

Commentary

Rebels Send Mixed Signs in Exhibitions

Tim Grgurich said at the Rebels' Halloween Hoops coming-out party that he'd get a feel for his first UNLV squad after the first exhibition against the Verich Reps on Nov. 17.

But after the Rebels were outplayed in all aspects by the Mexican National Team on Nov. 22, it's understandable if Grgurich became unsure about his team.

Against Verich, UNLV displayed moments of team brilliance, getting strong individual performances in a 98-92 win before 9,512 at the Thomas & Mack Center. Junior center Kebu Stewart led the Rebels with 24 points while grabbing 11 rebounds.

But it was the performances of juniors Clayton Johnson (21 points on 7-of-12 shooting, 2-of-4 from 3-point range) and Damian Smith (14 points, 3-of-4 on 3-pointers) that impressed Grgurich.

"Whatever happens to Damian this year he deserves," Grgurich said. "I tell you, he's a workaholic at practice, defensively, shooting the ball real well. He deserves a lot of credit for what he did tonight."

"And I think Clayton just needs to learn to play within the structure of the team, and that'll come."

While the Verich game provided a sign that "Happy Days are Here Again," which the band played before both exhibitions at the T&M, the Mexico game was the opposite. The Rebels lost 82-64.

The Rebels shooting against Mexico was poor, converting just 34 percent from the field.

Senior forward Patrick Savoy was having a good shooting game against Mexico before aggravating an old ankle sprain to his right ankle. Savoy had 10 points on 3-of-5 shooting and had five rebounds in 14 minutes before his injury.

Savoy was UNLV's top rebounder against the Verich Reps with 12.

Without Savoy and 6-10 freshman center Eric Lee, who missed both exhibitions with an ankle injury, the Rebels were forced to play with a guard-oriented lineup. The smaller lineup allowed Mexico to pound the ball inside to its post players.

As a result, Mexico's front line of Enrique Gonzalez, Rafael Solis, Octavio Robles, and Arturo Montes had numerous easy layups as the quartet combined for 53 points against Stewart and 6-3 senior Reggie Manuel.

Montes did the most dam-



JOHN SANTANA

age, scoring 22 points.

"We have to make adjustments in our defense and our defense is going to be the key to the season," Grgurich said. "But when you take out a Patrick Savoy at halftime, you take out a pretty good athlete. We

had to play with four guards the rest of the way who needed to play real aggressively, and we didn't do that."

Grgurich also experimented with an aggressive man-to-man defense for the first time in the Mexico loss. While the move succeeded at first, the Mexicans eventually had little trouble finding an open man. Mexico also had little trouble when the Rebels played zone.

UNLV trailed Mexico 43-38 at halftime despite shooting 34 percent. But the Mexicans built a large lead in the second half. They led by as many as 21 when Robles hit a 3-pointer to give his team a 74-53 lead with 4:15 left.

Interestingly, such a performance last year under Rolie Massimino would have drawn numerous boos. But the 6,890 who attended the Mexico game remained silent.

A likely cause of the poor play against Mexico was a strenuous practice the day before, as UNLV practiced for about four hours.

"We're working (the players) hard at practice," Grgurich said. "Many teams probably wouldn't practice as long as we did. But I don't think we can afford to do that. And I think when we get into the season we'll cut down the day before a game."

While the Rebels were inconsistent in the two exhibitions, one observer believes it won't be long before Grgurich has the 1994-95 squad playing like the great Runnin' Rebel teams of the past.

"I've been at their practices and they've been doing absolutely great," said former UNLV coach Jerry Tarkanian, who watched both games from courtside across from the Rebels' bench. "They'll get better and better with every team. They'll be a solid team by January."

Tarkanian also made some bold predictions regarding the program under his former assistant.

"They'll win the Big West Tournament (which UNLV hosts) this year," Tarkanian said. "And a year from now they'll be a top 10 team."

—John Santana is a sports writer at The Rebel Yell.

Rally

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for this time of year. I learned a lot tonight."

The Rebels rallied by shooting 64 percent in the second half and playing better on the boards after being out-rebounded 29-15 in the first half.

UNLV outscored Marquette 7-1 in the final 2:45 to force the overtime. Junior guard Damian Smith capped the rally by hitting his third 3-pointer of the game with 30 seconds left to tie the score at 68.

