

# GRAND OLD MASTERS OF BASKETBALL

Brief History of the "Buffalo Germans"

By "ALLIE" SEELBACH, Coach, Canisius College

**I**N the Golden Anniversary of Basketball, when many present and past records of teams have been written about and discussed, historians have overlooked the first and still one of the greatest records of them all as compiled by the Buffalo Germans Y.M.C.A. team, the Pan-American and first Olympic basketball champs.

In 1891, when Dr. Naismith originated the game at the Springfield Y.M.C.A. College, a young student, Frederick Burkhardt, played in that memorable first game. After graduation a year later, he took up his work at the Buffalo German Y.M.C.A. and here taught the game and organized the first Junior Buffalo League. As in many other cases, these are the men who definitely spread the game.

In 1895 a team composed of Al Heerdts and Billy Rhode, forwards; John Maier, center; Edward Miller and Jay Bayliss, guards; with Emil Martin as substitute, played their first outside games, winning eight and losing none. The next year Henry Faust replaced Jay Bayliss and the team won nine more games, again losing none. The following year the team graduated into the Senior division, Edmund Reiman replacing Emil Martin, and in meeting other representative Y and Athletic Club teams won 15 and lost 3. In 1900-01, as many more teams developed in this area, they won 33 and lost one, winning during this six year period a total of 87 games while losing six.

In 1901, the great Pan-American Exposition was held in Buffalo, and in June of that year the first National Open Basketball Tournament was played as a part of the Exposition's athletic program. Teams entered were the highly favored Entres-Nous team from Patterson, N. Y., Brooklyn, N. Y., Y; Cambridge, Mass., Y; Newark, N. J.; Flushing, L. Is.; St. Joseph's from Patterson; Manlius, N. Y. Military School and the Buffalo team, which entered for the novelty and experience this high class of competition would afford. The first day of the tournament, on a clay court, Buffalo defeated Brooklyn Y 10-6 and also the favored Entres-Nous team 16-5. The second day they polished off the Cambridge Y team 10-5, Newark 9-3, and Flushing 10-4. Since three of the players, Heerdts, Maier, and Reiman were still attending Masten Park High School, it was necessary for them to complete final examinations the last day of the tournament.

In 1907-08 the greatest winning streak of all times was started when Buffalo won its last eleven games of that season. The following year, 1908-09, they won 40 straight.

Included among the defeated teams were the Pacific Coast Champions from Dallas, Oregon, who had won 96 consecutive games and traveled 10,000 miles to play this game; and also Notre Dame, defeated twice after they had won 22 straight. In 1909-10, 34 more games were added, and in 1910-11, 22 more before the Herkimer, N. Y. team defeated Buffalo at Herkimer by one point. Following this game the team went on to win 34 games before losing to Tonawanda, N. Y., finishing a four year schedule winning 152 games while losing 2. During this 111 game streak, Buffalo scored 6001 points for an average of more than 54 points per game against the 12 opponents' 2017 or an average of 18 points per game. No team at any time scored more than 27 points in any one game against them.

They continued on as a team, naturally adding young blood occasionally, until they disbanded in 1929. A few of the men added included the following: Bert Post, Al Hutter, Bill McCleary, Dip Murray, Ray Knapp, Chuck Taylor and a few others. When they disbanded in 1929 they had won 761 games and lost 85 over a period of 29 years.

In 1931 at an average age of 51 years these men, Rhode, Heerdts, Schell, Ed Miller and Faust played in a benefit game at Tonawanda, N. Y. winning by one point. The excellent condition of these men is best illustrated by stating that three of the men played the entire 40 minutes while two played one half each following only three nights of practice.

All the original players mentioned in this article are still living and gainfully occupied in their chosen profession or vocation. Two are doctors, three are salesmen, one works for the Hewitt Rubber Co. and another in the Pullman Car Shops.

The long and useful careers of these former basketball stars is fitting testimony to the fact that the game is not harmful but helpful when properly played. No game has done so much, to my way of thinking, to build up healthy bodies. All over the United States may be found men who were contemporaries of the Buffalo Germans, and it goes without saying, all got satisfaction out of the game.