

Rebel gridgers ready for Spring Alumni Game

BY PAUL GUTIERREZ
SPORTS EDITOR

Though some may view Saturday's annual Spring Alumni Game as mere space-filler and more pomp than circumstance, members of the UNLV football team see it as a legit and competitive event.

"It's for bragging rights," said defensive back Jason Davis of the game to be held at the Sam Boyd Silver Bowl. "If we lose to the alumni, we'll never hear the end of it."

Wide receiver Henry Bailey

(last season's all-purpose yardage leader for the Rebels) agreed.

"I see this game as a result of all the hard work we've put in this spring," he said. "Not too many people realize that we've been working out since January, right after we got back from Christmas. So it's a relief to play (competitively) again."

Bailey electrified the contest last spring when he scored on a

"I'm looking to see how far this team has come along throughout the spring. Where we stand and where we need to go."

cornerback Clarence Mack.



Saturday's game at the Silver Bowl will also allow the Rebels to hit someone else at full-contact other than themselves for the first time since last November.

Though cornerback Clarence Mack makes no bones about wanting to win Saturday, he also sees the game as a learning experience.

Said Mack: "I'm looking to see

how far the team has come along throughout the spring. Where we stand and where we need to go."

Davis agreed. "Playing this game helps us determine what we need to do for the fall because we open at Death Valley (Clemson).

"But I want to win (Saturday) because of all we went through this spring."

Saturday's game begins at 1 p.m. and is free to the public.



No. 1 singles Pat Boles sports an overall record of 24-13.

Tennis teams head to BWC championships

Men will be grouped by seeds while women play single-elimination tourney in this weekend's championship games.

BY GREGORY QUINN
STAFF WRITER

This weekend's Big West Conference Championships may be the season finale for UNLV's tennis teams.

The men will take a season record of 11-10 to Ojai, Calif., for Friday, Saturday and Sunday matches, while the women, after tough losses to San Diego State and the University of San Diego, head out for Thursday, Friday and Saturday matches with an 11-7 record.

The championship format varies. The men will be grouped by their individual standings on their respective teams, while the women will play a standard single-elimination team tournament.

"The men are flighted," head coach Larry Easley said. "All the No. 1 (singles players) from the eight teams play against each other in a tournament, (as will the Nos. 2 and 3, etc.) all the way down to No. 3 doubles. So there's nine tournaments, if you want to call it that for the men. And each time you win you get a point. That's how the team championship is decided."

The Lady Rebels, seeded sec-



Becky Markosian is the No. 1 singles player for the Lady Rebels.

ond, will face New Mexico State in the quarterfinals of the team tournament, with a possible showdown against the University of Pacific in the semis.

"They should win against NMSU," Easley said. "Now UOP is pretty tough, so that will be a good match in the semis."

Last weekend, the Lady Rebels had a chance to make a dent in the national rankings against San Diego State and USD, ranked 16th and 20th, respectively. UNLV lost to SDSU, 5-4. It was a match, according to Easley, they could have won.

"SDSU went down to the last

match (No. 2 doubles with UNLV's Rachel Clark and Susan Agassi)," he said. "(We) could have won it. The girls did okay, but those teams are ranked.

"I think with the women, we're one player away. If we had a real tough No. 1 gal and moved everybody down one, we'd be ranked."

Overall, Easley's attitude about this weekend was casually guarded.

"From the look of it, if the guys don't do well, they'll probably be fourth," he said. "And the thing is, if they do well, we have a shot at winning it."

Rebel football should have a Strong season next fall

BY JAY SAPOVITS

Jim Strong doesn't want to talk about off-season turmoil. His response when asked about his future at UNLV: "I'm here and I'm coaching."

That is what the 39-year-old head coach loves to do. And his record indicates that he's getting better.

After two seasons Strong was 8-14 overall. Last season he posted his first-ever winning season at UNLV, 6-5. This included the Rebels' first win over national power San Jose State in eight years.

It was UNLV's first winning season since 1986.

The second check-mark went on the UNLV locker room wall.

Before Strong's first season he put three objectives on that same wall: first, graduate; second, winning season; third, bowl game. The Rebels have accomplished two of the three goals.

The first priority has always been a success during Strong's tenure.

Graduation rates for football players, according to the athletic academic adviser for football, Kevin



Jim Strong

allotted six years given by the NCAA. Strong makes sure his players go to class.

"He reminds them every day during the fall, team meetings and during practices that they need to go to class," Sweeney said.

Athletes are recruited with the understanding that education is of the highest priority.

"They are graduation-oriented when they come in, they have to be," Sweeney said.

So can Strong accomplish the third and final goal he has set for the football program?

He thinks this team has an excellent chance.

Strong cited last season's 4-1 home

Commentary

Sweeney, are good. Of the players who finished their eligibility, 78 percent will graduate in the

Homecoming. The Rebels also have 19 returning starters. In addition, 55 lettermen are returning from last year's team. Strong will also have the services of eight red-shirt players from last year.

This is the best foundation the fourth-year coach has had at UNLV.

That foundation includes Henry Bailey, who was fifth in the nation in all-purpose yards last season. As a sophomore he finished behind Ryan Benjamin of Pacific, Marshall Faulk of San Diego State, Glyn Milburn of Stanford, and Garrison Hurst of Georgia. Of these players, only Bailey and Faulk return to college this season, both as juniors.

Demond Thompkins is another outstanding Rebel returnee. Last season he was 17th nationally in receiving yards per game with 83.5. Thompkins also was 30th nationally with 4.91 receptions per game.

However, UNLV opens the season at Clemson and play four of its first five

games on the road. The conference opener at Reno and the addition of tougher conference opponents may inhibit UNLV's bowl chances.

This season Louisiana Tech and Southwestern Louisiana are in the Big West Conference for football.

Louisiana Tech lost to Alabama last season 13-0 and beat powerful Baylor.

Southwestern Louisiana consistently puts quality players on the field and is challenging every season.

Coach Strong knows this will be his most difficult season. His days at the university are numbered and the schedule of opponents is frightening but he remains optimistic.

His prophecy is that of a grandfather talking to his grandson. "If you take what you are given and work hard with it, good things are going to happen."

—Jay Sapovits is sports director of KUNV and Rebel Yell columnist