

Rebuildin' Rebels ready to run

BY PAUL GUTIERREZ
SPORTS EDITOR

The dawn of a new season brings fresh hopes and unlimited potential. And at UNLV, the situation is no different in regards to its men's basketball team.

"We're real excited," Coach Rollie Massimino said. "Anytime you open a season you tend to be. We've got a very enthusiastic group of young men who are going to have some fun."

It would be a totally different ending from last year's debacle. The J.R. Rider academic scandal that eventually saw the star kicked off the team and the subsequent beating at the hands of Southern Cal in the National Invitation Tournament ended what started out as a promising campaign.

"The whole situation with J.R. made us fall apart last year," Lawrence Thomas said. "Especially with the timing."

"But we're ready to enter post-season this year. We're more of a team this year because we don't have to rely on

one person."

The fact that there is no established scoring superstar will not hurt the Rebels, Thomas said. Rather, it will make them grow together and support each other.

"There's more togetherness. We should win our league this year because everybody is rebuilding in the conference."

Team captain Dedan Thomas, an honorable mention All-American last season, heads the list of returners. The point-guard was second in the nation a year ago, dishing out 8.6 per game. He was named the pre-season Big West Conference Player of the Year by the *Sporting News*.

Also returning are defensive specialist Reggie Manuel (8.5 ppg), Ken Gibson (45.8

percent three-point shooting), Lawrence Thomas (All-BWC Freshman team), Fred Haygood (1.3 ppg), Damian Smith (1.5) and Sean Loughran.

UNLV did land a recruiting class ranked in the top 20. The big two are junior college All-American forwards Clayton Johnson and Patrick Savoy.

Other top recruits include 6-foot-8 forward Brian Hoyer, 6-foot-6 guard Seth Meyers and 6-foot-2 guard Jermaine "Sunshine" Smith from Oak Hill Academy in Mouth of Wilson, Va., USA Today's No. 1 prep team in the nation last year.

Still, the Rebels will be without the big man they covet, at least until the Jan. 3 game against Virginia.

Kebu Stewart was ruled ineligible for NCAA violations committed last year as a red-shirt, accepting a plane ticket from a former booster. He averaged 36.2 points and 17.2 re-



Coach Massimino



Hyun-Ho Han/Rebel Yell

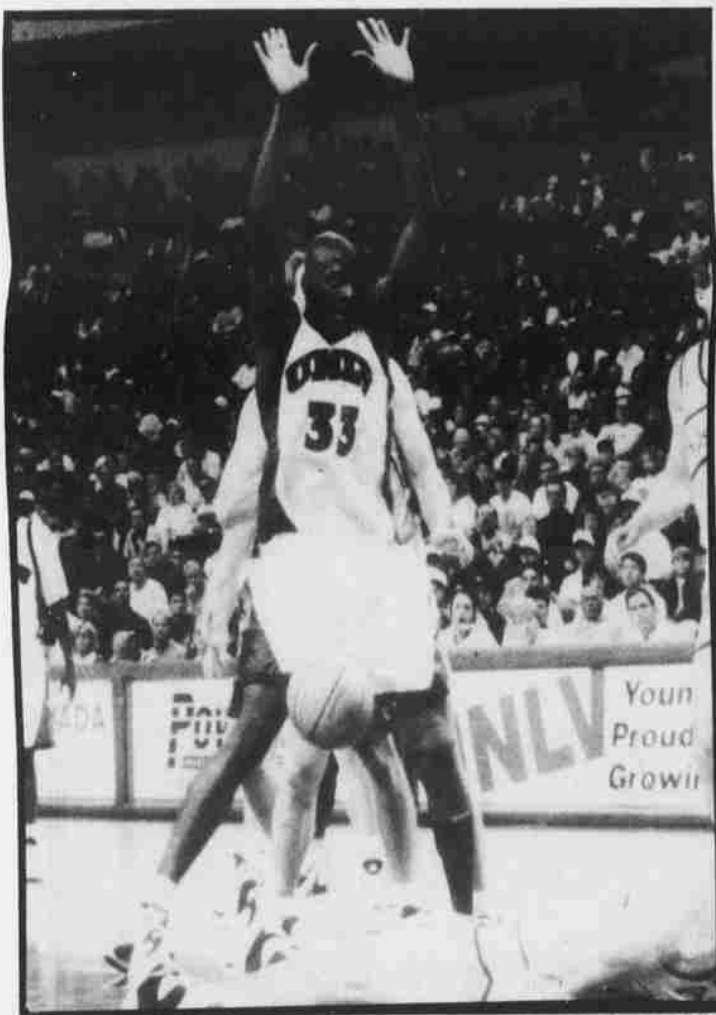
Reggie Manuel is being looked upon to increase his scoring.

bounds per game his senior year at Our Savior Lutheran High School in Brooklyn, N.Y.

