

The Ultimate Guide to

ABQ Sports

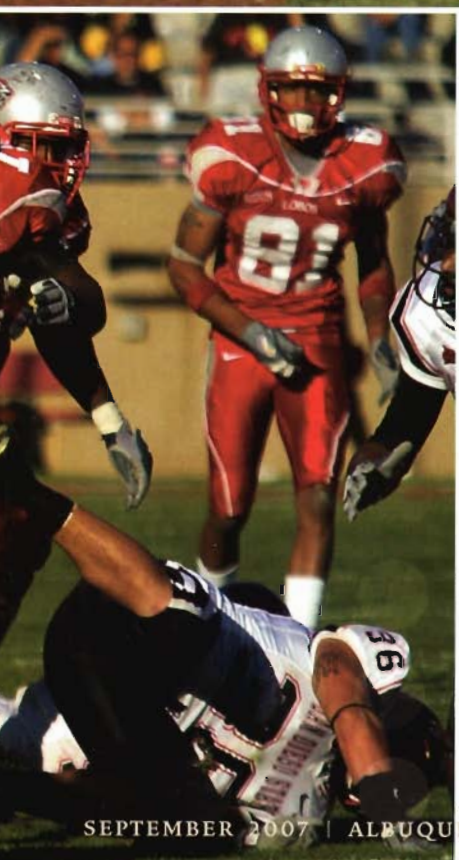
Your playbook with everything
you ever needed to know about
Albuquerque's wide world of sports

