

Volunteering keeps Hobbs man involved in the game

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NEWS-SUN

With a black whistle around his neck, Ron Lambert stands near the base line watching members of the New Mexico Junior College men's basketball team practice for an upcoming game in Castner Activity Center gym.

His hands in his back jeans pockets, the 65-year-old Hobbs man chews gum without saying much as players run up and down the court. After a player loses control of the ball following a steal, he calmly tells him to take better care of the ball.

As they begin to pick up the pace on the court, players start to make a lot more mistakes in the game, but along the sideline Lambert offers recommendations and encouragement.

"Settle down," he advises. "Let's go."

Lambert, who works at NMJC's Del Norte Fitness Center, does everything a college assistant basketball coach does, but he's just a volunteer. He's responsible for recruiting, scheduling practices and games and keeping stats while sitting on the bench with the other coaches during the games. During practice he operates the clock during timed drills and claps when players do a good job.

NMJC's men's basketball coach Jeff McCool is Lambert's supervisor at Del Norte Fitness Center. McCool needed someone to help keeping stats and perform other duties with the basketball team and asked Lambert if he wanted to help out about three years ago.

Naturally Lambert said he was all for it because it finally gave him a chance to be a college basketball coach.

"After years of being involved in sports I wanted to see how far I could go," he said. "And doing this is better than sitting at home doing nothing."

Lambert, who has been working with the team for the past three seasons, has been the offensive coordinator this year. He also is in charge of the basketball players' study hall three times a week in the morning.

Lambert played baseball, basketball and football in his childhood. He played on his base's baseball team while he served in the Air Force. After his son was born and became involved in sports, he continued to coach sports.

"It was natural for me to get there and do what I could do," the retired postal worker said.

After working at Del Norte Fitness Center, Lambert immediately comes over to the gym for practice. During pre-season, practice, which usually lasts two hours, is five days a week and during the season they have games twice a week and practice about three times a week.

Lambert said basketball is an exciting game. In basketball players and coaches are close to the action and the excitement can change in a heartbeat, and that's why he likes being part of the games and practices.

"It gives me a good feeling to be part of their lives and lead them in a good direction," he said. "It keeps me young."

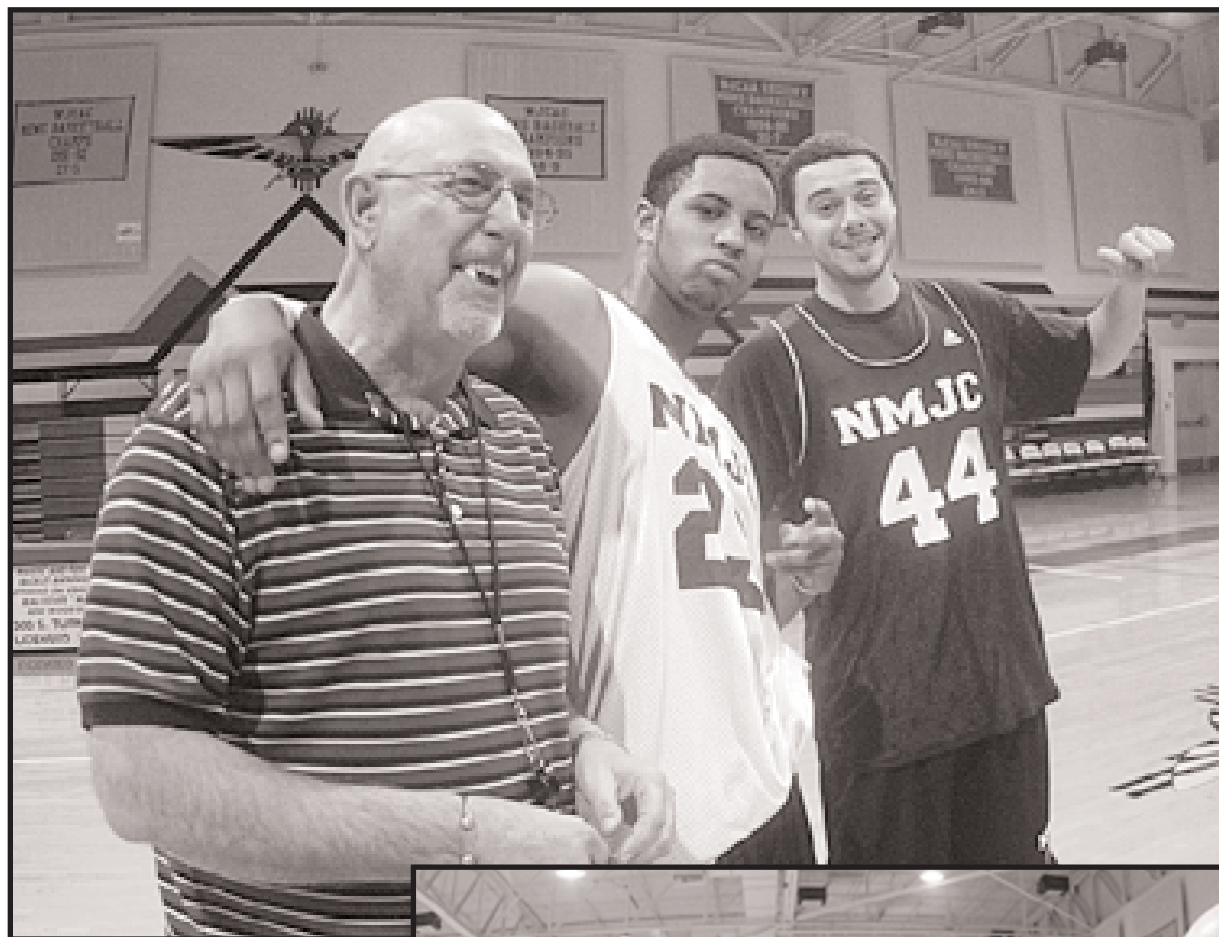
McCool said Lambert has been an invaluable resource. The longtime coach and athlete is someone he can bounce ideas around with and he provides an another set of eyes on the court.

"He enjoys being around the camaraderie and the game," McCool said. "It's a good outlet for him. It's somewhere where he feels useful and can make a difference."

NMJC basketball player and student Ed Hillard described Lambert as the type of coach to give players encouraging words when they need it. Lambert has also taught him to work hard and to be the best he can be.

Hillard said he appreciates Lambert giving his time and wisdom to the team.

"He cares about the game and us," he said. "He could be at home with his wife but he's here. He gives us his time and wisdom and every young person needs that."



Ron Lambert has volunteered for the New Mexico Junior College men's basketball team for the past three years. Lambert volunteers with keeping stats, recruiting, scheduling practices and study hall three times a week.



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