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Less than two weeks after testing their younger players in the Red Rock Tournanemt, Brigham Young University embarks on a short trip to Southern California to get some challenging game time for their 1st-stringers.

On Thursday night the Cougars will face the Aztecs of San Diego State in a clash of the 2012 DI-A champions and the DI-AA finalists. On Saturday, BYU will face UCLA.

The Cougars are installing a few changes on the offensive side of the ball, and will also be looking at life without some long-standing stars. Prop Mikey Su'a, scrumhalf Shaun Davies, and flyhalf Dylan Lubbe have all graduated.

"It's the cycle of college sports," said BYU Head Coach David Smyth. "Players graduate and you have to move on. But we have lost some players who have been a big part of this team for a long while."

Davies and Lubbe formed the halfback combination for five years, and while others stepped into those roles at times, they were the go-to playmakers. Su'a was a monster in the scrum, and the MVP of the 2012 DI-A final.

Now Smyth will look to a new crop of leading players, not least of whom is Ryan Roundy, now a senior and in his second season as the team captain. Smyth also mentioned flanker/lock Kyle Sumsion, lock TJ Allred, and Ray Forrester as experienced players expected to lead.

"I think Hoseki Kofe is set up for a big year, and Ryan Blaser is back from mission and we expect him to play well, also," said Smyth.

But none of those players are halfbacks. This week will be a testing ground for those guys. The experienced Inoke Funaki should get time at flyhalf and Jonathan Linehan and Luke Mocke will likely compete for the scrumhalf slot. But it remains a bit up in the air. These players have the skills and can do the job, said Smyth, but the communication between Davies and Lubbe was something special.

"That's the X factor," said Smyth. "They have the ability, but they have to develop that chemistry, which would allow them to perform when the pressure's on."

Kofe is an intriguing talent. The center suffered a concussion at the DI-A final, but has recovered and is expected to be even more formidable this year. He should be pairing once again with Paul Lasike to form perhaps the most imposing center tandem this side of Arkansas.

Lasike joined the BYU football team last season and suited up as a running back for the Cougars, rushing 33 times for 129 yards and two touchdowns. He has earned a scholarship for the football team, but by agreement between the two programs, will be allowed to play rugby.

Lasike is not on this trip to California, as Smyth wants to be judicious with how he uses his star, but for his part, Lasike wants to get on the field.

“He is champing at the bit to play rugby and wanted to be here,” said Smyth. “We will see him play rugby this spring; it’s just a question of when.”

BYU takes on the Aztecs Thursday night at 7pm. Smyth said he will be looking for the beginnings of a 1st-team performance from his players, but he will be testing some combinations.

"We have a game plan for each of these games, and we are matching combinations to face the two teams," said Smyth. "We are testing some things, but we are aiming to win these games."