

Gaucha Playoff Run Ends at Colorado

SB Women Fall in NCAA 2nd Round

By Jason Masini
Staff Writer

After starting the season with six straight losses, the possibility of the UCSB women's basketball team reaching the second round of the NCAA Tournament seemed remote. But on March 20, Santa Barbara found itself there.

After winning the Big West Conference Tournament and defeating BYU in the first round of the NCAA tourney earlier this month, the Gauchos flew to Boulder to take on #10 Colorado. They ran into a wall in the Lady Buffs and saw their dream run end, falling 81-54. UCSB finished the season at 19-12.

Colorado, the fourth seed in the West Region, used its intense man-to-man defense and its 9,531 fans to stymie the Gaucha offense and force UCSB into 28 turnovers, which Colorado turned into 31 points.

"We had a heck of a time getting into our offense," UCSB Head Coach Mark French said. "They made things very, very difficult for us. They play as good a man defense as anyone we've seen all year, and that's a credit to them and their coaching staff."

After the Gauchos tied the score at 8-8, Colorado's Shelley Sheetz connected on two of her five three-pointers on the night, giving the Lady Buffs a lead that they would not relinquish for the rest of the night.

UCSB senior center Becky Brown

picked up her third foul with 7:46 left in the first half and sat down until after the intermission, and Colorado proceeded to continue on its 20-8 run that ended on two Abby Wirfs free throws that made the score 28-16.

Santa Barbara cut the lead to 28-20 on a Christa Gannon putback, but the Lady Buffs allowed UCSB to get no closer and extended their lead to 38-24 at the half. By halftime, Brown and senior point guard Cori Close had combined for only two points for UCSB.

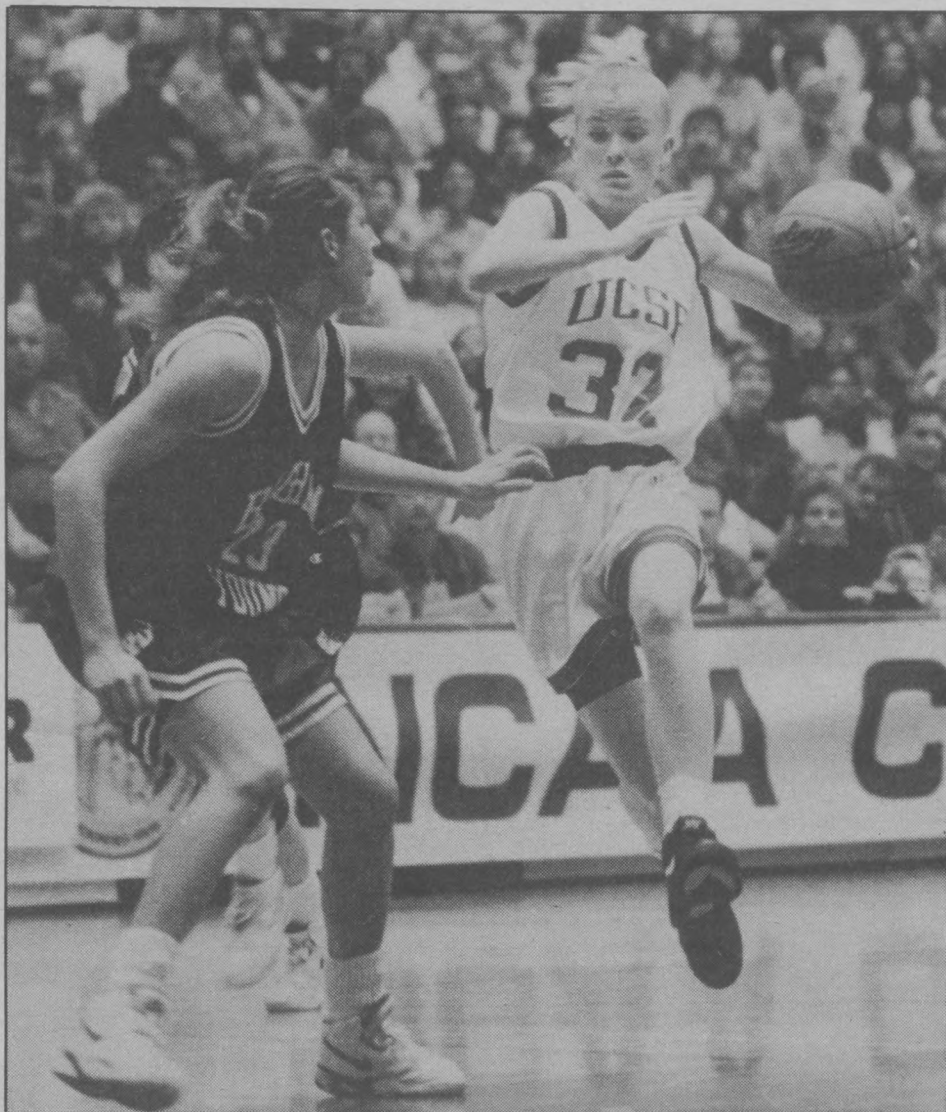
"As a team that's the best defense we've played against," said Close, who finished the final game of her career with 10 points, seven assists and eight turnovers. "It wasn't just one person. If I beat one person, there was a lot of great help out there."

