

Handout #9 Basketball Champions

Dr. James Naismith

Dr. James Naismith, a Canadian, invented the game of basketball in 1891. Today, basketball has become one of the most played and watched sports ever. Dr. Naismith was a professor at Springfield College in Springfield, Massachusetts. He was interested in creating a game that would keep students in good condition after the football season. The winter was long and there were no other sports offered again until the baseball and track season began in the spring. Even physical education classes during the winter did little to offer young athletes the type of conditioning they needed to stay in top shape. Physical education students were often bored with the routine of calisthenics and drills and wanted something active to play during the winter.



During a temporary teaching assignment Naismith thought of a way to have students play a game with a ball within the confines of a gym but without the roughness of outdoor games like football and rugby. Naismith, in inventing his game of basketball, borrowed elements from lacrosse, rugby and football. He also drew from “duck on the rock,” a game he played as a child in his native Canada. This child’s game gave him the idea of tossing a ball in an arc toward a goal. To keep the game from becoming too rough he required that the player with the ball either dribble it or take only one step before passing it to a teammate.

On the last day of his teaching assignment, Naismith decided upon a soccer ball for his new game and asked the janitor if he had any wooden boxes to be used as goals. The janitor couldn’t find any boxes but offered him instead two peach baskets. The coach hammered the goals into place and asked the physical education department secretary to type his 13 rules of the game. He then organized his class into two groups of nine students each. The janitor was on hand with his stepladder to retrieve the ball after it was tossed into the basket during the game that first day.

One of his students suggested that this new game be called “Naismith ball.” Naismith said that such a name would kill the game. Then it was suggested that the game be called “basketball” to which Naismith agreed.

On that December day in 1891, as the first game of basketball was played in the YMCA gymnasium in Springfield, Massachusetts, Naismith not only discovered the solution to his problem of keeping student-athletes in condition during the winter months, but also created what has become one of the most popular team sports today.

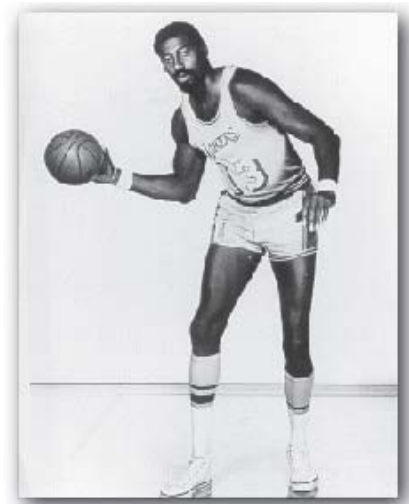
Naismith's philosophy was quite advanced for the late nineteenth century: he firmly believed that girls as well as boys could benefit from playing the game of basketball. When a group of elementary school teachers asked Naismith about the suitability of this game for girls he encouraged them to organize a girls' team and offered the use of the gym. He even got his future wife, Maude Sherman, to play the game. Sherman played in the first girl's basketball tournament which was held in March of 1892.

In addition to inventing the game of basketball, Naismith also was admitted to the Springfield Basketball Hall of Fame. Basketball has changed much since 1891: it has evolved into a quick moving and exciting sport for both the player and the fan. None of this would have been possible without Dr. James Naismith.

Wilton "Wilt" Chamberlain

At seven feet and one inch, Wilt Chamberlain is considered by many to be the greatest offensive player in the history of basketball. Few players have reached the level of domination that Wilt achieved during his basketball career. His arrival into the professional basketball league revolutionized the center position. Chamberlain's 100 point game, against the New York Knicks on March 2, 1962, was one of his many incredible accomplishments.

Wilt "the stilt" Chamberlain was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on August 21, 1936. A high school standout at Overbrook High School in Philadelphia, Chamberlain was the most sought after recruit in the country. He finally opted for the well respected basketball program at the University of Kansas, where he led the Jayhawks into the 1956 NCAA finals, losing in triple overtime to top-ranked North Carolina.



Chamberlain had so many unique basketball skills that several college rule changes were made to handle his unusual ability. These included: widening the lane, instituting offensive goaltending, and revising the rules governing inbounding the ball and shooting free throws.



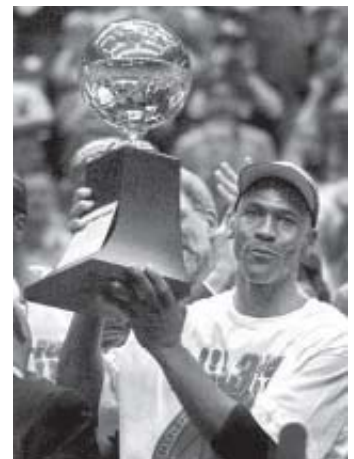
While playing for Kansas, Chamberlain was sometimes guarded by as many as three opponents at one time. Frustrated by such tactics Chamberlain left school and briefly toured with the Harlem Globetrotters. In 1959 he joined the Philadelphia Warriors and made an immediate impact, winning both the Rookie of the Year and MVP awards in his first season. He also averaged an amazing 38 points and 27 rebounds per game and was named to the All-Star team. He went on to win a championship with the Philadelphia 76ers in 1967.

