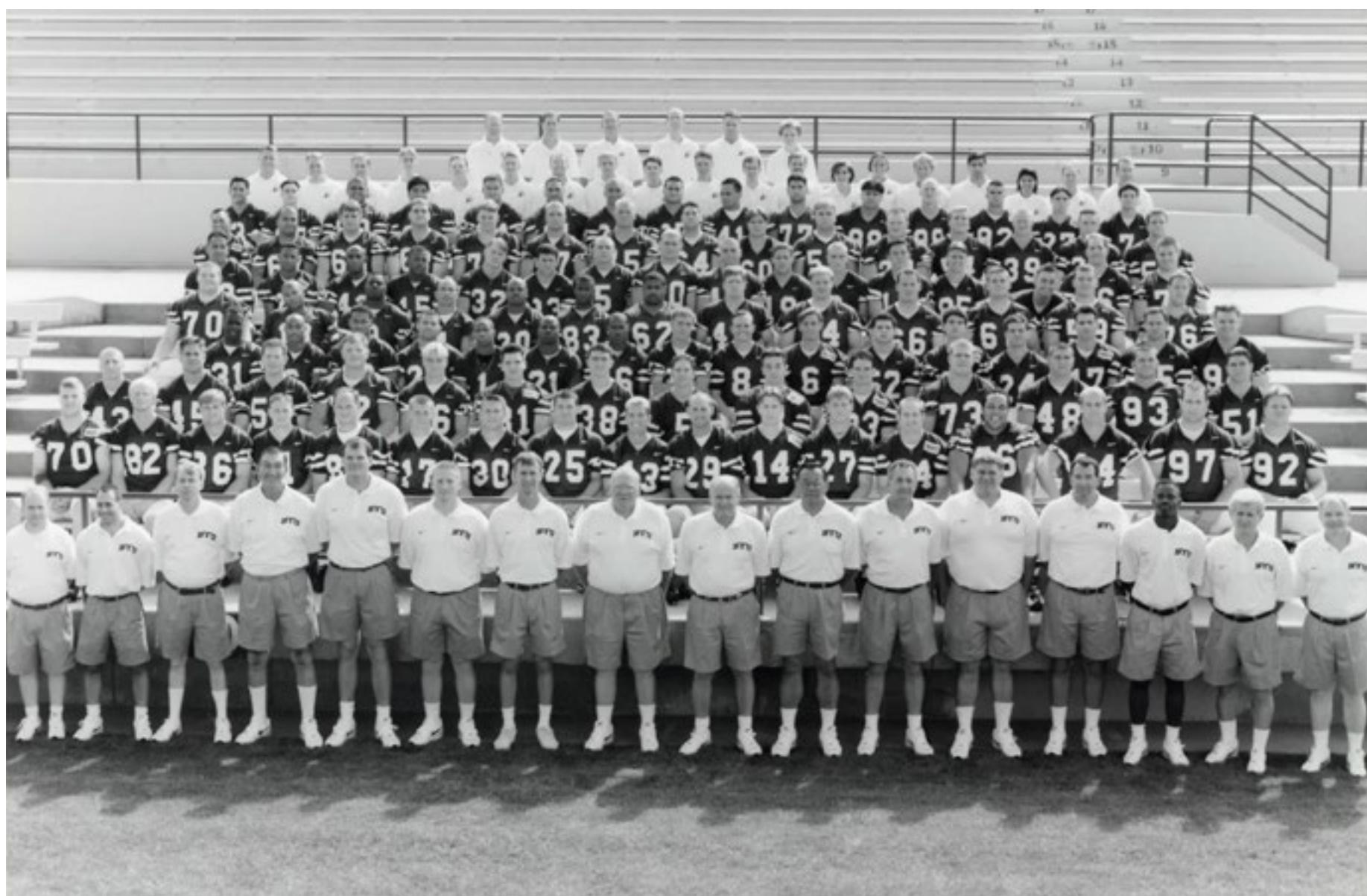
On everyone's hand was the number 10, Brad Martin's number.

"The whole team just talked about how we were being honored for having such a great team and such a great season in 1996, 25 years ago," said Stevenson. "All of us knew something was missing, and we knew that it was that Brad wasn't there."

# WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

By Joslyn Isabel Solorzano Galan

When we hear the words “football player” we picture famous people with busy lives. BYU’s 1996 football team is far beyond that. They have varied lives and experience, from football star players to devoted fathers and husbands. The former players not only share history and many great memories, but they also share a future that we bet none of them would have imagined having today. Keep reading and find out where they are now and what they’ve been up to since playing football for BYU.



BYU PHOTO

**The 1996 BYU football team poses for a group photo in Cougar Stadium.**

## HARLAND AH YOU

 In 2006 he founded Mana Resources, a mental health agency that allows for opening and healing. He lives in Boise, Idaho, with his wife and four children and they await the birth of their first grandson.

