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Basketball History

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BASKETBALL

Let us take a few moments here to discuss a well known sport. I wonder if any of you men know what sport was introduced in Bloomington in 1893 - 61 years ago.

It leads from one great athlete to another and ends with Delmar Darrah, a nationally known Masonic leader, who with the brains of an artist, conceived the inspiring splendor of the Passion Play that has made this City of ours the mecca for lovers of beauty and for lovers of Biblical and religious truth, and the opinion is confirmed that he first brought basketball to this section of the country.

He was the first to organize a basketball game in Bloomington or Normal and he was also first to sponsor a game at Millikin University at Decatur. That was in the year 1893 that Darrah discovered this game and introduced it here. He was teaching elocution and public speaking at I.W.U. at the time, having returned to the staff after graduating in 1890 and taking a years graduate work at the U of I. With slight experience he was appointed to take charge of the Phys. Ed. program at Wesleyan and it was the need for supplying some game that prompted him to decide on basketball. He wrote to James Naismith, the founder of the game at Springfield, Mass. and secured all the details and information necessary for the game.

Baskets were rigged up, balls obtained and most of the time was given in teaching the girls the sport. That was definitely not for the men! It was a "sissy game". It was girls basketball that first revealed itself in Bloomington - a game entirely without roughness in that players were not allowed to touch each other, very little dribbling was seen and the rule then demanded that only one bounce could be taken. In other respects the game is not much different from the present day basketball, but the basket has made a very decided change! Back in those days the basket was not opened at the bottom, allowing the ball to drop thru the net. When a ball went into the basket a cord had to be pulled to let the ball drop out.

The games were played in a barn on Phoenix Avenue and the sport became an attraction for spectators who would crowd into the inadequate barn and watch with delight the girl players. It continued to be a "sissy game" until after Mr. Darrah had been at I.W.U. for 5 years and during those five years he could not remember that the boys ever showed more than a passing interest in the game. Mr. Darrah had to go to Normal and instruct the girls there into the mysteries of the novel pastime. Soon after the game travelled to Millikin.

As the game became more popular the boys began to play it out of doors. Dr. Fred W. Brian, one of Bloomington's physicians, was on one of the first Wesleyan's boys' team. The sport was finally recognized as intercollegiate along with football and track. Kerley is generally recognized as Wesleyan's first basketball captain and about that time Fred Muhl was made athletic director at Wesleyan. Wesleyan won their first title game in 1912 when Adlai Rust, Geo. Hinshaw, "Wox" Sutherland,

Cecil McAvoy, and Fred Wollrab busted into the picture. Also in that year Fred "Brick" Young and Dr. Norman Elliott made all-Illinois teams.

Yes sir, Delmar Darrah gave this opportunity when the Masonic leader started that "sissy game" way back in 1893.

Yep! He really started somethin'.

*** This article was prepared in August, 1950, by Edward R. Kirkpatrick for one of his duck dinners, but was never used.

Illinois Wesleyan University

MEMORANDUM FROM PRESIDENT'S OFFICE

TO _____ DATE April 2, 1954

This document was presented to Illinois Wesleyan University by Mr. Charles Kirkpatrick at the special banquet honoring the basketball team of 1954 and their co-captains and the captains of preceding basketball teams back through the years. This document represents research by two brothers -- Edward R. Kirkpatrick and Charles Kirkpatrick.

SIGNED MJH