

# The Development of Professional Basketball in the United States, with an Emphasis on the History of the NBA to its 50th Anniversary Season in 1996-97

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Basketball has the distinction of being the only major competitive sport that began in the United States (Branch, 1970). Dr. James A. Naismith invented the game of basketball in 1891. While a physical education instructor at the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Training School (now Springfield College) in Massachusetts, and at the suggestion of Luther Gulick, the Director of the Gymnasium, Naismith, using two peach baskets and a soccer ball, developed a team sport that could be played indoors during the winter months (Mechikoff & Estes, 1993)

The game of basketball is now played by amateurs of all ages and at all levels, as well as by highly-skilled and highly-paid professionals. Millions of people throughout the United States and in many other countries now pack gymnasiums and huge arenas to watch basketball games, and millions more worldwide watch basketball games on television. Clearly, the game has come a long way from its early beginnings.

The intent of this paper is to chronicle the development of professional basketball in the U.S., documenting the significant changes that have taken place through the years as professional basketball modestly began, made varying degrees of progress, at times struggled to survive and finally spurred to what is now international popularity. Furthermore, to research, synthesize

and relate historical basketball information that few people would know or remember, outside of basketball historians and those interested in basketball trivia.

In its earliest years the game was played mostly by YMCAs and later by high schools and colleges. But even before 1900 devoted players rented armories and dance halls to play basketball. Since the rental of these buildings often exceeded whatever players could afford to pay, crowds were admitted for an admission fee. After the rent was paid any money left over was split up among the players. Thus the first "professionals" did not play the game so much to make money, but more for an opportunity to play. Promoters soon came into the game and hired players to play on a per game basis (Neft, Johnson, Cohen, Deutsch, 1975).

The first professional basketball league with contracts and paid players was the National League of Professional Basketball Teams, which began play Dec. 2, 1898. "That was the first organized league. That is real. That is documented. Anything else, they were just passing the hat," stated Mike Brooslim, curator of the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, Mass. The National League of Professional Basketball Teams had teams in Philadelphia, Germantown, PA, Kensington, PA, Trenton, N.J. and Millville, N.J. The Trenton Nationals won the first championship with an 18-2 record (Pitarresi, 1997). As more and more people became aware of the game and be-

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gan to play it, basketball experienced an explosive growth in a relatively short period of about twenty years (Mechikoff & Estes, 1993)

In the early years professional basketball consisted mostly of traveling teams that played a barnstorming schedule, local or regional tournaments and unsuccessful, short-lived leagues. Three dominate teams of this era were the Original Celtics, formed in 1914 which, with Nat Holman as its star, won over 90 percent of its games during the 1920s; and the all-black New York Renaissance (Rens) and Harlem Globetrotters. Organized in 1923, the Rens won 88 consecutive games during the 1930s before disbanding following the 1948 season. Organized in 1927, the Globetrotters incorporated trick shots, rapid ball handling and clowning into their game to entertain fans. Later, in the 1950s, they would take their act overseas (Swanson & Spears, 1995).

In 1937 the National Basketball League (NBL) was formed. It consisted of 13 industrial and independent teams in the midwest. The Akron Goodyear Wingfoots won the first championship by beating the Oshkosh All-Stars two out of three times in the post season playoff (Gietschier, 1996). Although some players received payment of some sort to play basketball much earlier than this and because only a few people are aware of the old National League of Professional Basketball Teams, the NBL is generally recognized as the first professional league.

The NBL endured several difficult seasons, especially during World War II, and twice finished the season with only four teams. Of particular note, in 1942-43 an NBL team, the Chicago Studebaker Flyers, was the first professional team to be integrated. In 1946 the NBL was playing with 12 teams. In the East were the Buffalo Bisons (who became the Tri-Cities Blackhawks before the season ended), Fort Wayne Zollner Pistons, Rochester Royals, Syracuse Nationals, Toledo Jeeps and Youngstown Bears. In the West were the Anderson Pack-

ers, Chicago American Gears, Detroit Gems, Indianapolis Kautskys, Oshkosh All-Stars and the Sheboygan Redskins (Gietschier, 1996).

Also in 1946, another professional league, the Basketball Association of America (BAA), was formed. The National Basketball Association (NBA), as we know it today, officially traces its roots to June 6, 1946 when prospective team and arena owners met at the Commodore Hotel in New York City and signed the original NBA charter. At that time, however, the league was called the Basketball Association of America (*Official NBA Guide*, 1996-97; NBA Press Release, 1996). The first President was Maurice Podoloff (*Official NBA Register*, 1996-97). Therefore the BAA is considered the forerunner of the NBA.

