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Reporter

photos by
Lisa Sutherland

UNLV's marching band: A blend of talent and commitment

"It's just the absolute best group of people that I know," Tom Leslie, director of the marching band said about this year's University of Nevada, Las Vegas Marching Band.

"These kids are out there Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings at 7:30. They want to play great music, they want to play it as well as they possibly can, and they want the audience to notice them."

UNLV's 1990 Marching Band is made up of 110 students, including the Color Guard, who play various instruments of percussion, horns, and woodwinds. The songleaders perform with the band at football games, but are separate and distinct from the band.

Practicing for the band is a grueling commitment that the musicians have to reconfirm every day.

Leslie said, "It is the first thing that happens in their day. It's a lot of playing, and it's a lot of loud playing because we are not a large college band. When movement is added like marching backwards, or sideways, it becomes very, very difficult to play [our jazz and pop music] well. But those are the techniques required of a contemporary marching band," Leslie commented.

Most compliments of the UNLV Marching Band require some musical skill.

Tony LaBounty, the assistant director of the marching band, said, "These people started their craft in the fourth or fifth grade, some even before that. There is no [group of people] who started so early doing what they do."

Nate McClendon, a junior and saxophone player, and Tracy Pickett, a junior and oboist, are two students in the band who have distinguished themselves as leaders, and hold the position of drum

majors. According to Leslie, the movements and tempos for the band are signaled and controlled by McClendon and Pickett.

"They are responsible for the actual show when we perform," he said.

Tom Leslie has been directing the UNLV Marching Band for the last six seasons. Leslie played the French horn and was drum major at the University of Iowa while working on his bachelor's degree in music. He received his master's in music education from the University of Indiana in 1974, and spent the next 11 years teaching high school bands.

The marching band prepares for two distinct aspects of their image. The performance element is the movements and precise musical pieces they practice every morning, and then perform at the football game halftimes.

"People's reputations are resting on how well we perform," LaBounty said.

"[Coach] Tarkanian will tell you that in a tight game, the band is good for two or three extra points, just by the excitement we build in the audience," Leslie said. He added that the band and the cheerleaders are also responsible for a great deal of audience excitement and emotion during the game.

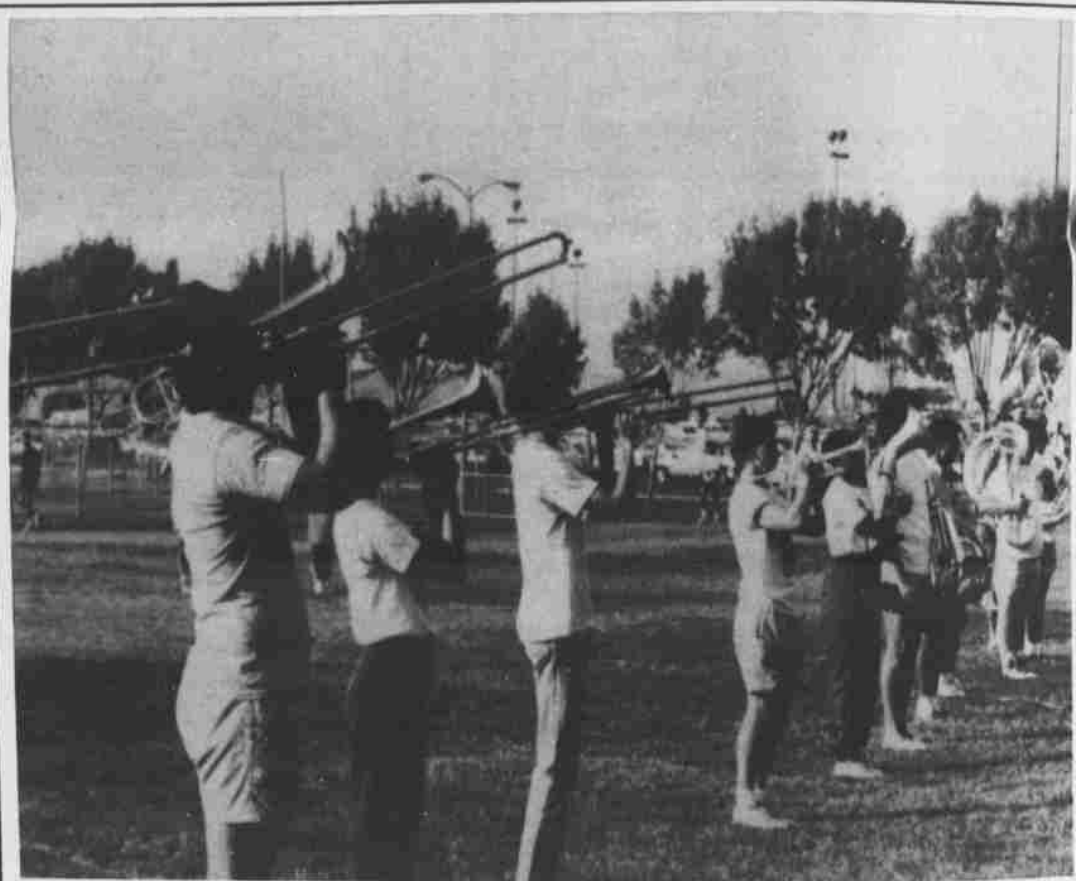
But the audience can control the band in the same respect.

"It's very difficult for the member of the band to continue playing well when the audience is leaving or doesn't respond," Leslie commented.

In the next few years, Tom Leslie would like to see UNLV's Marching Band grow in size, "so the kids won't have to play so hard to be loud as a band, and there will be more entertainment for the audience."



UNLV's - Marching Band xylophone section taps out a tune during practice.



76 trombones - Marching Band trombone section keeps in step with the rest of the band.



Hit that note - Band member plays his part to make it right.



1-2-3-4 - Marching Band practices a field formation.