

Whittingham

But this year, the Utes put together the country's 59th recruiting class. BYU, despite its struggles in its first Big 12 season, had the nation's No. 46 recruiting class — the Cougars' best under head coach Kalani Sitake.

BYU's creep back into the conversation for Utah's top players began when the No. 7 player in the state — Cedar Valley's Devonta Tuiataga — chose BYU over Utah. Asitaga followed. Then the No. 7 player — Kinlan Fomohema — picked BYU at the last second thanks to a strong push by defensive coordinator Jay Hill.

It all crescendoed when the No. 3 player in the state, Faletan Satuala, picked BYU over Utah in front of a national television audience. Satuala told The Salt Lake Tribune that he thought he was going to Utah up until two days before his announcement. But Hill and the defensive coaching staff convinced him to switch, with a key part of the Cougars' pitch being stability.

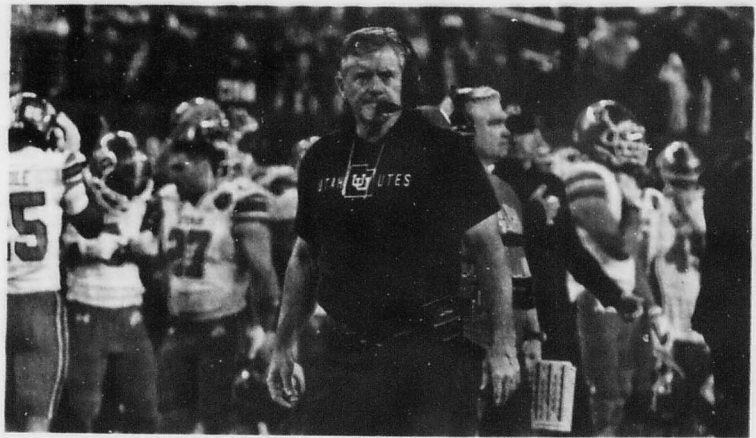
"I mean the biggest thing was Jay Hill and Kalani Sitake always reaching out to me, showing me so much love and letting me know they were going to be there," he said, "letting me know BYU was the best place for me."

Whittingham and Utah still locked up three of the top five players in the state, including the No. 1 prospect Isaac Garcia. For at least some recruits, Utah didn't have an answer to the concern they were having about Whittingham not being around for the long haul. In the end, this year marked the first time BYU had a higher-ranked class than Utah since 2014.

And if the 2024 class was thinking about it, so was the 2025 class. The No. 2 prospect in the state next year, Corner Canyon's Jerome Myles, said age has to be considered by recruits.

"That's probably one of the biggest factors I look for. Are the coaches going to stay? Are they just there for a little bit? Are they getting older or what?" he said in February.

Myles, who had long been considered a near lock for the Utes, announced last month that he had committed to Ole Miss and head coach Lane Kiffin.



Utah coach Kyle Whittingham looks on from the sideline before the Utes' Las Vegas Bowl clash with Northwestern on Dec. 23, 2023, in Las Vegas.

Legends of the long haul

When Nick Saban retired unexpectedly in January, he lamented how hard it became to give people commitments. Whether that was recruits, incoming assistant coaches or donors, the Alabama head coach found himself struggling to be truthful.

"I actually thought in hiring coaches, recruiting players, that my age started to become a little bit of an issue," Saban said on ESPN. "People wanted assurances that I would be here for three years, five years, whatever, and it got harder and harder for me to be honest about it."

Saban is 72, seven years older than Whittingham. But Utah's head coach fueled his retirement speculation several years ago when he said on ESPN radio in 2021 that he could "just about guarantee I won't be coaching at 65."

At the time, Whittingham was coming off a draining season in the wake of the death of his player Aaron Lowe. The coach's thoughts

had turned to family, and his father who had died at the age of 64.

In the years since Whittingham made that proclamation, he has hedged that bet a bit. He told The Athletic last year that, "as long as I'm passionate and enjoying what I'm doing," he'd continue coaching. But even then he cautioned he doesn't want to stick around coaching for too long.

