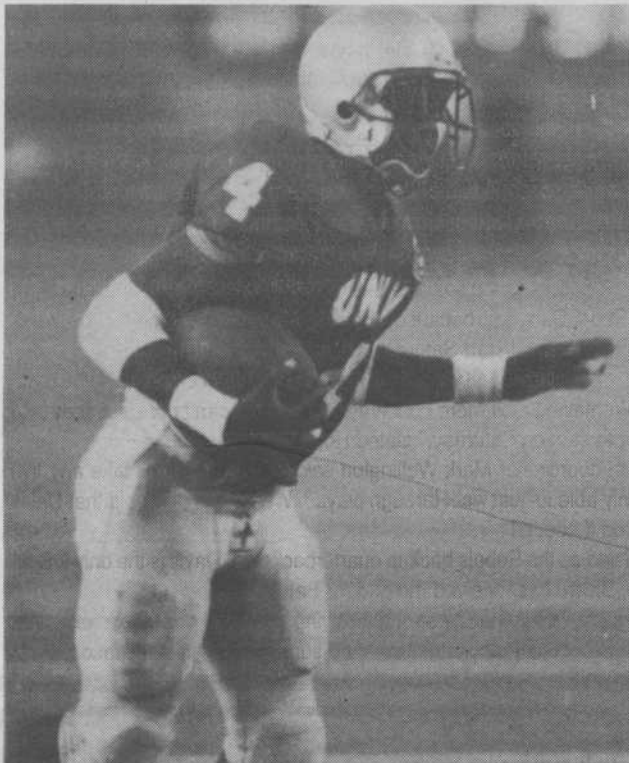




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Junior tailback Omar Love heads UNLV's running game for the 1994 campaign. UNLV Sports Information

OMAR LOVE SAYS HE HAS WORK TO DO AFTER VIEWING FIRST GAME FILM

W.G. Ramirez

When Omar Love came to UNLV in 1992, he was a highly touted Parade All-American from a national prep powerhouse - Eisenhower High in Rialto, California. Now, in his junior season with the Rebels, Love could finally be in position to step-up as a premier running back in the Big West, not to mention in the country.

As a sophomore, Love led the Rebels in rushing with 545 yards on 129 carries and seven touchdowns, but had his season brought to an abrupt halt when he was ruled academically ineligible for the final three games of the season. His freshman year wasn't highlighted until the final third of the season, when he rambled for 448 yards on 72 carries in the Rebels' final four games.

"I haven't really worried too much about how many yards I'm gonna rush, I was just worried about winning the (first) game," said Love, at Rebel Park after Tuesday's practice. "Even

though we won the game, I feel looking over the films, that I didn't do too good and I need alot more practice. I have a long way to go to reach my goals. It's gonna take some time.

"I have to be more focused and be more patient. When it's time to for me to have the ball and time for my block, I have to step it up."

Love had back surgery in the spring and was listed as questionable heading into fall practice. When he did make it to camp, he busted his finger and then it was questionable whether he'd actually be ready and in shape for the start of the '94 campaign.

"He's worked hard," says UNLV Head Coach Jeff Horton. "He missed spring ball and then he was having a good camp then broke his finger. I think Omar just needs to get in a little better shape. I think because of his injuries he's not in the best shape he can be, he's a step slow right now but I think with some practice and over time he'll

get much better. He's a guy that's got to have a great year for us, for us to be successful."

Running backs coach Joe Saunders has worked closely with Love since arriving on the scene with Horton, and feels that Love is well on his way to a productive season.

"The finger doesn't look like it's affecting him on the field," says Saunders. "He catches the ball well and it sounds and looks like he doesn't need to favor it."

Love says that the new coaching staff has put alot more confidence into the team and he is only looking towards the future, rather than comparing it to his past.

"Last year was a bad year for me so it's kind of foggy. I really don't remember some of the teams that I played for the simple fact that it was a bad season and I wanted to forget. I haven't really thought about trying to repeat. I'm just trying to do stuff different than I did previously."

Love is one of a handful of UNLV players that have filtered in from Eisenhower High, and being that he is now lining up behind the same quarterback he has been for twelve years, things are starting to look familiar.

"Little by little, it's starting to seem like old times," states Love. "I've been behind (Rebel QB) Jason (Davis) since I was nine, so when there was a busted up play (last Saturday), I cut back and he threw the pass to me. When I got back to the huddle, he said 'yeah, just like Ike-Mob.'" Davis was referring to a small clique of players that played for

Eisenhower, and when Love heard that, he simply replied, "O.K., let's do this, let's do this then."

When Love speaks about playing with his old teammates, there is a glimpse of excitement in his voice. Like a confident person that knows his 'boys' are right there with him, and at any time they will strike. He seems to get motivated about playing college ball with them, and admits that when he first arrived at UNLV there were no high accolade hopes, just the anticipation of teaming back up with his old teammates.

"I really didn't think Heisman or anything like that. I just thought that Jason and (former Rebel receiver) Demond (Thompkins) were there and it would be like old times. I just thought we'd be 'the trio' once again." While Davis is the Rebels' starting QB, Thompkins has been declared academically ineligible for the season.

"It's really disappointing because he's been here for me in my freshman year, then again in my sophomore year," admits Love about the loss of Thompkins from the team. "Now it's like something is missing. Before games, Jason will say 'You ready, let's do it,' and then I realize something is missing. It really hurts, but you have to move on."

Love says when preparing for football games, the team will treat each individual game as if it were the biggest of them all. Love rarely has a clue who the

(See Love, Page 20)

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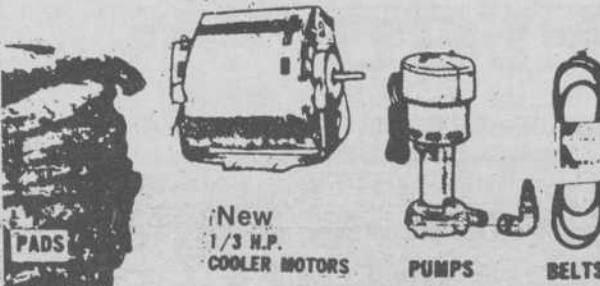
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