

Hoop History

The razzle-dazzle world of American basketball had humble beginnings in a Massachusetts gymnasium. James Naismith, an instructor at the YMCA Training School in Springfield, Massachusetts, is credited with inventing basketball. Naismith is said to have done so in order to give his students a sport that could be played indoors and fill the months between the end of football season and the beginning of baseball season.

Naismith had tried indoor soccer and lacrosse with little success. In the winter of 1891, Naismith decided to try something different. He hung a peach basket from the balcony at each end of his gymnasium and tossed up a soccer ball between two nine-man teams.

Some of the early rules included the following:

- If one side committed three fouls in a row, it counted as a goal for the other side.
- A player could not run with the ball. It had to be thrown from the spot at which it was caught.
- The game consisted of two 15-minute halves with a 5-minute rest in between.
- The ball could be thrown in any direction.
- The side making the most goals won the game.

The game was immediately popular. It was first played at other YMCAs and then spread to colleges. In the very early games, fans stepped into the games, using umbrellas or baseball bats to assist the players of their favorite teams. Soon net cages were put up to keep the fans out. That's where the term "cagers" originated. It is still used to refer to basketball players.

Unit 6

In 1898, Naismith took a job at Kansas University (KU) as the Director of Physical Education. He coached the KU team for 39 years before retiring in 1937. Naismith not only was KU's first coach but also was the only coach in the school's history with a losing record. During his career, Naismith watched his invention being transformed from a game with handwritten rules to an international sport that was included in the Olympics for the first time in 1936.

- Do you think Coach Naismith would be surprised about the acclaim given to today's NBA players? Why?

- How is basketball today a transformation of basketball in Naismith's day?

- What aspects of basketball today have been preserved from Naismith's day?