

## Commentary

## Notes from the Bench

Horton is calm, cool and collected in another season of questions

He walks to practice in a black, straw UNLV hat with no socks and a pair of loafers on.

He visits the Student Union on a daily basis, as well as other UNLV sporting events on campus.

Off the Bench

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"That is what Jeff Horton is about," Horton said. "I am always around the Student Union everyday and at other campus sporting events."

Horton is starting his second season at UNLV, and he is finding that it is reminding him of last season. Many of the same concerns have been popping up, and Horton is still curious about how his team will perform.

"Last season was a fluke," Horton said of the Rebels 6-5 season (5-1 in the Big West) which saw him take a share of the Big West Championship and a Las Vegas Bowl victory.

This season the big question mark hovering over the team is not with the quarterbacks, the offense or even the defense. It has to do with the kicking.

"We have a lot of guys who have never kicked before in game situations," Horton explained. There was a rush of walk-on kickers in summer camp, and Horton was hoping to find the gem in the group. He is still waiting.

In a scrimmage held Saturday only one kicker was able to split the uprights from more than 20 yards out. Horton expressed concern over the kicking situation, and hopes they will be ready by game time.

Not only is Horton wondering about his kicking prospects (he would probably do better if he got Pele' to take a few classes at UNLV so he would be eligible for football) but he also has a good number of new faces to go over in camp.

From last year's squad there are only three returning defensive starters and six offensive starters. There are a number of players who were redshirts last season who are now being called to fill big shoes.

So does this make it a rebuilding year for the throwin' Rebels?

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## Can Rebels keep the title?

## Football to defend Big West Crown this season

BY JEREMY E. MARTIN  
STAFF WRITER

Last fall the UNLV football team surprised critics and stunned disbelievers by taking a share of the Big West crown en route to its first bowl bid since 1984, a 52-24 Las Vegas Bowl rout of Central Michigan in a nationally televised event.

Defending the championship looks to be quite a chore.

Second-year Head Coach Jeff Horton is fielding a team that has lost eight starters on defense and six on offense.

The 1995 Rebels are a young and inexperienced group who will

have to step up on both sides of the ball to achieve the success of last year's squad.

Last year at this time the same question marks loomed over the team but Horton came in and made the team believe in themselves. He has a similar job this season.

Most prognosticators have the Rebels finishing somewhere in the middle of the Big West pack.

"These guys don't know what they are talking about," Horton said. "Last year they had us ranked ninth and this year they have us ranked fourth or fifth."

Horton's goals are much like last season's — win the conference and the Las Vegas Bowl.

"The season is like a horse race," Horton said. "Everyone leaves the gate at the same time and whoever is the strongest in the end wins the race."

Some of the main holes Horton and his coaching staff must fill are on the defensive squad, which is returning only three starters from last season.

Senior nose guard Paul Carrillo, senior linebacker Rossie Johnson and junior cornerback Jermaine Webster will be the leaders on the field and will have the job of inspiring younger teammates.

Offensively Horton says the

team is a little more solid. Despite returning only five starters from last year, the Rebels have two solid senior quarterbacks in starter Jared Brown and backup Ja-

son Davis. Possible quarterback of the future, redshirt freshman Kevin Crook, will be third in line.

The Offense will return a core of linemen in senior right guard Robbie Morrison, junior left tackle Dennis Whitmore and senior center Jose Gonzalez to protect Brown. Redshirt freshmen Mike Reily and Jerald Pierucci will fill out the line at right tackle and left guard, respectively.

The Rebels will sport a strong backfield with the Battle for Nevada and Las Vegas Bowl hero junior DeJohn Branch returning as the start-

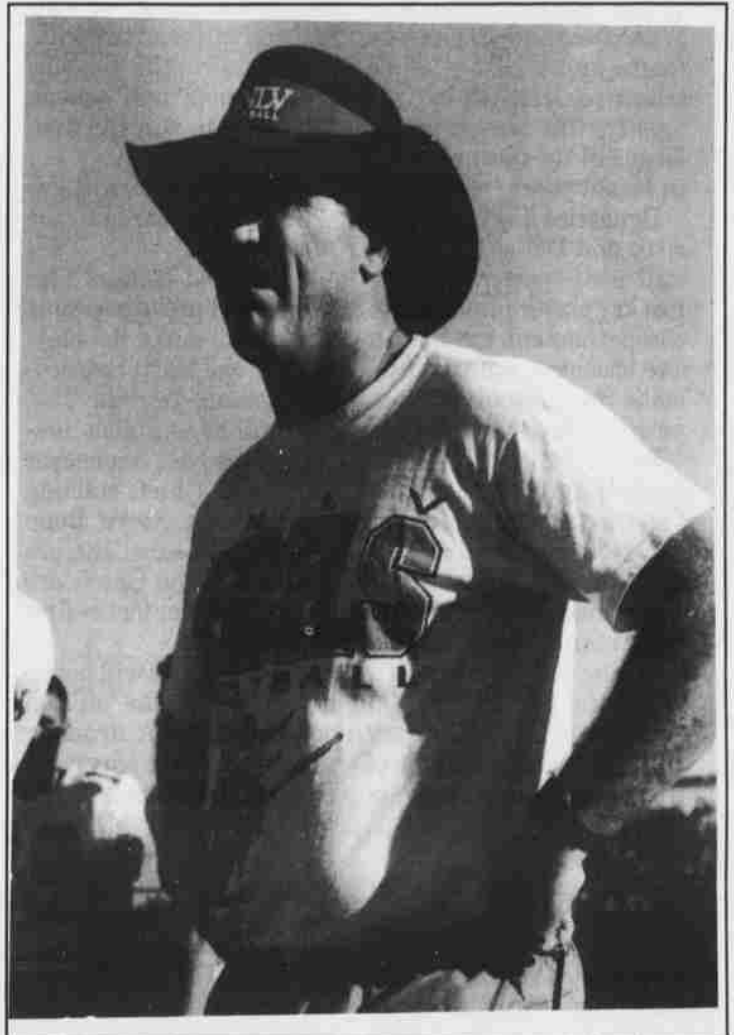


PHOTO BY RON HIBBLE

Coach Jeff Horton observes his players with a critical eye.

