

Rebel football preseason report card

By Scott Gulbransen
Staff Writer

The UNLV Rebel football team plays their way into contention for the Big West title?

That's what you will be reading in *The Rebel Yell* in November.

Fielding an older, wiser, and deeper team, Coach Jim Strong is ready to lead the Rebels into the top half of the Big West conference.

Let us pretend for a moment that the 1993 Rebel football team is enrolled in NCAA Football 101 with Professor Gulbransen. These are the grades I would give the scarlet and gray attack before they take the field.

Offensive Line: A- : Right tackle Jerry Reynolds leads the Rebels' strong offensive squad. Along with veteran center Howie McGowan and right tackle Doug Roper, the Rebels' offensive line is the best it has been in years, even after losing John Hurley to graduation and Lonnie Palelei to the Pittsburgh Steelers. Even with those two massive losses, the Rebel offensive line will do a phenomenal job at protecting whoever is at the quarterback position. They also provide excellent blocking for UNLV's running game.

Quarterback: Incomplete : Based on Bobby Stockham's four starts last season I'd like to give him a grade of B. Unfortunately, I cannot. Stockham has yet to prove he can handle the pressure of being a starting quarterback. He is the best the Rebels have at the position due to the season-ending injuries to John Ma'ae and JC transfer Jared Brown. Both of the injured quarterbacks were considered to be in competition for the starting position. The pressures of the starting position will either break Stockham or prove to be his ticket to fame. But one thing is certain—to win the Rebels must be productive at the quarterback spot. Oh, and they have to throw the ball.

Tight Ends: C- : Three weeks ago this grade would have been a C+ or B-. But since high school All-American Fred McClendon failed to qualify academically for UNLV, the Rebels look a little thin at the position. Tom Lewis and transfer Bryan Culp seem to have soft hands, and Coach Strong even suggested UNLV might throw to them. Quite a departure from a year ago. If they can exceed expectations the Rebel tight ends just might elevate UNLV's offense to the next level.

Running Backs: B : The Rebel running corps is deep. Despite losing starter Shannon McLean to academic ineligibility, the Rebels have a capable replacement in Omar Love. Love rushed for 448 yards in the last four games of the 1992 campaign. DeJohn Branch, who has blinding speed and great hands, will also see significant time in the Rebel backfield. Jabbar Thomas could also emerge as a starter. Back-ups, Robert Gi, Jonathan Perez, and Kyle Taylor provide the depth the

Rebels have lacked before.

Receivers: A+ : The two best wideouts in the Big West make their home at the Silver Bowl. UNLV's Henry Bailey and Demond Thompkins combined for 96 receptions, 1,751 yards and 14 touchdowns. Both are expected to out-perform their 1992 stats. Redshirt freshman Dan Stewart and Daemon Keener will also see time at receiver. If the Rebels want to make a run for the Big West championship, they have to throw to their receivers.

Defensive Line: C- : The Rebels' defense was ranked 101st in the nation. It is said you win championships on the defensive side of the ball. If this is true, the Rebels have to suck it up and perform beyond expectations. Erik Simien and Keith Washington are the best the Rebels have on the line. Tiger Townes and Steve Anderson also provide the solid run defense the Rebels will need. Whether they have enough to compete remains to be seen.

Defensive Backs: B+ : With the return of Rodney Mazion from his stint with the New York Mets

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organization, the defensive backfield looks quite a bit stronger than it did two weeks ago. Mazion and returning starter Jason Davis shore up one of the best defensive backfields in the conference. D'Mentrie Lacy provides strength and power at the cornerback position. The Rebels also gained JC transfers Neal Flowers and Dion Thompson. The secondary will have its hands full with the likes of Northern Illinois and Southern Louisiana, but they will respond with authority.

Linebackers: C+ : The Rebel linebackers were devastated by injuries in 1992. Three-year starter Rumane Hilton returning from an injury-plagued season should help the team considerably. The team also added six recruits for '93. They needed them badly. The depth should help to make the Rebel defense average.

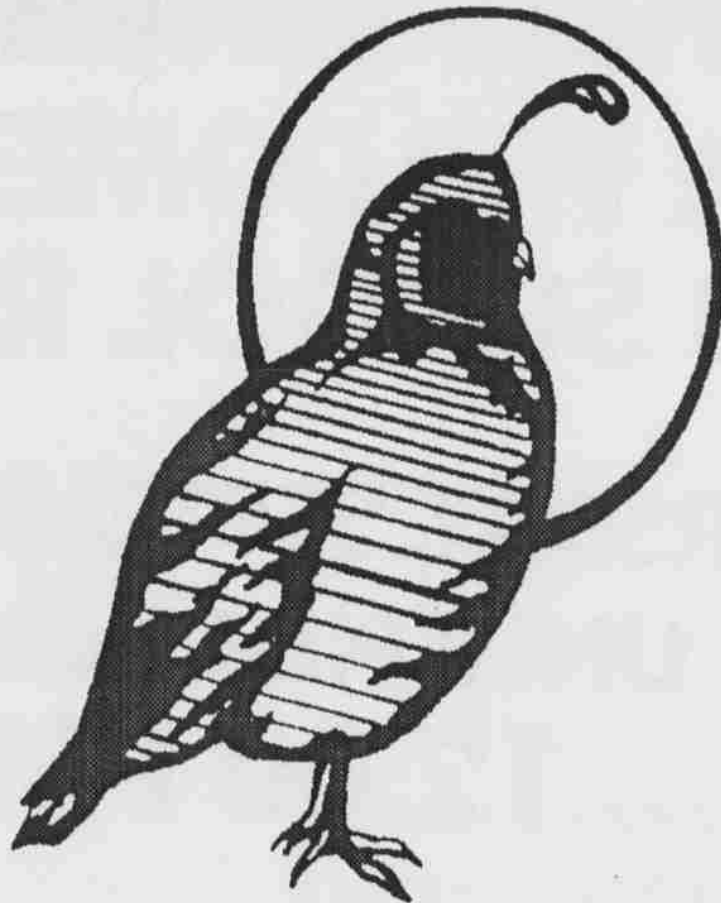
Coaching: A- : Jim Strong is a solid coach. When he arrived he had what looked like a high school powder-puff team. He has moved the program in the right direction. Most people have noticed, except for Jim Weaver, that the coach is see report



photo: Hyun-Ha Han

p.15 Stephen Anderson takes a breather before practice.

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