With his 65th birthday in November, every recruiting class from here on out will have that information to sit through unless Whittingham says publicly he intends to stay longer.

Privately, recruits told The Tribune that Utah has emphasized coaching stability as part of its recruiting pitch as well. Whenever Whittingham retires, there is a likely succession plan in place that will also promote defensive coordinator Morgan Scalley to head coach.

But even with that familiarity, it would still mean change.

Taani Makasin, a 2025 recruit out of Provo being recruiting by

BYU and Utah, admitted that much. "I think [stability] is important," he said. "I don't want to go somewhere and the person that recruited me isn't there anymore. I'm going there to learn from him. I'm not there to learn from whoever they're gonna hire next."

"So I think it is important, but I feel like Utah and BYU have both had a long history of stability with Kalani having been there for a little while. And then Kyle Whittingham obviously being there for a very long time, but the rest of his coaching staff has also been there for a while [if he retires]. It's a good place for both schools."

Going into 2024, Whittingham will be the fifth-oldest head coach in college football. North Carolina's Mack Brown, 72, will be the oldest and the only one older than 70.

Before spring practice even started, ESPN put Whittingham on its coaches on the hot seat. Not because he is losing, but because

of his age. Still, there are arguments out there that Whittingham's age won't be a factor in recruiting even if he does stay.

In the era of name, image and likeness money, players can follow their best offer even if the coach leaves. Utah being more competitive in the NIL space might be a bigger factor than a coach staying.

The one-time free transfer rule also helps. Players are more likely to take a chance on a program with a head coach in limbo. If he leaves, they can leave too.

But it is a risky proposition, especially as hundreds of players each year go into the portal and don't find a new home.

Either way, the reality is that other schools will use Whittingham's age against him on the recruiting trail. That goes for in-state recruits and beyond.

In a state that so often sees prospects choosing between BYU and Utah, the seismograph might show how coaching stability moves the tectonic plates.

Monson

t-w-o-m-i-l-l-o-n-d-o-l-l-a-r-s. It's unlikely how much of that total will come from marketing deals and how much is simply slapped on Osobor's personal barrel for signing up in Seattle. Granted, he's a fine player who helped Utah State do some unexpected things this past season as they qualified for the NCAA Tournament, but ...

Good lord. Maybe as a hamburger climbs toward costing \$100 in some posh eateries in some cities these days, \$2 million isn't what it used to be. And yet, it sounds like a bit pricey for a dude who isn't exactly Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, or even Victor Wembanyama. What would those guys get as college basketball stars in this current market?

The answer: As much as a player's best agent and a school's richest booster or combination of boosters were able and willing to shell out.

Somebody stated the other day that the math, in many of these situations happening here, there, not quick everywhere, doesn't work out. More than a few of these athletes are not will be not worth what they're being paid. My response was, it's not a purely mathematical formula, at least not every time. If a booster or a collective offers up a boatload for an athlete, will that athlete generate that kind of cash in return for the marketers or the school he represents or for him or her or she — via sales pitches, via increased interest, via ticket sales, via gear sold, via results — and the money generated thereby — on the court or on the field?

Sometimes, sometimes not.

What we're often looking at here is an emotional buy on the part of marketers and especially boosters who have more money than they can ever spend and that have a

love of and a rooting interest for their favorite school that is only exceeded by the far reaches of their ego. I get it. I have some good friends who fit into such blessed/cursed predicaments.

Their expenditure doesn't have to pay off financially for them or for their school, their football or basketball team and it doesn't even have to make sense.

Look at it this way: If a wealthy man wants to get around town, he can buy a car. Mobility is important. Get to get from place to place. But a Hyundai Elantra will do that just as efficiently as a Mercedes-Benz Maybach Exelero. It might not be as fast, or as comfortable, or as impressively, but no matter, it will do it just the same.

