

UNLV drops opener on fourth quarter TD

By Mark Landwehr
Acting Sports Editor

The UNLV football team lost its season opener on Saturday night in the Silver Bowl, 31-24, at the hands of the Southwest Missouri State Bears.

In a game marking the head coaching debut for Jim Strong, the Rebels made a strong showing, (no pun intended), but let the game slip away in the fourth quarter on a touchdown drive by SMSU that broke a 24-24 tie.

The game was a tale of two halves, SMSU dominating the first, and UNLV roaring back in the second.

The first half started with the Rebels taking a 3-0 lead on a 41 yard field goal by Todd Amrein that was set up by an SMSU turnover. The Bears fumbled the ball on their own 30 yard line, and Rebel defensive back, Carlton Johnson, made the recovery.

The remainder of the first half, however, was all SMSU, as they scored 21 unanswered points to take a 21-3 lead into the locker room.

The Bears totally dominated the line of scrimmage, gaining 164 yards rushing and 52 yards passing in just two quarters of play. The SMSU passing attack was led by multi-talented quarterback DeAndre Smith, who passed for 52 yards and rushed for 33 more in the first half. The Bear running attack was led by Eric Jenkins, who ran over Rebel defenders for 82 yards on only 7 carries before halftime.

The key to the Rebels first half demise was their inability to stop the Bears on third down. SMSU converted six out of eight times on third down situations in

the first half.

The second half of the game saw the Mr. Hyde side of the Rebels team show itself, as opposed to the Dr. Jekyll of the first 30 minutes.

After allowing a field goal on SMSU's first possession, that made the score 24-3, the Rebels switched from the 4-3 defense they employed in the first half, to a "46" defense, the so-called "Bear" package. The "46" defense was made famous by the 1985 Chicago Bears Super Bowl Championship team that led the NFL in defense.

A fumble in the first quarter led to three points, and a fumble on a punt return, recovered by UNLV's Keith Clough on the SMSU 37 yard line, led to seven more points. UNLV quarterback, Derek Stott, on the third play of the drive, ran 21 yards for the touchdown to make the score 24-10.

The touchdown fired up the crowd, and the UNLV defense as well. On SMSU's next possession, Defensive back, Carlton Johnson, intercepted a pass, and returned it 43 yards to the SMSU 13 yard line.

The Rebels took three plays to cash in on the opportunity, by scoring a touchdown on Stott's 12 yard pass to wide receiver Keenan McCardell. McCardell showed great concentration in making the grab, as the ball was deflected by an SMSU defender.

The point after touchdown kick hit the right upright, so UNLV's visit to the end zone made the score 24-16.

The Rebel defense then rose to the occasion. A 25 yard punt return by UNLV RB-QB "Hunkie" Cooper, put the ball at the Rebel's



Yell Photo / Lisa Sutherland

"Hunkie" Cooper - #14 takes a pass and heads upfield in Saturday's game against S.W. Missouri State Bears.

47 yard line.

At this point the crowd started a rousing chant of "Rebels", "Rebels", that got the team noticeably fired up.

Coach Strong said of the crowd, "The fans did a great job. They kept us in the game when we were down and out in the fourth quarter".

The Rebel offense responded with a 53 yard, 10 play drive for a touchdown. Twice on fourth down, Strong chose to go for it, and both times, the "Hunkster"(Cooper) got the call. Strong's junior college transfer recruit delivered two first downs to keep the Rebel drive alive.

The drive culminated in a 19 yard touchdown pass from Stott to running back Derek Black. It was then guts and ability time for the Rebels again, as Strong chose to go for the two point conversion, and Cooper was the man asked to carry the ball. "Hunkie" came through one more time, knotting the score at 24-24, with 7:06 remaining in the game.

It was up to the Rebel defense to hold the potent Bear offense, but they failed to do so. SMSU drove 63 yards in seven plays to score the winning touchdown that made the final score 31-24 in favor of the visitors.

Coach Strong, visibly hoarse after the game, said of the

loss, "I don't think anyone feels good after a loss. I'm in it to win it, not look respectable."

