**History of Basketball**

**Introduction**

Basketball is an extremely popular all around the world. The object is to put a ball through a hoop, or basket, and thus score more points than the opposing team. Teams comprise of ten players, with a maximum of five on court at any one time. Substitutions are unlimited during the course of the game. Although basketball can be played outdoors, it was invented to serve as an exciting indoor exercise for the winter months in a northern climate. It quickly became a spectator sport, however, and now attracts large audiences to gymnasiums and arenas, especially in the United States, South America, and Europe.

The sport is played on the amateur level by schools, colleges, other groups, and, since 1936 by national teams in the Olympic Games. It also is played by professional athletes, notably in the United States and Europe.

The foremost American championships contended for are those of the National Basketball Association (NBA) for professionals, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) for colleges. Britain has National Associations for each country and the English Basketball Association (EBBA) runs amateur national competitions, the National Basketball League (NBL) is run by Basketball League Ltd for professionals. International competion is organised by the Federation of International Basketball (FIBA).

**The Early Days..**

It all started with two peach baskets in a YMCA in Massachusetts. In 1891 James A Naismith (1861-1939), a leader of the Springfield YMCA, was thinking about ways of providing exercise for the young men in his care. As a physical education instructor he taught gymnastics, however he was looking for something new. He had the idea of nailing peach baskets onto the balconies as goals, at either end of the gymnasium and throwing a soccer ball into it from below. So a National and International game was born. In 1892 he published the first booklet containing the basic rules, almost unchanged today (although expanded upon considerably!). These rules were adopted by the YMCA and the Amateur Athletic Union. Word spread quickly amongst YMCA's in the Eastern United States about this new game. It took off so rapidly that the first intercollegiate game was played in 1897, and the first professional league in the following year. The Eastern Intercollegiate League was formed shortly afterwards, in 1902. Women also took up the game before 1900. The growing popularity of basketball resulted in improvements in equipment and skills. The metal hoop was introduced in 1893, and backboards in 1895. The soccer ball was replaced by the first basketball. As playing skills also became more sophisticated, the game attracted more and more spectators. Until the late 1930s, scores were low, sometimes in single digits. After each score, opposing centers (one of the five positions, the others being two guards and two forwards) lined up in the middle of the court and jumped for the ball. Then the team that got the ball would pass or dribble until a player was about 3 m (10 ft) from the basket before trying a shot. The slow pace did not inhibit the growth of the game, however. By the 1920s, basketball was being played all over the United States, and tournaments were being conducted in high school and college gymnasiums. Most states held high school championships for boys.

**The Rise of the Modern Game**

Several events in the 1930s spurred the growth of the game as a spectator sport and at the same time made basketball more exciting for the players. The first of these came in the 1932-33 season (basketball seasons tend to run from Autumn through to Spring) rules designed to speed up play were adopted. It became mandatory, under penalty of losing possession, to move the ball past midcourt in less than ten seconds. In addition, no player was permitted to remain within the foul lanes for more than three seconds. Then in 1934 a New York sportswriter, Ned Irish, persuaded the promoters at New York's Madison Square Garden, a large arena, to schedule doubleheaders between college teams. These events proved successful, and similar promotions followed in other cities. Before long, colleges began building their own arenas for basketball. Another significant advance occurred in 1936, when a Stanford University team traveled from California to a Madison Square Garden promotion to challenge the eastern powers in the "cradle of basketball." Opponents and fans were stunned by the Stanford style of shooting--one-handed while jumping, which contrasted to the prevalent method of taking two-handed shots while standing still. One Stanford player, Hank Luisetti, was so adept at the "jump shot" that he could outscore an entire opposing team. The new style gained universal acceptance, and basketball scores rose remarkably. In the 1937-38 season the center jump following each field goal was eliminated. At the end of the next season, Madison Square Garden brought in college teams from around the nation for the National Invitation Tournament (NIT), a postseason playoff that was adopted (1939) on a wider scale by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Although the NIT is still held annually, the NCAA tournament serves as the official intercollegiate championship. The University of Kentucky (coached, 1930-72, by Adolph Rupp), St. John's (in New York), the University of North Carolina, Western Kentucky, Kansas University, and Indiana University have been among the leading college basketball teams for years. From 1964 to 1975 the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), coached by John Wooden and led by the centers Lew Alcindor and Bill Walton, dominated the intercollegiate play-offs, winning the title an unprecedented 10 times in 12 years. The 1,250 college teams in the United States now draw about 30 million spectators per season. Although women have played the game since the 1890s, and even though a few states (Iowa, for instance) have shown great participatory and spectator interest in secondary-school women's basketball for some decades, significant growth and serious recognition of women's basketball in the United States and elsewhere did not occur until the 1970s. Almost all U.S. states now hold girls' high school tournaments, and basketball is the fastest-growing women's intercollegiate sport.

**Professional Basketball**

From 1898 on, many attempts were made to establish professional basketball as a spectator sport-but success did not come until 1946. The best of the early efforts was made by the Harlem Globetrotters, an all-black team that toured first only the United States and then internationally to play local professional or semi-professional teams. The Globetrotters, founded in 1926, were not affiliated with a league. Their style was and is often showy because, at least into the early 1950s, they could dominate all opponents. In 1946 serious professional basketball had acquired a following among American sports fans, who wanted to see the former collegians in action. That year the Basketball Association of America, with teams from the United States and one from Toronto, began competing in large arenas in the major cities. Another professional league, the National Basketball League, was already in existence, with many franchises in medium-sized midwestern cities. The two leagues merged in 1949 as the National Basketball Association (NBA) and pared away the weaker franchises.

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With the signing of the country's best collegians through what was called a player draft, the NBA could display both talent and balance. The NBA's greatest spurt of growth occurred in the 1960s and '70s. Although the Boston Celtics, led by Bill Russel, Bob Cousy, and John Havlicek and coached by Red Auerbach, won 11 of 13 NBA titles beginning in 1957, fans also closely followed such stars as Philadelphia's Wilt Chamberlain, Cincinnati's Oscar Robertson, and Los Angeles's Jerry West and Elgin Baylor. The NBA of the 1970s and 1980s exhibited a welcome balance of power: from 1970 until 1988 no team won consecutive NBA titles, though the New York Knicks (with Willis Reed, Walt Frazier, and Bill Bradley) won twice; the Boston Celtics, 5 times (3 with Larry Bird); and the Los Angeles Lakers, 6 times (5 with Magic Johnson).

In the 1970s the NBA expanded from 9 teams to 22. Some of the new franchises were acquired when the American Basketball Association (1968-76) merged with the NBA. Also, a Dallas franchise was added in 1980; Charlotte, Carolina, and Miami, in 1988; and Minnesota and Orlando, in 1989. During the late 1970s and early 1980s several women's professional leagues were begun; all of them failed financially. Women in the USA are currently under the WNBA. The NBA today enjoys a massive worldwide following, and European basketball is fast emerging. to challenge the domination of the Americans. Watch this space...!