

Former Rebel Still Aiming For NFL

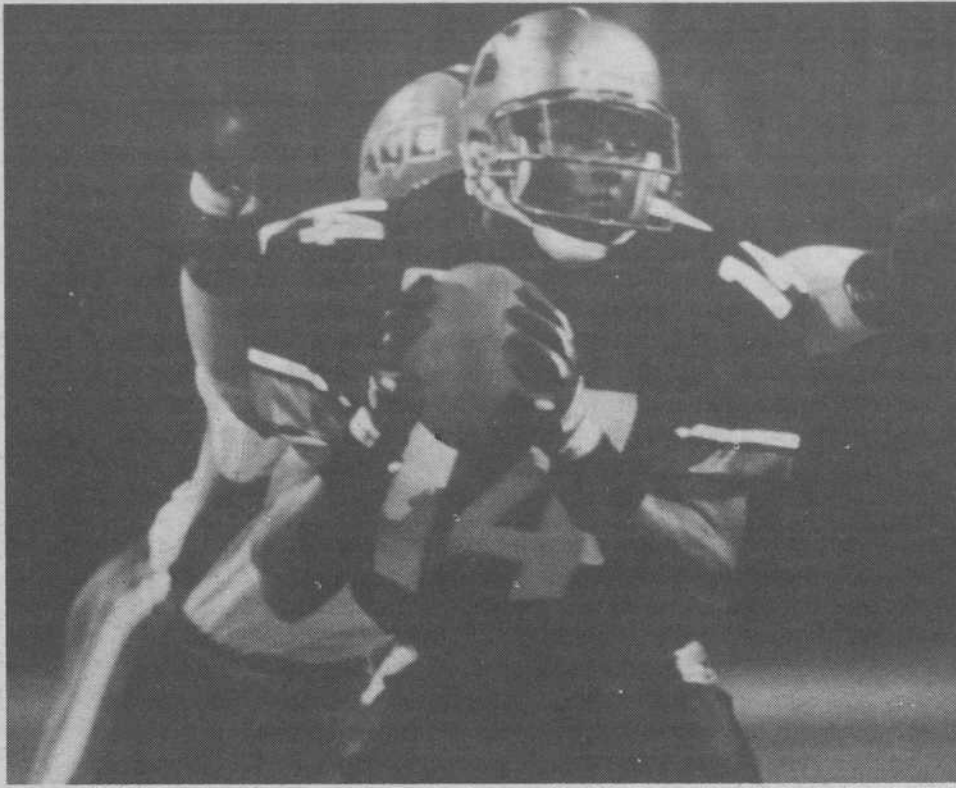
W.G. Ramirez

Question: What former UNLV football player has excelled to the top of the professional league he is affiliated with? His first year, he was named MVP of the league; in his second, he helped his team capture the league championship.

What's that you say, you didn't realize the National Football League had such a prominent player from UNLV. Well true Ikey isn't playing anymore and Randall isn't wearing any Super Bowl rings, but the reference isn't to the NFL.

Former all-purpose UNLV star Hunkie Cooper is rapidly becoming an Arena Football League "ambassador" as he puts it, but the year to be an NFL football player gets stronger after each season.

"I think if given the right chance and opportunity, and timing with the right team, I can still be an effective player in the NFL," said Cooper, during an interview last week. Cooper is currently spending his off-season in Las Vegas, briefly helping the UNLV football program, while



Former UNLV Rebel and current Arizona Rattlers star Hunkie Cooper is still aiming for the NFL.

looking forward at another shot in the NFL.

"The NFL is the granddaddy of 'em all. The NFL is the ultimate goal. That's where the best players are and that's where the players have been. It's where

the best players are gonna be."

UNLV Head Coach Jeff Horton was an assistant for the Rebels when Cooper was at the school, and also believes that Cooper would make a great addition to the NFL.

"He needs the right situation," admits Horton. "If someone puts (Hunkie) on his team, he can be effective as a receiver in the right kind of passing game. He is a guy that could turn a game around at any given time. He is

pound-for-pound one of the best I've ever been around."

Horton enjoys having Cooper on the scene at Rebel Park, saying his players could learn a lot from the school's third all-time single-season all-purpose rusher. "Hunkie knows he can jump in and talk to the guys whenever he wants. He is a great leader. He is the kind of guy I would want to have on my staff."

Cooper says he too is enjoying the time he is spending with the UNLV football players, as well as his time in Las Vegas and some quality time with three very special individuals.

"I'm always gonna be a big part of Las Vegas and always gonna reside here, and do things here in the UNLV program with football," stated Cooper. "There is good things happening for Hunkie Cooper besides football. He's settled, he's got a good girl in his life. He's a father, so there's life after football. Football is a part of my life but not all of my life."

Seven year-old Dirik and eight year-old Nigel are his two

sons and the love in his life for close to four years now has been Tiffany Crockett.

Although Cooper has reached the pinnacle that all professional players dream of - an MVP trophy and a championship - the two-time all-Big West Conference selection says that he won't be completely satisfied without a better shot at the NFL.

"It's something that I've tried harder and harder every time I went for it. It's an honor for some people to even say they've been there, but I don't think it would sit well with me, not playing and being effective there (since) I think I can. I'm gonna dedicate my spring training and my life to (the NFL) one more time, but if it proves to be unsuccessful, I'll go back to the Arena where I've become sort of an ambassador. I'll be satisfied with my professional career as an arena player not an NFL player."

