

Baseball

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ing the off-season, the Hustlin' Rebels are enjoying their finest season this decade.

The squad is 35-13 on the year, plays in the toughest baseball conference in the nation and has one of the top playing facilities in all of collegiate baseball, the three-year-old, \$1.2 million Wilson Stadium, which was financed entirely by a private donation.

Yet, only 350 people come out to see the Rebels each game.

Maybe that's because word about the team doesn't get out to the community.

"We get better coverage in the campus newspaper than the Sun or the (Review-Journal)," Dallimore said.

That's something the players take to heart.

"You look in the newspapers and we get three lines saying, 'The Rebels won again,'" said pitcher Tom LaRosa. "We're ranked 21st right now. It's been a long time since the basketball team or the football team has been that high, yet they're on the front page everyday."

LaRosa, who comes from Henderson, had an idea of how little local press the squad got. However, for others, like catcher Stacy Kleiner, the coverage is close to embarrassing.

"I come from Los Angeles and there in the San Fernando Valley, high school sports is a huge thing in the paper," Kleiner said. "Coming here to play a Division I sport, it's disappointing to not get covered, especially because how good we are doing."

So if the word doesn't get out about the team, people stay away from the ballpark.

"We have a good base of fans,

but the problem is, it's always the same people coming to the games," said Jim Gemma, sports information director for UNLV baseball for 15 years. "This is a tough town to draw in because you got so many things going. We just need to do a better job of getting the word out. We're a little disappointed with the media coverage."

Dallimore has done his job of building a team that's fun to watch on the field, and he's been doing it for a long time.

The Hustlin' Rebels have had just four losing seasons under Dallimore's reign, as well as having over 80 players advance to play professional baseball, including one of the top sluggers in the game, San Francisco Giants third baseman Matt Williams.

"We're doing all the right things on the field this year, that's for sure," Gemma said. "For the most part, people come out because it's a good team. The ball club is doing its part in drawing fans."

But winning isn't everything, as pitcher Mike Bauder found out.

"I've lived here my whole life and I thought Las Vegas was a winning town," Bauder said. "But we're winning and people still aren't coming out. It's kind of disappointing."

This year's squad is full of potential pro prospects and they show it on the field every day.

"We're fun to watch," said Green Valley High graduate Kevin Eberwein. "We play exciting baseball."

"It's more exciting to come watch some kids play hard in college than it is to go watch triple-A baseball," Bauder said, referring to the Las Vegas Stars.

Some locals may ask, who watches college baseball?

The answer: plenty of peo-

ple.

In UNLV's recent trip to face Cal State Fullerton, the defending national champions, over 4,800 fans turned out for the three-game series.

"The first time I played there, it was kind of nerve wracking. They get in your head," Eberwein said. "It's an awesome atmosphere to be in."

But it's not just at a champion's home. Long Beach State drew nearly 33,000 fans in 39 home games a year ago. That's the kind of crowd support UNLV players long to see.

"If we could fill the stadium the way they do in Fullerton, we would have so much more of a home-field advantage," Kleiner said.

But for now, the Hustlin' Rebels are faced with playing a handful of home games every year where their fans are out-numbered by the opponents.

Although a top-notch product and a top-notch facility have been provided, Dallimore said he is not in charge of promoting his team to the public.

"They pay people to do that," the coach said. "I wonder what they're doing with their time?"

Promotions are planned for the program — Little League Day, Seat Cushion Night, etc. — but it takes more than that, according to Dallimore.

"Baseball is the only spring sport that can generate revenue at the gate," Dallimore said, who added he has never over spent his budget in all of his 23 years of coaching at UNLV. "You can't build a program by cutting. You have to be creative and get people interested in the program."

The administration said getting people in the seats is also a concern of their own.

"(Baseball) should be able to make revenue at the gate," Kelleher said, who talked about the lack of attendance

at the Major League games played in early April at Cashman Field. "It's a tough town to draw. We're doing everything we can."

"We just need (Dallimore) to keep having these type of winning seasons he's had the past two years."

For Dallimore, his stint at UNLV has become more trying as the seasons progress. His rapport with the administration is not at an all-time best, and that's being nice.

"The administration wishes he was 13-35 instead of 35-13," said one source inside UNLV's athletic department who wished to remain anonymous. "They wish they could get rid of him."

But that's not the wish of

people involved with the program.

"Rebel baseball is Fred Dallimore and Fred Dallimore is Rebel baseball," Gemma said.

Kelleher, however, said the relationship is steady between the program and the administration.

"We're doing fine," Kelleher said. "Fred and I have a good relationship. He's doing a great job."

Only two and a half hours remain until the first pitch of the game against LMU. Dallimore sips from his now-warm soda and nibbles on some salted peanuts. It's time for Dallimore to get back to the field.

Today wasn't the day the grass was scheduled to be mowed.

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