"I think our young people will learn a lot from the way Colorado played defense," Close added. "It will be a different Santa Barbara team next year as a result of the way Colorado played."

CU's Mindy Henry (15 points, six rebounds) started the second half with a layup before Brown and Close hit baskets to bring UCSB to within 40-28, but Brown picked up her fourth foul with 18:33 to go and had to sit down again.

Colorado extended its lead to 52-36 on an Amy Mathern drive which was followed by Brown's fouling out with 12:01 left. But UCSB wasn't quite done, with a jumper by Close the Gauchos were back to within 12 at 54-42.

However, all hopes of a UCSB comeback were dashed when Sheetz immediately drained a pair of three-pointers. The Lady Buffs never looked back, outscoring the Gauchos 21-10 to finish out the game. The win sent Colorado to its first-ever Sweet-16 berth.



GERRY MELENDEZ/Daily Nexus

SHE'S GOT HOPS: Anna McConnell gets airborne as she drives to the lane during the Gauchos' 88-79 win over BYU in the first round of the NCAA Tournament.

UCSB Squads Take Different Paths in Big West Tournament

Women Go Through Hawaii, UNLV to Take Championship

By Jason Masini
Staff Writer

Entering the Big West Tournament as the third seed and taking on arch-rival Long Beach State in the first round was just what the UCSB women's basketball team needed to get back on track after finishing the regular season with a 68-64 loss to Cal State Fullerton.

The Gauchos routed LBSU 74-46 on March 10, and the squad took that momentum and turned it into a second consecu-



GERRY MELENDEZ/Daily Nexus

THE THRILL OF VICTORY: Dio Aguinaldo celebrates with Tournament MVP Cori Close after the title-clinching win over Hawaii.

Men Can't Put Away NMSU, Lose in 2nd Round at Long Beach

By Scott McPherson
Staff Writer

The UCSB men's basketball team entered the March 12-15 Big West Conference Tournament at Long Beach as the only team in the league to have never gone to the conference finals. Because of a brief 10-minute span in the Gauchos' second round contest against New Mexico State, UCSB is still the only Big West team to have never advanced to the title game.

After leading by as many as 13 points in the second half, the Gauchos couldn't put the Aggies

away, and NMSU outscored UCSB 12-6 over the final three minutes to pull out a 82-77 win at the Long Beach Sports Arena.

The sixth-seeded Gauchos had won the right to play top-seeded New Mexico State by downing Pacific 57-54 the day before.

The Gauchos appeared to be on the way to scoring an upset over NMSU, the regular season champion of the Big West. Guard Idris Jones set the tone of the game by scoring UCSB's first points on a three-pointer two minutes into the first half. Paul Johnson added another trey 30 seconds later, one of seven three-pointers the Gauchos collected before halftime on nine attempts.