The BAA started play with 11 teams in two divisions. The original teams in the East were the Boston Celtics, New York Knickerbockers, Philadelphia Warriors, Providence Steamrollers, Toronto Huskies and the Washington Capitols. The West consisted of the St. Louis Bombers, the Chicago Stags, Cleveland Rebels, Detroit Falcons and the Pittsburgh Ironmen (*Official NBA Guide*, 1996-97)

The impetus behind these early leagues was that businessmen who owned and operated large sports buildings (including the Arena Managers Association of America) wanted to attract crowds to those facilities when they were not booked for hockey games, boxing bouts and other events (Swanson & Spears, 1995; Gietschier, 1996; "NBA Heritage," 1996). Professional basketball was a hard sell back then, with owners, players, officials and the other early pioneers involved required to promote the game in order to bring in a decent crowd ("NBA Heritage," 1996). It was their vision that professional basketball could move from the smoke-filled dance halls and dusty armories that had been its home since the turn of the century and become more of a

barnstorming sideshow; it was never in even their wildest fantasies that it would occupy the place of prominence on the global sports scene that it does today (*Official NBA Guide*, 1996-97)

On November 1, 1946 the New York Knickerbockers played at Toronto in the first BAA game. The contest was played on a hardwood floor laid over ice in Maple Leaf Gardens, where the National Hockey League's Toronto Maple Leafs played (Voisin, 1996). The Knicks won that game, 68-66 (Taylor, 1996)

An indicator of priorities during that time period is that the Knickerbockers were relegated to play in the 69th Regiment Armory if Madison Square Garden was hosting a hockey game or a circus. Also, the Minneapolis Lakers, the best team of that era, were shuffled among three different arenas for home games ("NBA Heritage," 1996). Teams traveled by bus and train in the early years (*Official NBA Guide*, 1996-97)

The BAA played a 60-game, regular season schedule followed by the playoffs (*Official NBA Guide*, 1996-97; Gietschier, 1996) The Knickerbockers' Ossie Schectman made the first basket in BAA history. "It was a simple 'give-and-go'" play, recalled Schectman (Voisin, 1996)

In its second season in 1947 the BAA underwent some changes, with Cleveland, Detroit, Pittsburgh and Toronto dropping out and the Baltimore Bullets joining after leaving what was considered a lesser league, the American Basketball League. Regardless, Baltimore won the BAA title by beating Philadelphia (*Official NBA Guide*, 1996-97; Gietschier, 1996)

Meanwhile, the NBL also underwent some shuffling in 1947 as Chicago, Detroit and Youngstown left and the Flint Dow A.C.s and the Minneapolis Lakers were added. With the NBL mostly playing in smaller mid-western cities but with better bigger-named players, and the revised BAA comprised of predominantly East Coast teams in larger

markets, the two leagues were in competition. In 1948-49 Fort Wayne, Indianapolis, Minneapolis and Rochester jumped from the NBL to the BAA, but that did not stop some of the best college players from still going to the NBL. The result was a merger of the two leagues on August 3, 1949 (Swanson & Spears, 1995; Gietschier, 1996). The BAA, with Podoloff still the president, absorbed the six surviving members of the rival NBL and changed its name from the BAA to the NBA (Taylor, 1996)

In the early years of the BAA and after its name was changed to the NBA, the biggest star and most dominant player in professional basketball was George Mikan. A 6 foot 10 inch center, Mikan began his career with the Chicago American Gears in the 1946-47 season and finished it with the Minneapolis Lakers in 1955-56. Mikan led the Lakers to five NBA championships in six seasons. His play under the basket was so overwhelming that in 1951 the free throw lane was widened from six feet to twelve feet to move him farther out so as to give others a chance (Hoffer, 1996; "NBA Heritage," 1996). The next star in the NBA was Bob Cousy, a play-making guard for the Boston Celtics who, in terms of passing, set the standard for that time with his no-look, behind the back passes.

