

Lady Rebels must overcome size, reduced practice

by Tony Llanos and Nick Haley

After finishing last season with their first sub-20 game win season under head coach Jim Bolla and tied for second place in the conference, the Lady Rebels were predicted to win the Big West Conference by the coaches of the conference.

"I'm surprised," said Coach Bolla. And he should be amazed.

After losing center Merlelynn Lange and guard Shay Hargrove to graduation, the dean of Big West women's basketball coaches must look to others to fill in the void. And with so many new faces and a shortened preseason in which to prepare, Bolla must rely on untried talents.

"Seven of those 12 people are brand new," Bolla said. "We are struggling as a team right now due to the reduction of practice time. We're way behind where we typically are at this point. We have to make it (gameplan) simple, but effective."

The loss of veterans comes mainly at the post positions. This leaves the Rebels with a smaller team, but a good recruiting year has given the Rebels a solid lineup at guard.

"The highlight of the season should be our guard play," said Bolla at Wednesday's Big West Conference Media Day.

The Lady Rebels return three-point extraordinaire Gwynn Hobbs, who is expected to handle the point guard duties this year. In addition, they have recruited a pair of Australians, juniors Cherie Hogg and Trudie Hoggood. Hogg, a junior college transfer, is the anticipated starter at shooting guard.

Bolla's UNLV record

Year	Conference			Overall			Tourn.
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.	
1982-83	—	—		24	4	.857	
1983-84	4	0	1.000	24	7	.774	NCAA
1984-85	8	0	1.000	26	5	.839	NCAA
1985-86	11	3	.786	22	9	.709	NCAA
1986-87	13	5	.722	21	9	.700	
1987-88	14	4	.778	25	9	.735	NIT
1988-89	13	5	.722	27	7	.794	NCAA
1989-90	17	1	.944	28	3	.903	NCAA
1990-91	15	3	.833	25	7	.781	NCAA
1991-92	13	5	.722	16	10	.615	
Totals	108	26	0.806	238	70	.773	

"Cherie (Hogg) is a great player and she can play all positions," said Bolla about the Murray Bridge, Australia native.

The added depth will come as a relief to Hobbs, who played almost every minute of every game last year.

"We'll be able to rest her and keep her off the floor," Bolla said.

But Hogg isn't the only transfer expected to jump in right away. Bolla will also need someone new to fill in at forward.

"Right now, we're starting with two people who are beginning Division I basketball," Bolla said.

The other newcomer that Bolla expects in the starting lineup is Vivian Johnson. Transferring from Long Beach City College, Johnson will come in at the small forward spot. Despite her lack of size, Bolla has found Johnson to be a surprising force inside.

"She is a tremendous rebounder for her size and has great court awareness," Bolla said.

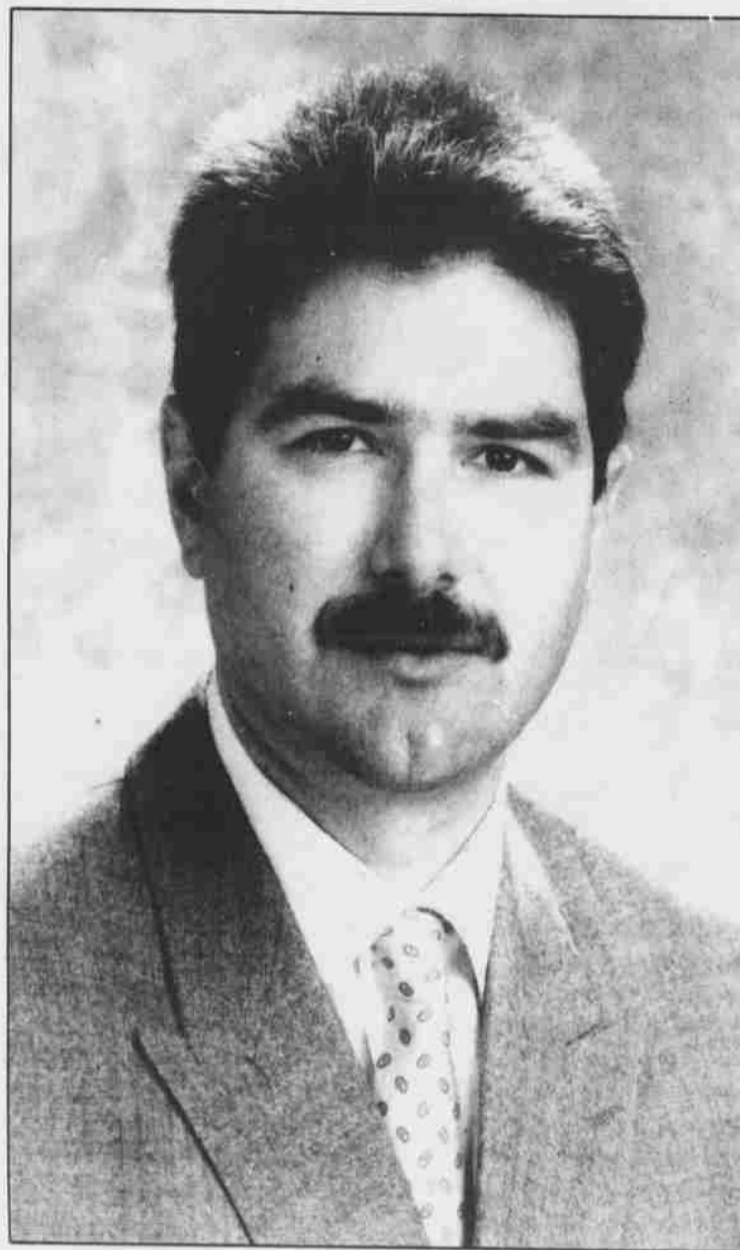
In the paint, the Lady Rebels return last year's starters Iris Dinerman and Teresa Jackson. Dinerman will shift to center with the departure of Lange. Jackson, who was selected to the All-Big West first team last season, will move to power forward, Dinerman's old assignment.