"They were shooting those

See MEN, p.3A



GERRY MELENDEZ/Daily Nexus

UNDER PRESSURE: Gaucha point guard Ray Kelly (center) is clearly fouled as he tries to elude a pair of Pepperdine defenders.

Season Ends With 'Stinker' in NIT

Gaucha Offense Can't Be Found in 53-50 Loss to Pepperdine at SB

By Scott McPherson
Staff Writer

After one of its most lackluster offensive games of the season, the UCSB men's basketball team quietly bowed out of the postseason by losing 53-50 to Pepperdine in a first round National Invitational Tournament game at the Thunderdome on March 19.

The Gauchos received the bid to the NIT after advancing to the semifinals of the Big West Tournament earlier this month, defeating Pacific in the first round of the conference tourney before falling in the second to New Mexico State.

The Waves of Pepperdine (23-7) were able to grab a lead late in the first half of the defensive battle, going up by as many as eight points before settling for a 6-point halftime edge. Although neither team shot well from the floor in the game,

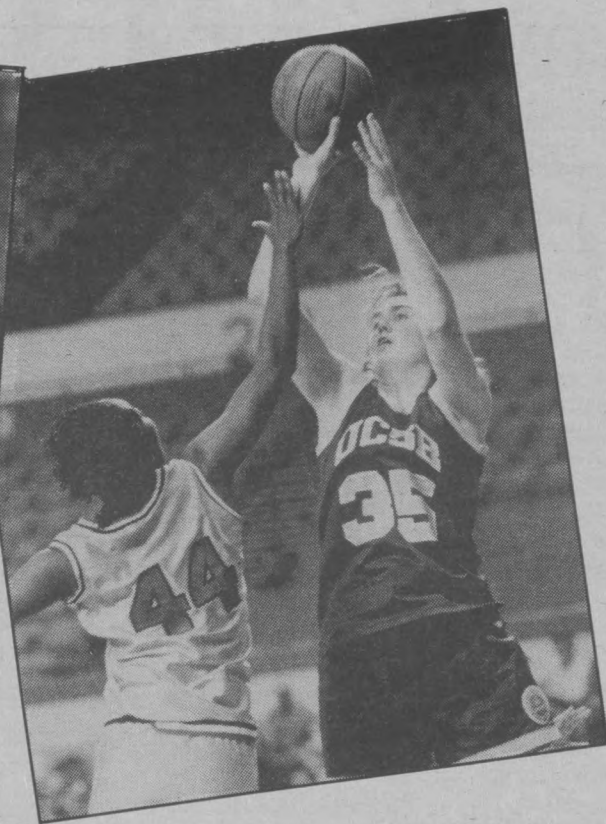
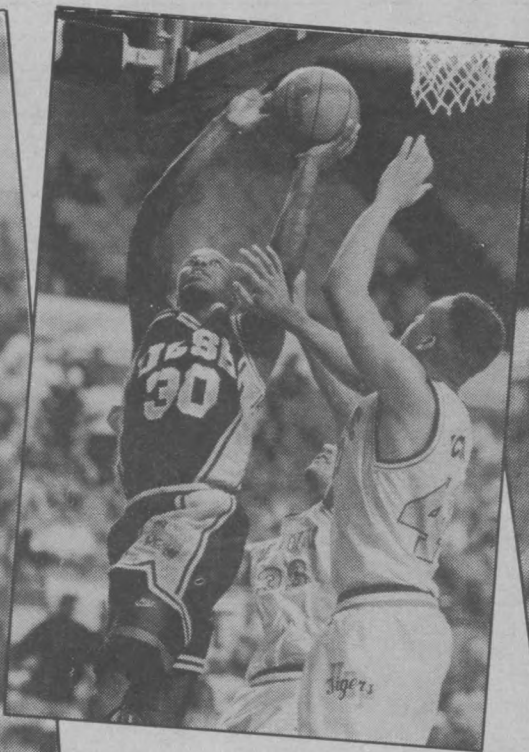
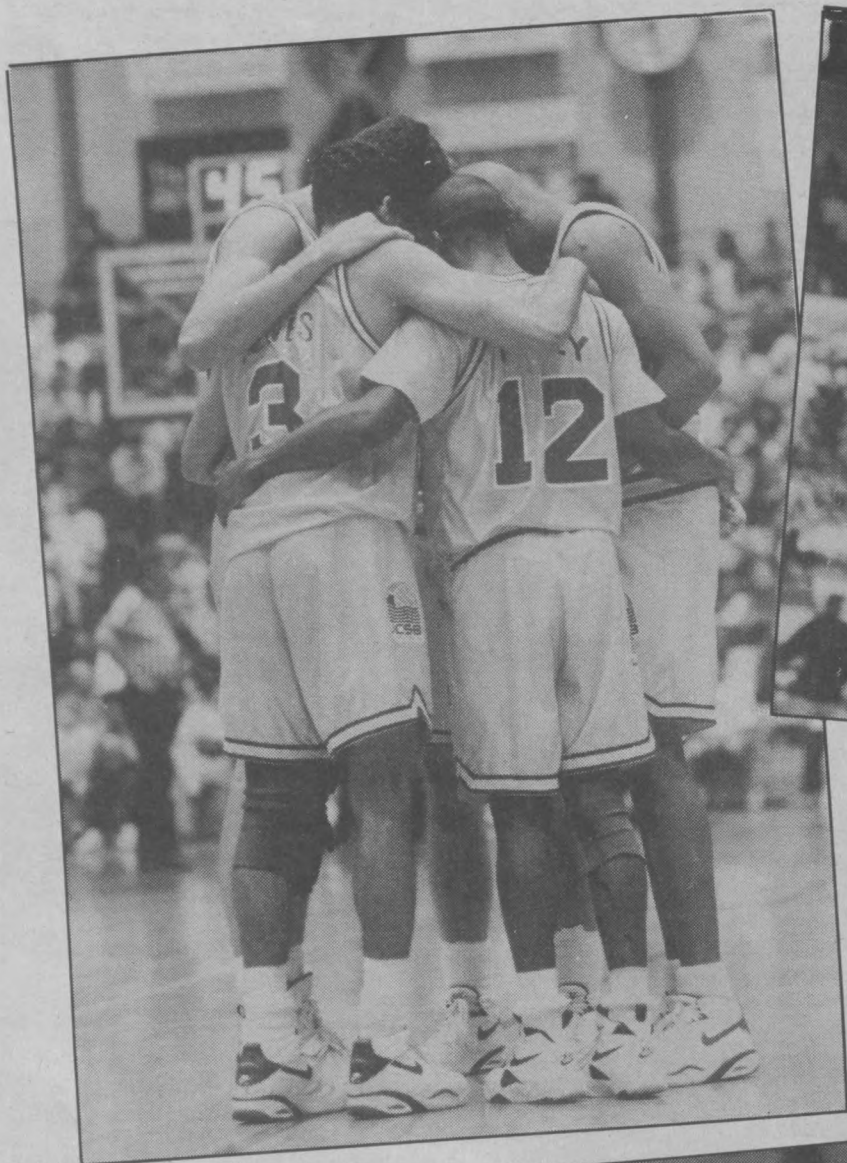
the Gauchos' poor 37% shooting accuracy on the night sent Pepperdine to the second round of the NIT while UCSB (18-11) packed it in for the year.

"We didn't want to end on a stinker like this," said Gaucha Head Coach Jerry Pimm, who concluded his 10th season as the UCSB skipper. "If you end up getting beat by getting beat, that's different — but I thought we helped an awful lot with our execution tonight."