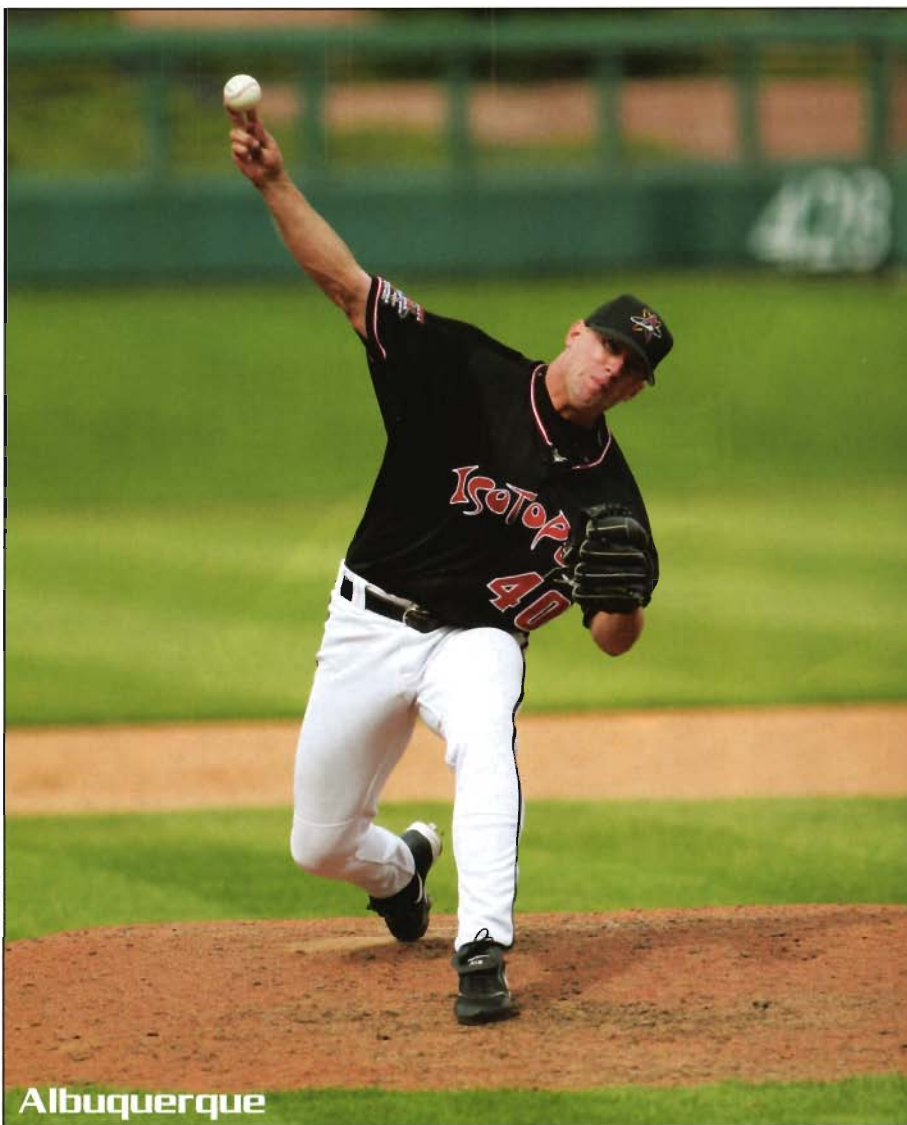
By Sonya Ewan

Courtesy Kim Lew Photography



Courtesy UNM Sports Information





Courtesy Kim Jew Photography

Isotopes

"Hey, batta batta batta, swing!" Isotopes catcher Paul Hoover hears as he hunches behind the batter, sending hand signals to the pitcher.

Ever knocked out a few squats in the gym? Hoover does about a hundred per game, but he hardly breaks a sweat. "Once you get used to it, it's just like walking," he says. "I can't stand for long periods of time but I can get down in a squat and sit there for a while."

Hoover says the spring winds that make challenging to predict which wall that homerun ball will fly over are just part of the game. "It doesn't matter where you play," he says.

"Early in the season, the weather's going to be cold, windy or raining. I played in Edmonton and we got hailed out in June!" Quick to praise Albuquerque and the Isotopes, he says, "The stadium is unbelievable, and the way John Traub and Ken Young treat the players is second-to-none. The fan support is outstanding." Recovering from knee surgery in May, Hoover should be back in the 'Topes lineup this month.

The Players

Average Player Salary: Hoover says the range is crazy. "Six-year free agents who have been around and

done big-league time—that's when you can make a little bit of money. New Orleans has a lot of older guys, so I'm sure their salaries are pretty high—from a \$300,000 high in Triple-A New Orleans to guys coming up through the organization over five months making \$15,000." That's for 144 games in a season.

Where They Come From and Where They Go: Remember catcher Paul Lo Duca, who played for the Dukes in the late 1990s? He now plays for the New York Mets with a listed salary of \$6,600,832. Recent 'Tope Jason Wood is with the Marlins. Hoover himself made it to the top with Tampa in 2001 and 2002 and Florida in 2005.

The Stats

Season: April through September

Price Tag: Club Level single game tickets: \$5 to \$22. Luxury suites: \$37,500 for a single season, but the minimum lease is three years. Right now, there's a waiting list 95 names long. In fact, 45 percent of the suites are currently leased for 10 years or more.

