

Don't question the 'Big,' but what about the 'Ten'?

BY JAY SAPOVITS

The Big Ten Conference is the strongest in college basketball this season. It boasts nine teams with winning records and also has the No. 1 team, Indiana. The only two teams that do not have an above even record are Penn State and Northwestern.

Wait! If they have nine teams with winning records and two losing teams, then they have 11 teams in the conference. How can they still be named the "Big Ten?"

My suggestion is simple: Change the conference name to simply the Big Conference and alternate titles throughout seasonal sports. How many teams are actually "big" in everything?

In basketball, they would be the "Big Nine Conference." Football could use the name "Big Seven." Illinois, Wisconsin, Purdue, and Northwestern get slighted in this process, but that would just give them incentive to work a little harder.

KUNV will broadcast its final basketball game of the season Sunday. The pre-game show starts at 12:30 p.m. and game coverage will follow. If you can't go to the game, then tune in 91.5 FM. Everyone involved has worked hard so the students can broadcast major college basketball now and for years to come.

Gwynn Hobbs was our halftime guest last Monday. Hobbs, along with Teresa Jackson, are excellent basketball players. That in no way discredits the other Lady Rebels who currently are the 19th-ranked in the Associated Press women's basketball poll.

It was pleasing when the Lady Rebels annihilated Reno 99-66, but next time, hit the century mark! It's a Reno thing, you should understand.

UNLV's men's basketball team annually gets discredited for playing a weak schedule. The Rebels dropped two spots down to No. 12 in Monday's AP poll. This is not bad considering that UNLV lost to Pacific, a school that is not recognized for their strength in basketball.

This year, however, the Rebels have played a strong schedule. They beat 15th-ranked Marquette (17-3) and then knocked off 17th-ranked Georgetown (12-6). UNLV completes its non-conference schedule against No. 25 Louisville (13-5). And that doesn't include New Mexico State (17-4) and Long Beach State (14-5), which both defeated national powerhouses. Earlier this season, the

49ers embarrassed then top-ranked Kansas; the Aggies defeated nationally-ranked Vanderbilt.

At the last Rebel game, three National Basketball Association scouts were in attendance: Billy Cunningham, former Philadelphia 76er and

now general partner in the Miami Heat; Marty Blake, who works for the NBA scouting department; and Mark Warkentin of the Seattle Supersonics. Too bad J.R. Rider won't be available for either the Heat or the Sonics when it comes time for their selection in the NBA draft.

If Rider could develop skills to handle the ball as well as former USC guard Harold Miner, then he would be unstoppable. I think his game in the next two seasons would be at the level of Chicago Bulls' Superstar Michael Jordan. It's the only flaw in Rider's game and it shows when he is forced to drive into the middle of the lane.

I also think that Rider and a teammate of his choice could beat his namesake university, Rider College, of the Northeast Conference. They play such schools as Marist, Wagner and St. Francis.

To its credit, Rider is in first place by one game with an overall record of 10-9.

If this game occurred, then my predicted score: Rider & a Runnin' Rebel of his choice 64, Rider College 58.

I do not want to be too critical of the Northeast Conference; it is not without its professional standout. Dallas Mavericks guard Mike Iuzzolino played for St. Francis.

Kenny Gibson won the AT&T Long Distance Award for his accuracy from three-point country. He shot over 59 percent from "behind the arch" in January.

It's so easy to pick on him. The junior guard from Bloomington, Ill., is slow and can't move with the ball.

In college basketball, teams have role players and that's a fact. Gibson is one and I'd bet my last letter that every coach in the country would like to have a player similar to Gibson available off the bench. However, don't ever let him start!

Let's face it, he plays 21 minutes a game, runs off and on the bench like a seesaw, and shoots the ball from the outside. To shoot the ball from 19 feet, 6 inches with consistency is no easy task.

