

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.

was too rough for indoor play. Hence, one of the first rules Naismith formulated was that the ball must be passed, not carried.

First he thought of putting boxes at each end of the floor for goals but decided they would be too easily defended. Then he placed the goals above the players' heads. The problem of what to use for goals was solved when someone suggested peach baskets. Since there were 18 players in the class, the first games were played with teams of nine. This was cut to seven and then to five.

Dr. Naismith opposed most of the rules changes since 1925 but always was friendly with his progressive colleague, Dr. Allen.

Naismith left Springfield in 1895 and went to Denver to become physical director of the Denver YMCA. He studied medicine at Cross Medical College in Denver and was graduated in 1898. That year he went to Kansas where he first was director of chapel, a position long since abolished.

Later he became a professor of physical education. He headed the department until 1925, retiring from active teaching in 1937.

As chaplain of the First Kansas Infantry, Dr. Naismith spent four months on the Mexican border in 1916. He engaged in YMCA work in France after the United States entered World War I.

Dr. Naismith was a rugged, sturdy man, and if the matter had been left to him, he might not have taken all of Rugby's roughness out of basketball as he liked rough and tumble physical contests. In his youth he played lacrosse and until the late years of his teaching fenced regularly with his physical education students.

While at Springfield, Naismith played on the same football team with Amos Alonzo Stagg, still the dean of American grid coaches. Dr. Naismith originated the forerunner of the headgear while playing at Springfield, but the first "helmet" didn't protect the head, merely the ears.

Dr. Naismith almost always went to Kansas City on the opening night of the Naismith league, an industrial wheel named in his honor. As long as he was