

SPORTS



NHL honors Coyotes goaltender Ingram
Arizona Coyotes (now Utah) goalie Connor Ingram has earned an NHL award that recognizes perseverance, sportsmanship and dedication. **C7**

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Utah football coach Kyle Whittingham looks on before a game against Oregon on Oct. 28, 2023, at Rice-Eccles Stadium. Whittingham will celebrate his 65th birthday in November. **RICK BOWMER** Associated Press/Reynolds

Just a matter of time

Utah football coach Kyle Whittingham's uncertain future has led to some highly rated recruits choosing to look elsewhere.

By **KEVIN REYNOLDS** The Salt Lake Tribune

For all the big-name offers and lavish campus visits, Ephraim Asiatu always knew his recruitment would come down to two schools. The four-star prospect from Herriman High School was wrestling between Utah and BYU, rival schools to the north and south of his home. Like so many in-state recruits before him, there was family history to consider. His father, Matt Asiatu, became a star running back at Utah. His whole family walked the hallways on the hill. Ephraim thought he'd follow them there, too.

But one thought kept nagging at the 17-year-old.

What if Kyle Whittingham retires?

The head coach who has ruled over Utah for 20 years once said publicly he wouldn't coach past age 65. Although he has been less committed about that in recent years, Whittingham will celebrate his 65th birthday in November. "I heard he was going to retire soon," Ephraim Asiatu said. "That played a big part in the decision."

So even as his legendary Ute father laughed through the pain, Ephraim, the No. 14 composite player in the state, picked rival BYU.

And he wouldn't be the only one.

While there's no doubt about Whittingham's talents and successes, his uncertain future has led some recruits to look elsewhere.

A tectonic shift

For the last decade, Whittingham and the Utes have had the clear upper hand in recruiting. As BYU drifted around in independence, Whittingham built a Pac-12 power that had an easy recruiting pitch. The Utes won often, put plenty of players in the NFL, and in a world where the ground always seems to be shifting, Utah had arguably the country's most rock-solid foundation.

It translated to Whittingham signing 12, top-five prospects in the state dating back to 2019. BYU, on the other hand, hadn't signed a single top-three composite Utah prospect since 2017.

WHITTINGHAM, CA

Questions for Utah schools, others swirl in the chaos of NIL payouts

Where will the NIL chaos/craziness/circus end?

"I don't know." I broke a double-shot of personal rules with those two items: 1) Don't start a column with a question; 2) Don't start a column with a quote, especially a non-definitive one that says nothing.

But, in this case, both of the above do say something. They are central to what's on a lot of college sports fans' and coaches' minds about now — for good



GORDON MONSON

reason. The question is what I'm asked again and again, week after week, the quote is from a respected major athletics department

administrator. And he meant what he said — he has no clue how or where or when the NIL spin will cave in on itself, but he figures it will not remain over the long haul the way it is at present.

How is it at present? Out of freaking control.

Example A is the recent news that former Utah State forward Great Osobor signed to play at Washington, where former Aggie coach Danny Sprinkle now runs the program, for ... what's this, \$2 million? For one year? That's right,

MONSON, CA



Utah State forward Great Osobor dunks the ball against San Francisco on Dec. 16, 2023, at the Delta Center. Osobor has since transferred to Washington. **THOM NELSON** The Salt Lake Tribune

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