So why does the rich guy do it? He has his reasons, even if he's not a collector who wants to turn the car into a garage queen and sell it later for even more than the ridiculous price he originally paid. Instead, he wants to get out and drive it, to be seen driving it, and beat the daylight out of it.

Nike founder Phil Knight has opened up the vault for Oregon athletics, in one way or another, a thousand times over, and the Ducks have frequently flourished on account of his largesse. He's made a huge difference for that school competitively. Perhaps he's gotten some monetary kickback for his donations, but here's what he's gotten more than anything — gratitude and grovitas, approval and affection.

In Eugene, he's not just the man, he's the king. Athletes might help sell some product for some entities, but how much? Hmm.

Boosters who either individually or as a part of a collective lure in an athlete to a football or basketball program that otherwise wouldn't have considered that school, those poo-bahs enjoy a status that's hard to come by. They say money

can't buy happiness, but it can buy one helluva quarterback — hello, Cam Rising — or power forward — hello, Great Osobor — or a coach — hello, Kevin Young.

Schools and their boosters don't always get what they pay for. Some of these mercenaries aren't as good of a talent or a fit as they seem. Some might get injured. Some might crumble under the new pressure that a big contract — or whatever the proper term should be called — brings.

I never liked the old, antiquated NCAA rules that were so prohibitive in what young athletes could and couldn't do, the way schools that were pocketing big money from their services used them and the term "amateurism" as some lofty, glorified, above-the-fray, exalted state of being that in reality just allowed institutions to give those athletes little for what the schools were getting in return. On the other hand, I didn't like cheaters and there was a whole lot of that going on for years, for decades — in those confines because it gave certain programs a competitive advantage over other programs.

But what do we have now? Certain programs getting a competitive advantage over other programs — and some athletes reaping the rewards because so many businessmen and boosters want to drive an Exelero, not an Elantra.

When and how and where it will end, to quote the aforementioned AD, "I don't know."

Even the pro leagues have salary caps and free agency/contract rules that are supposed to be at least partially level off ridiculous advantages for teams that do cannonballs into their huge stacks of cash.

Money doesn't always — not even now — win the day in college sports. But it wins it more often than it doesn't. Just ask the Aggies of Utah State, who now have not only lost their star coach to Luce's lure, but also their star forward.

Unlock the Power of Gold:

Secure Your Retirement with Genesis Gold Group

Faith-Based, America-First Gold

In the ever-changing landscape of investments, one asset has stood the test of time as a beacon of stability and value: gold. More and more investors are turning to the security and potential of a Gold IRA through trusted institutions like Genesis Gold Group.

The Timeless Value of Gold

For millennia, gold has been revered as a store of wealth and a hedge against inflation. Unlike fiat currencies, which can fluctuate wildly due to economic and political factors, gold maintains its intrinsic value over time.

Protecting Your Retirement

In today's volatile financial climate, safeguarding your retirement savings is paramount. Traditional retirement accounts, subject to the whims of the stock market, can be precarious. But with a Gold IRA offered by Genesis Gold Group, you can fortify your retirement nest egg with the enduring strength of gold.

The Expertise of Genesis Gold Group

When it comes to securing your financial future, trust and expertise are paramount. Genesis Gold Group boasts a team of seasoned professionals dedicated to guiding you through every step of the process. Their personalized approach ensures that your retirement strategy aligns with your goals and risk tolerance.

Call Now to Receive Your FREE Definitive Gold Guide, Exclusively from Genesis Gold Group

877-205-4956

genesisgoldgroup.com

Diversify and Prosper

Diversification is the cornerstone of sound investing. By adding a Gold IRA to your portfolio, you mitigate risk and enhance potential returns. Whether you're a seasoned investor or just beginning to plan for retirement, Genesis Gold Group offers the tools and resources you need to thrive in any market environment.

Your Path to Financial Security

Don't leave your retirement to chance. Take control of your financial future today with a Gold IRA from Genesis Gold Group. With their expertise and your determination, the possibilities are limitless.



Genesis Gold Group

POOR