Following a time out, Marquette held the ball in the final 17.2 seconds and had a chance to win in regulation. Point guard Tony Miller drove the lane but missed a layup. The rebound went out of bounds as time expired.

But Miller would hurt the Rebels in the overtime. His 3-pointer with 3:10 left put the Golden Eagles up 73-69. He lat-

er converted a layup with 46.9 seconds left to give Marquette a 77-72 lead. Miller finished with 14 points and nine assists.

Anthony Pieper, who led the Golden Eagles with 19 points, scored the last five Marquette points on free throws.

UNLV's Kebu Stewart led all scorers with 20 points despite 6-of-16 shooting from the field. He also pulled down a game-high 15 rebounds.

A big key in the Rebels' comeback was the switch to a 1-2-2 zone defense in the second half, with Stewart playing high. The move succeeded in getting UNLV's offense going by forcing turnovers and helping the Rebels grab more rebounds as Marquette struggled from the field.

"I told them at halftime that they had to learn how to win," Grgurich said. "At the end of the season they're the winning team."

The Rebels found a way to pull even with the Golden Eagles de-

spite losing forward Patrick Savoy, who fouled out with 4:33 left and UNLV trailing 63-57. Savoy, who was bothered by foul trouble the entire game, finished with 15 points and six rebounds in 21 minutes.

"He's been in the habit of reaching," Grgurich said. "We're trying to break him of that habit. But I think by the end of the season he can be a big power guy."

Marquette built the 23-point halftime lead with the help of a 16-3 run in the final 5:30 of the first half. The Golden Eagles built their lead after Savoy picked up his third foul on a charge and Stewart picked up his second personal.

With Stewart and Savoy on the bench, Grgurich went to a lineup which had four guards and 6-10 freshman Eric Lee. Marquette was able to grab several offensive rebounds against the smaller lineup, which led to several second-chance baskets.

Corner

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The fact that former President Robert Maxson and former university legal counsel Brad Boone were found in violation of state ethics laws regarding former (notice all the former prefixes) men's basketball coach Rolie Massimino's secret supplemental contract is not that big of a surprise. What is surprising, and perhaps even disturbing, is their nonchalant attitudes towards the matter.

They just don't get it.

According to reports, both Maxson and Boone feel as though they did nothing wrong in setting up such a deal for Daddy Mass back in the spring of 1992. In fact, they feel they did the right thing by keeping Massimino's outside monies accountable. After all, they argued, the previous coach (Jerry Tarkanian) had similar deals that were out of institutional control.

Maybe. But the fact of the matter is, Maxson, with the help of Boone and the supervision of athletic director Jim Weaver (depending upon who you talk to), deceived the public with his manner of hiring Massimino. Think back to that turbulent time, the campus was split over the "academics vs. athletics" issue that Maxson fostered.

With the uncovering of the secret contract, Maxson and Boone's hypocrisy shines through. If it truly was an academics vs. athletics issue, as Maxson would have you believe, then he wouldn't have bankrolled a contract for a basketball coach near \$1 million. And he wouldn't have allowed Massimino to recruit the same type of student-athletes for which Tarkanian was famous (or infamous, again, depending upon who you talk to).

In the movie *Tombstone*, Doc Holliday had the line of the show when he drawled, "My hypocrisy knows no bounds."

Sound familiar?

And the early favorite for most the overused, boring, dull and unimaginative cliché describing the men's basketball team—the Road Warriors. No, not because Kebu Stewart (or any other Runnin' Rebel for that matter) bears a likeness to the former pro wrestling tag team champs. But because UNLV will be making five cross-country trips this season. The Flyin' Rebels will log more than 24,000 miles in the air with trips to Marquette, Seton Hall, Louisville, Miami and Virginia.

In case you missed it, *The Yell* came out with its basketball preview issue two weeks ago. With the theme, Back to the Future, *The Yell* superimposed Tim Grgurich's face onto Michael J. Fox's body and made it look as though his DeLorean was parked in the Thomas & Mack lot.

—Paul Gutierrez is the sports editor at The Rebel Yell.

THE PROFESSOR

gets an **F** this week for not writing his critique of the UNLV-UNR game (even though we said he would). He's lucky there's only one game left or he'd be joining Rolie (without \$1.88 million).



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