League: Pacific Coast, Triple-A

Affiliation: Florida Marlins

Manager: Dean Treanor

Team Owner: Ken Young

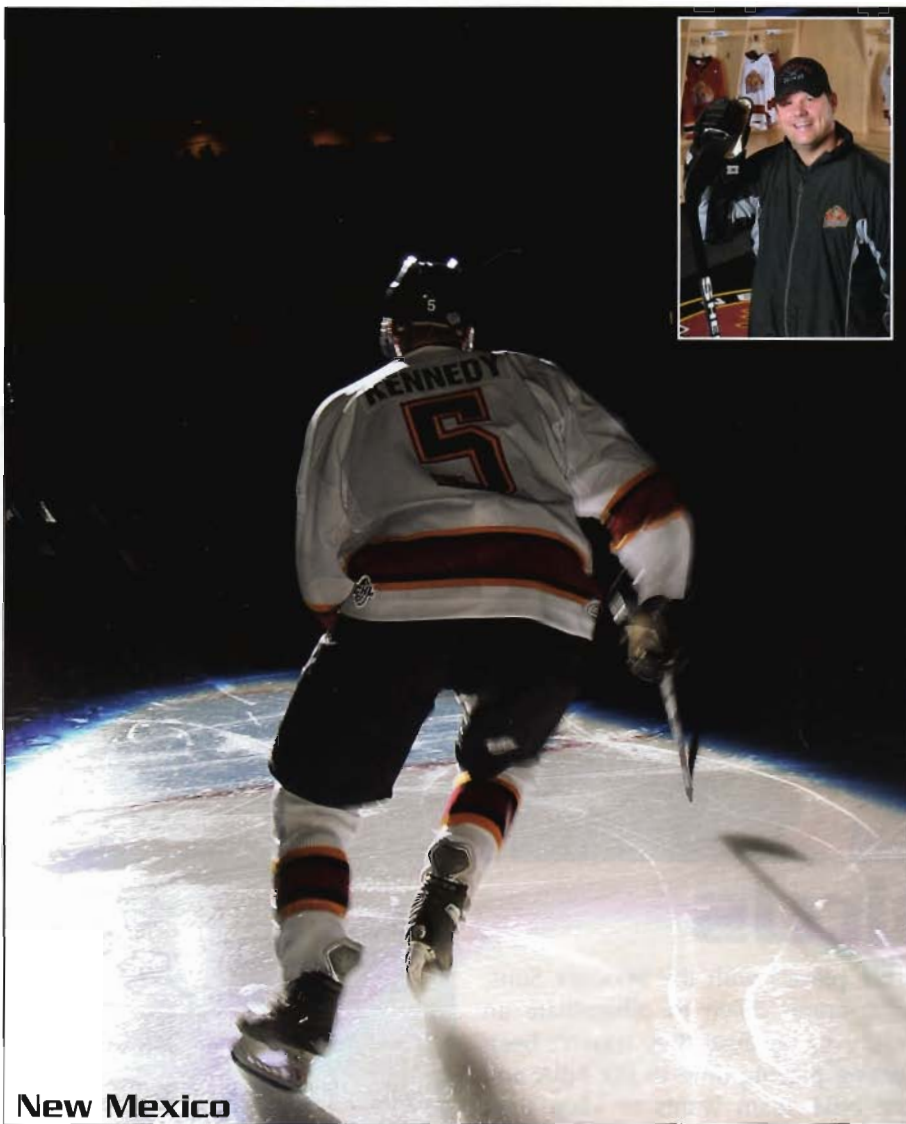
General Manager: John Traub

Venue: Isotopes Park, seats 11,000

Average Attendance: 8,304 in 2006

Best Seat, Hoover's Pick: "Right behind the plate, as close to the field as possible but behind the net so it's safe," says Hoover. "I make sure my wife and daughter are always behind the net."

Trivia: The Albuquerque Isotopes recently hosted the 2007 All-Star Game and events during the Sandia Resort Triple-A All-Star Fiesta. The game was broadcast nationwide on ESPN2.



New Mexico

Scorpions

In their first season at the new Santa Ana Star Center, the Scorpions started with ten rookies—more than any other team in the Central Hockey League. Head coach Ray Edwards explains, “We wanted to be young, to build a program, to go to some of these good universities and get kids from there so we could start to create a relationship.”

Edwards proved his method works when the Scorpions earned the Southwest Division Champion title. “I knew if we just continued to develop and teach, we’d be okay,” he says. “It wasn’t a surprise to us that we started getting better. The plan really came to

fruition as we got into the playoffs and were playing our best hockey.”

The Players

Average Player Salary: Edwards breaks it down: “Teams have a \$10,000 salary cap for 18 guys. That’s \$500 a week, but some make \$400 a week and some make \$800 per week plus bonuses. We also pay for housing, furniture and utilities.” 64 regular season games.