In 1947, the second year of the merger, the Minneapolis Lakers were one of three teams added. Of the three teams, the Lakers were the only franchise to survive, although it had to relocate to Los Angeles in 1960 to do so. On the other hand, in alphabetical order the list of franchises that entered the league at various times but did not survive include: the Anderson Packers (1949-50), Baltimore Bullets (1947-48/1954-55), Chicago Stags (1946-50), Cleveland Rebels (1946-47), (original) Denver Nuggets (1949-50), Detroit Falcons (1946-47), Indianapolis Jets (1948-49), Indianapolis Olympians (1949-50/1952-53), Pittsburgh Ironmen (1946-47), Providence Steamroll-

ers (1946-47, 1948-49), St. Louis Bombers (1946-47/1949-50), Sheboygan Redskins (1949-50), Toronto Huskies (1946-47), Washington Capitals (1946 47/1950-51) and the Waterloo Hawks (1949-50) (*Official NBA Register*, 1996-97; Taylor, 1996)

With nowhere near the fanfare, drama and controversy that surrounded Jackie Robinson's breaking Major League Baseball's color line with the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947, on October 31, 1950 the Washington Capitals' Earl Lloyd became the first Negro to play in an NBA game (Taylor, 1996). Chuck Cooper with the Boston Celtics and Nat "Sweetwater" Clifton with the New York Knickerbockers followed him later that year (A. Rust and E. Rust, 1985; "NBA Heritage," 1996). Hank DeZonie also played five games for Tri-Cities during the 1950-51 season (Z. Spoelstra, personal communication, February 18, 1997).

The NBA has not always prospered and was not always as popular as it is today. In fact, the NBA was in trouble in the early 1950s when it suffered and almost died from a lack of interest because of boring, low-scoring games ("NBA Heritage," 1996). On November 22, 1950, for instance, the lowest-scoring game in NBA history was played when the Fort Wayne Pistons beat the Minneapolis Lakers 19-18 (*Official NBA Guide*, 1996-97). Also average attendance during the 1952-53 season, the first year that figures are available, was only 3,210 per game (Swanson & Spears, 1995; Taylor, 1996). The invention of the 24-second clock by Danny Biasone, then the owner of the Syracuse Nationals, speeded up the action and may have saved the league. The clock was first used in the NBA on October 30, 1954 ("NBA Timeline," 1996; Swanson & Spears, 1995)

Regardless, around the time of its 10-year anniversary in 1956, there was concern that the league might not survive. However that year Boston drafted 6 foot 11 inch Bill Russell from the University of San Francisco and his rebounding and defensive skills led

to a new uptempo, fast-break style of play that helped revolutionize the game. Russell teamed up with Cousy and when soon joined by several other good players, formed the foundation of the Boston Celtics dynasty which from 1956 through 1969 won 11 championships in 13 years ("NBA Heritage," 1996)

In 1959 the NBA, operating with eight teams, relocated many of its smaller franchises to major population centers and began a westward movement with the Minneapolis Lakers going to Los Angeles. With better players, especially seven-foot Wilt Chamberlain who entered the league that year after playing the previous season with the Harlem Globetrotters, the NBA passed the two million mark in attendance (Swanson & Spears, 1995). Chamberlain, an offensive star, and Russell, the defensive star, seemingly were in competition with each other and created an exciting personal match-up and box office draw. Although Chamberlain, who beginning in 1959 led the league in scoring seven straight years, took individual honors, the Russell-led Celtics won the team title every year from 1959 through 1966. Other stars also entered the league around that time, including Oscar Robertson, Jerry West, Bob Pettit and Elgin Baylor, all of whom added new energy and created a significant boost in interest ("NBA Heritage," 1996). By 1970 the NBA had expanded to 17 teams spread out across the country. New stars like "Pistol" Pete Maravich, Earl "the Pearl" Monroe and Walt "Clyde" Frazier added individuality and a more flamboyant, creative style of play.

In the meantime, however, a new professional league—the American Basketball Association (ABA)—was formed in 1967 (*Official NBA Guide*, 1996-97). This upstart league used a red, white and blue ball, a 30-second shot clock, allowed three-points for field goals made beyond 25 feet (Swanson and Spears, 1995) and in general emphasized a more individual and creative style of

play than the established NBA. The big star and symbol of the ABA was Julius Erving, nicknamed "Dr. J." Erving lent credibility to the fledgling league, which helped attract other top college stars and even enticed some NBA players to jump leagues ("NBA Heritage," 1996).