Pimm's squad did indeed help the Waves, as the Gauchos coughed up 16 turnovers and allowed Pepperdine to grab 15 offensive rebounds, many of which were put back in for easy scores. On the night, Pepperdine outrebounded UCSB 34-31.

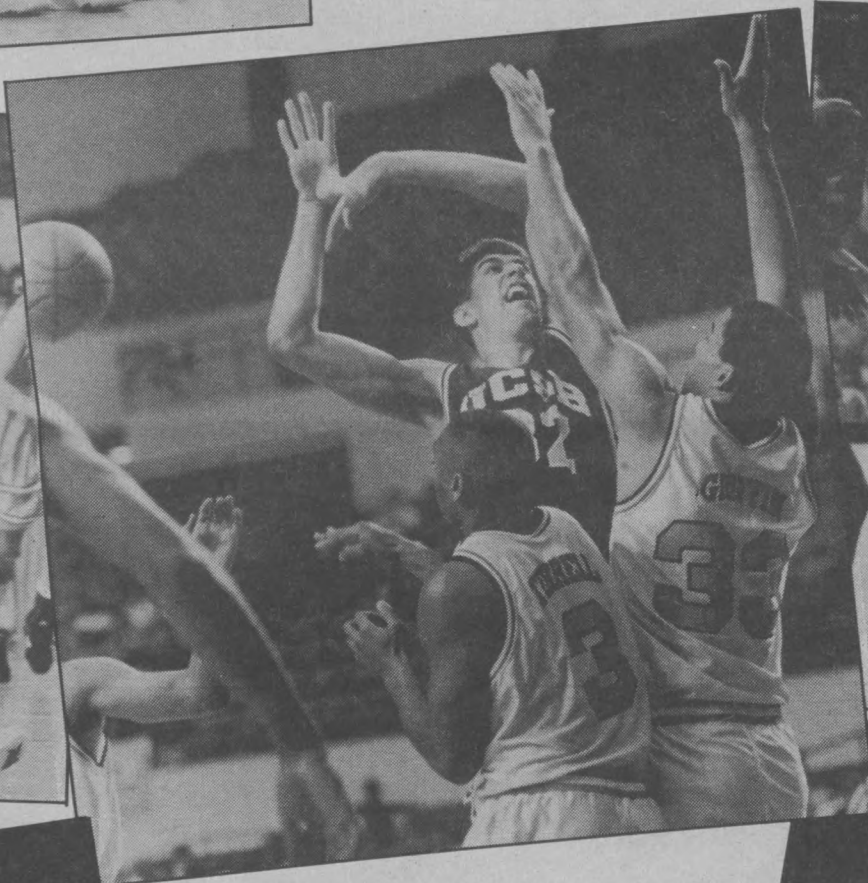
While the Gaucha defense was having problems blocking out, the offense had very little going for it. UCSB was only able to hit 18 shots from the field, and reserve forward Duane Carter was the only Gaucha to score in double figures, tallying 10 points.