Where They Come From and Where They Go: Edwards explains, “We recruit from Major Junior. That’s where they get drafted from. Also from NCAA Division I hockey. The

ECHL tries to get our guys and we try to get theirs. We get the odd guy from Europe.” According to Edwards, several Scorpions have the potential to play up in the AHL. “I try to tell these guys, ‘I’m gonna teach you what real work and dedication is,’” he says. “If you want to be great in this game, only a small percentage make it and it’s the percentage who invest in their careers.”

Where Are They Now: Retired Scorpion and Rio Rancho resident Pete Ambroziak played 12 games for the Buffalo Sabres of the National Hockey League and several seasons in the AHL. Scorpions goaltender Scott Reid was called up for 13 games with the Milwaukee Admirals last season.

The Stats

Season: October through March (playoffs in April)

Price Tag: Single game tickets during the 2006/2007 season: \$10 to \$36. Luxury suites: \$30,000 for a single season with a minimum lease of three years. The suites are currently sold out.

League: Central Hockey, Double-A equivalent

American Hockey League (Triple-A) Affiliation, 2006/2007 season: Milwaukee Admirals

Venue: Santa Ana Star Center seats about 6,500 for hockey games

Average attendance: 3,217

Best Seat, Coach’s Pick: “That seat between the two benches—that’s the best!” Edwards says. “A lot of fans love the glass because they like to be right down there.”

Who’s Sitting in That Luxury Suite?: Scott Creagan, Graphic Connection custom sports apparel and a Lobo football player from 1988–1992, is the lucky occupant. “Hockey is the closest thing that I’ve found to football with the speed, hitting and overall excitement,” he says. “I go to all the football games and I like baseball and basketball too. I’m just a sports fan in general.”



Thunderbirds

It doesn't get much more exciting than buying a team and winning a championship the very first season. That's what happened for local attorney and minority owner of the Albuquerque Thunderbirds, Sam Bregman, in 2006.

Bregman, an ambassador for the young NBA Developmental League, says, "We're creating a new league and style of basketball for people who may not get the chance to see NBA basketball. They can see guys who

have played with the Phoenix Suns, who come down to rehabilitate an injury or because they haven't been getting playing time in the NBA and the NBA team wants to keep their skills sharp." The upshot? Experienced players, exciting games.

The Players

Average Player Salary: \$16,000 plus housing.

Where They Come From and Where They Go: "The developmental

league conducts a draft and players sign contracts," Bregman says. Some players get called up to the NBA and that's what we want. Our first year, we had [Chuck] Hayes. He's now a starter for the Houston Rockets."

The Stats

Season: November through April

Price Tag: Single game tickets: range from \$9 to \$25 for box seating, VIP seats: \$100.

NBA Affiliations: Phoenix Suns, Cleveland Cavaliers and Indiana Pacers

Head Coach: Former coach Michael Cooper returned to the WNBA; the T-birds just announced NBA alum and former Iona Jeff Ruland as his successor.

Venue: Tingley Coliseum

Average Attendance: 2,300

Big Name Fans: Maria Constantine, owner of Mykonos Café, first became interested in the T-Birds because of Greek player Andreas Glyniadakis. "Andreas happened to come to the restaurant when he joined the team; the team wanted to do Greek Night to celebrate his signing," she says. "But when he [left] to play for the Sonics, I stayed involved with the Thunderbirds because I'd met [majority owner] David Kahn and was impressed with his dedication and philosophy."

- DARING
- PROVOCATIVE
- SOPHISTICATED
- ORDINARY





Lobos Women's Basketball

Don Flanagan knows how to treat a lady. The coach of the UNM women's basketball team begins his 13th season this November with a unique coaching style. "My focus is more on the positive than most coaches. That's a part of my philosophy—you get better results from positive conversations with athletes."

After winning the 2007 Mountain West Conference championship, several key players have graduated, to be replaced by new, younger players. "You really have to focus on building a foundation for their future and for your team," Flanagan says. "So it

might take us a little bit longer, but we've had 12 years of success and I don't think we're going to fall on our face next year. I always try to tell fans, 'We'll be good. Just give us a little bit of time.' I think that's what I'll be saying this season."

