



James Naismith, the man who invented basketball in 1891

YESTERDAY

A New Sport Is Born

With two peach baskets and a soccer ball, a man changed sports history.

BY ALEXIS BURLING

It was a freezing winter in 1891. The young men at the Springfield YMCA Training School in Massachusetts were feeling antsy. They had been cooped up indoors for weeks and were looking for new ways to exercise. Running laps around the gym was **monotonous**. Weight lifting relied too heavily on strength. What the students really wanted was a game that required skill, energy, and, most importantly, an appetite for fun. But what could that be?

The school's director had an idea. He approached the brightest, brawniest teacher, James Naismith, and gave him two weeks to come up with a new sport that could be practiced individually but played as a team. So for the next 13 days, Naismith experimented with whatever he could find on school grounds. He used chair legs as bats. He knotted jump ropes together for nets. Nothing worked.

But on the morning of the December 21st deadline, Naismith became inspired. He snagged two peach baskets from the school's cafeteria and sprinted to the gym. He hammered the baskets to opposite walls, grabbed a soccer ball from the locker room, and gathered his students in a circle to explain the 13 rules of the game: The ball may be thrown in any direction with

Compare/Contrast

Directions:

- 1. Read both articles.**
- 2. Write down five facts each about how basketball got its start and about what the sport is like today.**

one or both hands. No running with the ball, and no tripping or tackling allowed. A point is earned when the ball is thrown into the basket.

Everyone loved the idea and rushed to get a game under way. But there were complications. Some players hogged the ball. Others slammed into each other, forgetting to look where they were going. One thing was certain, though: The men were hooked. What did they decide to call it? Basketball.

Before long, basketball became a sensation. Students at other YMCAs competed against each other. Kids across the country begged their teachers to let them play the new game. In 1936, basketball became an official sport at the Olympics in Berlin, Germany, and the National Basketball Association was formed 13 years later. It would be years before basketball would evolve into the televised sport it is today. But players have come a long way from the days of throwing a soccer ball into a peach basket. ■



TODAY

A Game of Big Stars

Superstars like Kobe Bryant light up the thriving NBA.



Kobe Bryant, shooting guard for the L.A. Lakers, prepares to make a shot.

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3. On a separate piece of paper, write a paragraph that explains how the game of basketball has changed over time, from 1891 to the present.

On the night of June 14, 2009, Kobe Bryant was focused. The 6'6" shooting guard for the Los Angeles Lakers gazed up at the more than 17,000 popcorn-munching basketball fans crammed into the Amway Arena in Orlando, Florida. They had come to watch the final showdown between Bryant's team and the Orlando Magic. Some had even shelled out \$13,000 for courtside seats. If the Lakers won this game, they'd claim the 2008-2009 NBA championship title. As Bryant sprinted onto the court with two minutes left in the game, he knew it was up to him to make that happen.

Since its birth in 1949, pro basketball has ballooned into one of America's most popular sports. Hundreds of thousands of **ardent** fans pack stadiums from October to June each year to see 30 pro teams compete. Even more catch some of the 82 games on television. On this heated night in June, approximately 14.35 million people tuned in from their living rooms.

NBA players have become some of America's biggest celebrities. And they have the corporate sponsorship—and salaries—to prove it. Cleveland Cavaliers' forward LeBron James is now the face of VitaminWater. Kevin Garnett, a forward for the Boston Celtics, makes a shocking \$24.75 million—the highest base salary for the 2009-2010 season of any NBA player. And Kobe Bryant? On top of his \$21.26 million paycheck, Nike pays him \$45 million a year to use his name on sneakers.

But despite the fame and fortune, the life of a pro-basketballer isn't always easy. Players can be traded to lesser teams. Sponsors can drop their contracts. An ankle fracture or leg injury, like the incapacitating dislocated kneecap former L.A. Clippers point guard Shaun Livingston suffered in 2007, can keep a player out for the season—or end his career.

And there's always the pressure to win. In the last few moments of the game, Bryant made his final shot: Swoosh! At the sound of the buzzer, his teammates poured onto the court. They had beaten the Magic, 99-86. Bryant jumped up and threw his fist in the air, beaming his biggest smile to the thousands of flashing cameras. He had led his team to victory. And boy, did it feel good. ■