

MEETING BASKETBALL'S INVENTOR

George R. Edwards
University of Missouri

"Doctor Naismith to see you."

This announcement by the clerk at a Lawrence, Kansas, hotel broke up a chinning bee with an official who had handled our game the night before when "Phog" Allen's Kansas team had given us some fancy lessons in scoring points. Both the referee and I welcomed this opportunity of talking shop with the man who, as a student more than forty years ago, evolved the game which now is played by more persons than any other team sport.

Dr. James Naismith certainly is a perfect example of his own teaching, and forces the wish on one that at 73 years of age we can be as active as he. Erect, broad of shoulder, sturdy of frame he presents a genial face featured by twinkling eyes, and a closely clipped mustache touched with gray. His speech, actions, and poise demonstrate the enthusiasm, sympathy, interest, and alertness which have endeared him to generations of Kansas students in his physical education classes.

Basketball is a child of his brain, and like any proud father he is keenly interested in the welfare of his offspring never missing a chance to discuss or to study its problems. Unquestionably no other individual is so well-versed in basketball; its values as well as its short-comings; its origin and growth; its tremendous world-wide popularity.

"Well, doctor, how did you like the game last night," was asked him almost immediately.

"Fine exhibition", came the reply. "But, you know, as I watched those boys I marveled at the skill in handling the ball, shooting, dribbling, and guarding the modern players exhibit. They easily performed stunts which never even remotely came to mind when we were first experimenting with basketball back at Springfield Y.M.C.A. College in 1890. It seems incredible to me that so many features of the original rules are still intact when it was impossible for us to anticipate the many feats that you coaches and the players would develop.

"Take, for instance, the dribble. Originally a player could bounce the ball while running only a short distance without losing it even if no guard was near. Today an ordinary player controls the dribble about as well as if the ball was tied to his hand. In fact, a good dribbler has as much control of the ball as if he carried it. Such skill has put unintended loads on the guard. For that reason it appears necessary to place more and more responsibility upon the dribbler than upon his guard when contact ensues. Too often recently have I seen a guard who is doing a good defensive job fouled when an expert dribbler tries to circle him."

The speaker smiled at the official who showed every indication of assuming that the reference was intended for some other referee. If so he was unprepared for the jolt which was coming.