

Mayhem at the Box Office

Unless something is done soon, a lot of kids playing race-horse basketball will have heart disease in later life

by **LEO FISCHER**

• SPORTS •

BASKETBALL, as played today, is wrecking the future health of thousands of our youngsters!

What was once a recreational pastime has been "needled" into a frenzy of harmful action through radical rule changes in the past few years.

High school and college athletes are being "burned out" by the fastest, most exhausting and most nerve-wracking sport since ancient gladiators were tossed in to joust with ferocious lions and tigers.

Hard words, my friends?

Perhaps.

But watch the heart-disease curve go up and up—despite reports whitewashing basketball as it is now played. And the victims, unless something is done about it soon, will come in large numbers from the youngsters now cavorting on the nation's hardwood floors.

In the year preceding his death, Dr. James A. Naismith, originator of the sport, gave up almost completely attending games. Asked the reason, he shook his head sadly and replied:

"This isn't basketball the way I used to know it. I devised a game for players. I wanted it to be an interesting, healthful competition. And it was, up to a few years ago. Now the spectators have taken it over and the rules have been changed so that the game is played for their benefit. No one seems to give a thought any more to the boys or their

health. I guess they just want to draw crowds. This isn't my game of basketball."

And he is right. About the only similarity between basketball of today and half a dozen years ago is reminiscent of the feud which once raged between Doc Meanwell at Wisconsin and Ward Lambert at Purdue. Each collected royalties on a certain type of ball and there was always a squabble about which was to be used when they met. Once, before a game, Meanwell wired Lambert

"What kind of a ball are you going to use Friday?"

Lambert wired back:

"A nice, big round one!"

It's still a nice, big round ball that they're using in the game—but the other rules have undergone amazing alterations.

From the time Dr. Naismith hung up those historic peach baskets in 1891 up to a few years ago, players had the entire floor in which to roam or rest. Then it was decided that there was too much resting and not enough roaming—particularly after a couple of Illinois high school teams played a 1 to 0 game and Wisconsin won a Big Ten conference contest by a score of approximately 12 to 9. There was also a game on the Pacific Coast where players on one side held the ball for fifteen minutes while their opponents read newspapers and the crowd jeered.

Instead of considering these as isolated freak incidents, the rules committee began

to view with alarm, and proceeded to speed matters up. It decreed that a line should be drawn through the center of the playing floor. It decreed further that a player obtaining the ball in the half farthest from his own basket had to get the hell out of there within ten seconds.

Jesse Owens can run a hundred yards in ten seconds quite easily, but after all it isn't much space on a stop watch. You have to hustle to get across that line. And thus was taken Step No. 1 in the transition of basketball.

Three years ago it was decided to inject another shot of vinegar into the game. Following agitation from the Pacific Coast, the rules committee voted the sport's most radical change—elimination of the center jump. Those last five words on paper seem harmless, but their effect was to do away with the twenty or thirty second break between the scoring of a basket and the time the ball was again put in play by the two centers jumping for it in mid-court.

As a result, basketball now is sustained motion, except for an occasional injury or exhaustion time out. Play is practically continuous. As soon as the ball whips through the net, it is grabbed by a man from the other side and put into play, while players on the team which has scored sweep like tornadoes for the opposite end of the floor to take up defensive positions.

Certainly, it's a swell game to watch. We love it. So do the thousands of others who jam into gymnasiums, field houses and indoor stadia to watch the boys run themselves ragged scoring points and giving thrills to the cash customers.

Nat Holman, famous coach of New York's City College and one of the greatest players of all time, sounds the keynote of the modern game with this observation:

"Basketball is a spectator's sport. Its recent tremendous growth in popularity is clear evidence of that. We must keep it a sport of action and color to retain the public's fancy."

But what about the players?

Experiments prove that the abolition of the center jump, plus other changes, have added seven to ten more minutes of actual playing time.

The ball is rocketing back and forth for about thirty-eight minutes out of a possible forty in the average college game. Football, with all its hipper-dipper and speed-up, is cold molasses in comparison. Fifteen minutes of slam-bang play is about all in the average college game, careful timing reveals. And that is sixty minutes of play.

Cage scores have skyrocketed. Not long ago at New Orleans, Loyola and Centenary played a game which the latter won, 78 to 72,

Continued on page 158



"He maintains a terrific speed till the end—then he tires a bit"