

BIG WEST CONFERENCE TITLE UP FOR GRABS THIS YEAR

By W.G. Ramirez

In a conference once dominated by the UNLV Runnin' Rebels, there are now at least five legitimate contenders that could walk away with the tournament title, which gets underway Friday in Long Beach, California. Not only do the Rebels find themselves amongst heated competition, but they enter Friday's opening round as the #2 seed behind #1 New Mexico State.

UNLV will open tournament play against Utah State at approximately 7:00 p.m. at the Long Beach Arena. The Rebels swept the season series against USU 87-78 in Utah and 94-86 in the final home game of the season at the Thomas and Mack Center.

The Runnin' Rebels hit the

bumpy trail in the final week of the regular season as they lost two of their last three games against New Mexico State 90-88 and to Cal-St. Fullerton 84-83, both on the road. UNLV finished the season with a 20-6 mark, 13-5 in conference play.

The Rebels' first loss of the season came on the road, at the hands of tournament host Long Beach State 101-94. Not only did the 49ers defeat UNLV in Long Beach, but they also toppled NMSU 97-71. Although the two games were held at The Gold Mine on campus, home-court advantage could play a factor in this year's tourney.

Then again, the 49ers' erratic play could work against them as it did when Santa Barbara and Pacific came in to the Gold Mine and beat LBSU 68-59

and 69-66 respectively.

Long Beach State, the #4 seed, opens conference play against #5 Cal-St. Fullerton at approximately 9:00 p.m. The two teams split the season series, each winning at their respective home court. The winner of this particular game could possibly be the spoiler of the tournament for the higher seeds.

The darkhorse of the tourney may be in #3 seed Pacific. The Tigers have tasted victory over New Mexico State, UNLV, Cal-St. Fullerton and Long Beach State twice. The only problem for the Tigers is that they lost their season series to UC Santa Barbara, who happens to be Pacific's opening round opponent.

The whole tournament looks to be like a batch of scrambled

eggs, all of which have been put in the same basket. The resulting scenario could possibly put three Big West teams into the NCAA tournament if, of course, NMSU and UNLV fail to capture the tournament title. The Aggies and Rebels seem obvious choices for at-large bids into the NCAA's "Big Dance." If one of the other schools manage to capture the conference tournament, they would receive an automatic bid into the NCAA Tournament.

Since 1976, UNLV has captured 7 tournament titles, former Big West member Fresno State won 3 titles. Seven teams have captured the title once. New Mexico State is the defending tournament champion, as they squeaked past Pacific last season 74-73.

Final Regular Season Standings

	Conf.	Overall
NEW MEXICO STATE	45-3	23-6
NEV-LAS VEGAS	13-5	20-6
PACIFIC	12-6	16-10
LONG BEACH STATE	11-7	19-9
SANTA BARBARA	10-8	17-9
CAL-ST. FULLERTON	10-8	15-11
UTAH STATE	7-11	10-16
NEVADA	4-14	9-17
SAN JOSE STATE	4-14	7-19
UC IRVINE	4-14	6-20

UNLV'S ALL-AMERICAN CANDIDATES SWEEP BIG WEST PLAYER OF THE YEAR HONORS

By W.G. Ramirez

UNLV's J.R. Rider and Teresa Jackson topped the competition as the Big West's conference coaches voted them both Big West's Players of the Year.

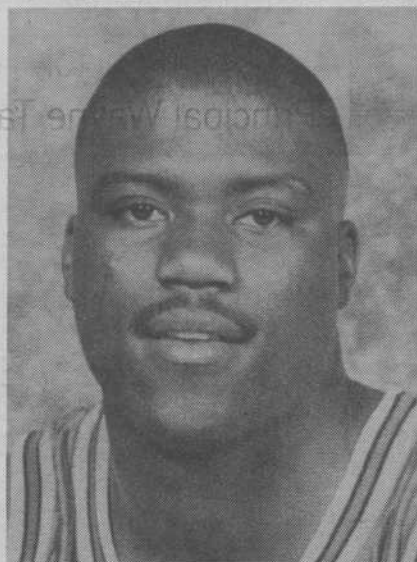
It marked the first time since 1985 that both of the conference's Player of the Year were solely from UNLV. Misty Thomas and Richie Adams walked away with the honors eight years ago.

In 1990, Larry Johnson won the Big West Player of the Year for the men while Pauline Jordan shared the women's honor with Hawaii's Judy Mosley.

