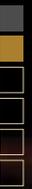


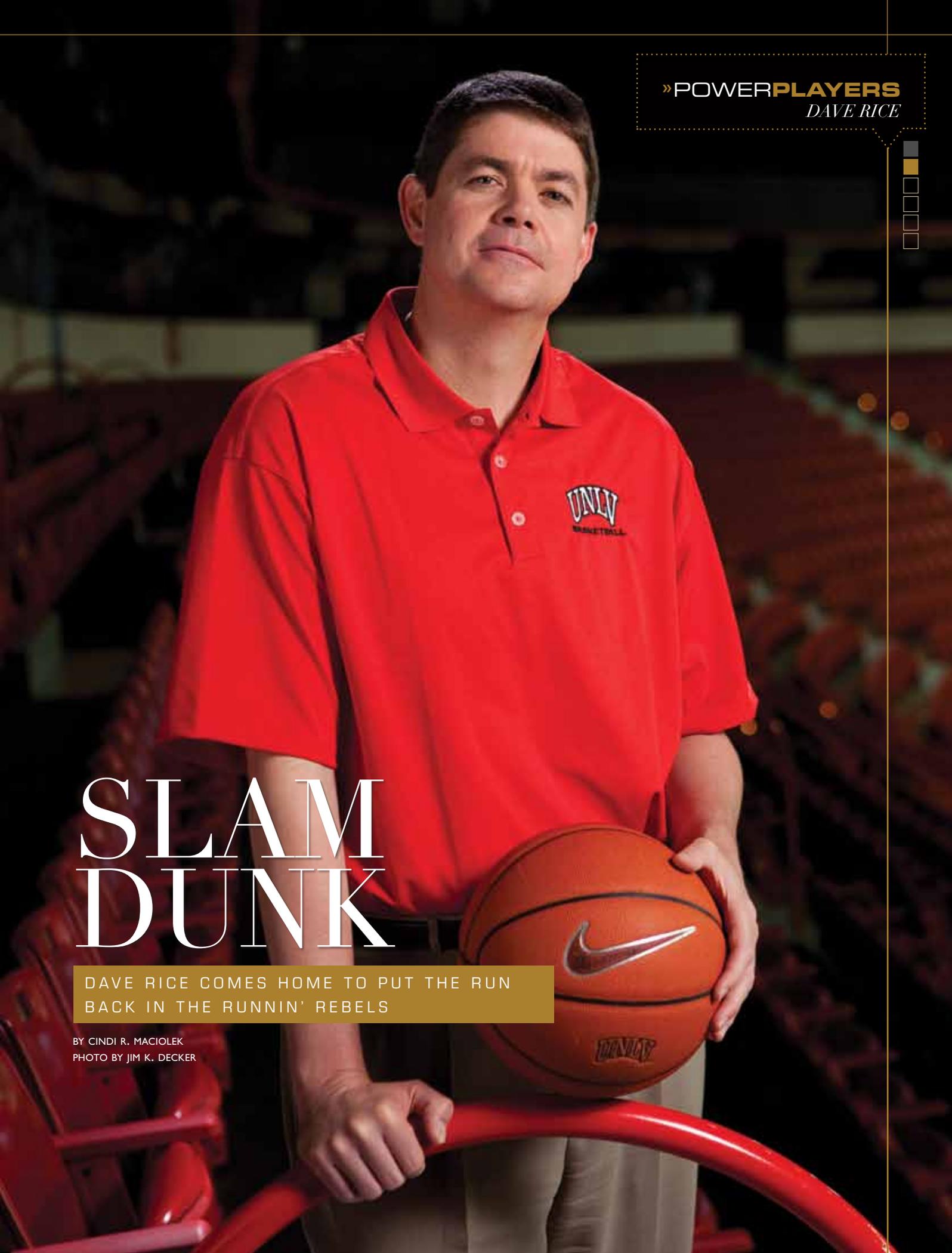
» POWERPLAYERS
DAVE RICE



SLAM DUNK

DAVE RICE COMES HOME TO PUT THE RUN
BACK IN THE RUNNIN' REBELS

BY CINDI R. MACIOLEK
PHOTO BY JIM K. DECKER





The first former player to become head coach of the UNLV program, Rice played for two seasons (1989-91) at UNLV as a reserve guard on two of legendary coach Jerry Tarkanian's Final Four teams.

When UNLV's men's basketball team began its search for a new head coach this past spring, one familiar name kept popping up: local fan favorite, Dave Rice. Since 1989, Rice has spent all but seven years in Las Vegas as part of the Runnin' Rebels organization. In addition to playing on the 1990 national championship team, Rice was an instrumental member of the coaching staff for 11 years. With a successful stint at that state to the north for the last few seasons, Rice is now happy to be back home and in charge of the team he loves.

Rice actually grew up in Southern California, but made his way to Las Vegas when it was time to select where he would play basketball at the collegiate level. Upon graduating from high school, his options were

many, but he opted for UNLV when Coach Jerry Tarkanian convinced him it was the place to be.

"When I was a kid, I wanted to play sports forever, and I was lucky enough to come to UNLV on a scholarship and play for Coach Tark," said Rice. "I had the opportunity to go to other schools and people asked me why I chose UNLV. I felt the program under Coach Tark had a legitimate chance to win a championship, which is an incredible experience. In actuality, we were part of two Final Four teams and we did win that national championship."

Although Rice loved to play basketball, he didn't consider himself a top pick. "I recognized I wasn't a star player in high school. I was a role player. That experience

has helped me as a coach to understand how to build a good team by balancing the stars with the supporting players."

