

## THE ORIGIN OF BASKET BALL

Dr. James Naismith

(Given at Forum January 5, 1932, Springfield College)

I have been asked to speak on the origin of basket ball and I feel a little embarrassed about this because it is more or less personal, but wherever I go no matter how fine a talk or lecture I may give, always two questions are asked of me either at the time or afterwards:

1. How did you come to think of it?
2. Has it changed much since that time?

These are two thoughts in the minds of people, out of curiosity, or from interest in the game itself. I am going to try to give you a full idea of basket ball, its origin and some of the changes that have taken place - very few in my limited time.

In order to get an idea of the origin of the game, it is necessary for us to know something of the situations in which we were at that time. I look at the young people coming into physical education today with all the facilities for work and with all the different games and sports; in fact, we have come to the point where a great deal of physical education is games and the policy of many institutions is games.

In 1890, when I first entered this institution there were practically no games with the exception of football, baseball and track; football in the fall, baseball and track in the spring. Soccer we played very little. From the time that we stopped playing football in the fall until baseball began in the spring, we had nothing but work on the horse, buck, and different pieces of apparatus, along with calisthenics. I wonder what men in physical education today would do with that limited sphere to work in; how would we get along? That was the condition we had and we all felt, Drs. Seerley, Clark, Gulick and Stagg, that we should get together and talk it over. We needed some sort of game that would be interesting and could be played indoors. We had three games: three-deep, line ball, and Dr. Gulick's game called cricket.

We had a seminar in which we discussed these things quite frequently. It was a seminar in psychology and one day in discussing inventions, Dr. Gulick made this statement: "There is nothing new under the sun, but all new things are simply a re-combination of the factors of existing things." That was the proposition made to us. We simply re-combined the factors of the old and made the new.

After thinking it over, I said to Dr. Gulick: "If that is true, we can go to work and invent a new game." Nothing much

more was said about it but Dr. Stagg said he assigned that as our home work for the next meeting but no one brought in any record at all.

There was a class of secretarial men, twenty to twenty-five years of age. Most of them played on the football team and when the winter season came and they were put on the parallel bars, etc. they had no interest in them. They did not care for it, they were not interested in learning it, and there was no fun in it. Dr. Clark, who is present today, one of the finest athletes and gymnasts we had in the institution, a graduate of Williams, a medical man, everything in the world that could make a man efficient in work of this kind, found that same condition. It was not individuals at all, but existing conditions.

At a faculty meeting Dr. Clark spoke and told how difficult it was to handle these men. He made another statement saying "The difficulty is, with that particular group of men what we want is recreative work; something that will please them and something they will want to do."

I told Dr. Clark that if he would play games, he would get the attention of those fellows. After a little while, Dr. Gulick said "Naismith, I wish you would take charge of that class." If I ever tried to back out of anything, I did then. I did not want to do it. I had charge of a group interested in boxing, wrestling, fencing and swimming and I was perfectly satisfied with my work. Dr. Gulick said he wanted me to do it. I had to do it or get out and I felt pretty sore about it. I thought Dr. Gulick had imposed on me by giving me something I did not want to do and compelling me to do it. As we walked along the hall, talking about it, he said "Naismith, this would be a good time for you to invent that new game you said you could." I closed my fist, and looked at Dr. Gulick's face for a spot to plant my fist, but I saw a peculiar twinkle in his eye which seemed to say "put up or shut up".

He then said I could do two things: 1. I could make up a game. 2. The game must interest that group.

Whether or not he realized the importance of what he did at that time I don't know but it turned out to be the best thing that could have been done.

I took that class - not in very good humor, nor grace. We tried to play football indoors, but broke the arms and legs of the players. It proved to be too rough, and it was not long before the boys rebelled against it. We then tried soccer, but broke all the windows. Then we tried lacrosse and broke up the apparatus. We found that this did not work.

I sat at my desk one day, scratching my head, trying to work something out. This thought came to me: They all liked to play football. Why can't we play it indoors?--Because it is too rough. Why is it rough?--Because we tackle. Why do we tackle?--Because we run with the ball. If we did not run with the ball, there would be no necessity for tackling. We need a game to play indoors. -----I had it! Just by asking myself these few questions--Why? I think that is one of the biggest things in the world today.