With the exception of the Denver Nuggets of the old NBL in 1948-49, major league professional basketball did not extend westward beyond Minneapolis and St. Louis for many years. However throughout the 1960s the trend to expand west continued with franchises shifting or being formed in San Francisco (1962) and San Diego and Seattle (1967), as well as Atlanta (1968). Counting the short-lived American Basketball League (not to be confused with the old ABL) which briefly existed from 1961-63, and the ABA (1967-1976), teams were established in Hawaii, Kansas City, Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Antonio, Minnesota, Anaheim, Dallas, Denver, Houston and Oakland (Swanson & Spears, 1995). In 1976, the ABA's four strongest franchises (the New York Nets, Denver Nuggets, Indianapolis Pacers and the San Antonio Spurs) merged into the NBA ("NBA Timeline," 1996; Taylor, 1996)

In the late 1970s, however, the NBA again suffered from waning interest, dwindling attendance and decreased television ratings. In fact in 1979, in its 33rd year of existence, the future of the league was uncertain with 40 percent of the seats in NBA arenas empty and TV ratings down 18 percent ("NBA Heritage," 1996). By this time the league consisted mostly of African-American players and most of its top stars were black. Whereas the influx of black athletes added excitement and reenergized the NBA in the late 1950s and early 1960s, now ironically many critics said the league was "too black," and that it had become a league of individual stars but with a lack of teamwork ("NBA Heritage," 1996). Others ascribed it to the long regular season that eliminated

only a few teams from the post season play-off series. Still others maintained that it was the much-publicized drug abuse scandals among players of that time period that damaged the public's perception of the game.

But just as Russell, Robertson ("the Big O"), West and Chamberlain had done about two decades earlier, in the 1980s along came former college superstars Earvin "Magic" Johnson in Los Angeles and Larry Bird in Boston to again invigorate the league. Both being tall (6 feet 9 inches), versatile players who played guard (a position formerly intended for smaller, quicker players who could dribble and handle the ball, pass it and set up plays) they changed the way the game was played. That was because Johnson and Bird could do everything that much smaller players of previous eras could do and, based on their eventual inclusion among the officially-selected 50 best players in NBA history, do it better. Just when the NBA needed a shot of adrenaline, Johnson and Bird gave the NBA a new marquee match-up that revived its sagging popularity.

Johnson and Bird developed into a great personal rivalry that equaled the Wilt Chamberlain and Bill Russell rivalry of an earlier era. They challenged each other and brought out the best in each other, as well as in all the other players that they played with and against. The two gave new spirit to the game and helped take the game to a higher level. In fact, with television interest and revenues at a new high, the NBA was never hotter (Swanson & Spears, 1995; "NBA Heritage," 1996)

Somewhat overshadowed in all this was that on August 30, 1979, Anne Meyers joined the Indianapolis Pacers, becoming the first woman to sign with an NBA team (Taylor, 1996). That same year, the three-point shot (3 points for a field goal made beyond 23'9"), an ABA innovation that the NBA adopted, was introduced (Swanson & Spears, 1995; Taylor, 1996)

During this period of time and since, several superstars and attractions had entered the league, including Charles Barkley, Hakeem Olajuwon, David Robinson and of course Michael Jordan, to name only a few. It is difficult and perhaps unfair to try to compare players from different eras. However, based on the sheer number of his individual basketball records, accumulation of the most prestigious awards and honors that can be bestowed upon a player, major contributions to team championships and almost any other quantifiable criteria, Jordan has been recognized by most basketball experts to be among the very best to ever play the game (Swanson & Spears, 1995). Referred to as "Air Jordan," "His Airness," and "the Human Highlight Film" because of his unique acrobatic moves while sailing through the air and his extraordinary above-the-rim hangtime, for many Jordan has set a new standard for comparison. Between 1984 and 1992 Johnson, Bird and Jordan won every Most Valuable Player Award. The most recent big-name player to enter the NBA is Shaquille O'Neal. Together this group has not only sustained but increased the popularity of professional basketball.

By the early 1990s professional basketball and especially the NBA Playoff Series had become one of the nation's most popular television sports events. An average of almost 18 million TV sets were tuned to each of the six games of the NBA championship final series in 1993 between the Chicago Bulls and the Phoenix Suns. As one network sportscaster stated following that series, "... the NBA and (commissioner) David Stern have the most popular athletes and they have marketed them well. . . . The heroes are in basketball . . . basketball's pace is made for the MTV generation" (Martzke, 1993). Sound league management, exciting and talented players, excellent marketing and a fast-paced game all contributed to the rise of professional basketball in the 1980s and 1990s. After one hundred years the

sport experienced unprecedented popularity (Swanson & Spears, 1995).

