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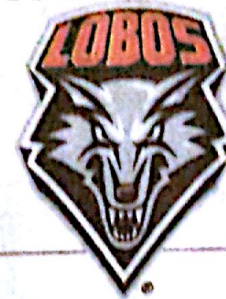
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BUSINESS ■ B1

Tourney time

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SPORTS ■ D1



100 miles

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GO! ■ B4

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Ronnie Millorn, who is deaf, signals to Albuquerque Academy's Chris Martin to shoot two free throws during action Wednesday at the Pit.

JIM THOMPSON
JOURNAL



He's seen it all and heard none of it

■ *Deaf referee from Santa Fe making tough calls at state tourney*

BY MARK SMITH
Assistant Sports Editor

"Hey ref, are you blind?"
"Call it both ways, ref!"
"You're missing a good game, ref!"

Virtually every high-level basketball official has heard those taunts thousands of times.

Except Ronnie Millorn. He's never heard any of those antagonistic comments. He's never heard anything, period.

Millorn has been completely deaf since birth and communicates by lip reading and

sign language.

"That is the one advantage," Millorn said Tuesday with a smile, through his interpreter and son Logan. "I can't hear the fans.

"But I can still feel them." Millorn is one of the state's top basketball officials, which is why he's calling games

More prep hoops

Atrisco Heritage, Valley, Sand reach Class 5A boys' "Final Four" D1, D3

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Deaf referee is 'just another official' at tourney

from PAGE A1

this week at the New Mexico Activities Association/U.S. Bank State Basketball Championships.

"Really, he's just another official," says Valley boys coach Joe Coleman, who watched Milliorn call his team's 50-45 win against Cibola in the opening round of the tournament on Saturday. "They let you know ahead of time. But he communicates with you, and lets you know what you need to do to get his attention. He's very professional and does a fine job. You would never know he was deaf."

Born in Tucson, Milliorn and his family moved to Santa Fe when he was an infant. He attended Santa Fe's New Mexico School for the Deaf, where he became a star basketball player and graduated in 1977.

He played three years of college basketball at Seattle Community College where he received an associate's degree in welding. From there, it was back to Santa Fe to teach and coach at NMSD.

"Having played and coached is definitely an advantage (when it comes to officiating)," Milliorn said. "I went to a camp to be an official years ago. It was a slow-going process getting to know the game from another perspective.

"The first few years, the coaches were really hesitant

about me and they really wanted me to prove myself. It took time until they were willing to move me up to varsity games."

Milliorn has officiated both football and basketball for about 17 years, mostly with the assistance of sons Logan, 25, and Jared, 21. The sons sit at the official scoring table to help their dad — who cannot speak — to communicate.

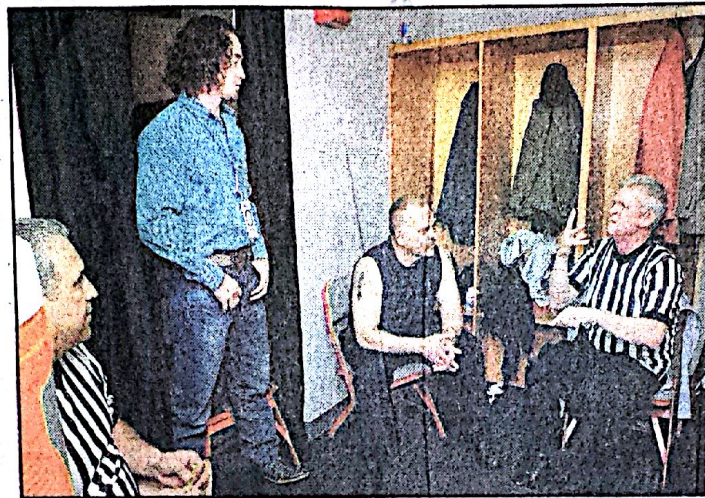
But Jared is now a student at New Mexico State and Logan moved to North Dakota to work on a farm. So the past few years Ronnie often has gone solo.

"He is so in tune with everything," said Dana Pappas, the NMAA's commissioner of officials. "If you didn't know (he was deaf), you wouldn't know by watching him. He reacts to what's going on — the horn at the table or whatever the case may be."

This is the third year Milliorn has called the state tournament. It would have been his first without Logan by his side, but the latter returned from North Dakota for the week.

Before each game, Logan helps his dad discuss the game plan with the other officials. During the game, Logan sits at the scoring table in case there is any need for clarification.

"I really can't ever remember a controversy," Logan said. "He's got great nonver-



JIM THOMPSON/JOURNAL

Ronnie Milliorn, right, signs to his son Logan, who in turn relays to officials Mark Romero, left, and Mark Salazar.

bal communication skills. His hand gestures, visual communication, visual contact, lip-syncing — he's great at reading lips. Throughout the entire season, he doesn't have me with him. He does all of it by himself.

"State is more serious, I mean it's not like championships are on the line or anything," Logan said with a smile. "I knew he'd feel comfortable if I was here, and it makes it look better when he's being presented to the coaches before games."

Milliorn got into officiating when longtime friend Danny Lujan — who played high school ball against Milliorn — convinced him in the mid-

1990s to give it a try.

"When I started officiating, he was coaching NMSD," said Lujan, who played for Pojoaque and is in charge of assigning varsity games to officials in northeastern New Mexico.

"He said he wanted to start refereeing, and I started taking him to junior high games. He took a liking to it."

Lujan says he has called countless games with Milliorn, who still lives in Santa Fe.

"It's been a process, but Ronnie's really worked hard to get where he's got. It's a challenge, but he does a heck of a job," Lujan said. "At first, it was an issue. Guys got frustrated. Officials had to explain calls

Anecdotes

■ The Journal's James Yodice, after watching the first three quarters of Wednesday Albuquerque Academy-Los Lunas game, asked a Journal reporter which one was Milliorn. When asked to guess, he guessed the wrong one.

■ The Journal asked UNM women's coach Yvonne Sanchez, who was on press row during the game, to watch Milliorn and see if she noticed anything different about him. She did not, and was surprised when she found out he was deaf.

"Wow, good for him," she said. "That's great he's doing this."

■ Before the game, Milliorn met both coaches with his interpreter. "He said, 'If you need a time out, just tap me,'" Academy coach Roy Morgan said with a smile. "He said, 'don't worry, you won't get a technical (foul) for it.'"

to coaches that Ronnie made, and it's hard enough explaining your own calls. But his work-ethic is phenomenal. He really listens — if that makes sense — and always wants to know how to improve."

While Milliorn can't hear ref-baiters, he knows they're out there.

After all, he can see them. And feel them.

"When you lose one sense, the other senses get stronger," Logan said. "So he can feel the crowd when it gets going, and when they get after him. But he can key it out."

Ronnie added, "I can't hear the crowd, but in a situation like at Valley last week, it really, truly impacted me as to how loud the game was. I could feel the vibrations because of how small Valley's gym is."

Milliorn has called games around the world. Last summer, he worked the International Deaf Basketball World Championships in Europe.

But it's here, in his home state and the Pit, he most cherishes calling games.

"I've really fallen in love with basketball officiating, and I appreciate all the officials I've worked with, the NMAA and New Mexico Officials Association and my sons helping me," he said.

"This experience, and the challenge of a calling a game when it comes down to state, makes me feel even more inspired, even more motivated for the kids. It wants me to help them prove their education is really worthwhile."