The Players

Where Are They Now? "Jordan Adams was drafted by the WNBA. Chelsea Grear tried out but was a last cut. We have players come close, but not many go into the WNBA," Flanagan says. But former team members have also found success as

engineers, doctors, entrepreneurs, and businesspeople—"all successful," says Flanagan, "in the professional world."

Game Day: "I used to tell everybody, 'Your perception of women's basketball, if you've never seen it, is that girls can't play well. All I'm asking you to do is see one game,'" Flanagan says. "People came to see us and they were amazed at the skill, at the team concept where we got the ball to an open player—we didn't just have one star—and the fundamentals and how hard we play."

The Stats

Season: November through March

Price Tag: Single game tickets: \$8 to \$11 for non-UNM affiliated fans.

Conference: Mountain West (MWC)

Venue: The Pit is 41 years old with impending renovation.

Average Attendance: 10,355 in 2006

Best Seat, Coach's Pick: "When I first got here, Rudy Davalos [retired UNM Director of Athletics] and I sat down and I said, 'Look, women's basketball is going to get popular. We need to promote it. Let's keep the seats cheap.' So we sold the Lobo level for \$50 a year," Flanagan says. People who bought could continue getting tickets at that same price for a lifetime. "I had a lot of parents who jumped on those front row tickets. Those are pretty darn good seats!" he says. And a pretty darn good deal: the season tickets now run \$350 each.

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University of New Mexico

Lobos Men's Basketball

Forget about R&R. First-year head coach Steve Alford was so busy with three Bs during the summer—basketball, bonding and the Bahamas—that ATM couldn't catch him to get the lowdown on the upcoming season. In late May, Alford and the team traveled to the Caribbean to play against its teams and start building the chemistry that could help

the Lobo men reach new heights and a better away-game record.

But during his absence, Alford has indulged Albuquerque fans with his personal blog: The Alford Blog. Notable entries include, "It's never easy to leave one place and move to another, but the people here have made it as smooth as possible."

Also, "Just wanted to let you

know that CBS Sports is airing the 'GEICO Presents College Basketball's 10 Greatest Shooters' special on Final Four Saturday, March 31. I am thrilled to be honored among so many great names in the history of college basketball. Below is a partial list of the honorees and I'll let you decide who the best was." That list included the likes of Michael Jordan, Larry Bird, Allen Iverson, Reggie Miller—and Coach Alford.

The Players

Where They Come From and Where They Go: Former Lobo Danny Granger is with the Indiana Pacers; Kenny Thomas is with the Sacramento Kings; and, of course, retired Chicago Bull Luc Longley played for UNM before joining Michael Jordan.

Fun Fact: Speaking of Jordan, Alford himself won gold at the 1984 Olympics playing on a basketball team alongside Jordan and Patrick Ewing.

The Stats

Season: November through March

Price Tag: Single game tickets: \$9 (standing room only) to \$22 (for non-UNM affiliated fans).

Conference: Mountain West (MWC)

Average Attendance: 12,853 in 2006

- INDEPENDENT
- AUTHENTIC
- LEGENDARY
- CONFORMING



Courtesy Photo



the women's league is; it's number two in the world. There's a great opportunity here to see something that's different."



Lady Asylum

The Lady Asylum began the 2007 inaugural season *en fuego*, earning a 3-0 record to sit atop the Southwest Division after thrashing the Denver Diamonds, 2006 SW Conference champions. At the helm is retired Albuquerque firefighter of 21 years and head coach Peter Clinch. "We tried a year ago to get this off the ground but it fell through," he says. "But a couple of the players worked hard behind the scenes. The timing was right and they asked me if I'd come back to coach. I said yes. It's a big opportunity for all of us right now."