—Jay Sapovits is KUNV's sports director and Rebel Yell columnist

Commentary

Rebels down Long Beach State, 95-83

BY PAUL GUTIERREZ
STAFF WRITER

Though coach Rollie Massimino said revenge was not a factor heading into Monday night's ESPN tilt with conference rival Long Beach State, a sense of payback dominated the Thomas & Mack Center.

The possibility for a revenge-type mindset was there, especially since the 49ers had run the Rebels into the ground last month, 101-94, ending what was then the nation's longest winning streak and UNLV's 48-game Big West Conference unbeaten string.

But the Runnin' Rebels kept their composure en route to a 95-83 win Monday evening to run the nation's longest home-court winning streak to 59 games.

"We're not into revenge," said Coach Mass. "We're not into war or anything like that. It was more somewhat like seizing the moment—*carpe diem*."

The physical and bruising style of the Niners made for a full contact-type first half that saw the visitors hold a five-point lead in the early going, 7-2. UNLV knotted things up at 7-all and took its first lead at 10-9 following a trey by J.R. Rider. Rider would finish with a game-high 31 points.

The Rebels extended their lead to five, 20-15, on a Fred Haygood tip-in 6:35 into the contest. But LBSU reclaimed the lead and held a six-point advantage, 34-28, at the 4:25 mark following a dunk by Bryon Russell, who would finish with 27 points, 20 in the first half. Ken Gibson came out of his two-game funk to give the Rebels a three-point lead courtesy of a trey, 37-34, but the Niners outscored the hosts 8-4 down the stretch to hold a one-point lead at the half, 42-41. It would be the last lead of the night for the Niners.

Reggie Manuel hit a trey just 16 seconds into the second half to give the Rebels a 44-42 lead and though there would be two ties the remainder of the game, UNLV would never fall behind.

The 49ers closed to within two, 56-54, on a Rod Hannibal three-point play with almost 17 minutes left in regulation. The Rebels answered with a 16-6 run that saw Evric Gray block a shot, Gibson dive over the LBSU bench to save the ball, and Dexter Boney convert the pass into a bucket all on the same play. By the time the smoke had cleared, UNLV held a 12-point advantage, 72-60, with 9:20 left in the game.

LBSU would close to within five points three times in the remainder of the game, the last at 84-79 with 2:42 left, but an