Cooper was picked up by the New Orleans Saints and participated in their preseason camp. Cooper believes he was let go because of his physical attributes. (See Cooper, Page 22)

Rebels Get Week Off From Big West Action



Defensive backs Jason Davis and Marvin Robinson close in on La. Tech running back John Cooper. Coach Horton has stressed that his defense must stop the run.

W.G. Ramirez

After three straight thrilling victories, the UNLV "Throwin" Rebels will get a break from conference play this week, as they prepare for independent Tulsa on Saturday in Oklahoma.

UNLV (4-2, 3-0 in Big West action) completed the first half of their conference schedule last Saturday with a last-minute victory over Louisiana Tech 24-20.

Rebel quarterback Jason Davis nailed All-American candidate Randy Gatewood with an 11-yard TD pass with :33 seconds remaining to keep UNLV's conference record unblemished.

"We had to fight and scratch for every yard we got," said Head Coach Jeff Horton, following the victory. "It didn't look good there for a while late, but the kids believed in the 'no dogs down'

theory and they came back and made big plays when we needed to.

In a sense, the fourth-quarter heroics have been a blessing in disguise according to Horton, as each win carries emotion over to the next game.

"The kids believe now whenever they're behind they can still come back and win no matter how much time is left or what the score is.

"Once you get that confidence like that, it becomes easier and easier to come back on people, because you really believe in it," added Horton.

At practice this past week, Horton says things had gotten off to a slow start, but did say that the Rebels would be ready for the Golden Hurricane by kickoff.

"I look at myself," said Horton, Wednesday at Rebel Park, "and if I'm dragging then I know the players are dragging. Com-

ing off three emotional and physical games is tough. Monday was slower than usual, Tuesday was better but today was good."

Horton says his main concern right now is to straighten out his kicking game. His specialty teams unit was called for nine penalties for 75 yards last Saturday, and he isn't pleased at all. He also believes his offense needs to execute better, saying that they "need to take advantage of the opportunities (they're) getting."

Tulsa (1-4) brings a four-game losing streak into Saturday's game, not to mention a sophomore tailback named Solomon White that could do damage to the Rebels' troubled defensive rushing game.

"The last three games, they've risen to the occasion, but the defense has to stop the run," says Horton.

UNLV is last in the Big West

in rushing defense, allowing 1,539 yards in six games for an average of 256.5 ypg. In five games this season, White is averaging close to 91 ypg., while Tulsa is averaging close to 120 ypg.

Horton knows that a win in Tulsa could bring a bit of early recognition to UNLV, not to mention a lot more confidence to his team.

"It's important to get the rec-

ognition against a team like Tulsa. We're on the bubble during a crucial part of the season."

Gatewood also believes that this is a crucial game, saying a win could benefit the Rebels for the San Jose State game on October 29.

"We're gonna try to use this game (against Tulsa) to build on for our following conference (See Rebels, Page 22)

"It's Gotta Be The Shoes..." (UNLV trainer Kyle Wilson)

As the Rebels have continued to be fortunate in the injury department, trainer Kyle Wilson is screaming, "It's gotta be the shoes!"

The UNLV trainers have tried to eliminate footwear that is more apt to create injuries for football players, and it seems to be working quite well.

"The biggest thing we've done to try and avoid injuries is with the shoes," says Wilson. "The majority of our players have been put into grass cleats, rather than screw-on cleats. Screw-on cleats dig in and if the player gets hit, something is gonna give. Either an ankle, a knee or even a hip."

It's not as easy as it sounds though, just switching up shoes.

For instance, when the Rebels arrive in Tulsa, Oklahoma for Saturday's matchup with the Golden Hurricane, Wilson and his assistants will check the turf at Skelly Stadium for a number of things.

"This week, we will bring an astro-turf shoe and also a basketball-style shoe," says Wilson. "If it's new turf, they'll wear the basketball-style shoe. If it's older turf or it's raining, they'll wear the astro-turf shoe. As turf ages, it gets slipperier, just as if it were raining."

Wilson admits that the Rebels have been extremely fortunate to have

played their road games on natural grass, but also says it is unusual to be this healthy this far into the season. "Some years you have a lot (of injuries), this year we just lucked out.

"We've added more flexibility work and stretching during strength and conditioning," added Wilson.

According to Wilson and equipment manager Paul Pucciarelli, the Rebels bring 5,000 lbs. of equipment with them to each game. Whether the game is on the road or at Sam Boyd Stadium, a 24-foot truck is needed to haul UNLV football to its destination.

"Every week is an away week for the equipment managers and the trainers," says Pucciarelli. "Home games are just shorter."

And how much of the equipment is shoes? Each player is provided with one pair of practice shoes, while the equipment managers administer one pair of grass shoes and two pair of artificial turf shoes - wet and dry.

After determining what kind of shape the field is in, for each game, Wilson decides which shoes will be worn.

- Willie Ramirez

BEAT THE HEAT... BEAT HIGH PRICES!



PHIL'S SALVAGE
BUILDER'S EMPORIUM
1131 So. Main 382-7528