

BASKETBALL TOPS AS SPECTATOR SPORT
By Dan Parker

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One of the amazing things about the strictly American game of basketball is that, although it has been the sport of the masses ever since its peach-basket beginning in Springfield, Mass., in 1891, its possibilities as a spectator sport were almost completely overlooked until recent years.

Invented as a "participent" sport to furnish an outlet for the excess energy of students at the Springfield Y.M.C.A. College during the winter months, it was treated as such for many years before a smart young sports writer named Ned Irish awakened the country to its latent possibilities as a gate attraction. Colleges have been building huge football stadia for decades. But the average college basketball court was built with little thought of providing room for spectators. Thus, if Irish hadn't proved by his Madison Square Garden experiment that basketball is a greater attraction than either hockey or boxing, college teams would probably still be playing all their games in stuffy gyms where only a few thousands at the most could be accommodated.

The great appeal of basketball lies in the fact that practically everyone in America has played it and, therefore, has more than a passing interest in it, not to mention more than a smattering of knowledge about its fine points. The same used to be true of baseball but there are so many forms of diversion for the growing boy nowadays that America's so-called "national pastime" no longer is played by every growing boy. Basketball leads all other American pastimes both as a spectator and as a participation sport. It is played in every hamlet in America and tops both football and baseball in annual paid attendance.

The last available figures on attendance at sports events were compiled in 1935 by Frank Menke. That year he estimated that 80,000,000 had attended basketball games in the United States, as compared with 60,000,000 for softball, 50,000,000 for baseball and 40,000,000 for football. Since then, basketball has experienced its biggest boom. It is doubtful, however, if any of the other leading sports except softball has shown an increase in attendance in the same period.

One of the reasons for the increased interest in basketball is that those who draw up the rules for the game have heeded the protests of the public against features which didn't appeal to them. The chief complaint about basketball was that there was too much whistle blowing. Almost every second, the game was stopped by the annoying toot of the official's flagiolet. The revision of the rules several years ago eliminated much of the cause for this complaint without radically changing the fundamental points of the game. In fact Dr. Jas. A. Naismith, who invented the sport, commented not long ago on the fact that 12 of the 13 original rules he drew up are still in the books. Hockey might take a hint from basketball by revising its rules to speed up the game and cut down the whistle tooting.

A factor that has made basketball popular is that it gives the studious, non-athletic type of kid a chance to shine at a competitive sport, whereas football and baseball would keep him forever a spectator. Basketball is rough enough not to be a sissy's game but not rough enough to cause injury to a frail youngster--unless he taxes his heart by over-indulgence in it. Speed and craftiness count more than strength in this sport.

Naturally the growth of basketball in New York has not been without its
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