



PHOTO BY PAUL GUTIERREZ

Despite recent inquiries into his academic standing, Rider has stepped up his play on the court.

## Rider on the Storm

J.R. excels on court despite recent controversy

BY PAUL GUTIERREZ  
SPORTS EDITOR

It seemed to start innocently enough.

Three weeks ago, Board of Regents Chair Carolyn Sparks was quoted in an issue of *The Rebel Yell* praising the academic advances of NBA-bound J.R. Rider under the direction of new coach Rollie Massimino.

"J.R. Rider is a perfect example," she told a journalism class on campus. "He was a throw away. He had flunked out and couldn't transfer. Massimino helped him. Rider went to summer school and made up a whole semester and look at him now. He is one of the brightest players on the team."

Sparks, who at one time criticized former coach Jerry Tarkanian for bringing undeserving "ghetto kids" on campus, continued her attack on him in the same article.

"The players were spoiled kids," she was quoted as saying. "They didn't even have to go to class. This is not a pro basketball camp."

These comments, of course, drew the ire of Tarkanian who called Sparks hypocritical. He said that for Rider to make up that amount of school work would be almost impossible.

Then the local media got involved, checking into leads that Rider rarely goes to class. And when Massimino benched his leading scorer to start the game against New Mexico State, suspicions peaked as to reasons why. Massimino termed it "a coach's decision" while reports swirled regarding an argument between the two during a Rebel practice.

The latest controversy in Runnin' Rebel Land has again opened a schism between academics and athletics and has also served as fodder for an eager press.

Despite being at the eye of the hurricane, Rider has excelled his play on the court, scoring a career-high 44 points in the Nevada win before adding 36 points against Utah State Saturday evening.

*"So when the school talks about me or the community that just makes me work harder and it puts a smile on my face."*

J. R. Rider

"That stuff just makes me work harder," Rider said, regarding how he keeps his composure on the hardwood. "It seems like when someone wants me to

fail or not succeed, it gives me positive adrenalin and momentum to work harder and prove people wrong."

Heading into the final three games of the regular season, Rider is averaging 29.2 ppg, and 8.8 rebounds per outing.

Even with all the heartache and feuding, Rider said that playing the game is still worth it. Said Rider: "It's always fun."

"So when the school talks about me or the community, that just makes me work harder and it puts a smile on my face."

## Rebels run past 'Pack, Aggies

BY PAUL GUTIERREZ  
SPORTS EDITOR

The Rebels gained some much-needed momentum heading into the season's stretch run courtesy of a pair of home wins over Nevada, 100-93, and a Senior Night farewell victory over Utah State, 94-86.

UNLV has lost defensive specialist Reggie Manuel to a knee injury at least until the Big West Conference tournament. Manuel injured the knee in practice before the Nevada game and underwent arthroscopic surgery Friday, Coach Rollie Massimino said.

Manuel's defensive presence was missed in both contests but the Rebels offense was more than enough in the wins.

The Rebels overcame a 49-46 halftime deficit to pull out the win over the Wolf Pack behind J.R. Rider's career-high 44 points.

"We got a little lethargic but we came back in the second half," said Massimino.

Rider's mark is the third highest in UNLV history.

"Obviously, we don't know how to stop J.R.," said Nevada coach Len Stevens.

Freshman Lawrence Thomas started in place of the injured Manuel and scored 15 points while both Dexter Boney and Evric Gray (11 rebounds) pitched in 14 apiece. Dedan Thomas contributed

seven points with seven assists and Ken Gibson had six points.

Saturday, seldom used Jason Brooks and Clint Clausen started with fellow seniors Gray, Rider, and Dexter Boney against USU as the program paid tribute to the fourth year players.

"This was kind of an emotional evening for a lot of reasons," Massimino said following the win. "(The players) showed the character and chemistry that can be developed on a basketball court."

"It certainly carried over into the basketball game," Massimino added.

Indeed. In a game that saw just one tie, at 2-all, and the Rebels never trail, the hosts dominated their last home game of the season, holding a game-high lead of 17 points with just over seven minutes in regulation.

Rider again paced the Rebel scoring with 36 points and 13 boards. Gray scored 16 with 12 caroms while Boney added 14 points. Both Dedan Thomas (11 assists) and Gibson (three treys) scored 11, Lawrence Thomas pitched in five points and Damian Smith made a free throw.

The 13th ranked Runnin' Rebels (19-4, 12-3) close out the season with road games at UC Irvine Thursday and CalState Fullerton Saturday.

## Bobby Hurley loathed by fans, adored by NBA

BY JAY SAPOVITS

### Commentary

Bobby Hurley is the best point guard in college basketball. He will also be the second back court player taken in this year's NBA draft. Yes there are many guards who appear more talented but the fact is they don't have the same resume as the main Blue Devil.

Hurley will be a high selection for a number of reasons. He plays both ends of the court well, has proven himself as a winner, and has two weeks experience against the greatest players in the world. These factors have helped him climb in the selection board.

His ability on the court was challenged last summer as he had the unenviable task of running the point against the "Dream Team" in California during their practice weeks

for the Olympics. He was so impressive that Magic Johnson said he could play in the NBA today. Respected NBA coach Chuck Daly also had positive words about Hurley's performance. That may weigh heavy with the general managers of the worst franchises in the league.

The worst team in the NBA is the Dallas Mavericks. They could take Hurley with their top selection. Remember they drafted Jimmy Jackson who was a guard and Hurley does many things better than him. For Dallas' sake I hope signing his name is one.

Minnesota may also want to reunite the Laettner-Hurley combination that won two NCAA titles. If nothing else, this duo would sell tickets, an important

consideration with a 23,000-seat home arena such as the Target Center.

Washington may also need the sleek passing point man. Hurley would free up Michael Adams to just shoot. And just outside the beltway, a marketing ploy with Tom Gugliotta from N.C. State could fill an often vacant Capital Center.

Sacramento could also use a durable point guard like Hurley. In his entire Duke career he only missed a few games. The Kings would relish a productive addition to play with a healthy Mitch Richmond.

Draft speculation usually starts around this time. It gives non-playoff teams a reason for being. The hope that waits in the halls of college buildings could determine the futures of many teams.

Without Chris Webber's announcement that he's opting for the draft, certainty can't be as-

sured. The lottery is also something that allows for inaccuracy. But I feel the following list will hold up in June when college students transform into working millionaires. Webber included, here are my choices as the "Select 7" before the tournament starts.

1. Chris Webber, Michigan 2. Calbert Chaney, Indiana 3. Jamal Mashburn, Kentucky 4. Rodeny Rogers, Wake Forest 5. Bobby Hurley, Duke 6. Anfernee Hardaway, Memphis State 7. J.R. Rider, UNLV.

After the tournament is over, Hurley may even go higher. After all, UNLV fans should remember it was at our expense Duke can go for three rings in a row this year.

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The UNLV baseball team received a precious gift last weekend, RAIN!

There is no reason that a team of this caliber, which is high,

should be 5-7. Their schedule has been relatively easy. When the Big West Conference games begin there will be no room for lazy errors, runners picked off, and bad outings on the mound. All of these have been prevalent this year. In a three-game stretch last week the Rebels committed 13 errors. To err is human, but 13 times is a joke!

Before the season started head coach Fred Dallimore was adamant about the ability of this year's team. He said they were good players. I trust Dallimore's baseball knowledge and relation of his expectations. So far this year, the Hustlin' Rebels have not lived up to their ability.

—Jay Sapovits is sports director at KUNV, and a Rebel Yell columnist