



KANSAS LEGEND BIOGRAPHY

Dr. James Naismith (1861-1939)

Although the Inventor of Basketball was born and raised in Ontario, Canada, he is fondly remembered for his contributions to the sport in Kansas. Naismith was a physical education instructor, and under Dr. Luther Halsey Gulick at the YMCA Training School in Springfield, Mass., created one of America's most beloved games.

James Naismith was born in Almonte, Ontario, and orphaned at age nine. He attended Almonte High School, taking three years off before graduating in 1883. He attended McGill University and Presbyterian College in Montreal before heading to the U.S. to continue his education. He attended the YMCA Training School (now Springfield College) in Massachusetts beginning in 1890.

The following year, Naismith was given 14 days to invent an indoor game that would provide athletic distraction to a rowdy group of youngsters through the winter. Inspired by a children's game duck-on-a-rock, Naismith invented basketball. The game was initially played with a soccer ball and two empty peach baskets, with only ten written rules. Soon, the goals were modified from peach baskets to hoop nets, and Naismith wrote the 13 original rules of the game.

The first college basketball game was played on Jan. 18, 1896, between the University of Iowa and the University of Chicago. Naismith, meanwhile, was earning a medical degree at the University of Colorado, which he received in 1898. From there, Naismith came to the University of Kansas as Director of Physical Education.

At KU, Naismith also served as basketball head coach for KU's first basketball game, held on Feb. 3, 1899. He spent the next 39 years with the university, during which time he also became an ordained minister and served with the YMCA in France during World War I.

Although basketball did not bring Naismith fame or fortune during his lifetime, he did have the opportunity to see basketball become an Olympic sport in 1936. The National Association of Basketball Coaches (NABC) sponsored Naismith's trip to Berlin to see the first international competition of the sport before his death in 1939.

Naismith was inducted into the Kansas Sports Hall of Fame in 1961. Additionally, the world's only Basketball Hall of Fame bears Naismith's name. The University of Kansas pays tribute to Naismith and his contributions with a statue of the Father of Basketball just outside the basketball fieldhouse and a campus dormitory with his name.

