

Utah head coach Kyle Whittingham watches the Utes' game against Colorado on Nov. 25, 2023, at Rice-Eccles Stadium. Utah is moving from the Pac-12 to the Big 12 next season.

Monson

BY ERIC BUTLER

of preseason guesses are going right now — forecasting that Utah will reign over the newly expanded conference in Year One.

The Utes are highly ranked in most early polls, some prognosticators placing them in the Top 10, many having them qualifying for the new 12-team playoff.

Joel Klatt of Fox Sports not only has Utah "most likely" winning the league — "They're the best team in the Big 12," he says — and getting a top-four seed and a bye in the playoff, he also says that Salt Lake City "is immediately the toughest place to play in the Big 12."

You can hear the objections in places like Stillwater and Manhattan and maybe Provo, too. But Klatt is backed by some statistical formulas — granted, they are incorrect — that rate Rice-Eccles Stadium, where the Utes are 18-1 over the past three seasons, near the

“

They're the best team in the Big 12 ... [and Salt Lake City] is immediately the toughest place to play in the Big 12."

JOEL KLATT | Fox Sports analyst, on the Utah football team

summit of difficult road stops in all of college football. It's a tribute to the team and to its fans.

Either way, that's the perception, and while widely held views sometimes are wildly off target, in this case, Utah's reputation is an accurate reflection of the remarkable progress the program has made. Longtime Ute fans can remember the days when games were lost before they were even played, when Utah might rise up on occasion to snag a win, but when more often it was scheduled by out-of-conference teams as an easy victory for them and a money game for the Utes.

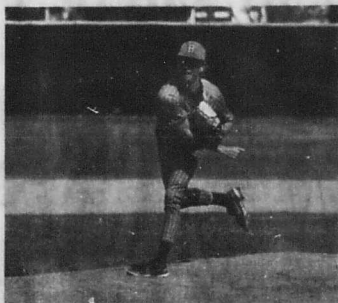
Not anymore. Any team looking for easy now wouldn't schedule Utah and most certainly would only come

to Rice-Eccles if it were seeking a bloody nose and broken kneecaps. Big 12 opponents will have no choice in the matter, come they must.

So, wherever you land on the sliding scale of philosophical debate over image being everything or image being nothing at all, you've got to admit, competitively speaking, owning one that puts bits of doubt in opponents and stirs just the right amount of confidence in a football team is useful. Better to be respected or feared than to be discounted or laughed at.

Almost nobody in the Big 12 is discounting or laughing at Utah as it heads into its virgin season there, and voices around the country seem to agree that only the foolish would do so.

PREP SPOTLIGHT • CASE BEAMES



Brighton High School's Case Beames is a three-sport athlete who has been a crucial part of the Bengals' pitching rotation this season.

Beames has been money on mound for Brighton High

By ERIC BUTLER

SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

A three-sport athlete, Brighton's Case Beames has plenty to do. But no role is as prominent as the one he has on the Bengals' baseball team.

Brighton started the season by losing two of its first three games. It's been all about winning ever since for the Bengals, who rattled off 15 victories in a row in the aftermath of the slow start.

"I think we're surprising a lot of people, the way we've played," Beames said. "We lost the first two games of the season, but we were just getting into it. Ever since then, we've been rolling." Beames has generally been tasked to finish off three-game sets with Region 6 rivals, which are single games on Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday.

As a pitcher, Beames has

upheld his end of the bargain every time, as Brighton entered May with a perfect 17-0 region record.

Beames has a 4-0 mark on the mound, with a minuscule 1.11 ERA. The junior swings a good stick, too, with a .490 batting average, but it's pitching where Beames sees his future.

"I love them both. If I play at the next level, it would be for pitching," Beames said. "Last year, I was mainly football and curveball. But this year, my changeup has been just as good and I've been throwing it a lot more."

A receiver for the Bengals in football, and a guard in basketball, Beames is likely to see his contributions increase exponentially during his senior year. But he's already arrived on the diamond.

"Yeah, it's increased a lot, especially when I'm pitching," he said. "I have to be locked in every game."

QB Goff has earned contract extension, Lions GM Holmes says

By NICK BAUMGARDNER
AND AMOS MORALE III

The Detroit Lions aren't being shy about their desire to reach an agreement with quarterback Jared Goff on a contract extension. General manager Brad Holmes said on Thursday, Goff has "earned" it.

"It's a high priority for us and both sides are working really, really hard," Holmes told 97.1 The Ticket on Thursday. "These things just take time, you know."

Holmes said the Lions have been working on a new deal for Goff for a while. Detroit recently signed two other key pieces of their offense: tackle Pene Sewell and wide receiver Amon-Ra St. Brown, to large multi-year extensions this offseason.

"In a perfect world, we'd have had all three of them done bang, bang, you know, but these things just kind of take a while, especially with the quarterback market," Holmes said. "But I do have faith that it's gonna get done."

Coach Dan Campbell called an extension for Goff a priority at the owners' meetings in March. Last season, Goff helped the Lions win a division title for the first time in 30 years and two playoff games in one of the best seasons of his career. He finished second in the NFL in passing yards (4,575) and fourth in touchdown passes (30).