er. Branch took over for Omar Love last season after a two-game suspension. Branch racked up 161 yards on 26 carries against the Nevada Wolf Pack in his first start. He added 125 yards on 13 carries in the Las Vegas Bowl. Branch finished the season with 374 yards in 90 attempts for four touchdowns.

Due to a sprained knee Branch suffered in practice, he will be out of action for 3-4 weeks, Horton said. He hopes to have him back by the Sep. 16 game at Eastern Michigan. Palomar Junior College transfer, junior Tony Burton, who

redshirted last year with a shoulder injury, will be the starter until Branch gets back. Burton is a slender back at 5-11, 185 lbs. but has good speed in the open field.

Bruising senior Shannon Wilson (formerly Shannon McLean) is back after a two year absence and will get about fifty percent of the carries until Branch returns, Horton said.

Wilson was a *Parade Magazine* first team All-American coming out of St. Martin Deporres High School in Detroit. He was named to the All-Big

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## Rebels to play SWC co-champion Rice in season opener

JEREMY E. MARTIN  
STAFF WRITER

The Rebels will have their last attempt to get a win against a Southwest Conference opponent when they travel to Houston to play the defending SWC co-champion Rice Owls this Saturday at Rice Stadium.

The Rebels are 0-5 vs. the SWC, which is disbanding after this year. Rice, who has never faced UNLV in football, will join the Rebels in the Western Athletic Conference starting next season.

Rice is in a similar situation as UNLV. They are a team that has continually been at the bottom of the ranks in the SWC. They have a second-year head coach in Ken Hatfield who led them to a share of the conference title last season.

Despite the similarities there are some distinctive differences in the two teams. The Owls are returning seven offensive and nine defensive starters from last year's championship squad. The Rebels will only return eight players total from last year's team.

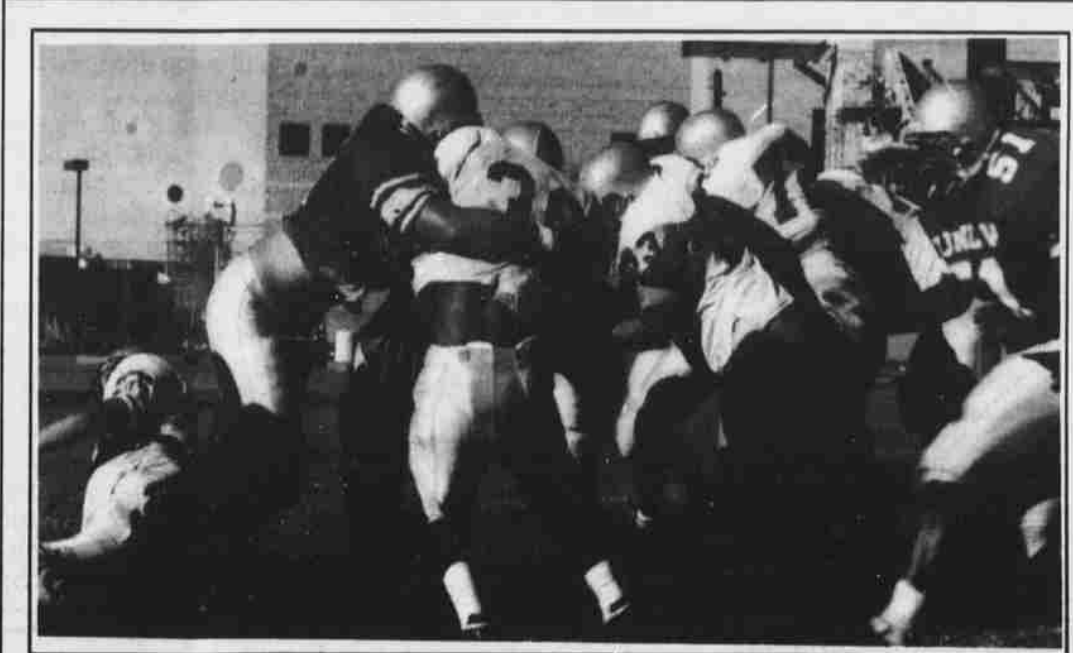


PHOTO BY RON HIBBLE

Rebel Defense swarms around the ball carrier at Tuesday's practice.

The Rebels are 16-11 (.539) in 27 season openers and hope to increase that percentage Saturday.

"Our key on defense is to be disciplined," Head Coach Jeff Horton said. "We can't let the Rice's running game lull us to

sleep and get burned on a play action pass."

The Rice offense is led by senior quarterback Josh LaRocca and last season's leading rusher junior fullback Spencer George.

On defense, Horton will pay

special attention to junior defensive end Ndukwe Kalu and the linebacker tandem of seniors Larry Izzo and Joe Davis.

"Those guys make a lot of plays," Horton said.

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