See NIT, p.3A

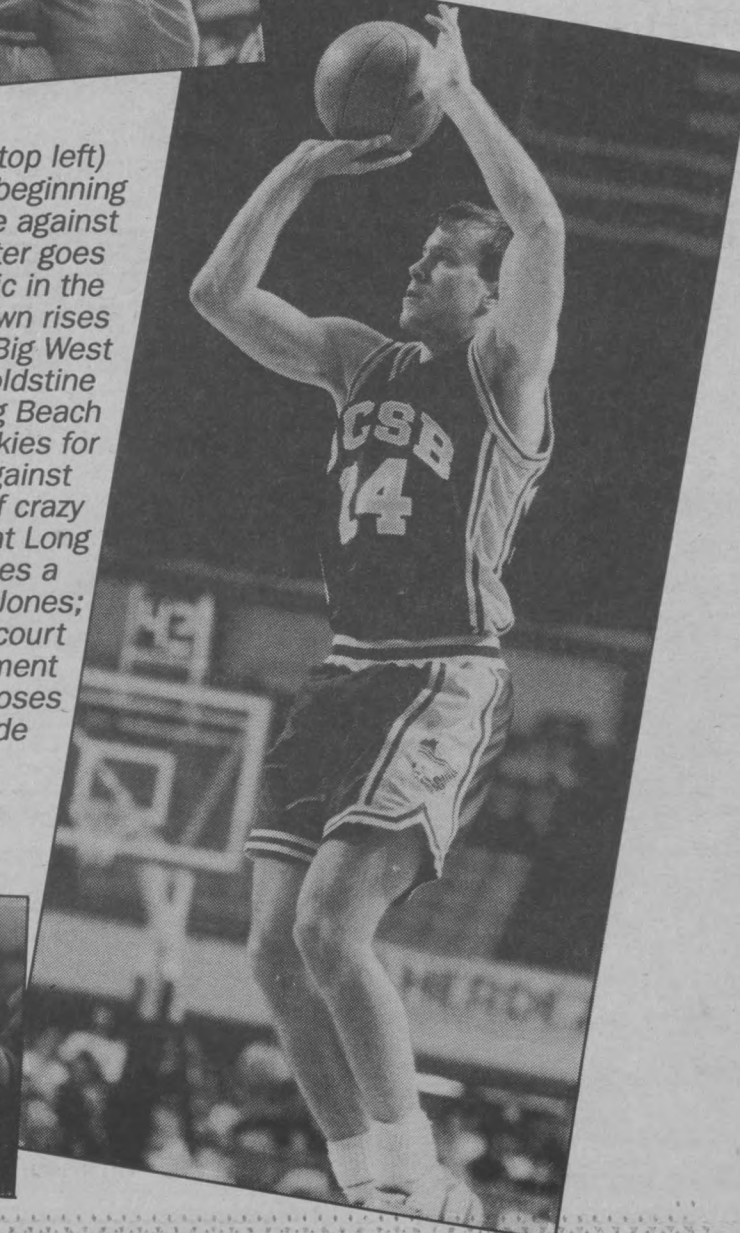


GAUCHO POSTSEASON BASKETBALL

Photos by Gerry Melendez



GAME ACTION: (clockwise from top left) Gauchos players huddle up before beginning the second half of their NIT game against Pepperdine; Forward Duane Carter goes strong to the hoop against Pacific in the Big West Tournament; Becky Brown rises above a Hawaii defender in the Big West Championship game; Lauren Goldstine looks for the basket at the Long Beach Sports Arena; Michael Meyer skies for one of his three 3-pointers against New Mexico State; A couple of crazy Gauchos fans enjoy the scene at Long Beach; Paul Johnson launches a shot over Pepperdine's Dana Jones; Cori Close brings the ball upcourt during the Gauchos' tournament win over UNLV; Doug Muse loses the ball while battling inside against Pacific.



WOMEN

Continued from p.1A
tive Big West Championship, defeating #20 UNLV in the semifinals, 62-58, and #19 Hawaii in the title game, 80-77.

In the NCAA Tournament, UCSB defeated BYU 88-79 at home on March 17 to advance to the second round, in which the Gauchos were blown out 81-54 by Colorado on March 20.

Big West Tournament MVP Cori Close led the way for the Gauchos in the postseason. The UCSB senior point guard saved her best for last, as she averaged 16.3 points, 10.0 assists and 4.7 steals per game in the conference tourney and may have nailed the shot of her career in the late stages of the title game.

After leading for most of the night, UCSB found itself trailing Hawaii 77-73 with 1:39 remaining, and the Gauchos were looking for something to get them back into the game. Close came down the floor and calmly buried a three-point basket from the top of the circle to narrow the Hawaii lead to one point.

Christa Gannon then made one of two free throws and tied the game at 77-77 with 1:00 to go.

After a critical Wahine turnover, Close was fouled and made her first free throw but missed her second. UCSB freshman Amy Hughlett came down with the rebound of her young career and got the ball to Close, who was fouled again. Close connected on both free throws with 11



MEDIA DARLINGS: UCSB players (from left) Becky Brown, Cori Close and Anna McConnell enjoy a postgame press conference after defeating UNLV 86-79.

seconds remaining to put UCSB up 80-77.

