

MIDDLE WEST OWES SPECIAL DEBT TO THE INVENTOR OF BASKETBALL

Dr. James A. Naismith Lived to See This Section of the Country Produce Dominant Teams in the Most Popular of Indoor Team Games—He Was Last of Three Persons Responsible for the Sport.

THE conjunction, forty-eight years ago this winter, of an educational authority, his young Canadian assistant, an impatient Irishman and a helpful janitor resulted in America's foremost indoor team game, basketball. The educational authority, Dr. Luther Gulick, died several years ago; Frank Mahan, the Irishman, and Stebbins, the janitor, have dropped out of sight. The young Canadian, Dr. James A. Naismith, to whom sole credit for the actual invention of the game belongs, was 78 years old when he died Tuesday in Lawrence just at the time of year when nearly 100 million players and spectators were turning their attention once more to the game which Dr. Naismith deliberately put together in the winter of 1891-92.

Sport followers of Kansas City and the surrounding region are in debt particularly to Dr. Naismith, for without his invention



WHEN BASKETBALL WAS ONE YEAR OLD—PHOTOGRAPH OF A GAME PLAYED IN SPRINGFIELD, MASS., IN 1893 (FROM DR. NAISMITH'S COLLECTION).

some of the most stirring athletic contests ever seen in this territory would never have been played. Host for many years to the national A. A. U. tournament Kansas City gained the reputation of being the basketball capital of the country, despite determined competition from the state of Indiana and New York City. Kansas City's teams frequently won the A. A. U. event and their players, such as Milton Singer and Forrest DeBernardi, to name only two, are regarded as among the immortals of the sport.

Lately the intercollegiate tournament has replaced adequately the A. A. U. events. At near-by Lawrence, Dr. F. C. Allen has developed teams at the University of Kansas, which year in and year out have been perhaps the strongest university fives in the nation. The Kansas City, Kansas, high school team once won the national interscholastic tournament in Chicago, a title captured a year or so later by a Wichita high school.

Old Convention hall was filled to capacity time after time on the nights of important games. Crowds of 10,000 and 12,000 were commonplace for several years. Next month the Naismith league, Kansas City's fastest amateur league, named after Dr. Naismith, is moving into the Municipal Auditorium because it had outgrown first, the Armory, and later, the Rockhurst field house. Next March the finest college teams in the nation, will compete here, probably in two tournaments, while the National Coaches' association holds its annual meeting.

KEEPING CHILDREN OFF STREETS.

Yet Dr. Naismith's contribution to sport was in no sense regional. In every state, city, town and village in America the winter months have been enlivened and made more joyous by innumerable games of basketball in school, church and Y. M. C. A. gymnasiums. Thousands of mothers have looked out of kitchen windows to note with relieved satisfaction that their children, along with those of the neighbors, were earnestly engaged in tossing a scuffed ball at some sort of crude iron hoop on a tree or a garage door, safely off the streets, building physiques, improving co-ordination, quickening eyes, passing the hours happily.

Not even national boundaries have confined basketball. In his library at Lawrence Dr. Naismith had rule books in the language of nearly fifty countries. One year almost 10,000 copies of the basketball guide were sold in China. The 1936 Olympic games saw more than twenty nations competing for a title, won of course by the United States whose players had a longer tradition, more experience behind them and better fitted in stature for a game which puts some premium on height.

A federal government bureau has estimated that each year 18 million persons play some sort of organized basketball, throughout the world. Probably about 15 million of those players are in this country where, the bureau estimates, 80 million persons watch the games. The number of children engaged in unorganized play very nearly approximates the number of healthy children in this country.

Basketball's popularity is due mostly to a few factors. Since only five players constitute a side it is easy for schools and clubs to organize a team. The equipment is relatively inexpensive and the rules are easily comprehended by players and spectators alike, both of which groups are attracted by its speed, the simplicity of its object and the frequency with which that object is attained.

NEEDED AN ENERGETIC PASTIME.

It was his indulgence in a cliché that led Dr. Naismith to be assigned the invention of a game to keep the active young students at the Springfield (Mass.) Y. M. C. A. training school, occupied during the winter. Led by Mahan, the students all studying to be Y. M. C. A. secretaries, rebelled just before Christ-

mas in 1891 at such indoor pastimes as twirling Indian clubs and playing tag and three-deep. Fresh from the football field the students wanted a game to challenge the skill and energy of real men. They appealed to Dr. Gulick, head of the school's physical education department. He promptly thought of Naismith who a few days before in a conversation with his superior had remarked, with notable unoriginality even for 1891, that there is nothing new under the sun, that the new things in this work are simply a combination of the old factors. Calling young Naismith into his office Dr. Gulick reminded him of that remark and suggested that he prove its truth by inventing some kind of a new game out of the elements of old ones.