"We can run a lot," Stevenson said. "We only have a couple of big players this year so we'll have to run a lot."

With no clearly dominating small forward this year, reserves should figure greatly into the rotation. While junior college transfer Vivian Johnson will provide the muscle, Stevenson will be the speedster getting quick points on the breakaway.

"I think her real attribute is her transition game," said UNLV women's basketball head coach Jim Bolla of the Riverside, Calif. native. "But if we don't get the initial score, we have to go into our halfcourt set."

Thus if Stevenson wants to contribute more, she'll have to work on executing the halfcourt



Jim Bolla's Lady Rebels were voted first in the Big West Conference coaches' poll at Big West media day in Los Angeles.

ment. "Jackson will play the No. 4 spot (power forward) but she is a true three (small forward) player," Bolla said. "She will play the four due to our lack of size."

Stevenson brings speed, experience off the bench

by Nick Haley

What's in a reserve? For the UNLV women's basketball team, depth translates to versatility. And for a team still finding itself, flexibility may be just what the Lady Rebels need to recapture the Big West Conference title.

With the loss of Merlelynn Lange and Sharon Hargrove to graduation, the 1992-93 women's basketball team must rebuild its inside unit almost entirely from underclassmen—Jackson is the team's only senior. At the forward position, only Jackson and Alisha Stevenson return from last year's 16-10 squad, Stevenson for her third tour of duty with the Lady Rebels.

Last year, Stevenson played backed up to the dominating tandem of Jackson, Lange and Hargrove, all Big West All-Conference selections. But this year, the Lady Rebels are smaller and less imposing unit meaning they'll need to change tactics. Fortunately, the Lady Rebels have a faster squad, which is well suited to Stevenson.

plays. While this has been Stevenson's weakness in previous seasons, Johnson, who will most likely start at small forward, believes in Stevenson's versatility—if only she could get her mind focused on the game.

"She has to be more aware, to think about plays and pay close attention in practice," Johnson said. "It's a mind thing."

As one of the Lady Rebels' five returning letterwinners, Stevenson has a head start. In the 1991-92 season, she started three times and played 20 games. With preseason cut nearly in half by new National Collegiate Athletic Association rules, Bolla has little time to teach newcomers in fundamentals and needs all the assistance he can muster

from his veterans. Having Stevenson come off the bench already familiar with the system will give the Lady Rebels depth where they need it most.

"Right now, we're moving her in at three (small forward position)," Bolla said. "She's more of an off guard or a small forward than a post player."

Johnson disagrees. She believes Stevenson, who stands five feet eleven inches tall, has all the physical attributes she needs to handle the post. The key to her success this year, she says will be in putting her athleticism to use.

"She's big for her position (small forward)," Johnson said. "She can be strong (forward) if she wants to, it's all mental."



Alisha Stevenson

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