Hailing from England, Coach Clinch has been an Albuquerque fan for three decades. "I liked the city, the climate and the way of life, the open space—very different from where I'm from. I was a professional soccer player in England for ten years but I got injured and came here to rehab

and decided to make it my home."

The Players

Average Player Salary: Travel, airfare and hotel is all taken care of, but players go without cash due to NCAA rules. "Still, it takes about \$50,000 to have a team just for a short [nine-game] season," Clinch says.

Who To Watch: "Amy Warner is very special. There's not a guy around here who's faster than she is," Clinch says. "She's the best player in the city. That's not a put-down of anybody else, it's just that she has this gift of being fast. She broke all kinds of records playing at Notre Dame. Brittany Cooper went to ASU and moved back. She scored three goals in her first two games."

Game Day: "It's every bit as physical as the guys' game," Clinch says. "They play their hearts out. The community doesn't realize how big

The Stats

Season: May through July plus playoffs

Price Tag: Single game ticket: \$5

League: Women's Premier Soccer (WPSL)

Team Owner: Opal Stalls, House of Soccer

Venue: Menaul High School

Average Attendance: "Fifteen hundred fans the first game and an estimated 1,400 the second game, despite bad weather," Clinch says. "Word of mouth is getting around and anybody who's been out [to see us] is raving about the way the girls play."

TRIUMPH

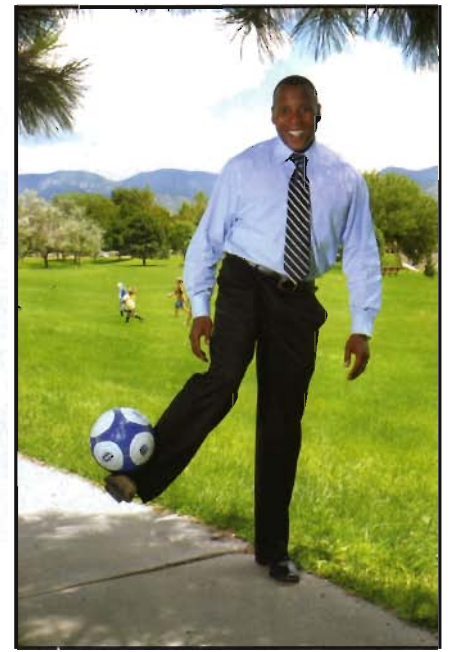
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Courtesy Photo



Asylum

Intensity is the name of the game for Asylum coach Dennis Genas. Hailing from England, Genas says, "There they train more, monitor diet and nutrition—things people take for granted here, not just at the level I'm coaching but in youth soccer as well. But the team that we have here—they're as close as it can get to being professional."

Genas is a big fan of Albuquerque weather. "I was coming over for a few years doing summer camps and then going back to England. I was working in Minnesota but the weather there was so bad in the winter," he says. "I was given a position here as a director of coaching for a youth club. Now I run my own club, Elite FC, teaching kids three to 18 years old."

Genas says he's proud of what

his players give to the community, and hopes the community will give the team a soccer arena in return. "A lot of these guys are kids who started playing soccer in Albuquerque and now they're giving back with coaching and playing here," he says. "We'd like to get to the point where we have a venue and a training facility that's ours—somewhere people can come to see a great game."

The Players

Who Are They? "Most of the guys on this team are full- or part-time coaches and that's their priority," Genas says. "Many are UNM players and players from other colleges who finish their commitments with their schools and then play for us in the summer."

The Stats

Season: May through July plus playoffs

Ticket Cost: Single game ticket: \$5

League: National Premier Soccer (NPSL)

Championships/Titles: 2006 Southwest Division champions

Venue: Menaul High School

Average Attendance: "We had a few thousand at every single game last year," he says. "The kids have a club night and turn up in their uniforms to give it that community atmosphere."

- FUNCTIONAL
- SPORTY
- IMPULSIVE
- COMPLICATED



Courtesy Leon Trujillo



had players who are 18 years old up to players who are 47," Moses says. The players' day jobs run the gamut. "We have a firefighter, I'm an office manager, someone works at Sandia," says Moses.

