

JANEL M. BIRRENKOTT

Easily the most talented deaf female basketball player in the annals of the sport in the state of South Dakota is Janel Birrenkott, a Lemmon native, whose unstoppable tactics on the court are well-known throughout Deaf America. Many basketball experts compare her most favorably with Gallaudet University's all-time great, Rhonda Miller, who has been contacted by several professional teams for an opportunity to pursue a career in the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA).



A world class athlete, Janel was equally proficient in three sports – softball, track, and basketball, all for which she qualified as a scholarship recipient at Northern State University in Aberdeen. Her athleticism in both high school and college was awesome beyond description with one major honor after another on a continuing basis – a sure bet all-state first team selection in whatever sport she participated in and the 1993 South Dakota Sportswriters Association's Independent Athlete of the Year Award recipient, to mention just a couple of the never-ending list of unsurpassable accomplishments.

Some of her impressive feats worthy of mention here are as follows:

- Competition at the 1993 World Games for the Deaf representing the USA women's basketball team in Sofia, Bulgaria which won a gold medal. Janel averaged 17 points a game and captured the most valuable player award. USA's original female javelin thrower was suddenly taken ill and could not compete. Janel pitched in and contributed a bronze medal performance.
- Another gold medal performance for the USA women's basketball team at the 1997 Deaf Olympics in Copenhagen, Denmark and another MVP award to her credit.
- Janel participated in four American Athletic Association of the Deaf (AAAD) Basketball Tournaments and placed on the all-star first team each time along with two MVP awards and three team championships.

Janel is presently employed at Pima Community College in Arizona as a sign language instructor and instructional specialist in other areas.