

Name _____ Date _____

History of Basketball

An American game that has traveled well is basketball, now played by more than 250 million people worldwide in an organized fashion, as well as by countless others in "pick-up" games. Basketball originated in 1891 when a future minister named James Naismith (1861-1939) was assigned to teach a physical education class at a Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) training school in Springfield, Massachusetts. The class had been noted for being disorderly, and Naismith was told to invent a new game to keep the young men occupied. Since it was winter and very cold outside, a game that could be played indoors was desirable.

Naismith thought back to his boyhood in Canada, where he and his friends had played "duck on a rock," which involved trying to knock a large rock off a boulder by throwing smaller rocks at it. He also recalled watching rugby players toss a ball into a box in a gymnasium. He had the idea of nailing up raised boxes into which players would attempt to throw a ball. When boxes couldn't be found, he used peach baskets. According to Alexander Wolff, in his book *100 Years of Hoops*, Naismith drew up the rules for the new game in "about an hour." Most of them still apply in some form today.

Basketball caught on because graduates of the YMCA school traveled widely, because Naismith disseminated the rules freely, and because there was a need for a simple game that could be played indoors during winter. Naismith's legacy included the first great college basketball coach, Forrest "Phog" Allen (1885-1974), who played for Naismith at the University of Kansas and went on to win 771 games as a coach at Kansas himself. Among Allen's star players was Wilt Chamberlain, who became one of professional basketball's first superstars -- one night in 1962, he scored a record 100 points in a game.

The first professional basketball league was formed in 1898; players earned \$2.50 for home games, \$1.25 for games on the road. Not quite 100 years later, Juwan Howard, a star player for the Washington Bullets (now called the Washington Wizards), had competing offers of more than \$100 million over seven seasons from the Bullets and the Miami Heat.

Many teams in the National Basketball Association now have foreign players, who return home to represent their native countries during the Olympic Games. The so-called Dream Team, made up of the top American professional basketball players, has represented the United States in recent Olympic Games. In 1996 the Dream Team trailed some opponents until fairly late in the games—an indication of basketball's growing international status. In Athens in 2004 Argentina took home the gold, the first time a Latin American country won the basketball honor.

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Basketball Fun Facts

James Naismith, a teacher at a YMCA in Springfield, Massachusetts, is credited with inventing basketball in 1891.

The first “hoops” were actually just peach baskets and the first backboards were made of wire.

The game became an official Olympic event at the Summer Games in Berlin, Germany in 1936.

Two leagues called the National Basketball League (NBL) and the Basketball Association of America (BAA) merged after the 1948-49 season to become today's National Basketball Association (NBA).

The Boston Celtics have won the most NBA championships (17), including seven straight from 1960 to 1966.

Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, who played 20 seasons in the NBA, holds the record for most points scored in a career with 38,387.

On March 2, 1962, Philadelphia center Wilt Chamberlain scored 100 points in one game against New York. That is the most one player has ever scored in one game.

Current Atlanta Hawks coach Lenny Wilkens has won more basketball games than any other coach.

The American Basketball Association (ABA) was a 10-team rival league to the NBA that began play in the 1967-68 season and folded nine years later after the 1975-76 season. Four current NBA teams – Indiana, Denver, New York, and San Antonio – originated in the ABA.

The NBA instituted the three-pointer before the 1979-80 season, an idea it borrowed from the ABA.

The Chicago Bulls have won all six NBA Finals in which they've appeared.

Michael Jordan, who retired in January 1999 but returned to the league in 2001, has scored more points (5,987) in the playoffs than any other player.

The Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame is located in Springfield, Mass.