UTAH — 5-YEAR WIN TREND

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
14			(B) N'western	(B) Texas	
13	COLORADO	WASHINGTON	(CG) Washington	(CG) Oregon	
12	OREGON	WASH ST	ARIZONA ST	USC	
11	WASHINGTON	OREGON	WASH ST	COLORADO	
10	CAL	ARIZONA ST	WASHINGTON	ARIZONA	
9	(B) Indiana	USC	BYU	UCLA	
8	ARIZONA ST	STANFORD	COLORADO	WASHINGTON	
7	UCLA	(B) WVU	OREGON	CAL	
6	OREGON ST	COLORADO	UCLA	ARIZONA ST	
5	ARIZONA	UCLA	USC	OREGON ST	WASHINGTON
4	USC	ARIZONA	ARIZONA	WASH ST	USC
3	San Jose St	San Jose St	STANFORD	Idaho St (FCS)	WASH ST
2	BYU	BYU	N. Illinois	N. Illinois	COLORADO
1	S. Utah (FCS)	N. Dakota (FCS)	Weber St (FCS)	BYU	OREGON ST

KYLE WHITTINGHAM

UTAH — 2020 RESULTS

2020 RESULTS			Yard +/-	TO +/-	GRADE
USC	L	17-33	-30	-3	28.6
WASHINGTON	L	21-24	-1	-1	48.4
OREGON ST	W	30-24	68	1	70.1
COLORADO	W	38-21	55	2	79.9
WASH ST	W	45-28	132	1	82.7
OVERALL: 18th / 66		PAC12: 5th / 12			61.9

UTAH — BEST/WORST GAME GRADES (LAST 5 YEARS)

YEAR	OPPONENT	W/L	SCORE	GRADE
2019	CALIFORNIA	W	35-0	113.8
2019	OREGON ST	W	52-7	104.0
2019	UCLA	W	49-3	103.8
2019	WASH ST	W	38-13	100.8
2017	UCLA	W	48-17	98.4
2019	TEXAS	L	10-38	10.8
2018	ARIZONA ST	L	20-38	11.9
2019	OREGON	L	15-37	16.7
2017	ARIZONA ST	L	10-30	18.0
2017	OREGON	L	20-41	22.3

UTAH

		RANK
Scoring Offense	30.2 ppg	52
Points per Play	0.44	49
Total Offense	410 ypg	53
Yards per Play	5.9	47
Rushing Offense	194 ypg	39
Yards per Carry	5.1	24
1st Down YPC	5.2	31
Explosive Rush	8.2	10
Passing Offense	216 ypg	76
Yards / Attempt	6.9	80
QB Rating	123	90
TD / INT Ratio	0.9	113
Sacks / Attempt	4%	23
Explosive Pass	5.1	101
Return. Production	81%	34

For two straight cycles, Utah finished #1 in my Player Development metric which compares the NFL Draft production vs. raw recruiting expectations for all 65 Power 5 programs.

The only reason Utah didn't make it three in a row this past April, was that almost the entire roster chose to return for 2021 and take advantage of the NCAA's bonus eligibility year. One by one, the announcements fell into place like a line of falling dominos.

Under Kyle Whittingham, Utah is the perfect example of a so-called "developmental" program where they have built a very specific culture and are able to identify the exact type of player/person to fit right in. And regardless of star rating upon arrival in Salt Lake City, they continue to churn out wins on the field, and picks in the NFL Draft.

Remember, Utah was the original "BCS Buster" by going undefeated in 2004 and did it again in 2008 with a win over Nick Saban in the Sugar Bowl. Their surge on the field helped land the most elusive prize in college athletics: a Power 5 conference bid.

And in less than a decade, Utah won multiple division crowns and actually led the league in draft picks.

They are chasing a bigger goal beyond the South title – a Pac-12 championship.

As the roster cycles ebb and flow at developmental programs, the stars are aligning for 2021. Of course, 2019 was the senior-laden starting lineup that was packed with eventual NFL picks. That made for a younger roster in 2020, and a transition year damaged by the disrupted offseason. All of those ahead-of-schedule reps and that valuable game experience in 2020 will pay dividends this fall.

OFFENSE

There was an expected drop-off from 2019 with the loss of multi-year starters and leaders at quarterback (Tyler Huntley) and running back (Zach Moss). Worse, 2020 starter Cameron Rising was knocked out in the first quarter of the opening game.

The result was a significant step back in the pass game both in taking care of the ball and in hitting on explosive, long-yardage plays:

- Touchdown/INT ratio: #12 in 2019 ... #113 in 2020
- Explosive Passing: #13 in 2019 ... #101 in 2020

For 2021, the quarterback room, and really all the offensive skill positions, have been bolstered by blue-chip wins from the Transfer Portal. Utah added a 4-star dual threat quarterback Ja'Quinden Jackson (Texas), a former 4-star receiver Theo Howard who has amassed 1500+ yards at UCLA & Oklahoma, and a pair of 4-star backs Chris Curry (LSU) and TJ Pledger (Oklahoma).

