

By CLAIRE BIE

The breadlines in New York during the Winter of 1930-31 were longer than an elephant's memory. The dull, glazed pain of defeat showed in men's eyes, and the desperate hunger showed in their waistlines. There were no jobs, and there was no bread.

And then, because of a young sports writer's idea--but wait, we're getting ahead of our story. Dapper Jimmy Walker was then the Mayor of New York town, and he called on his friends, the sports writers, to help relieve the misery that drenched the city.

Ned Irish was a young sports writer on the New York Telegram, making forty dollars a week. During the Winter, he covered basketball, and saw it played in gymnasiums built for the game, but not for the spectators. Each season, the sweaty gyms would be crowded to capacity, then crowds would be turned away because of lack of seating space. A promoter at heart, it hurt Irish to watch people with money in their hands turned away.

Ned knew that none of the colleges would willingly permit their basketball teams to come into Madison Square Garden to play, because there is that aura of professionalism about the place. But in the name of sweet charity, Irish staged a basketball triple-header at the Garden on January 19, 1931, with all New York teams competing. The Garden had 18,210 seats for sale that night, and when 18,210 tickets were sold, Irish knew he had his teeth into something.

That night, basketball graduated to the big league of sports.

It took two more years to bring the colleges around to playing regularly in The House That Tex Rickard Built, but finally Irish arranged a double-header featuring Westminster (Pa.) College vs. St. Johns, and New York University vs. Notre Dame.

Notre Dame is a magic name in sports, and 17,000 fans paid their way into Madison Square Garden that night. When Joe Sophomore marched through the turnstiles with his girl, it was a cinch that Irish had a "hit", because for years, nobody brought girls to basketball games.

Since that night, teams from all over the country have come into New York, and basketball has become a more national game, because the Western coaches took back home with them some ideas they picked up by playing against us, and they, in turn, left some things here for us.

Basketball has come a long way since its invention in Springfield, Mass., by Dr. Weismith in 1891. It has come an especially long way in a very few years if you remember that the first intercollegiate league was not permanently set up until 1911. Its progress was retarded to some degree because of the citizens of one street--Twenty-third Street, in New York. Those citizens were young men who played under the team name of "The Celtics".

They were the best, so it is only natural that whatever little tricks and bits of strategy they developed were adopted by other basketball players. The Celtics were, of course, professionals, but amateur basketball pretty well aped everything the pros did, thus making it natural that the same evils should spring up simultaneously in both branches of the game. The crowds soon tired of the stalling and rough play. The amateurs changed; the pros didn't. That's one reason why today you have in basketball the one, the only, college sport not in any way rivalled by the professionals.

The colleges did away with much of the roughness by having the referee call a lot of fouls. That became almost as bad an evil, for American sports fans hate a whistle.