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The Secret of Basketball's Popularity

FOOTBALL can be traced back to ancient harpistan, the game played by the Greeks; hockey owes its origin to the sport of the ancient shepherds who with crooked sticks drove a crude ball over hilly country; baseball indirectly can be traced to the old Indian game of lacrosse or possibly to cricket; but basketball, the most recent of the popular pastimes, owes its existence to all of these games. The fact that it has grown in popularity so fast that today it surpasses all of them in spectator and player interest, is a tribute to the farsightedness and ingenuity of its inventor, Dr. James Naismith.

Few sports have the appeal that basketball has. The proximity of the spectators to the players makes them feel that they themselves are part of the game. Quite naturally they thrill vicariously to the fast moving plays, the sudden passes, and the sensational shots. The fact that almost everyone at the game, man, woman and child, has at one time or another participated in the sport adds to the enthusiasm.

The game is easily played and comprehended. While difficult to master, there is nevertheless a great deal of satisfaction and gratification in scoring goals and in preventing one's opponent from scoring. All over the world courts are standard equipment whether in a big metropolis like New York or San Francisco or in an antiquated Arabic city like Fez in northern Africa. Backboards with a hoop attached are found wherever boys are at play. In the back-yards of the flower bedecked huts of Hawaii, the sun drenched haciendas of Mexico, and the wind swept fields of Alaska, the equipment of the cage pastime is in evidence.

The Philippine Islands has its hundreds of teams, and all of them play the fast, stirring game with

the fervor and intensity with which it is played in the United States. Truly basketball today circles the world. It is the most democratic of sports, for every man on the team is equally important and all are dependent on each other. Of every team it can be said that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

In the brief fifty years of its existence, basketball has come a long way from the crowded and stuffy gymnasias of the robust nineties. The game has advanced to the point today, where it is played in brightly illuminated palestras and magnificent indoor amphitheaters. In recent years, the shibboleths which shackled it in the form of provincial biases and sectional rule interpretations have been erased by the flood of intersectional games.

Today teams can travel anywhere and feel at home. Obviously the game has grown up. Formerly cage quintets had some misgivings about traveling any distance from their own bailiwicks. They knew the hazards involved. Sectional biases and strange provincialisms often made of basketball a rowdy enterprise instead of a gentleman's game.

No one has ever taken count of the number of people who attend games, but it is estimated that basketball plays to more than 90 million people annually. How many play it is also a mystery, but someone has said that Dr. Naismith's game in half a century has grown from 18 men to 18 million. 18 men constituted the number of players on the two teams which initiated the sport at Springfield in 1891. Today, there is no country in the world that does not have its basketball players. Dr. Naismith may not have known what he was starting, but this must be admitted—he did start something, so let us give honor where honor is due.