During his 14-year NBA career, he played with Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, where he set many NBA records including “Most Points Scored” in a career, 31,419; a season - 4,029; and a game - 100. His scoring average for his career was 30.1 points per game. He scored over 55 points per game 72 times. Wilt also set rebounding records with 23,924 in his career, 2,149 in one season and 55 in one game. Wilt led the NBA in scoring for seven years, rebounding for 11 years, and in assists in 1968. Chamberlain played 47,859 minutes in 1,045 games, and never fouled out. He played on NBA championship teams in Philadelphia (1967) and Los Angeles (1972). He also played in 13 All-Star games. Chamberlain was a natural athlete who possessed amazing speed, strength and agility.

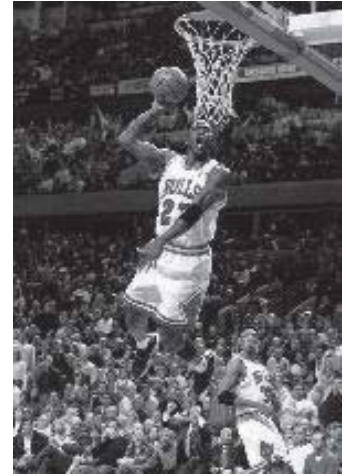
Wilt died at his home in Los Angeles on October 12, 1999.

Michael Jordan

For many, Michael Jordan is considered the greatest basketball player of all time. To back up this claim, fans point to his six championship rings, his NBA Finals Most Valuable Player selection in all of those titles, and his eight NBA scoring records. In addition, this 6 foot 6 inch superstar guard was a perennial NBA first teamer. You could always pencil Michael in as the starting guard for the All-Star game. In the 1997 All-Star game he became the first player ever to record a triple double with 14 points, 11 rebounds and 11 assists.



Michael holds the record for the most career scoring titles—eight, including seven in a row. He scored so many points that it is almost unfair to compare him with other players. On November 6, 1996 Michael scored 50 points for the 36th time in his career. He passed the 25,000 career points total, and during his career continued to dominate in the scoring category. Michael was also the Chicago Bull's All-Time leading scorer. His career scoring average of nearly 32 points per game is also the best of all time. On December 30, 1997 Jordan broke Kareem Abdul-Jabbar's record of scoring in double digits in 788 consecutive games.



In addition to his tremendous offensive feats, Michael was also a top defensive player. He became the fourth player to record 2,000 career steals on April 4, 1996. He led the league in steals three times. Michael was also named the NBA Defensive Player of the Year in 1988 and has nine All-Defensive first Team Selections to his name. This accomplishment beat the Bobby Jones record of eight selections to this well respected team.

Michael, a University of North Carolina star, was named the Consensus College player of the year in 1984 and College Player of the Year in 1983 and 1984. As a freshman, he averaged 13.5 points per game and won the Rookie of the Year award. After his sophomore year he was named College Player of the Year by The Sporting News. In his junior year, he was once again selected as College Player of the Year. Michael was a true Tar Heel: he wore his Carolina Blue shorts during his games for good luck. Michael has also been on two Olympic Gold Medal teams, once as a college player in 1984 and once again as part of the Dream Team in 1992.



A talented showman, Jordan knew how to dazzle a crowd. Defying gravity, he was able to leap as high as 44 inches off the ground and apparently hover in the air before jamming the ball into the hoop for a slam dunk. This is how Michael earned his nickname, His Airness. What made Michael so unique was his ability to combine his flashy style with genuine skill.

In 1993 Michael's father, James, was killed in a robbery. This devastating event in Michael's life was one of the factors that prompted him to leave the NBA and the Chicago Bulls. He claimed that basketball held no more challenges for him. He turned to baseball and played for the Chicago White Sox organization. He was quick and could play defense but had

trouble hitting. After a short stay with the White Sox he returned to the Chicago Bulls in March of 1995. It wasn't until the 1995-96 season that Michael was in full form. In 1996 he was named MVP for the fourth time and won his fourth NBA Championship and Finals MVP Trophy.

Michael announced his retirement from basketball and the Chicago Bulls for a second time on January 13, 1999. He then became part owner and president of the Washington Wizards. Although he stated he was "99.9 percent sure" he will not return to play the game he loves, he did indeed put on the Wizards jersey to resume play in October of 2001. "It's definitely the challenge," Jordan said. "I'm not coming back for the glory. I think I left the game with that, but the challenge is what I truly love."