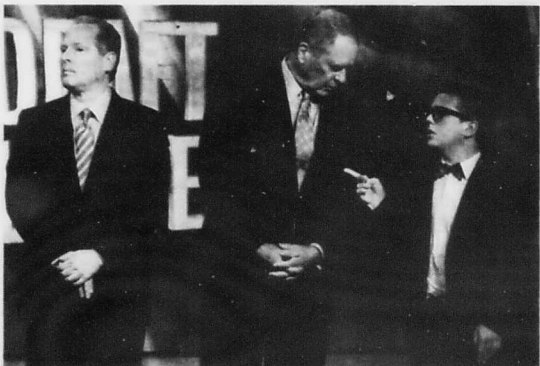
Since joining the Lions as part of the trade that sent quarterback Matthew Stafford to the Los Angeles Rams in 2021, Goff has thrown for the fourth-most yards (12,258) and seventh-most touchdowns (78) of any quarterback in the NFL over that stretch. Detroit's offseason was busy

before it ever started. The Lions entered 2024 with plans on getting something done with two stars on rookie deals: St. Brown and Sewell. Both of those players signed extensions with the team before the NFL Draft. The Lions also entered 2024, even before their playoff run, with plans to extend Goff. So it's not surprising to hear Holmes say signing Goff is a priority or that both sides are "working really, really hard" to get something done. Nor is it necessarily a surprise to hear him say he's confident a deal will get done.

At the same time, Goff's contract is far more complicated than what Detroit was dealing with in terms of both St. Brown and Sewell — two guys under the age of 23. Goff, who turns 30 in mid-October, has had a terrific three-year run. Detroit and Holmes "earned" a new deal per Holmes.

Goff's next contract is expected to flirt with \$50 million annually — a number currently reserved for Patrick Mahomes, Joe Burrow, Justin Herbert, Lamar Jackson and Jalen Hurts. Additionally, Trevor Lawrence, Tua Tagovailoa and Dak Prescott could all be looking at new extensions.

The market is going to dictate the terms of Goff's next deal. Holmes was clear about that. How far along Detroit waits before getting something done, though, will be an interesting question. The Lions drafted former Tennessee QB Hendon Hooker in the third round last season. And while the 26-year-old sat out last year rehabbing a college knee injury, he's expected to be ready for camp this year. Detroit's future plans clearly revolve around Goff as the starter. It's just a matter of how long that window will be.



Then-Utah Jazz general manager Kevin O'Connor, center, talks with Nick Gilbert, the son of Cleveland Cavaliers owner Dan Gilbert, at the 2011 NBA Draft Lottery in Secaucus, N.J., as David Kahn, left, then-general manager of the Minnesota Timberwolves, looks off to the side.

Lottery

BY ERIC BUTLER

Beyond that, teams jumping up above the Jazz can also push them downward. There's a 34.48% chance that the team stays at the No. 8 position, but the second most likely outcome is that they draft at No. 9, which has a 32.09% chance of happening. Two teams could skip them — a 6.75% chance — which leads to the Jazz drafting No. 10.

If three or four teams skip up above the Jazz, though, they would lose the pick entirely. That's due to the trade in which the Jazz salary dumped Derrick Favors to the Oklahoma City Thunder in 2021, giving them a protected pick in either 2024 (top-10 protected), 2025 (top-10), or 2026 (top-8). The odds of this pick conveying to OKC this year are minuscule, though: just 0.39%.

While team execs have stated they don't have a preference on whether they convey the pick this year or in future years, it's an interesting conundrum regarding which would be better for the Jazz.

NBA Draft Lottery

Sunday, 1 p.m. MDT
TV = Ch. 4

On one hand, giving up the No. 11 pick would be a seemingly worst-case scenario for a top-10 protected pick owed over multiple years. On the other hand, this is generally regarded as a weak draft.

Jazz lottery history

Thanks to being a playoff team for most of their history, the Jazz have less lottery experience than most teams. Since the lottery was introduced 40 years ago in 1985, the Jazz have only participated nine times. Overall, they've stayed put six times, dropped twice, and won a higher selection once.

The drops proved to be significant. In 2005, the Jazz fell one spot from No. 5 to No. 6, which perhaps incentivized then-GM Kevin O'Connor to use future draft assets to go get his guy: three-time All-Star Deron Williams. Then 12-time All-Star

Chris Paul was selected fourth in that draft, while Raymond Felton and Martell Webster went fifth and sixth.

The 2014 lottery looked to be one of the brightest in history, and the Jazz entered with the No. 4 selection. Instead, they fell down to No. 5 and used it on Dan- to Exum. His career spluttered in Utah, in large part due to injuries, and the Australian found himself out of the NBA for two seasons. This year, though, Exum has enjoyed a career resurgence with the Dallas Mavericks. Denver do-it-all forward Aaron Gordon was drafted No. 4, while MVP Joel Embiid was selected No. 3.

But the good lottery outcome came in 2011, when the Jazz had both the No. 6 and No. 12 selections. No. 12 stayed put, but the No. 6 pick jumped up to No. 3, which they used to draft Enes Kanter. Kanter's career with the Jazz was relatively short — he too was traded to the Oklahoma City Thunder. It was a weak draft, though: the No. 2 pick was Derrick Williams, and No. 6 Jan Vesely went to the Wizards and played just three seasons total in the NBA.

POOR