

Dr. James Naismith

By Oswald Tower Editor of  
the Rule Book.

A leading newspaper publishes an editorial under the caption "He invented Basketball", concluding with the following sentence: "Few men in the whole history of sport have done so much for clean living and real sport as did that simple and modest man who provided the world with an exciting game which requires both teamwork and individual prowess". The only exception one can take to that statement is in its use of the word "few", for Dr. Naismith has no peers in the whole history of sport with respect to his contribution - his name stands at the head. All of our other great games calling for team competition have come to us through a process of evolution. Basketball alone is the creation of one man, invented out of hand for a definite purpose and to fill a real need.

That Dr. Naismith was a simple and modest man the writer can attest from personal observation. During the period from 1910 to 1920 I had the privilege of serving with him on the Basketball Rules Committee. Never would one have suspected from any remark made by him in the many meetings that we attended that he had invented the game or that he had a greater knowledge of it than the rest of us. He sat calmly by while we harranged about the rules, occasionally offering a helpful suggestion but never urging the adoption of any ideas of his own. He gave us a free hand to tinker with his game and I often felt that he was quietly amused at our efforts to improve its game.

My last long interview with Dr. Naismith took place in 1936 when he asked me to go over the manuscript for his history of basketball. He was having difficulty in finding a publisher because of the uncertainty of the demand for such a book. I remember saying to him: "Some day there will be plenty of demand for it. Don't let anything happen to that manuscript, for you are the only man in the world who knows the whole story of basketball. Whether you find a publisher now or not, you have the satisfaction of knowing that you have put on paper the story of your great contribution to humanity and that it will be available if anything should happen to you".

Dr. Naismith's contribution to human welfare cannot be appraised adequately. Never has there been a game played over so great an area of the earth, under such a variety of conditions and by such diverse groups of players. It has provided an interest for millions which is wholesome and uplifting. I had hoped that Dr. Naismith would be spared to help us observe the fiftieth anniversary of his game and to receive fitting recognition of his achievement.

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