The 1996-1997 season was the 50th Anniversary year of the National Basketball Association (*Official NBA Guide*, 1996-97)

The NBA currently consists of 29 teams, with only two, the New York Knickerbockers and the Boston Celtics, still playing in the same city and having the same nickname. Besides the Knicks and Celtics, the only other NBA franchise today that can claim roots going back to the BAA's first season is the Golden State Warriors, which played in the BAA as the Philadelphia Warriors. (*NBA News*, 1996). Four other current franchises go back to the NBL. They are the Detroit Pistons, which started out as the Fort Wayne Zollner Pistons; the Philadelphia 76ers, which had their beginning as the Syracuse Nationals; the Atlanta Hawks, which were once the Buffalo Bisons and the Tri-City Blackhawks before moving to Milwaukee, St. Louis and then Atlanta; and the Sacramento Kings, which started out in 1948 as the Rochester Royals, became the Cincinnati Royals in 1957, the Kansas City Omaha Kings in 1972 and the Kansas City Kings in 1975 before moving to Sacramento in 1985 (*Official NBA Guide*, 1996-97; *Official NBA Register*, 1996-97; Gietschier, 1996; Taylor, 1996; "NBA Heritage," 1996)

On November 1, 1996, fifty years to the day after the first official NBA game between the Toronto Huskies and the New York Knickerbockers, the Toronto Raptors, a franchise that has only been in the current NBA for two years, hosted the Knickerbockers in a game that was played at the Skydome. This time, rather than on a floor placed over ice, the game was played on a floor that was laid over the Astroturf field that the Toronto Blue Jays' Major League Baseball team plays on.

From its humble beginnings playing in dingy arenas in small cities in the eastern part of the U.S., a half century later the NBA has become international in scope with the

1992 U.S. Olympic "Dream Team" helping increase popularity around the world ("NBA Heritage," 1996). NBA games have already been played in Germany, Spain, Mexico and Japan. They have been televised in 180 countries in 44 languages. Furthermore, although Wat Musaka from China played briefly for the Knicks in 1947 and there have been other foreign players periodically here and there on NBA rosters throughout the league's history, in 1985-86 Georgi Glouchkov from Bulgaria led what has been called "the foreign invasion." There are currently 32 foreign players in the league, with the NBA holding the rights to seven others ("NBA Timeline," 1996; Z. Spoelstra, personal communications, February 18, 1997 and February 24, 1997; two unidentified NBA communications department employees, personal communications, February 24, 1997). Also, from no African-American players in the NBA when the league was started, the percentage has steadily increased from the time Earl Lloyd broke the color line in 1950 to slightly more than half (51%) in 1966 to the vast majority (82%) in 1996-97 ("NBA Timeline," 1996). However, while basketball has led all other sports in the appointment of African-American head coaches, the fact remains that team ownership remains exclusively in the hands of whites. Likewise most of the front office personnel are also white (Swanson & Spears, 1995).

For comparative purposes, the average player salary in 1946 was about \$4500 per year ("NBA Timeline," 1996), with the average salary in 1997 being \$2.3 million. The top superstar in the game today (Michael Jordan) earns an annual salary in the \$30 million range (Voisin, 1996); Spoelstra, personal communication, February 18, 1997). Whereas Mikan averaged \$12,000 a year in salary, in July of 1996 Shaquille O'Neal signed a seven-year contract with the Los Angeles Lakers for \$120 million (Hoffner, 1996).

Tickets for the best seats for the first NBA game at Toronto Maple Leaf Gardens in

1946 were \$2.50. The average NBA ticket price in 1996 was \$34.08. The Portland Trail Blazers have the highest average day-of-game ticket price, \$47.49 (Bloomberg News Service, 1996). Price of front row seats at New York's Madison Square Garden in 1946 was \$5, whereas the 1996-97 price is \$1000 (New York Knicks, 1996). Television contracts went from none to \$39,000 in 1953-54 for 13 games (\$3000 per game) to \$275,500,000 in 1996-97 ("NBA Timeline," 1996; Spoelstra, personal communication, 1997). Whereas nine businessmen paid approximately \$100,000 for the original Toronto Huskies franchise in 1946, forty-nine years later the NBA expansion Toronto Raptors franchise cost \$125 million. All this enabled professional basketball players to go from merely sports stars to cultural icons ("NBA Heritage," 1996)