(We have developed into two classes: Scientists who inquire How. Philosophers who inquire Why. The philosophers are so few we do not get very far. If the scientists told us how and then why, we would be a good deal better off in the world - this is only on the side, away from the origin of basket ball.)

If we don't let them run with the ball, what are we going to do? Think of a goal of some kind. In soccer, and lacrosse, we had a perpendicular goal and a goal keeper, but the difficulty with that was that in order to make a goal you had to throw the ball with as much speed as possible. The harder you threw, the more chance there was for you to make a goal. That again made for roughness. I thought of the underhand swing. That is a negative rule and negative rules do not work efficiently.

I was stumped for a while. By and by I began to think of a little game I had played near Affleck's home - Duck on the Rock. We found a rock two feet high and two feet across. Each one took a stone about the size of his fist. One put his stone on the rock and the rest of us got behind a line and tried to knock it off. We would throw our stones as hard as we could at his and if we happened to hit it, it was all right, but if we missed it, we went way down. Once in a while we threw the ball in such a way that it would knock his off and come back again and we would walk up and get it.

I think I have it! Instead of throwing the ball straight for the goal, let us throw it in a curve and we cannot throw it hard. You must take your time and use skill instead of power and speed. Then I thought of putting a mark on the floor; just a circle, and use that for the goal, but the goal keeper would stand in it and we could not make the goal. Put it above his head and no one can stand in it and you would have a chance of making a goal once in a while. It would be horizontal and high in the air.

My next thought was how was I going to put it in play? I used Gulick's idea of taking parts of other games. Polo - put the ball in the center, line the team up at both ends and have them rush for the ball. There would be a mix-up in the center of the floor when that happened so that idea was thrown out. I recalled in playing English Rugby that when the ball goes out of bounds, two forward lines line up at right angles to the side line where the ball goes out; the umpire stands outside, back of the line, and throws the ball in between the two lines. But I remembered that when we jumped for the ball the elbows interfered and there was

much roughness. If we took two men out of that group and put them in the center, there would be no roughness. I did not appreciate the ingenuity of American boys for I have seen some pretty rough things done. We threw it from the outside in on the floor. Then I thought that the ball must be thrown in such a way as to fall between the two center players.

We went to work and jotted down some of these thoughts. There were thirteen of them - until that time thirteen was an unlucky number for me but since then it has changed. I had these typed and carried them down and pinned them up on the bulletin board. As I was going down with a soccer ball in my hand, as I had concluded we would want a round light ball, I met "Pop" Stebbins. I said, "Have you got a couple of boxes eighteen inches square?" He said, "No, but I have a couple of old peach baskets." He brought them up and I nailed one at each end of the gallery - ten feet from the floor. If the gallery had been eleven feet high the goals would probably have been at that height today.

I got things ready and the class came down. Frank Mahan, a big, burly Irishman who played tackle on the football team, came down among the first and my mind was pretty well disturbed. I had a soccer ball in my hand, two peach baskets on the wall and an idea in my head. I did not know how to go about it. My future as I looked at it then depended on the throw of the ball. When Mahan came down he looked up and saw one basket, then he looked around and saw another one. "Humpf" he said "another new game." That was the attitude they all had and they were ready to scrap anything brought before them. They did not want to give in to me but I called them up. There were eighteen men in the class. I divided it into two sections, nine men on a side at first. Mahan was center on one side, Patton on the other. I tossed the ball between them and I never had any more trouble with the class, or the game. The class took to it and the only difficulty I had was to drive them out when the hour closed.

Another reason was: There was a school not very far away. Our gymnasium was down in the basement and the door opened on to the street. A number of school teachers used to come in and watch the boys play games and added incentive to playing. The regular hour was between 11 and 12. At the close of that hour every day the girls would come in and the boys would play ball for them. Soon there were as many as 100 people watching the game from the gallery. It was not long until some of the teachers came to me and asked why they could not play that game. I did not see any reason why they could not. I thought it was a good game and would be all right for them.

