

★ MICHAEL COOPER ★

Volumes could be written about "The Man Called Coop."

At the University of New Mexico, where Michael Cooper became an instant Lobo basketball hero, fans in the infamous Pit made the rafters ring to the chant that would follow him through his brilliant collegiate and pro career.

"Coop! Coop! Coop! Coop!"

In 1977-78 when the Lobos won the Western Athletic Conference title with a 13-1 mark (24-4 season), the chant developed into an emotional tribute to Cooper, the athlete and Cooper, the man.

An All-American and a floor leader extraordinaire, Cooper helped guide the New Mexico Lobo basketball team that season to a No. 4 ranking by United Press International — the finest ever in UNM's history.

The "Coop!" chant didn't stop there.

It was picked up in the Inglewood (Calif.) Forum where Cooper would star defensively for the LA Lakers while the team won five world championships.

A third round selection by Los Angeles, Cooper played in 793 games for the Lakers during 12 seasons. In 1985, he was named the defensive player of the year by the National Basketball Association.

He played at his best with such Laker stars as Earvin "Magic" Johnson and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar.

It's only fitting that Cooper, 35, who earned additional public acclaim here with his "Call Coop" hot-line for troubled teen-agers, is honored tonight as an inductee into the Albuquerque Sports Hall of Fame.

Cooper, 6-6, who retired from the NBA after the 1988-89 season (he later played one final pro season in Rome), joins Mel Daniels, another ex-Lobo all-pro star in the Albuquerque Sports Hall of Fame.

Cooper was a runaway first-team all-WAC choice in 1978.

Among those joining Cooper on the all-American team his senior year were Larry Bird, Indiana State; Butch Lee, Marquette; Freeman Williams, Portland State; Phil Ford, North Carolina; Ron Brewer, Arkansas; David

Greenwood, UCLA; Jack Givens, Kentucky; Mychal Thompson, Minnesota and Rod Griffin, Wake Forest.

Cooper had as great a career in the pros as he did with with the Lobos.

A transfer from Pasadena (Calif.) Junior College, Cooper scored 454 points (15.1 average) in 30 games for the Lobos as a junior.

In 1977-78 when the Lobos averaged an awesome 97.5 points per game, Cooper had another 451 points (16.1 ave.) in 28 games.

Don Haskins, the veteran Texas-El Paso basketball coach, described Cooper as "one of the best defensive players I've ever seen."

During the regular season with the Lakers, Cooper scored 7,214 points in his 793 games for a 9.1 average. He also had 3,451 assists, 966 steals and 1,860 rebounds. In 159 playoff games he scored another 1,554 points (9.8 average), had 678 assists, 196 steals and 550 rebounds.

He set an NBA playoff record in 1982 with six 3-point field goals in Game 2 of the NBA finals against Boston. He hit five in a row in the second quarter of that game. He's listed among the all-time Lakers in several statistical categories, second in steals, third in games played, fourth in assists and eighth in 3-point plays.

He left the Lakers after the 1989-90 season to sign a million-dollar contract with El Messagero-Rome of the European Basketball League. He finished his playing career in Rome after one season.

Cooper now is assistant to Lakers general manager Jerry West.

He hasn't forgotten his New Mexico roots.

In 1986 Cooper and the New York Knicks' Rory Sparrow were co-recipients of the prestigious J. Walter Kennedy Citizenship Award given to NBA players and/or executives who have devoted time and energy to helping their community. Cooper was honored for his "Call Coop" hotline and for his camps for kids and adults in both Albuquerque and Los Angeles.

He and his wife, Wanda, and their three children, Michael Jr., Simone and Myles, make their home in the North Valley.