

# Dr Naismith Gave KU Basketball Its Start Back In 1898

Dr. James Naismith, who invented basketball in Springfield, Mass., in 1891, gave basketball its start on the KU campus seven years later.

Dr. Naismith came to Mt. Oread because the University needed a physical education director who also could lead the chapel services. Basketball and other athletic events did not meet with immediate success on the campus. In fact, it is reported that Dr. Naismith was so discouraged by the lack of interest that he would have returned home if he hadn't sold all his household goods.

By 1920, enthusiasm had so increased that sufficient seating was at a minimum. The seating capacity was 1000, with single admissions at 35 cents and reserved seats at

15 cents extra. Reserve seats for the season were \$1.

In 1921, the game was becoming so popular that members of the physical education department stressed the need for a bigger gym with a larger seating space. That year, season tickets for the 10 conference games sold for \$5.

Dr. Naismith, who had been educated for the ministry, originated basketball for 18 young men in a class at Springfield, Mass., YMCA college in 1891 while training to become a physical director.

The idea came in answer to the question as to what the physical education classes could do when the weather would not permit outdoor sports. At that time the only winter sports were ice hockey, snow

shoeing, and other sports which required considerable equipment and were carried on out-of-doors.

The only indoor games were group games where a number of people gathered and played without any reference to teamwork.

Physical educators of that time felt a need for a game that could be played indoors in the evening, and that called into play competitive spirit and teamwork. It was with this aim in view that the game was developed.

The first basketball team con-

sisted of nine players. This number of players was used because the class consisted of 18 members and the game had to be devised to accommodate a large number of players.

The first baskets were ordinary half-bushel vegetable containers hung to the balcony at the ends of the floor, with someone stationed to empty them after each goal. Later peach baskets were used because of their greater depth. The name basketball was adopted due to these baskets used.

Rules were very uncomplicated

with no free throws, out of bounds did not count and the penalty for fouling was the penalty box on the sidelines. The game usually ended when all the players had fouled out.

The popularity of the game was immediate and soon became a national sport. YMCA directors took the game to many parts of the world, and now over 50 nations play basketball. In 1936, basketball was adopted by the eleventh Olympic games at Berlin, largely through the efforts of Coach Phog Allen.

## Bibliography, Dr. James Naismith

The late Dr. James A. Naismith is best known for his invention of basketball, considered today the only major sport originating in America.

Strange as it seems the fact that he authored a sport which was to sweep the fancy of both competitors and fans, gave him less satisfaction than his 39 years of teaching at the University of Kansas.

Dr. Naismith regarded his invention of the game as an episode in a long career devoted to the improvement of the physical conditions of succeeding generations. Naturally, he observed the growth of basketball with satisfaction but he always remained a great deal more calm about the game than did thousands of players, spectators and coaches.

Dr. Naismith thought wrestling was better exercise than basketball. Personally, he would rather go into a corner of Robinson Gym at KU and instruct a couple of eager youngsters in the art of fencing than watch a 100 games of basketball. He drew as much pleasure from the sight of a clever tumbler as he did from watching such Kansas all-Americans as Paul Endacott and Al Peterson perform on the hardwoods.

While experts sat up late thinking of ways to amend the rules of basketball, Dr. Naismith, who died November 28, 1939, at the age of 78, worked away at tabulations of the comparative measurements of the various freshman classes which entered the University.

Those measurements, as well as various other figures for different phases of physical man, Dr. Naismith tabulated mostly to gratify his own curiosity. He seldom published any of his results, and a visitor at his office would see hundreds of dusty cards in and on top of filing cases.

There was a time when Naismith even thought it foolish for a grown man to actually propose to devote his life to the game he invented. About 1910, Dr. F. C. "Phog" Allen, now one of the country's most illustrious hoop mentors, told Naismith he was going to Baker University at Baldwin, Kansas, to coach basketball. The good doctor was incredulous.