## JASON ANDERSEN

 Andersen played for New England Patriots and Kansas City Chiefs, and was signed with the Miami Dolphins and Cleveland Browns. Andersen began his coaching career as part of an NFL internship, coaching at Paola High School in Kansas. He was the offensive line/special teams coach for one season at Phoenix College and the offensive line/tight ends coach for one season at the University of Rochester in New York. He then moved to the defensive side of the ball, coaching the defensive line and special teams for one season at Dixie State in St. George. In 2014 he returned to the offense, becoming the offensive line coach for Southern Utah University in Cedar City. He lives in Lehi with his wife and three children, and coaches at Lehi High School.

## JASON ANDERSON

 He is a realtor at HomeSmart Premier Realty in Boise, Idaho. He is married to Janene Anderson. They have four children, two sons and two daughters. He has a passion for beekeeping and he runs a food truck called Holy Crepe with his wife.

## DONNY ATUAIA

 He is from Laie, Hawaii, and is married to Sara Atuaia. They have five kids and live in Orem. He has been a football coach at Timpview High School since 2019.

## MARK ATUAIA

 Fom Laie, Hawaii, Atuaia is a football coach at the University of Virginia and lives in Charlottesville with his wife and six children.

## MARGIN HOOKS

 He is the owner of the Sky's The Limit Elite Training in Dallas, Texas. In 2001 he began his professional career by signing as a free agent with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. The next year he signed with the Miami Dolphins and was allocated to play in NFL Europe with the Scottish Claymores. After two years in Miami, he joined the Colorado Crush of the Arena Football League (AFL). He finished his professional career after a stint with B.C. Lions of the Canadian Football League. He lives in Dallas, Texas with his five-year-old son.

## CHAD LEWIS

 The former tight end signed as an undrafted free agent with the Philadelphia Eagles in 1997. Lewis was re-signed by the Eagles and caught the game-clinching touchdown pass in the 2005 NFC Championship game. However, on that play Lewis suffered a Lisfranc injury to his left foot that kept him out of the Super Bowl XXXIX loss to the New England Patriots. In 2002, the NFL sent Lewis to Taiwan, Singapore and Thailand to promote the league. Since then, he has visited China several times to give interviews and help with football clinics. In 2009, Lewis released a memoir, *Surround Yourself with Greatness*, and in 2010 he returned to BYU as an associate athletic director. He is a regular speaker at BYU and the Missionary Training Center. He lives in Utah with his wife and six children.

## KAPO MC GUIRE

 After going unselected in the 1997 NFL Draft, McGuire signed with the Indianapolis Colts in May 1997. As a rookie he appeared in three games. On August 26, 1998, he was waived by the Colts. Later that year he was promoted to the Colts' active roster. For the season he appeared in one game. He returned two punts for four yards and four kickoffs for 75 yards. In 2001, he joined the Birmingham Thunderbolts of the short-lived XFL. For the season, he recorded 23 receptions for 181 (7.9 avg.). He also returned one kickoff for five yards.

## ROB MORRIS

 In 2000, Morris was selected in the first round (28th overall) of the NFL Draft by the Indianapolis Colts, where he spent his entire career. Morris started at middle linebacker for the Colts for the first five years of his career and was the Colts' leading special team's tackler in the 2006 season. Morris also started nine games for the Colts during the 2006 season, including three games in the playoffs and Super Bowl XLI. In 2001, Morris had his best statistical year with 114 total tackles (84 solo) and one sack. Morris was an unrestricted free agent after the 2006 season and was re-signed by Indianapolis on March 5, 2006. He injured his left knee in the fourth game of 2007 and had season-ending surgery. He was released after a failed physical on February 27, 2008.

## STEVE SARKISIAN

 He has been the head football coach at the University of Texas at Austin since January 2021. Sarkisian served as the head football coach at the University of Washington from 2009 to 2013, then at the University of Southern California from 2014 to 2015. While at BYU, he played quarterback and went on to play professionally with the Saskatchewan Roughriders of the Canadian Football League (CFL). In April 2015, it was reported that Sarkisian and his wife filed for divorce. Sarkisian and his ex-wife have three children, two daughters and a son. Sarkisian has since married Loreal Smith, a former collegiate track star and coach.

## JOHN TAIT

 Regarded as the No. 1 offensive tackle available in the 1999 NFL Draft, Tait was selected 14th overall by the Kansas City Chiefs. Sports Illustrated called him "a pure left tackle" with "no real physical weaknesses." As a rookie in Kansas City, Tait held out during the negotiation of his first contract. There was a meeting between Tait, his two agents and Chiefs general manager Carl Peterson, wherein Tait and his agents left. Shortly afterward Tait signed an offer sheet for five years. At the end of Tait's contract with the Chiefs, the team put a transition tag on him. Tait signed with the Chicago Bears in 2004. His contract was for six years and \$34 million. On February 21, 2009, Tait announced his retirement.

# Brighter than autumn leaves.

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