

The History of Basketball

Pre-reading

Questions:

- How do you think basketball was born?

Definitions:

- Superintendent – a person who is in charge or who manages something
- Balcony – an upper floor that extends out over the main floor
- Opponent – one who plays or fights against another often in a contest or game



Kansas State Historical Society Portrait

Reading

The basketball player steals the ball. He passes it down the court to an open teammate. The teammate shoots. A defender tries to block the shot. No luck. The ball is sailing toward the hoop. Swish! The basket is good. The crowd cheers!!! Two points are added to the home team's score. Many people throughout the world love the game of basketball. It is an exciting game to watch and to play. Who do we have to thank for inventing this great game?

Dr. James Naismith and Dr. Luther Gulick are the men to thank. In December 1891, Naismith, a 31 year old Canadian native, invented the game, and Gulick prompted him to do so. Naismith was a graduate student at the YMCA Training School in Springfield, Massachusetts. He was studying physical education, and Gulick was the superintendent of the physical education department.

Gulick challenged the physical education graduate students to come up with, "an indoor game that would be interesting, easy to learn, and easy to play in the winter by artificial light." He wanted a game that would force players to use their minds and their bodies, a game of skill and strength.

Only Naismith took the **challenge** seriously. The concept of basketball was born from a game Naismith enjoyed as a child. He and school friends would play "duck-on-a-rock". The game involved attempting to knock a "duck" off the top of a large rock by tossing another rock at it.

The first games of basketball were played with a soccer ball (it was easier to dribble than a football) and two peach baskets. The baskets were nailed to the gymnasium's balcony at the height of ten feet to be used as goals. A person stood on top of a ladder to retrieve the ball. Naismith devised a set of thirteen rules for this new game of basketball. The **original** thirteen rules have stood the test of time pretty well. Here are some of them:

1. A player cannot run with the ball. The player must throw it from the spot on which he catches it.

2. No shouldering, holding, pushing, striking or tripping in any way of an opponent.

The first infringement of this rule by any person shall count as a foul; the second shall disqualify him until the next goal is made or, if there was evident intent to injure the person, for the whole of the game. No substitution shall be allowed.

3. The time shall be two fifteen minute halves with five minutes' rest between.

4. The side making the most goals in that time shall be declared the winners.

The popularity of basketball spread quickly. It was introduced in many nations as early as 1893. It became an Olympic sport at the Berlin games in 1936. Naismith was flown to Berlin to watch those games. He died in 1939.

Understanding

1. What does the word **challenge** mean? _____

2. How are today's basketball games similar to the first basketball games? _____

3. How are today's basketball games different from the first basketball games? _____

4. What does the word **original** mean? _____

5. Why is Gulick considered an important person in the history of basketball? _____

6. How old is the sport of basketball? _____

7. What historic moment did Naismith get to experience before his death? _____

Writing

Option A: Summarize the reading in your own words.

Option B: Write about today's basketball teams, players, or coaches. What teams, players, or coaches do you like best and why?
