

MELITON J. "MEL" OTERO

Meliton J. "Mel" Otero was a trailblazer of modern day football and basketball officials.

If the Western Athletic Conference had relaxed its mandatory retirement age a few years earlier, he easily might have called 3,000 games. He settled for 2,500 games. He officiated his last WAC basketball game at age 50 and his last football game at age 55.

Otero, 67, an Albuquerque native, was one of 14 enshrined into the National High School Sports Hall of Fame in Kansas City, Mo. last year along with such notables as Len Dawson, Elroy "Crazy Legs" Hirsch, Jim Taylor, Cliff Hagan, and the legendary Ralph Tasker, the Hobbs High School basketball coach.

He also was elected into the New Mexico Officials Association Hall of Fame in 1985.

Otero officiated football and basketball for 36 years in city league, high school and college. He called 74 district, regional, state and invitational basketball tournaments at the high school level and four North-South All-Star Games. In football he officiated 25 district, region and state football playoffs. He was the first to retire from WAC officiating in both football and basketball.

Otero was selected as the first American referee to tour with the U.S. Women's amateur team that played eight games in Russia in 1975. The team played two games each in Moscow, Riga, Ama-Ata and Frunzi.

Otero called the first ever basketball game in Johnson Gym in 1957 and the first game to be played in University Arena in 1966. He also refereed the first Fiesta Football game in Tempe, Ariz. in 1971.

He now is serving in his 16th year as an observer of officials for the WAC and has served as the central Regional Commissioner of state high school officials and president of the New Mexico Officials Association.

Otero attended St. Mary Grade School and Washington Junior High School before his graduation from Albuquerque High. He attended New Mexico State one year before joining the Navy where he was a hospital corpsman during World War II.

He worked for the State Employment Commission, the Post Office and Chval's Awning Co. before joining Sandia Corporation in 1951.

Otero started his own company in 1960 as an owner of a Dairy Queen outlet on North Fourth Street and still operates the family business.

He called football and basketball games in high school, junior high and later in the college ranks in the Border Conference, the Rocky Mountain Conference, the Skyline Conference and the Western Athletic Conference.