Naismith's first thought was to invent an indoor version of football, which even then was the great college sport. He realized at once, however, that tackling would have to be

eliminated since the game was to be played on a hard surface. He reasoned that tackles are made in football to keep the ball carrier from running. He determined that in his game the man with the ball wouldn't be allowed to run. What could he do with it? Naismith decided that he should throw it through some sort of a goal. He reasoned that because of the small indoor quarters it would be better if a premium were put on accuracy rather than speed of throwing, so he decided to have the ball tossed in an arc instead of hurled in a straight line.

To put some action into the game Naismith ruled that the players, other than the ball holder, could move at will. The only question left was how to advance the ball. To solve that he invented the forward pass, not then used in football. He fixed the number of players on a side as nine because there were eighteen students in the class.

NO BOXES TO SPARE.

The matter of what to use for goals puzzled him. Finally he went to Stebbins, the janitor, and asked him for two boxes about eighteen inches square which could be placed on poles and used as goals. Stebbins, a parsimonious man when it came to saving boxes, said he didn't have any to spare. But he offered to go home and get a couple of empty peach baskets. Naismith decided they were just the thing and he and Stebbins nailed them to the balcony at each end of the gymnasium floor. Then Naismith called in the physical education class, explained the game, and invited them to go to it. They did and young men and women, boys and girls, have been "going to it" ever since.

After a few days Naismith and the players noted two flaws in the game. Both had their humorous aspects. The method of putting the ball in play, in the original version, called for the referee to stand outside of the court and throw the ball in between the two teams, since it did not seem safe for the official to venture among the milling players. Such a long toss required better aim than the referee possessed and both teams didn't get a fair chance at the ball. So the rule was changed to allow the official to go out on the floor and toss the ball between two players as he does now.

The problem of getting the ball out of the basket after a goal had its ludicrous aspects. At first a spectator was induced to stand in the balcony and retrieve the ball, an ordinary association football, but before the game was ended he got tired. A step ladder was set up and one player would scale it and return the ball. Then a wand was used to dislodge the ball. Not until 1898 were the now familiar iron rims with attached nets used.

Since its invention and early refinement basketball has changed little in its fundamental rules. As the game has developed new problems have cropped up with which the rules makers have had to deal. Dr. Naismith, who was honorary chairman for life of the rules committee of the game's governing bodies, always maintained a flexible mind on the matter of rules changes. He judged them on merit alone, opposing some, heartily approving others. He never regarded the original game as sacred, knowing better than anyone else that it was man-made and so could be man-changed.

It might be appropriate if players all over the world paused in their game sometime this winter to think a little about what Dr. Naismith did for them, their predecessors and the thousands who will follow them. But the pause should be brief, the game resumed quickly, for it was one of the great satisfactions of Dr. Naismith's life that during all of his waking hours he was conscious that somewhere someone was re-expressing for the so many millionth time, what he first expressed in 1891. *Ted O'Leary* — T. M. O.

Death Takes Doctor Naismith, Friend of Youth, who Had A Life of Service

Father of Basketball
Won Friends By
Living The deals He
Taught To Students

Funeral services will be held at the First Presbyterian church Friday afternoon, at 2:30 o'clock. Burial will take place in Memorial Park cemetery. The Masons will have charge at the grave.

Dr. James Naismith, who wanted to "build character in the hearts of young men" and spent his life doing it, died at 1:50 a.m. Tuesday morning at his home on University Drive.

The 78-year-old doctor had been director of physical education at the University for 40 years prior to June, 1937, when he retired from full-time teaching duties.

Sunday, Nov. 19, he was stricken with a cerebral hemorrhage and taken to the Lawrence Memorial hospital. After what was described as a remarkable recovery he was returned home, where he suffered a relapse Friday. Since last Saturday he had been in a coma.

Possessor of three degrees, Dr. Naismith was a physician, a member of the Kansas Medical Association, but never practiced medicine. He also was ordained a Presbyterian minister, but never preached.

He preferred, rather, to deliver his message on clean living indirectly through teaching young men to love clean athletics.

Doctor Naismith wrote a book in 1918 which he called "The Basis of Clean Living." That book and that title characterize the life of the former professor.

When Doctor Naismith was with the Y.M.C.A. in France during the World war, he found that too many of the boys got into trouble when they went into town on leave. His clean living and preaching this time took the form of a fight ring. He would start a bout just as the men were leaving and manage to get them so interested that they did not leave the camp at all. It was another example of the practical preaching Doctor Naismith advocated throughout his life.

Doctor Naismith married Miss Maude E. Sherman of Springfield, Mass., in 1894. Three daughters and two sons were born to the marriage. Mrs. Naismith died in March, 1937.

Born in Almonte, Ontario, on Nov. 6, 1861, Dr. Naismith was left an orphan at the age of eight. After making his home with an uncle, he attended McGill University in Montreal, and was graduated with an A.B. degree in 1887.

The second of Doctor Naismith's degrees he earned at Colorado University in 1898 when he was made doctor of medicine. He received a master of physical education degree in 1910 while with the Springfield, Mass., Y.M.C.A.