After consultation they were given a certain hour to practice. You boys don't know what clothes the girls wore then - bustles, hoops and high heels - and they played in them! It was not long until the stenographers of the school got up another team. Some

of us young unmarried men got our sweethearts interested in it and we got a ladies faculty team. The girls asked me to umpire. I agreed to but I didn't know as much about ladies as I do now. We got along nicely until I called a foul on one of the girls. She asked, "Did you call a foul on me?" and then she told me where I came from, where I was going to, and what my character was! I tried to pacify her but couldn't do it. The only way was to toss up the ball and then she had to fall into her place.

That girl was not different from other girls. They never had a chance to take part in any game where sportsmanship was required. It was something new for them. Some had played shuttle cock and a few other games similar to that; they had not even played tennis. For a number of years the rules were adopted as unsportsmanlike conduct among women. This is not true today. Some of the finest sportsmanship has been exhibited in women's basket ball games. They never had the chance to do that sort of thing and get into the line of sportsmanship. I felt if basket ball did not do anything else than relieve womankind from that condition, it was well worth putting into existence.

Basketball has been played on roller skates, on horseback, and in the water so the game has been extended from that time.

Since coming to this institution there are two things that struck me:

1. As I stood in the gallery the other day and watched the class of one hundred men on the floor, I thought back to 1891 when there were three men in the physical department: Harvey Smith, Myron Rideout, and Webb.

2. Another thing was that the boys seemed to be very uniform in size. There used to be stubby men and tall men. I was trying to find the tall men but I could not. Why is this? I made this remark to Mr. Brock. His reply was, "We select our men." What a difference in 1891! We used to go out and compel them to come in and now some of them are compelled to stay out. What a wonderful change in forty years!

This thought came to me - why do we have so many now in comparison with that time? It was a very different proposition going into physical education work in 1890 than it is now. When I decided to enter physical work and spoke to a young man whom I expected to be my brother-in-law, he asked "What are you going to do now?" I replied, "I am going to Springfield and take up athletics." Then he said, "Athletics to the devil" When I first played football on the McGill team in 1883 a group of my chums got together and had a prayer meeting over me because I was playing on the varsity team. You would not realize that now but it is a fact. The change of attitude is illustrated in a letter which I received

from the man who started that prayer meeting. He wrote, "In thinking over our old class I don't think any one has made a bigger contribution to the building of character than the one who invented basket ball." There is a difference in outlook on physical education today from what it was at that time. Men had to enter that work against the general opinion and they had to have more or less of a missionary spirit in working out their ideas of what good could be done.

I hope you will pardon a personal experience, but it may help you. Way back in my college days I was lying on the bed one Sunday and thought: What is this all about? What is life about? What are you going to do? What are you going to be? What motto will you hold up before you? I put up on the wall, not in writing, but in my mind this thought: "I want to leave the world a little bit better than I found it." That is the motto I had then and it is the motto I have today. That has been a mighty fine thing to me.

I was studying theology and planning to be a minister as that looked to be the best thing I could do. During football practice when McMutt was playing guard, something went wrong. The air went blue with profanity. In the northern woods we have nothing else to do but practice profanity and he was a good exponent of it. By and by he turned around to me and said, "I beg your pardon. I forgot you were there." I had heard worse than that before but I thought: why should anyone apologize to me for profanity? I went to Dr. Budge, secretary of the Y M C A, and told him "I believe that there was something in playing the game square, playing it hard with all the intensity that you have, but playing it square. I think you can influence men by doing that sort of thing." Dr. Budge told me they had a school for that very thing in Springfield, and I told him I was going to see it.

I came in the summer and saw what you were doing. I took a trip not only in this state but out through the west to see how Y M C A's worked, and found that there was a possibility of building and developing the character of the individual through physical activities. I have never regretted it. I asked my sister and uncle a few years ago if they had forgiven me for not becoming a minister. They shook their heads. I had gone against their wishes but I am not sorry and I have found it is a tremendously fine thing for the building of character.

The best definition of character I know is: It is that combination of reflexes within me which determine how I shall act under unforeseen circumstances. The reflexes you build on the floor are going to become a part of your character. The best illustration of that is:

An old watchman was riding a horse through the main street close to the university just as the students were going out. His