Hawaii was unable to score in the closing seconds, and the Gauchos came away with their second consecutive Big West Tournament championship.

"This year's title is so special because with eight newcomers, who would have thought we would be Big West Champions? We did, in here," said Close pointing to her heart. "This one is very, very sweet and it's a great credit to the program."

Close finished the game with 23 points and a tournament record 15 assists, and UCSB freshman Lauren Goldstine finished with 16 points, 12 of them coming in a 3:40 span in the second half.

"Personally, I felt a lot more pressure coaching last year's team," said Head Coach Mark French,

who led the squad to a 27-5 mark in 1992. "That was five years of building a program, of having the school work at establishing the program. This year, I enjoyed it more. We've had a lot of ups and downs this year and it is a great credit to our kids the way we ended up."

Gannon, who scored 11 points and pulled down seven rebounds in the title game, was named to the All-Tournament Team.

To get to the championship game Santa Barbara had to go through UNLV, a team that defeated the Gauchos in both regular season contests, including a heartbreaking 86-79 UCSB loss in overtime at the Events Center two weeks earlier.

With 13:02 remaining and the Gauchos trailing 41-31, it looked as if UCSB would drop a third to the Lady Rebels. But the

Gauchos put together a late rally and eventually tied the game at 54-54 with 3:12 to go.

Brown then followed in her own miss and Close hit a driving layup with 1:38 to go to complete a 10-0 Santa Barbara run. Close then added four free throws down the stretch to preserve the 62-58 win.

In the first round of its second-ever NCAA Tournament appearance, UCSB took on a 24-4 BYU team that had won the WAC title and was looking to advance to Colorado. The Gauchos held off a late rally to take home the 88-79 victory.

Once again, it was Close who led UCSB with 21 points and eight assists, while Anna McConnell was unstoppable from the outside, hitting for 19 points on 8-13 shooting from the field. Goldstine added 15 points.

MEN

Continued from p.1A
things with hands in their faces," NMSU Head Coach Neil McCarthy said. "I think they earned most of their three-pointers, and I think they played very well tonight."

The Gauchos played well enough to surge ahead to a 38-31 at halftime on the strength of a 11-2 run over the final four minutes, including a pair of three-pointers from freshman Chris Ford.

Meanwhile, the sharpshooting of Aggie point guard Sam Crawford kept NMSU in the game. Crawford threw in seven three-pointers of his own as part of his game-high 27 points, and also keyed the New Mexico State comeback in the second half on the fast break.

Duane Carter's 7-foot jumper with 15:20 remaining gave the Gauchos their biggest lead of the game at 53-40. Ten minutes later it

was gone, as a layup by NMSU forward Cliff Reed tied the score at 63-63 with five minutes to play. After Ray Kelly's scoop shot gave UCSB a 71-70 edge with 2:47 left in the game, the Gauchos went scoreless for the next two minutes.

Jones led the UCSB squad with 16 points, while Paul Johnson added 10 points and 10 rebounds.

The Gauchos were able to defeat third-seeded Pacific in the final 15 seconds when Jones made the front end of a one-and-one and his missed second shot went out of bounds to UCSB. With five seconds left, Carter connected on a 5-foot hook shot to put UCSB up by one, and a pair of Johnson free throws closed out the Gaucho win.

Johnson scored 14 points to lead the Gauchos, with Carter adding 11 on 5-of-6 shooting from the floor.

NIT

Continued from p.1A

"For some reason we cut our offense a little short tonight with some anxiousness and some bad reads," Pimm said. "But you've got to credit Pepperdine's defense — they did a good job of defending us and making us take some shots that were not good shots."