That list doesn't even include their biggest commit for 2021's outlook. Charlie Brewer was Baylor's starting quarterback for the last four seasons, with a peak in 2019 when he passed for 3,100+ yards and 21 touchdowns while leading their unlikely charge to the Big 12 title game. However, he took a step back in 2020 – some suspected lingering injuries or concussion issues – and fell to a 61% completion rate and a 14-8 TD-INT ratio. It is rare for a 4-year, winning quarterback to have a mutual "parting of ways" with the program, but perhaps a fresh start and location will click.

Brewer was a perfect 15-15 in the spring game, and got all the first-team reps as Rising was still recovering. In last year's preview, I correctly predicted Rising would be the Game 1 starter, despite the general consensus from other publications that South Carolina transfer Jake Bentley was QB1. I cited Rising's extra year of familiarity with the playbook and coordinator Andy Ludwig's praise.

It feels like a similar situation this time around, with the key difference being that Brewer got the entire spring season allowing him to "catch up" in terms of playbook/scheme and reps here in Utah. Look for a true fall camp battle, but regardless, this position's level of play will improve from 2020.

In such a dark year, Ty Jordan provided light and happiness for Utah fans and college football fans alike. After he tore through Colorado's defense, I sent a tweet calling him "the best back you haven't heard of yet." His memory and spirit will fuel this team and fan base after his tragic passing.

Jordan's breakout freshman year scared the other three running backs into the transfer portal, requiring Whittingham to make some additions. Micah Bernard has the most experience in this offense, while Pledger had a productive 451-yard, 9-touchdown season for Oklahoma. I assume that's your one-two punch, with Curry pushing into the rotation.

UTAH — OFFENSE & DEFENSE, vs. OPPONENT AVERAGE (PERCENTILE)

	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	10-YEAR
OFF %	30%	69%	50%	29%	47%	16%	17%	31%	12%	6%	56th
OFF Coord.	ANDY LUDWIG	TROY TAYLOR	HARDING / RODERICK		CHRISTENSEN	BRIAN JOHNSON		CHOW			
DEF Coord.	MORGAN SCALLEY					PEASE	KALANI SITAKE				
DEF %	48%	92%	81%	80%	34%	73%	59%	53%	41%	80%	17th

UTAH		RANK	
Scoring Defense	26 ppg	47	
Points per Play	0.39	55	
Total Defense	365 ypg	37	
Yards per Play	5.5	50	
3rd Down Conv%	34.3%	20	
Rushing Defense	108 ypg	11	
Yards per Carry	3.8	35	
Negative Play %	10%	34	
Explosive Rush	8.2	87	
Passing Defense	257 ypg	99	
Yards / Attempt	6.7	25	
QB Rating	121	20	
Completion %	57.6%	26	
Explosive Pass	5.1	28	
Return. Production	91%	4	

Brant Kuithe is an All-American caliber tight end, and Ludwig gets creative in his usage – end arounds, screens, etc. Another do-it-all is veteran Britain Covey who finally last fall returned to full health after he took a physical beating in 2018 and was out for 2019. Covey had a punt return touchdown against Oregon State and also posted a 91-yard score in the finale, the 2nd longest pass play in Utah history.

More roster shuffling saw two-year starter Bryan Thompson end up at Arizona State and Samson Nacua at BYU, but brought Theo Howard in from UCLA/Oklahoma. Look for electric Jaylen Dixon to get back into the rotation, and the spring star was big-frame freshman Devaughn Vele.

Utah's offensive line has been above average for quite some time. They dominate weaker defensive lines, but crumble against the blue-chip recruiting programs like USC, Texas, Washington, and Oregon in past seasons. Nick Ford is an All-Pac 12 anchor at center, and Whittingham believes it's his best line yet. Simi Moala earned all-league honors in 2019, while Sataoa Laumea earned them in 2020. Four starters are back from a line that improved year-over-year in run push, even from an already strong 2019.

DEFENSE

Coming into 2020, the defense had to replace nine starters after a veteran, record-setting unit graduated to the NFL. Fast forward a year, and the 2021 defense returns ten starters from the reload/transition season.

But here's the kicker: the statistical drop-off during the transition season *wasn't* catastrophic. Instead, this unit ended up a serious *strength* with Utah finishing 1st in the Pac-12 in rushing defense, 2nd in yards/play, and 3rd in scoring.

Now, all of those growing pains reverse into an extremely experienced and talented defense. Coupled with the best coordinator in the conference Morgan Scalley, this will be the best in the Pac-12.