Of all of the original players, coaches, referees and executives from the original leagues, only Arnold "Red" Auerbach, former head coach and currently President of the Boston Celtics, and veteran Philadelphia statistician Harvey Pollack were there at the beginning (Ryan, 1996). After Podoloff, who served as President from 1946-1963, NBA Commissioners have been J. Walter Kennedy (1963-1975), Lawrence O'Brien (1975-1984) and David J. Stern (1984-present) (*Official NBA Register*, 1996-97). It cannot be denied that, as we know it today, the NBA has certainly come a long way and in many ways is much different from the old primitive BAA.

SOME NOTEWORTHY HISTORICAL FACTS (*Official NBA Guide*, 1996-97, p. 216-231)

- The oldest team in the NBA is the Detroit Pistons, which began play in 1941-42 as the Fort Wayne Zollner Pistons
- As of the 1996-97 season, the oldest current player in the NBA is Robert Parish, age 43.

- The most games played in the NBA—Robert Parish; 1,568
  - The most seasons played in the NBA—Robert Parish; 21 (1976-77 through the 1996-97)
  - The most consecutive games played in the NBA—Randy Smith; 906 (February 18, 1972-March 13, 1983)
  - The tallest players to ever play in the NBA—Manute Bol and Gheorghe Muresan, both 7 feet, 7 inches tall
  - The shortest player to ever play in the NBA—Tyrone “Muggsy” Bogues, 5’3”
  - The team with the most wins in NBA history- Boston Celtics (2,422)
  - The team with the worst single-season record in NBA history (1972-73 Philadelphia 76er: Won 9, Lost 73)
  - The longest winning streak in the NBA—The Los Angeles Lakers, 33 consecutive victories during the 1971-72 season
  - The longest losing streak in the NBA—The Vancouver Grizzlies, 23 consecutive losses during the 1995-96 season
  - The largest attendance for an NBA game—61,983 (Boston vs Detroit at the Silverdome; January 29, 1988).
- SOME NOTEWORTHY NBA REGULAR SEASON SINGLE-GAME RECORDS** (*Official NBA Guide*, 1996-97, p. 216-231)
- The most points scored in a single game—Wilt Chamberlain, 100 points (Philadelphia vs New York Knickerbockers at Hershey, Pa., March 2, 1962, attendance 4,124; Chamberlain also has the top four high point games)
  - The most rebounds in a single game—Wilt Chamberlain, 55 (Boston at Philadelphia; November 24, 1960)
  - The most assists in a single game- Scott Skiles, 30 (Denver at Orlando; December 30, 1990)
  - The most steals in a single game—Larry Kenon, 11 (San Antonio at Kansas City; December 26, 1976)
  - The most blocked shots in a single game—Elmore Smith, 17 (Portland at Los Angeles: October 28, 1973)
- SOME NOTEWORTHY NBA SINGLE-SEASON RECORDS** (*Official NBA Guide*, 1996-97, p. 216-231)
- The most points scored in a season—Wilt Chamberlain; 4,029 (1961-62)
  - The highest scoring average in a season—Wilt Chamberlain; 50.4 (1961-62)
  - The most three-point field goals made in a season—Dennis Scott; 267 (1995-96)
  - The most rebounds in a season—Wilt Chamberlain; 2,149 (1960-61)
  - The most assists in a season—John Stockton; 1,164 (1990-91)
  - The most steals in a season—Alvin Robertson; 301 (1985-86)
  - The most blocked shots in a season—Mark Eaton; 456 (1984-85)
  - A unique accomplishment during a season—Oscar Robertson (Cincinnati Royals) averaged a triple-double (30.8 points, 12.5 rebounds and 11.4 assists) for the entire 1961-62 season
- SOME NOTEWORTHY NBA CAREER RECORDS** (*Official NBA Guide*, 1996-97, p. 216-231)
- The most points scored in a career—Kareem Abdul-Jabbar; 38,387
  - The most rebounds in a career—Wilt Chamberlain; 23,924
  - The most assists in a career—John Stockton; 11,310
  - The most steals in a career—John Stockton; 2,365
  - The most blocked shots in a career—Hakeem Olajuwon; 3,190
  - The most three-point shots made in a career—Dale Ellis; 1,269
  - The most coaching wins in a career—Lenny Wilkins; 939
  - The most consecutive games played—Randy Smith; 906 (February 18, 1972-March 13, 1983)