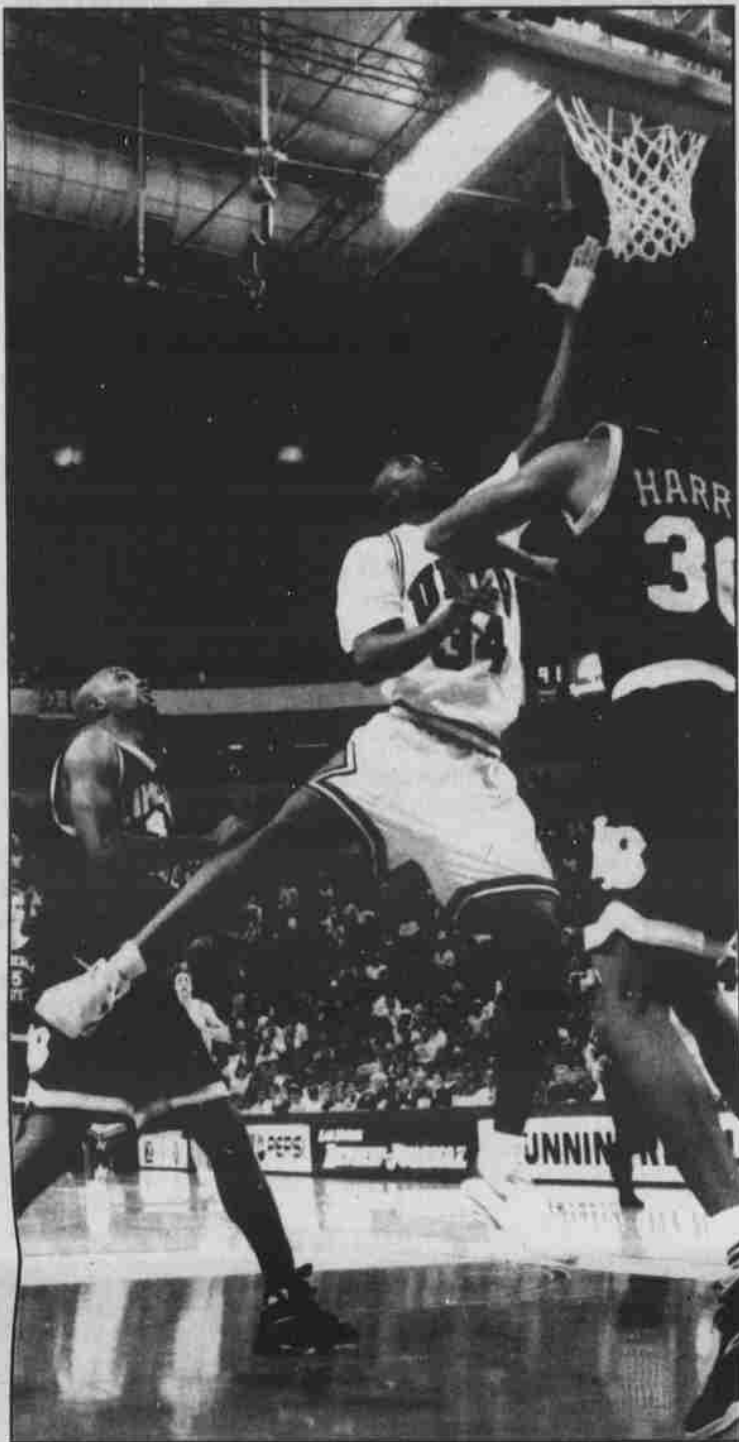


PHOTO BY NICK HALEY

Senior forward J.R. Rider tallied 31 points and pulled down eight rebounds against Long Beach State Monday.

11-4 UNLV run closed out the scoring.

"I thought we played a terrific second half," said Massimino. "Dexter Boney again had a very quiet (yet) terrific game. And J.R. is J.R. He's an offensive machine."

"I'm proud of our guys because in the last six minutes we just buckled down and played defense," Massimino added.

The Rebel defense held Lucious Harris to 13 points, 10 below his season average.

"This was a very sweet victory," said point-guard Dedan Thomas, who is second in the nation with 8.6 assists per game. "Because down there (in Long Beach) they just wore us out and we're not used to losing the transition game."

"But there was no revenge fac-

tor," said Thomas said, who finished with 10 points and 11 assists. "We want to win this league and go far in the tournament. We had to start right here with this game."

Boney followed Rider's 31 with a 23-point effort and three treys. Gray scored 20 points and grabbed 10 rebounds. Gibson scored six points, Manuel three, and Haygood two.

UNLV shot 52 percent from the field while the Niners were at 48 percent. The Rebels converted 20-of-26 free throws while LBSU was 16-24.

The No. 12 ranked Rebels (15-2, 8-2) are at San Jose State today and host Louisville Sunday in a nationally televised game on ABC sports.

BIG WEST CONFERENCE

	Conference		Overall	
	W	L	W	L
UNLV	10	0	16	1
Hawaii	14	1	20	3
UC Santa Barbara	8	2	10	8
New Mexico State	8	5	12	8
Pacific	5	4	12	5
Long Beach State	4	6	5	12
San Jose State	2	7	3	14
CS Fullerton	2	9	4	13
Nevada	1	10	1	15
UC Irvine	0	10	1	17

Thursday, Feb. 11
No. 19 UNLV at Nevada, 7 p.m.
UC Irvine at CS Fullerton
UC Santa Barbara at San Jose State
Long Beach State at Pacific

Saturday, Feb. 13
New Mexico State at No. 19 UNLV, 7:30 p.m.
Long Beach State at San Jose State
UC Irvine at Nevada
UC Santa Barbara at Pacific
CS Northridge at CS Fullerton