It starts in the trenches, in Sack Lake City, where veteran starters are backed up by blue-chip freshman. Mika Tafua earned all-league honors in 2020; he and Maxs Tupai were both part of that historic 2019 unit and return at both end spots. Behind that duo are two homegrown 2020 4-stars in Van Fillinger (Corner Canyon) and Xavier Carlton (Juan Diego Catholic).

Devin Lloyd led the team in tackles in 2020 and 2019, and should push for All-America honors as the leader of a potentially elite defense. On my phone call with Scalley, he emphasized Lloyd's strong leadership qualities and how this team rallied together through such a tough year. Lloyd is flanked by Nephi Sewell who started all five games and shined against Colorado with 11 tackles, a forced fumble, and a pick.

The secondary was another complete rebuild as the 2019 group went pro. While extremely young, this group flashed high upside and athleticism, and put the Ballhawk "B" in Scalley's RSNB. In fact, Utah's 17 straight seasons with a Pick Six is by far the longest in the nation.

Their 1.4 interceptions/game was 8th in FBS, and now three of the four starters are back for 2021. Clark Phillips was Utah's highest-rated commit ever, and even as a true freshman starter shined with a Pick Six and a fumble recovery in the Washington State win. Vonte Davis should also push for all-league recognition, and this group will have a significant "2nd year bonus" with their first full offseason together.
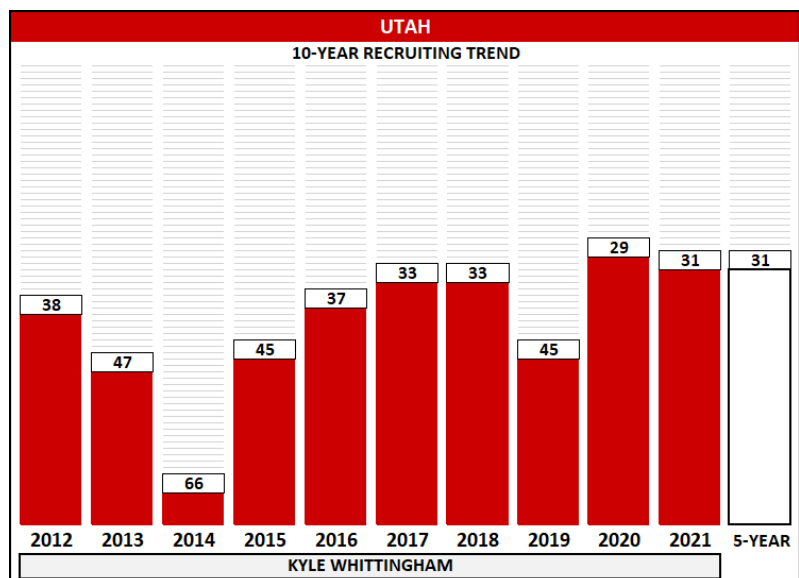
OUTLOOK

When 2020's expected "rebuild" year on defense was more of a "reload" and remained among the league's top three units, I set my target on Utah as a Pac-12 South favorite in 2021. Utah is one of the best developmental programs in America, and they operate in cycles. 2021 is the part of the process where they are becoming veteran and loaded with all-conference players.

The staff loaded up on transfer portal wins to infuse talent into the offensive skill positions, and that combination makes Utah my pick to win the South.

UTAH		
2021 SCHEDULE		
S. 2	WEBER ST (FCS)	
S. 11	@ BYU	
S. 18	@ San Diego St	
S. 25	WASHINGTON ST	
O. 2	- - - BYE - - -	
O. 9	@ USC	
O. 16	ARIZONA STATE	
O. 23	@ Oregon State	
O. 30	UCLA	
N. 5	@ Stanford	
N. 13	@ Arizona	
N. 20	OREGON	
N. 26	COLORADO	

UTAH		RANK / 66
All-Time Wins	693	29
All-Time Win %	0.594	24
Wins (Last 100)	605	23
Wins (Last 50)	335	28
Wins (Last 25)	202	21
Wins (Last 10)	76	27
Wins (Last 5)	39	17
Game Grader (10 yr)	55.2	25
Game Grader (5 yr)	61.7	13
Game Grader (3 yr)	65.7	10
Draft Picks s' 2000	62	29
Draft Picks s' 2010	39	21
Player Development: Recruit Rank ('14-'17) vs. Draft ('18-'21)		3
Win Conversion: Recruit Rank ('12-'20) vs. Wins ('16-'20)		12

UTAH						GAME GRADER (RANK / 66)					
2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	10-YEAR
61.9 (18)	75.3 (8)	59.9 (22)	56.9 (28)	54.7 (27)	61.6 (19)	50.7 (38)	44.9 (44)	38.9 (51)	46.9 (40)	55.2 (25)

UTAH
10-YEAR RECRUITING TREND

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	5-YEAR
38	47	66	45	37	33	33	45	29	31	31

KYLE WHITTINGHAM