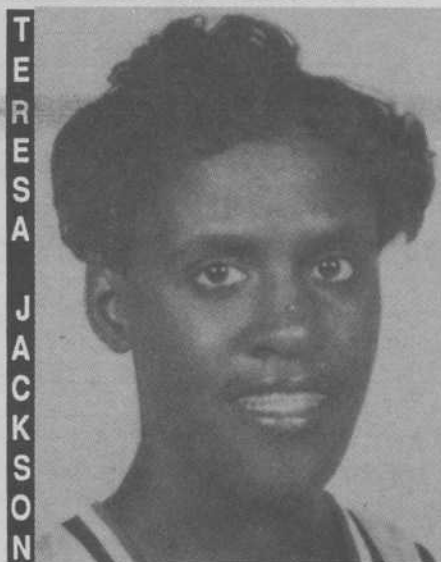
Jackson, a 5-11 forward for the Lady Rebels, led the conference in scoring at the conclusion of the regular season with a 22.7 point per game average, eighth highest in the nation. She also ranked in the league's Top 10 in field goal percentage (7th, .517), free throw percentage (4th, .793), and blocked shots (3rd 1.1 bpg.). Jackson, who was honored by Sports Illustrated earlier this year as the Women's Player of the Week, recorded a single-season best when she converted 11-of-11 free throws against UC Santa Barbara on March 1.

To date, Jackson is the Big West all-time free throw percentage leader, hitting 351-for-439, a .800 pct. average.

Rider, the 6-5 standout for the Runnin' Rebels, finished the regular season atop the scoring ranks in the Big West and second in the nation with a 29.2



J R RIDER



T ERESA JACKSON

average. His league-leading average ranks second on the all-time Big West season chart behind Raymond Lewis of Cal-St Los Angeles, who averaged 32.9ppg. in 1973.

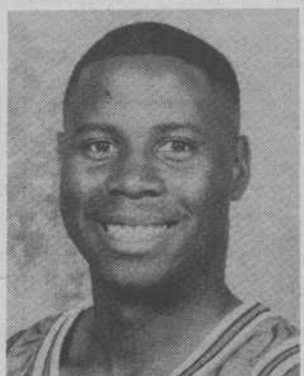
Rider is also among the Big West's leaders in field goal percentage (.526), 3-point field goal percentage (.402), free throw percentage (.840), rebounds (8.7) and 3-point field goals made per game (2.0).

Twice Rider has scored 40 or more points in a game, including a career-high 44 in a conference victory over Nevada. In January, he ran together a streak of six consecutive 30-point performances, which garnered him conference player of the week honors two weeks in a row.

On the season, Rider posted 15 30-point games to help keep the Rebels in the national rankings every week. Like his

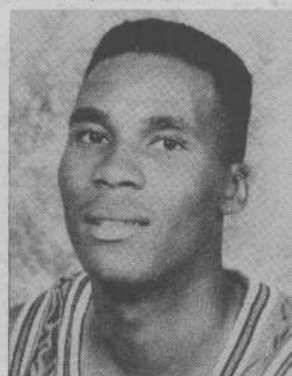
FIRST TEAM ALL-BIG WEST

Along with Big West Player of the Year, J.R. Rider, teammates Evric Gray and Dexter Boney were named to the All-Big West First Team. The trio were known as "UNLV's Big Three!!!"



counterpart from the Lady Rebels, Rider too was named as SI's Player of the Week earlier this season.

The post-season honors come just 2-1/2 weeks after both players were honored with the



Las Vegas Sentinel-Voice Male and Female Athletes of the Year. Last Sunday the Las Vegas Review Journal released their annual Best of Las Vegas poll, which found Rider the city's favorite UNLV athlete.

WORLD-RANKED BOXER ALEX GARCIA TO DEFEND TITLE AT THE RIVIERA

Heavyweight Alex Garcia, ranked in the top 10 by all World Boxing organizations, will defend his North American Boxing Federation championship Saturday, March 27 at the Riviera Hotel & Casino against an opponent soon to be announced, hotel officials said.

The championship bout will highlight the monthly boxing card promoted by Banner Promotions and Momentum Enterprises, in association with the Riviera. It marks the seventh consecutive month the resort has held a sanctioned title fight.

The card will be televised on the Hispanic network, Univision, as well as the Sports Bar & Race Track network. However, it will be blacked out in Las Vegas.

(See Riviera, Page 20)

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