

MOMENT OF THE YEAR: Winning the Wac

By Eric Gruzen
Staff Sports Writer

In what could be described as one of the greatest turn-arounds in recent college basketball history, the UNLV Runnin' Rebels won the Western Athletic Conference tournament and, by doing so, gained an automatic berth to the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 1991.

In doing so, the Rebels had to beat two of the top teams in the country in Utah and New Mexico, along with the Jerry Tarkanian-led Fresno State Bulldogs and Hawai'i Rainbows.

Just three weeks ago, the Rebels were on the bubble even for the WAC Tournament, and now, there is no bubble to worry about because they are going to the NCAA Tournament after winning all four WAC games and 10 of their last 12 games overall.

"I am really proud of these kids," Head Coach Bill Bayno said. "There is nothing like getting off the plane and representing your school in the NCAA Tournament. I don't care who we play, we will go to Mars and play the Lakers if we have to."

The Rebels (20-12) won't have to go to Mars, but they will be going as far as any team in the tournament, travelling to Hartford, Conn. to take on Princeton in the first round.

Princeton has an overall record of 26-1 and is currently ranked eighth in the nation. They swept all 14 of their Ivy League games this season and have won 19 consecutive games since their only loss of the year, a 50-42 defeat at the hands of No. 2 North Carolina.



Flashback: Hands down the moment of the year. UNLV beats New Mexico for the WAC Tournament title.

With their near-perfect record and consistent, fundamental style of basketball, are the Rebels a little intimidated?

"No, this team wasn't intimidated by Utah, and they weren't intimidated by New Mexico," Bayno said. "We do have a lot of respect for Princeton, obviously. We are just going to come out and play hard."

Rebel point guard Mark Dickel feels the same way.

"I'm definitely not intimidated," Dickel said. "I know they execute very tough on offense and defense. We are just going to have to be patient. But I feel we are playing our best basketball, we have a lot of confidence right now."

"It doesn't matter where or

who you play," Dickel said. "If you want to be successful and want to win, you have to play the best teams. Right now, everyone is feeling really comfortable with each other. I'm really excited, this is a once in a lifetime opportunity."

The Rebels and their fans are not likely to forget the week that just occurred at the Thomas & Mack Center. The week started out with a victory over Hawai'i, usually a thorn in the Rebels side. This time however, the Rebels were able to edge out a 64-59 victory.

Things were not looking good for the Rebels after the win on Tuesday night. The fifth-ranked Utah Utes were awaiting the Rebels with open arms. The

Utes had their way with UNLV during the regular season, defeating them 67-54 and 79-68 in games at the Thomas & Mack and at the Huntsman Center, respectively.

In a game that can only be described as unbelievable, the Rebels were able to take control of the mighty Utes, hold them off and win the game after a last second three point attempt fell short, 54-51. Afterwards, the floor was covered in rampant UNLV fans which would become the theme of the Rebel victories.

Although, after the victory over Utah, it seemed like the tournament crown was theirs, the Rebels still had to defeat the often difficult Fresno State Bulldogs, followed by the winner of

the TCU/New Mexico game. It seemed like a daunting task to say the least.

The Fresno State game started out perfectly from the Rebels standpoint after jumping out to a first half 13 point lead. However, the game got tighter and at one point, Fresno State took a lead late in the second half, but the Rebels dug deep and pulled out a 76-67 win.

The stage was now set for the Rebels to face the New Mexico Lobos. UNM had beaten the Rebels twice in the regular season, 79-61 and 75-66. The Rebels dominated early, grabbing a 13 point lead similar to the one they enjoyed against Fresno. But, like the Bulldogs, the Lobos fought back and grabbed a lead late in the game. A late three by Dickel, then clutch free-throw shooting by Dickel and Tyrone Nesby clinched the game and championship for the Rebels as screaming UNLV faithful rushed the floor.

"This was something I've dreamed about my whole life, it is why I came to this school and my dreams came true," Brian Keefe said after his 18-point performance against New Mexico. "We can beat anybody it seems like at this point."

