

The Doctor and the Baskets

Player subsidies, scandals and big gates were undreamed of when basketball was invented

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Dr. Naismith holds a soccer ball like that first used for basketball. Peach baskets replaced refuse boxes because defending players turned the boxes over.

NOW in its 66th year, basketball, the sport that has outclassed all other athletic contests in terms of annual attendance, saw much of its early development in Denver. The game was only four years old when its inventor came to the Mile High City as YMCA director of physical education in 1895.

James Naismith came west to his new post after developing the game as an instructor at the YMCA College at Springfield, Mass. He added refinements and rewrote the rules in Denver while studying for his doctorate at Gross Medical College—later consolidated with medical schools at the universities of Denver and Colorado into the present University of Colorado Medical School, with its center in Denver.

The floor of Springfield's YMCA College gymnasium served as the first basketball court. The first "goals" were huge refuse boxes, not peach baskets, as has come to be generally believed.

Players frequently sat in these floor-level goals or turned them upside-down to prevent opposing teams from scoring. When players were injured scrambling for the goals the boxes were replaced with peach baskets, nailed to the gymnasium balcony.

A basket was placed at each end of the court, out of reach of the players with no particular height in mind. Later, when the rim of the basket was measured, it was found to be 10 feet from the floor—still the prescribed height for basketball goals today.

The first ball used was a regulation soccer type. The physical education class of 18 men was divided into two teams, with Naismith as referee. The number of men on a team was later reduced to seven and finally to five, where it stands now.

Basket bottoms were removed when players tired of climbing the stairs to the running track on the balcony above the main floor to remove the ball after each score!

The game spread rapidly and colleges all over America were soon playing it. Later it migrated to foreign countries and is now played in every civilized country on earth.

Each school soon developed its own version of basketball so, in an attempt to standardize his new game, Naismith wrote the first set of rules in February, 1892.

Peach baskets were soon replaced by metal hoops with a white cord net attached. Hoop diameters and backboard sizes have been standardized. But the fundamentals of Naismith's game remain.

Games were originally begun by tossing the ball into the air between teams, giving