

## RUSTY MITCHELL

Rusty Mitchell, celebrating his silver anniversary as men's gymnastics coach for the University of New Mexico, has great expectations for the future.

He envisions a national championship for his Lobos.

And, he has high hopes that UNM will be successful in being the host school for the NCAA Gymnastics Championships within the next several years.

Mitchell, who will be 49 on June 1, is an ideal choice as the 43rd inductee for tonight's 18th annual Albuquerque Sports Hall of Fame banquet.

He was inducted into the Collegiate Gymnastics Hall of Fame in 1985.

A 1964 graduate of Southern Illinois University, Mitchell twice has been assistant coach of the U.S. Olympic team.

He was head U.S. coach at the World University Games in Moscow, Russia, in 1973; head coach at the World Games in Varna, Bulgaria, in 1974; press coordinator for the 1979 World Championships and a staff member for the 1981 National Sports Festival.

"This selection by the Albuquerque Sports Hall of Fame is a career milestone for me," said Mitchell, the first gymnast ever to successfully perform a double backflip in Olympic competition (Tokyo, 1964). The internationally-acclaimed maneuver, named the Mitchell, was named in his honor.

"My career as a performer ended when I took over as UNM coach in 1966," he said. "I was in my prime, but I felt I had accomplished all I wanted to do.

"Pete McDavid, (then) the UNM athletic director, offered me a coaching opportunity that I'd always dreamed about. I jumped at the chance.

"I'm proud of my program. We've made giant strides. And, we will get better."

Excluding this year's (1991) NCAA Championships, Mitchell's record lists:

- A 24-year dual meet record of 195-73 including 11-5 in 1991.
- Teams which placed in the top 12 nationally in 14 of his 24 years at UNM.
- A total of 13 individual NCAA champions and 46 individuals earning all-America status as top three NCAA finishers.

- Eleven of a possible 18 Western Athletic Conference championships; the last six in a row — including 1991 (the WAC did not hold championships during 1979-85, inclusive).

- Midwest collegiate coach of the year three times in the past five years.

- By team or by individual, Mitchell has been represented in the NCAA championships since 1967.

Born in Phoenix, Ariz., Mitchell was reared in Baldwin Park, Calif., where his father was in the construction business.

"My older brother, Homer, started me in my gymnastics career," said Mitchell. "He entered my name in a meet when I was about 10 years old.

"I was a tiny tyke. About 4-feet-8 and I weighed about 88 pounds. He told me to do a series of cartwheels, and I did.

"I loved the applause. I knew then that gymnastics was what I wanted to do."

A world class tumbler and a superb all-around performer, Mitchell starred as a gymnast in junior high and in high school and earned a scholarship under coach Bill Meade at Southern Illinois University.

During his three years at SIU, the Salukis were unbeaten in dual meet competition and won one NCAA title. Mitchell won three individual NCAA titles there.

He won the hearts of Albuquerque fans when UNM played host to the 1962 NCAA Championships in Johnson Gym. Mitchell won the tumbling title and placed sixth all-around.

He astounded international judges when he reached his peak and made the U.S. Olympic team in 1964. He had the highest score (9.7) in floor exercise in the Tokyo Olympics, when he became the first ever to do a double backflip in that competition.

He graduated with a degree in physical education at SIU in 1964 and received his master's degree there two years later. He also served as an assistant SIU coach for two years.

Excluding 1990, his individual NCAA champions include Bob Manna, 1969 high bar; Stormy Eaton, 1971 floor exercise; Jon Aitken, 1973 high bar; Chuck Walter, 1977 pommel horse; Steve Jennings, 1982 pommel horse; Chad Fox, 1986, 1987, 1988 and 1989, vault and 1987 floor exercise; Paul O'Neill, 1988 and 1989 still rings.