



# The Rebel Yell

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TUESDAY EDITION

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## University remains mired in controversy

Scandal-plagued university is still reeling from latest academics-athletics fiasco. Rider is now discussing lawsuit.

BY CHED WHITNEY  
EDITOR IN CHIEF

The controversy surrounding UNLV basketball star J.R. Rider did not dissipate over spring break.

What has grown from statements made by Board of Regents chair Carolyn Sparks to Rider's suspension by Athletic Director Jim Weaver and UNLV President Robert Maxson may cost Maxson and others in the UNLV administration their jobs.

In its Sunday editorial, the *Las Vegas Sun* called for Maxson to step down as president. The *Sun* also criticized five university regents, including Carolyn Sparks, the board's chair, and Joseph Foley, both of Las Vegas.

Maxson picked Joseph Malik, head of the Northwest Accrediting Association, to conduct an independent investigation of the controversy. Malik, who was to arrive in Las Vegas Monday night, will look into the administration's—specifically the athletic department's—role in Rider's fulfillment of his eligibility requirements. Malik's qualifications to effectively investigate the Rider situation have been questioned by a regent.

Other local media picked up on comments made by Sparks in the Feb. 11 edition of *The Rebel Yell*. In the article

Sparks talked about what she believed to be a great improvement in the basketball program's handling of its academic affairs under head coach Rollie Massimino.

The *Las Vegas Review-Journal* interviewed former coach Jerry Tarkanian, who questioned how Rider could have completed the amount of summer work the athletic department was crediting him with. Such a thing could never have taken place when he was coach, Tarkanian said.

What followed was a whirlwind of media scrutiny.

In a front-page story in the March 10 *Review-Journal*, Vicki Bertolino, an instructor at the Community College of Southern Nevada, claimed she was pressured to give Rider a grade for an English course taken during the summer. Bertolino, a former UNLV journalism teacher, said she was pressured in November by compliance officer Jaina Preston and administrative assistant Tom Pecora to give Rider a grade.

Bertolino gave Rider a C-minus for the course despite the fact she says he didn't complete all the assignments.

After completing his own investigation, Weaver declared Rider eligible, saying that no improprieties occurred.

Then on March 14 the *Review-Journal* published examples of Rider's homework papers, which didn't appear to have been done in the same handwriting. Additionally, Rider's first name—"Isaiah"—was misspelled on some of the assignments.

Despite finishing with a 21-7 record and spending most of the season in the



*"I have been hung out to dry by a university administration that refuses to accept responsibility."*

J.R. Rider

Associated Press Top 25—the Rebels were ranked as high as 10th—UNLV was not included in the NCAA's 64-team tournament field. UNLV accepted a bid to the National Invitation Tournament. The 32-team NIT is traditionally second fiddle to the NCAAs.

Then, last Tuesday, the day before the Rebels' first-round NIT game with Southern California, Weaver and Maxson called a press conference to announce that Rider was being suspended, thus ending his UNLV basketball career.

The Rebels were beaten by USC, 90-74; it was UNLV's worst loss ever in the Thomas & Mack Center.

Two days later Rider read from a prepared statement at a press conference, saying he was being abandoned by the university, including the basketball staff.

"I am publicly stating that I am being made a scapegoat by the university administration," Rider said. "I obviously didn't choose the courses without input from the university staff. I obviously did not obtain a tutor without input from people at the university."

"However, the university officials involved in this have put all the blame on me for the wrongdoing. It should also be obvious to anyone who fairly evaluates this course of events that the university administration monitored my progress during the summer as they were certainly interested in me being able to pass these courses and thus being able to play basketball."

## Maxson not going to resign

Despite rumblings among university regents, UNLV president says he has no plans to step down.

BY THOMAS MOORE  
NEW EDITOR

Is the clock ticking for UNLV President Robert Maxson? In the wake of the renewed athletics vs. academics controversy, the rumors predicting Maxson's possible departure have gained new momentum.

Following revelations concerning Runnin' Rebel J. R. Rider's allegedly falsified homework and the declaration of his ineligibility, many people, and not just supporters of ousted coach Jerry Tarkanian, have called for Maxson to leave.

At least one regent has been quoted as saying that Maxson has become an embarrassment to the school. Lonnie Ham-margren said that because of the recent controversy, the regents need to conduct a personnel session at the next regents meeting on April 8 and 9.

Maxson said he has no plans to resign despite what anyone else has said. Maxson said when he started at UNLV he



Maxson

declared when he finished his term as president he plans to teach, said "I have no plans to exercise that option at this time."

There have also been unconfirmed rumors that the regents are angling for Maxson's early retirement.

Regent Shelley Berkley has been quoted, in reference to the possibility of Maxson's departure, as saying "the best in-

terest of the institution and not any one individual should be taken into consideration."

The problem, according to some pundits, is that after former basketball coach Jerry Tarkanian was removed and Rollie Massimino was hired, the athletic department pledged to chart a new course which stressed academics. With the new accusations, critics have questioned whether or not the desire to change was sincere and if any basic structural changes were made.

In response, Maxson said he was at a loss as to what else the school was to do in light of the accusations that were made. Maxson claimed the athletic department had lived up to the standards set following the Tarkanian scandal. He said that immediately after Rider's work was questioned in a local paper, the university declared Rider ineligible and initiated investigations.

Maxson said he had heard that the people behind the rumors were the same group of boosters who have been pushing for his resignation from the start of the controversies with Tarkanian.

"Some of our faculty have told us that a group that wants Tarkanian to return as coach are behind some of these events,"

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### Time line

#### FEB. 11

In an article in the Feb. 11 issue of *The Rebel Yell*, Carolyn Sparks, chair of the Board of Regents, refers to what she considered dramatic improvements in the men's basketball program. "(Under former coach Jerry Tarkanian) the players were spoiled kids," Sparks said. "The current situation (with Rollie Massimino as coach) is much better." Sparks used star forward J.R. Rider as an example: "He was a throw-away. He had flunked out and couldn't transfer. Massimino helped him...now he is probably one of the brightest players on the team."

#### FEB. 13

The *Las Vegas Review-Journal* interviews Jerry Tarkanian about Sparks' comments in the *Yell*. Later in the week KTNV-TV 13 anchor Ron Futrell blasts Sparks for her comments.

#### MARCH 11

The *Las Vegas Review-Journal* runs a front-page story—"Rebel star's grade is questionable"—about a community college instructor, Vicki Bertolino, who says she was pressured into giving Rider a passing English grade.

#### MARCH 12

Athletic Director Jim Weaver says the *R-J* story had been investigated and concluded that nothing improper had occurred.

#### MARCH 14

A front-page *Review-Journal* story shows English papers done by Rider, two pages in different handwriting and some with his first name—"Isai-ah"—spelled wrong. Weaver continues to maintain nothing is wrong.

The NCAA releases the pairings to its 64-team basketball championship; the 21-7 Rebels are not included. Later, UNLV accepts a bid to the National Invitation Tournament.

#### MARCH 15

Apparently unsatisfied with the administration's investigative efforts, several university regents call for an investigation into Rider's work.

#### MARCH 16

At a press conference, University President Robert Maxson and Weaver announce Rider is suspended, effectively ending his UNLV basketball career. It is revealed that a tutor admitted writing part of one of Rider's English papers. According to the *Las Vegas Sun*, at least five regents want Maxson out.

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