You might think it's all about basketball when it comes to Rice, but there's really more than meets the eye. Education was very important in the Rice family -- his dad was a high school history and government teacher, and his mom was an English teacher, then an elementary school principal. And not only was Rice a Rhodes scholar candidate, but he earned both his bachelor (Political Science) and masters degrees at UNLV.

"I originally planned to go to law school. However, before I could finish the LSATs, Coach Tark gave me an opening on his staff. He saw something in me that I didn't see in myself. My dad was also a high school basketball coach but I had never considered that as a career," Rice revealed. "When I started coaching I wasn't sure if I wanted to do it for a living, so the first year, I also began my MBA which I completed, but I did fall in love with coaching. I've always loved to compete but the opportunity that I could make a difference in other people's lives as a coach was really important to me. I had an unbelievable experience as a player, and I wanted to give that sort of experience to others."

But it's not just the players he plans to give an unbelievable experience to, he knows fans also have high expectations for the team with his arrival. "It is great to be back and we do sense the buzz. It's great for our players. We have a lot of work to do. Hiring Stacey Augmon as an assistant coach is a huge deal. He really complements the rest of our staff. Protecting our home base is a priority. Local recruiting has basically been zero yet there are so many good high school players in town right now. We want to encourage the high quality players to stay here in Las Vegas and join the team.

"UNLV has a really good program with a great tradition. Coach Kruger left everything in a good place, and we have 11 returning scholarship players. You won't find a better prepared or harder playing team.

"We're recruiting really hard right now. I definitely want to put the run back in Runnin' Rebels. The style of play is the most important factor. I want that mindset -- play fast, push the ball, play really exciting basketball. Our philosophy is based on consistency. We want to be the hardest practicing team in the country. Our only goal is trying to win our



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next game. If we have that goal in the short term and we do win, if we do that enough times, really special things can happen at the end of the year.

"The last six years at BYU were great, and the rivalry that developed between BYU and UNLV was interesting, but it's good to be back in Las Vegas," said Rice of his home base. "My wife is a UNLV grad, both sets of parents live in Las Vegas, my brother coaches at Bishop Gorman and my wife's brother lives here, too."

Coach Kruger left Rice a surprise in his office: a basketball that commemorates the 2007 MountainWest Conference championship that UNLV won against BYU. "I have so much respect for Coach Kruger. Over the years, it became a great competition between UNLV and BYU, which was very interesting for me. I've had numerous conversations with Coach Kruger since I started. He also invited me to co-host the Coaches vs. Cancer event. It's been his project and I really appreciate his sharing the hosting duties with me."

It's not all basketball all the time with Rice. Golf is another one of his passions. "I'm very competitive. If it's a particularly busy season, my handicap in April is a 12, but by August it can be a four or a five."

He and his wife, Mindy, are also busy raising two sons, a sports-loving 14-year-old and a free spirited eight-year-old. "Just to prove how committed I am to our marriage, our wedding was on October 19 and official practice usually begins around October 15. We've grown up in the game together. Our oldest son was born on October 14, 1997 and

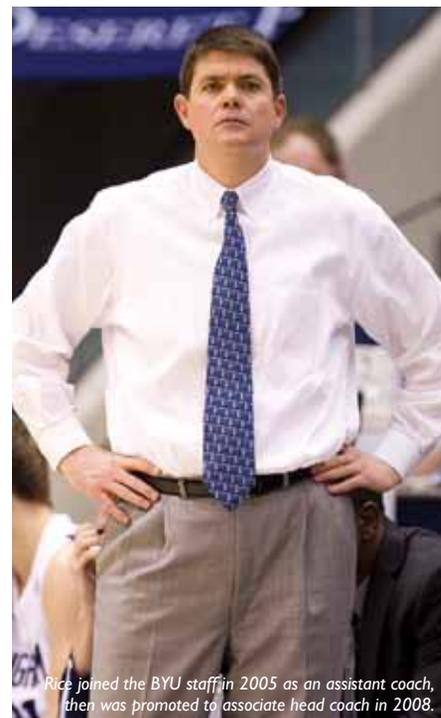
November 1 we had our first exhibition game and he was there. He loves sports and loves playing basketball and baseball and is similar to me in personality.

"Our younger son is a lot different, but loves life and enjoys being eight years old. He's not that sure about sports whereas our older son is focused on it already. It's funny how you can raise your kids the same way and how different they both are."

Rice is also very civic minded, and if he's not watching sports on television, he's keeping his eye on politics. "I watch a lot of different channels. I'm not discriminating in terms of taste for political shows. I always loved history and political science. When we went on vacation, I enjoyed going to historical and art museums.

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Even though you might think a winning season or even playing with NBA players would be tops for this coach, that's not necessarily the case. "There's so much our program can do. I've been lucky to have played or coached with 14 guys that played in the NBA, but the most special day to me has always been commencement. It's really meaningful. Sometimes the player is the first person in his family to graduate. When they go back and give to their communities, it perpetuates itself. It's powerful and life changing," Rice offered.



In addition to getting his players to graduation day, Rice is also trying to instill the idea of community service in them. "They should know how blessed they are with the opportunities they've been given and to recognize we all have a way to make a difference. My wife and I talk about it all the time. I won't be here if I don't win games. I know that. I want to be head coach for a long time but my whole identity is not wrapped up with that. It's really so much more."

Follow the Runnin' Rebels at www.unlvrebels.com/sports/m-baskbl/unlv-m-baskbl-body.html.