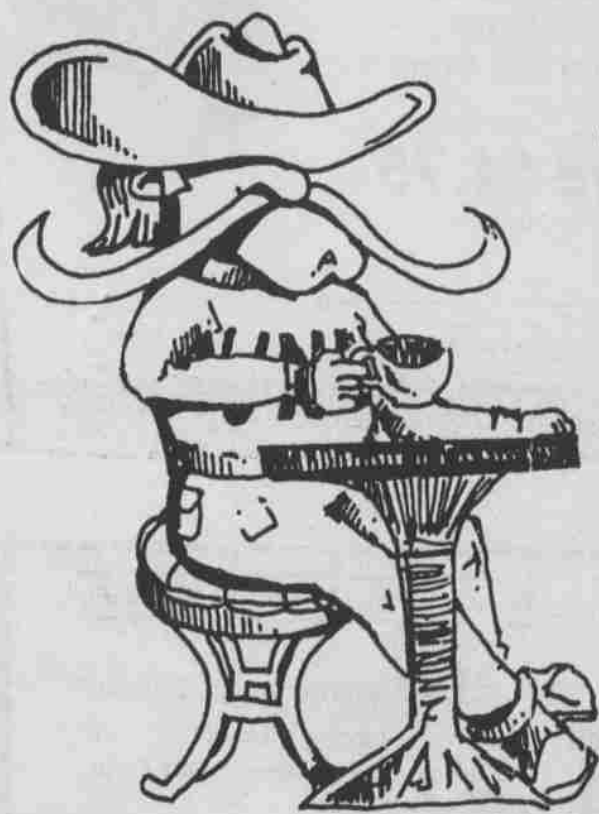
The Rebels looked more than respectable in staging their furious second half rally to tie the game. UNLV showed that it could play competitive football in the face of adversity.

The Rebels next game is this Saturday at 2 p.m. at Houston, against the University of Houston Cougars, (see today's Football Matchup for details).

UNLV's next home game is on September 22, at 7 p.m. at the Silver Bowl against San Jose St.

Once again a section of 5000 seats will be set aside for students (with proper i.d.) to attend for free.

Cafe Espresso Roma

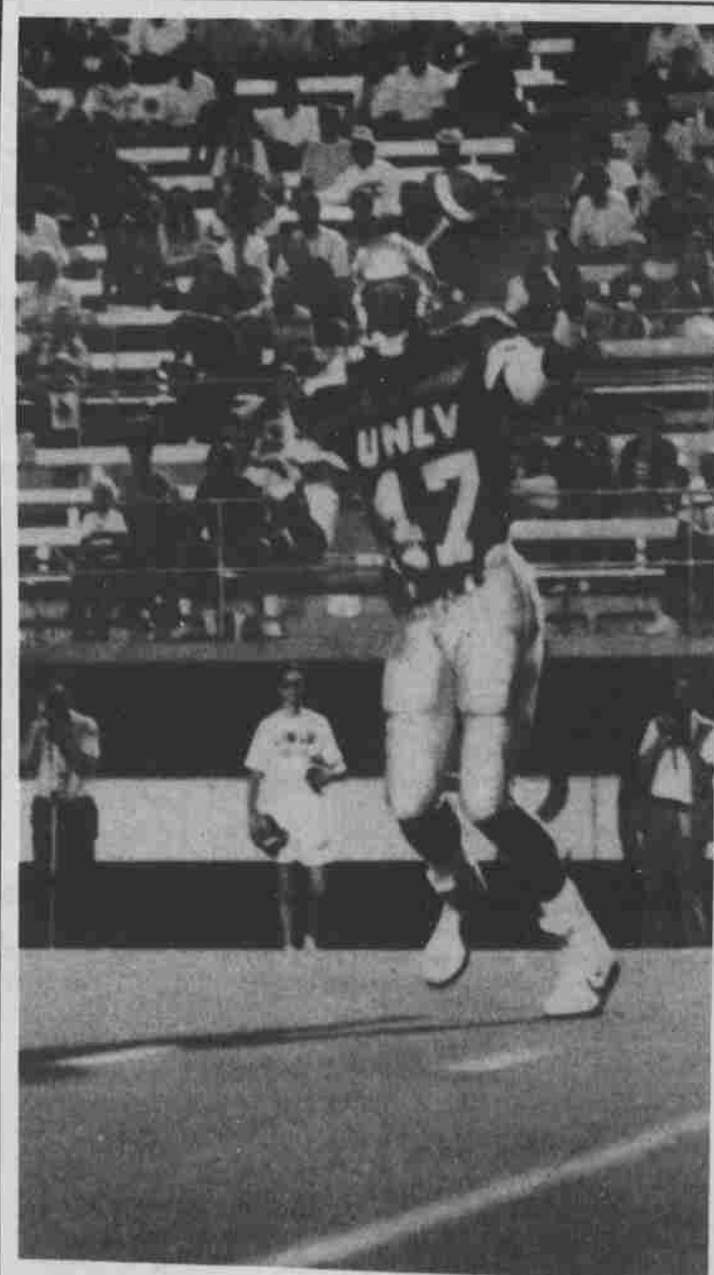


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Runningback - John Price reaches for a pass during UNLV's home game opener.