Game Day: "A lot of people say, 'I can't believe those are women out there,' because of the intensity with which we play," Moses says. "Especially teams like Dallas—they're three-time champions. There's no denying that they know what they're doing. They hit hard and they're big. We're not out there just to mess around."

Burn

On certain Saturdays in August through October, you can catch the bone-jarring, intense play of the New Mexico Burn women's professional football team, now in its third season. "The league says we're professional because we play by NFL rules. We play full-contact," explains Christy Moses, team CEO and quarterback for the Burn.

Moses explains that many of the players play simply because they can. "They weren't allowed to play and now they have an opportunity," she says. "They want to show young girls that women can do anything that men can do." Still, playing for the Burn has risks. "Women are more prone to knee injuries, so we've had our fair share. Each year, we get six or seven serious injuries."

In a game denied access to most of its players during their youth, it

takes time to develop a strong talent pool. "We should definitely be more competitive because we have those veterans who have been around," she says. "Being in the football industry, we get emails about girls playing in high school. It'll help the league if we can keep it together and continue. We'll have someone coming out of the system who knows about football."

The Players

Average Salary: "Each player receives a check for a dollar per game. None of them have ever cashed their checks, though," Moses says. "I loan players certain equipment and pay for travel and hotel rooms, but they have to raise \$600 for the team through sponsorship, ticket sales or advertising the program."

Average Age and Profession: "About 27 to 28 years old, but we've

The Stats

Season: August through October

Price Tag: Single game ticket: \$10 for adults, \$5 for kids. Season ticket: \$32.

League: Women's Professional Football (WPFL)

Head Coach: Dominic Juarez

Venue: Wilson and Milne Stadiums

Average Attendance: 600. "The league talks about how we have some of the biggest crowds," Moses says. "Our first year, we had a sold-out game at Menaul, which seats 1,000. Our first game last year, we had about 1,200."



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Lobos Football

The UNM Lobo football team draws more fans than any other sport in the city. "Football combines a lot of different aspects that people hold in esteem," says head coach Rocky Long. "It relates to the guy who works for an hourly wage. And just the thrill of watching people compete at a high level and intensity is entertaining to a lot of people."

A star quarterback for the Lobos from 1969 to 1971, Long says players today have a different experience than

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the one he had. "The coverage is so much more dramatic now than it used to be," he says. "People are allowed to express their opinions and athletes of today are under higher scrutiny than the athletes of my day. It was much more fun to be a college athlete when I played."

Entering his tenth season as head coach, Long appreciates the laid-back attitude of the community. "This always felt like home to me and my wife," Long says. "People here allow you to be yourself without making automatic judgments on what kind of person you are. That's the best thing about New Mexico—not just Albuquerque."

The Players

Where Do They Go From Here?

You're well aware that Brian Urlacher plays defense for the Chicago Bears, and Long says that at least seven active players in the NFL played for UNM. Three offensive linemen include Ryan Cook with the Minnesota Vikings, Claude Terrell with the St. Louis Rams and Terrance Pennington with the Buffalo Bills.

Fun Fact: "[Former Lobos kicker] Katie Hnida was the first female kicker in Division I," says Long. "At the high school level, there are a lot of girls playing throughout the country, but not college. Size and explosive power eventually gets them. When I coached little league football, the best player on our team was a girl."

The Stats

Season: September through November

Price Tag: Single game ticket: \$14, \$20, or \$27 for adults. UNM students get in for free.

Conference: Mountain West (MWC)

Venue: University Stadium

Average Attendance: 28,633 in 2006 (low compared to the 30,000-plus average of the past few seasons)

Best Seat, Coach's Pick: "A lot of football guys like to sit in the end zone because they can actually see the plays being formed," he says. "Everybody wants to be on the fifty-yard line and about halfway up, because you're over the team and you can see the game from end to end."