"About three weeks ago I said that if we make the WAC Tournament, we were going to win it all," Keefe said. "We are becoming a pretty good team, we are definitely gelling. We are playing hard and that is all you can ask for. Good things happen if you play hard."

"We are just proud of what this team has been able to do," Bayno said. "We've been the Cinderella team all season and hopefully that will continue."

Editor's note: This is a reprint.

Cyprien to stay with Runnin' Rebels

By Adam Hill
Staff Sports Writer

UNLV Assistant Coach Glenn Cyprien has decided to stay with the Rebels, after seriously considering a job with Nebraska.

Cyprien went as far as dialing Coach Nee's number, but luckily for the Rebels, Nee was not home and Coach Cyp remained a Rebel.

As a reward for remaining in the program, Cyprien has been named the Rebels' top assistant.

The 31-year old will also receive a raise to go along with his new title, associate head coach.

"After talking with Billy on Sunday and again on Monday, and talking with some people involved in coaching that I've known for years, I know I've made the right decision," Cyprien told the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. "I like it here. We're a program on the rise, and I feel we all can have success here."

Before the weekend, all clues indicated that Cyprien was headed for Lincoln, Neb. He spent two days there and reports were that he was offered a six-figure deal. He made \$75,000 last year at UNLV.

"On Saturday, I was 80% sure this was what I wanted to do and was ready to make the

decision then," Cyprien told the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*.

Bayno was able to convince Cyprien to stay, however. Bayno and Cyprien both reported that the details of the raise would not be finalized until an official meeting with troubled Athletics Director Charles Cavagnaro.

Last year, Greg Vetrone, the highest paid assistant, made \$79,300 but was not designated as the No. 1 guy.

"I know I'll be asked about money, but I want the community to know this wasn't about money," Cyprien told the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. "I have professional goals and the big one is to be a head coach. Now, ADs can look at my resume and see 'Associate Head Coach at UNLV' and it will make a big difference."

Bayno was the associate head coach at UMass under John Calipari. He agreed that the new title will make him a more legitimate head coaching prospect.

"When I was named associate head coach under John it made a great difference in my career," Bayno told the *Review-Journal*. "It makes a big difference to any assistant, and I know 'Cyp' will be a great head coach."

Cyprien is known as a great recruiter. He brought Tyrone

Nesby and Greedy Daniels to the program, as well as two top-notch players for next year. This time, though, he was the recruitee as Nebraska made a strong push for him.

"They hit him hard for awhile and all he was seeing was their side of it. I was honestly really worried he'd already made up his mind," Bayno told the *Review-Journal*.

Bayno then needed to make his case.

"I know 'Cyp' is a loyal guy and he knows we're capable of something special here. It was just a matter of getting to him, sitting down, and reminding him he's a valuable part of our program," Bayno told the *R-J*.

Cyprien informed Nee of his decision on Monday.

"He took it very well and understood. It was a very hard decision. I can't tell you how hard it was. Coach Nee took me into his home—I met his family—and really sold me on becoming a Cornhusker," Cyprien told the *R-J*.

It wasn't until Bayno's second meeting with Cyprien on Monday that he decided to remain in Las Vegas.

According to Bayno, Cyprien's new title won't bring any new responsibilities. Cyprien, who has coached at UT-San Antonio, Lamar, Jacksonville, and Western Kentucky,

will just have a title added.

"He already has a lot of responsibilities," Bayno told the *R-J*. "All of our assistant coaches have input. I'm the coach, but I don't think there's any more duties I can give him because he's already so in-

olved.

The next event of interest to Rebel hoop fans is the NBA draft in July. Keon Clark is expected to be a lottery pick, while Tyrone Nesby is projected anywhere from late first round to mid-second round.

Graduation Celebration


LAWRY'S
THE PRIME
RIB

Treat your Grad to a complete dining celebration featuring Prime Ribs of Beef carved tableside from a silver cart.

Dinner served nightly 5-10pm
Reservations for any size Group
893-2223

4043 H. Hughes Pkwy at Flamingo Rd.
Reserve your Graduation table Today!