Defense was the name of the game from the opening tip. After eight minutes of play, the score was deadlocked at 10-10, with neither squad's offense

able to run smoothly. After a Doug Muse layup evened the score again at 15-15 with 9:23 to play in the half, the Waves were able to pull slowly ahead. Pepperdine's LeRoi O'Brien grabbed an offensive rebound and scored from underneath to give the Waves a 23-17 edge. The visitors were able to hold the 6-point lead, as the teams went to halftime with Pepperdine up 29-23.

The Gauchos had a chance to send the game to overtime, but Michael Meyer's last-second three-point attempt was well off the mark.

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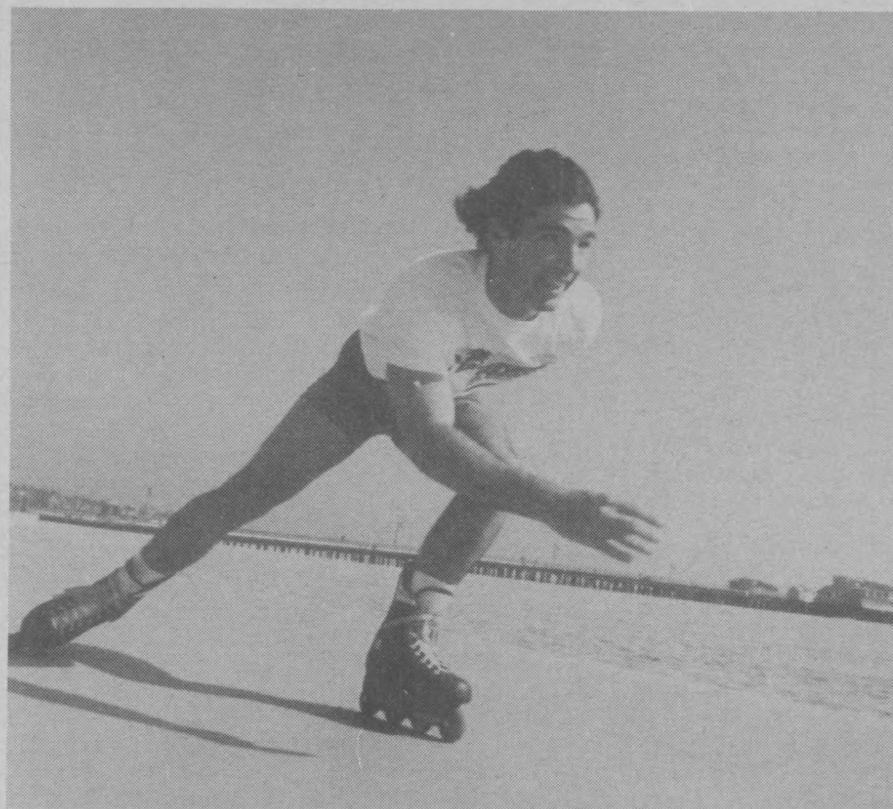
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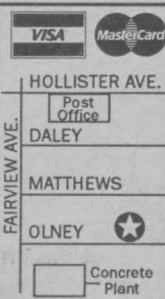
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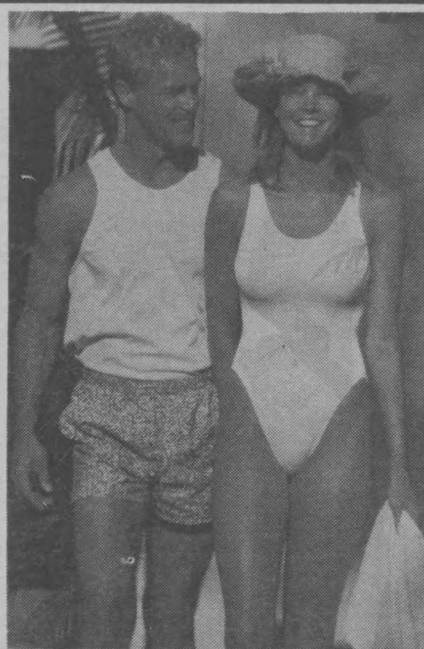
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