— The highest career average points per game (minimum of 400 games)—Michael Jordan; 32

#### SOME OTHER NOTEWORTHY EVENTS ("NBA Timeline," 1996, unnumbered page)

1950 (Nov. 22)—The lowest scoring game in NBA history was played (Fort Wayne Pistons 19, Minneapolis Lakers 18)

1951 (March 2)—The first NBA All-Star game played at Boston Garden

1959—The first inductees were elected to the Basketball Hall of Fame

1960s—Larry Fleisher, an attorney and agent for some of the players, organized the National Basketball Players Association (NBPA) (Berry, Gould, Staudohar, 1986).

1963-64—The Boston Celtics start the first all-black lineup

1966—The first \$100,000 annual salary (Wilt Chamberlain, Philadelphia 76ers)

1968—The Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame opened in 1968 in Springfield, MA

1983 (Dec. 13)—The highest scoring game in NBA history was played (Detroit Pistons 186, Denver Nuggets 184)

1984—A salary cap and free agency instituted

1996: The signing of the first \$100 million free-agent contracts

1996-97: The NBA officially celebrated its 50th Anniversary

#### THE TOP 10 TEAMS IN NBA HISTORY ("Top 10 NBA Teams Picked," 1996)

As a part of the NBA's 50th Anniversary in 1996, the media who regularly cover the league, without ranking them, selected the Top 10 teams in NBA history. The teams selected are: the 1965-66 Boston Celtics, the 1966-67 Philadelphia 76ers, the 1969-70 New York Knicks, the 1971-72 Los Angeles Lakers, the 1982-83 Philadelphia 76ers, the 1985-86 Boston Celtics, the 1986-87 Los Angeles Lakers, the 1988-89 Detroit Pistons, the 1991-92 Chicago Bulls and the 1995-96 Chicago Bulls.

#### THE 50 GREATEST PLAYERS IN NBA HISTORY ("50 Greatest Players," 1996)

Also as a part of the 50th Anniversary, regardless of position and without ranking them, a panel of media, former players and coaches, current and former general managers and team executives selected the 50 Greatest Players in NBA History. Alphabetically they are: Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Nate Archibald, Paul Arizin, Charles Barkley, Rick Barry, Elgin Baylor, Dave Bing, Larry Bird, Wilt Chamberlain, Bob Cousy, Dave Cowens, Billy Cunningham, Dave DeBusschere, Clyde Drexler, Julius Erving, Patrick Ewing, Walt Frazier, George Gervin, Hal Greer, John Havlicek, Elvin Hayes, Earvin Johnson, Sam Jones, Michael Jordan, Jerry Lucas, Karl Malone, Moses Malone, Pete Maravich, Kevin McHale, George Mikan, Earl Monroe, Hakeem Olajuwon, Shaquille O'Neal, Robert Parish, Bob Pettit, Scottie Pippen, Willis Reed, Oscar Robertson, David Robinson, Bill Russell, Dolph Schayes, Bill Sharman, John Stockton, Isiah Thomas, Nate Thurmond, Wes Unseld, Bill Walton, Jerry West, Lenny Wilkens and James Worthy.

Eleven active players are among the all-time best group. As a group the 50 players have accumulated 107 NBA Championships, 49 Most Valuable Player Awards, 17 Rookie of the Year Awards, 447 All-Star Game selections, 36 scoring titles, nearly one million (923,791) points and 410,327 rebounds.

#### TEAMS IN THE AMERICAN BASKETBALL ASSOCIATION (1968-1976) (*The Official NBA Guide*, 1996-97, p. 212)

In alphabetical order the franchises throughout the existence of the ABA were: Anaheim Amigos, Carolina Cougars, Dallas Chaparrals, Denver Nuggets, Denver Rockets, Houston Mavericks, Indiana Pacers, Kentucky Colonels, Los Angeles Stars, Memphis Sounds, Miami Floridians, Minnesota Muskies, Minnesota Pipers, New Jersey Americans, New Orleans Buccaneers, New

York Nets, Oakland Oaks, Pittsburgh Condors, Pittsburgh Pipers, San Antonio Spurs, San Diego Conquistadors, San Diego Sails, Spirits of St. Louis, Texas Chaparrals, Utah Stars, Virginia Squires and the Washington Capitols.

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