Massimino said that his players will have to build roles

in order for a successful season.

"Everyone has to establish an identity," he said. "We have more depth this year. That's our biggest strength."



Hyun-Ho Han/Rebel Yell

Patrick Savoy's defense reminds some of Stacey Augmon.

Johnson and Savoy evoke memories

BY SCOTT HAVERLOCK
STAFF WRITER

Star-studded newcomers Clayton Johnson and Patrick Savoy are already being compared to former UNLV All-Americans Larry Johnson and Stacey Augmon.

But the modest high-flying Runnin' Rebel duo, which won't play its first Division I game until Saturday, shrugs off the comparisons - at least for now.

The new Johnson, at 6-foot-5, 210 pounds, has been likened to LJ, a two-time All-American forward at UNLV who led the university to its only national championship in 1990.

Savoy, a 6-foot-8, 215 pounder, brings back memories of Augmon, an All-American defensive gem for the Rebels during their early-90's heyday.

"Comparing me to Larry is

not a comparison," Johnson said respectfully. "The talk is all fine and dandy, but this is not an individual affair. I haven't done anything to deserve all the talk yet. I'm still trying to get everything straight."

Savoy added, "That's a nice comparison, but I want to be known as Patrick Savoy."

It's difficult to fault critics, locally and nationally, for uttering such comparisons.

Johnson and Savoy were both junior college All-Americans last season.

Johnson's 24 point, 11 rebound average last season helped the College of Southern Idaho qualify for the national junior college tournament.

Savoy averaged 21 points, 11 rebounds and three blocked shots, leading Mississippi Gulf Coast College to a fifth-place finish in the national junior college tournament in March.

The *Sporting News* listed Savoy as one of the top six



Clayton Johnson.

junior college power forward transfers in the nation this year and Johnson as one of the top see *Memories* pg. 6

Thomas dishing it out for UNLV

BY PAUL GUTIERREZ
SPORTS EDITOR

If there's been one knock against Dedan Thomas, it's that he's too unselfish.

The Rebels' senior point-guard was second in the nation a year ago in assists, averaging 8.6 per game. His total of 248 assists last season ranked eighth in school single season history. And he had the top assist-to-turnover ratio in Big West Conference play, 3.71 to 1.

It was enough for him to be named honorable mention All-American. Strangely, he wasn't even named all-conference, being rated below the likes of New Mexico State's Sam Crawford - who led the nation in assists per game - Utah State's Jay Goodman and UC Santa

Barbara's Ray Kelly.

In two years, Thomas has 344 career assists, No. 10 on the UNLV all-time list.

Thomas, 22, was voted the team captain by his teammates.

"I'm just ready to get going," Thomas said. "We've got some great recruits, a good nucleus to work with. I'm really anxious to start."

Thomas' career at UNLV started as a red-shirt for the 1990-91 season.

Before that, he played at Antelope Valley Junior College in Lancaster, Calif., averaging 12.4 points and 9.5 assists per game in 1989-90. The Marauders went 27-6, winning the Foothill Conference at 13-1. Thomas set a single-game record for as-

sists with 17 against Golden West College.

Thomas would rather give than receive.

"Last season ended on a sour note," he said. "Once we get going, we can have a good season."

Thomas Tidbits

- His uncle Bobby played running back for the Los Angeles Rams from 1971-72, and the San Diego Chargers from 1973-74.

- He is a social work major

- He enjoys listening to music and cooking in his spare time.

- Graduated from Taft High School in Woodland Hills (Calif.) High School in 1989.



Hyun-Ho Han/Rebel Yell

Thomas averaged 7.5 points and 8.6 assists per game last year.