

# PRO BASKETBALL HAS PLAYED AN IMPORTANT PART

By John O'Brien

JOHN O'BRIEN, President of the American Basketball League since 1928 was educated at St. John's College in Brooklyn. Since 1908 he has been associated with Basketball as player, manager, coach and referee. He is Vice-President and Director of several oil companies.

**T**HE first draft of the thirteen rules devised by the fertile brain of Professor James Naismith governing the playing of basketball had scarcely been hung on the bulletin board of Springfield College, Springfield, Mass., in February, 1892, before the professional player accepted the game as his own and exercised a dominating influence in its early development, which has continued with slight diminution to the present day. He kept the sport alive in the gaslighted mauve decade when college interest was rather passive, and his contributions then and now have been of immeasurable value.

Few of the universities of the country had gymnasiums large enough for the staging of basketball in its formative period, but in almost all of the industrial cities of the East were located armories, Y.M.C.A.'s and clubs with auditoriums of sufficient size to arrange for the proper presentation of the game. In various towns and cities along the Northern Atlantic Coast the development of numbers of capable players quickly ensued, and with a keen civic pride various municipalities attracted to their confines such players as had made noteworthy reputations. Before many years had elapsed a strong feeling was created in the Eastern section of the country that there was "Gold in them thar hills," and the mining of this ore has continued with a preponderance of good pay dirt while few faulty structures have appeared.

The first professional league came into being in 1896 under the name of the National League, comprising the leading teams in the State of New Jersey and in Philadelphia, Pa.

From the start of the game in 1891, a number of important professional traveling teams unquestionably added their great contributions to the advancement of the sport. In the earlier days, and after the turn of the century, the 23rd Street Y.M.C.A. of New York City, the 17th Separates of Flushing, L. I., Clark House—University Settlement of New York City, the Crescents of Paterson,

N. J., and while not of professional origin, the Buffalo Germans of Buffalo, N. Y., winners of the Olympic Championship at the St. Louis Fair in 1904, spread the doctrine of physical fitness and the need for clean living in order to compete successfully in this newly developed sport.

Following these groups came one of the prominent teams of all time—the Company G of Gloversville, N. Y., later known as the Troy, N. Y., World Champions. This team not only competed in the New York State League, where it won several championships, but it took the most extensive trip planned up to that time by playing games nightly as far west as Wyoming. Few, if any clubs ever amassed a greater number of victories without defeats than the famous Troy combination, over so vast a territory. The club to overthrow the Troy reign in New York State was Utica, N. Y., composed for the most part of Clark House—University Settlement boys from the lower East Side in New York City.

In later years the New York Nationals took up the trail established by the Troy Club and accomplished remarkable achievements during a twelve-year period by playing clubs in all sections of the country, with few setbacks.

Probably the greatest traveling team in the annals of the game was a group organized on a New York City playground in 1914—and called the Original Celtics. The managers of this enterprising light-weight team soon enlisted the cream of the professional players of the country and paid salaries comparable to those received by major league baseball luminaries, so that after World War I, the Celtics with a star-studded lineup made the world conscious of the supremacy of the Eastern type of professional basketball. These ambassadors of sport, recognized now as one of the greatest teams ever developed if not the peer of them all, played outstanding quintets of the East, Mid-West, Far-West and South. Rules of all types and descriptions, halls of large and small dimensions with