

Peterson, Robert W. *Cages to Jump Shots; Pro Basketball's Early Years*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990. Pp. 224. Photographs, appendices. \$19.95.

Surprise! -there *was* professional basketball before Larry Bird, Michael Jordan, Irwin "Magic" Johnson and even George Mikan. And great teams of the modern era such as the Boston Celtics and the Lakers (both the Los Angeles and Minneapolis variety) were preceded by such aggregations as the Buffalo Germans, Original Celtics, Olson's Swedes, the Cleveland Rosenblums, New York Renaissance, and the forerunner of today's Detroit Pistons, the Fort Wayne Zollners. Teams were populated with such colorful and skillful players as Eddie Wachter, "Dutch" Denhart, Bennie Borgman, "Pop" Gates, and Bobby McDermott.

All these, and more, are recounted in this work by Robert Peterson, a free lance writer from New Jersey. Peterson is probably best known among sports historians for his signal work in 1970 *Only the Ball was White*, a history of black baseball prior to Jackie Robinson's entry into the National League. Here in *Cages to Jump Shots*, a relatively short book (183 pages for the text), he covers the beginning of the game of basketball in 1891, the formation of the first professional team in 1896, the first professional league in 1898 and then the long winding way of players, teams, and leagues till approximately 1950. The game's development from the early years when it was played in wire or net cages

to keep the ball in play, to games in ballrooms where promoters held dances at half-time and after games as part of the entertainment package and on to the great contests at the Chicago Stadium are all here. There is even an appendix done by William Himmelgarn, historian/statistician for the Basketball Hall of Fame's *Newsletter*, which gives a year-by-year standing of the various professional leagues, 1898-1954. The experimentation in systems of offense, the pivot play, set shot, passing patterns and how they evolved to the incredibly skillful game of today are also considered.

The author takes a very human look at the game and this is reflected in the many interviews with great and not-so-great players, coaches and the myriad of people associated with the game at various periods. Their colorful stories show just what a tough game it was in its early days. Referee Marvin Riley retorted to a player who complained to him about an opponent on his back, "you big truck horse, if you let him do that, don't come crying to me, get in there and play" (p. 40). It was this rough play, however, that plagued the game in its early years and stunted its growth.

The black and ethnic influence, particularly Jewish, is probably the strongest section of the book. Jewish players were prominent and dominated several teams on the East Coast. The South Philadelphia Hebrew Association's team (the Philadelphia Spas) was the most celebrated. Peterson's discussion of the integration of black players and teams into the game in the early 1940s, well before the National Basketball Association's hesitant integration in 1950, is unique. Quotes from Blacks and Whites of the period are poignantly illuminating. His previous research in black baseball undoubtedly makes him more sensitive to this situation. He carefully weaves the fabric of the game in an area usually glossed over in other histories.

Some aspects of the book could have been stronger. The first is the contribution of the World Tournament of Professional Basketball held in Chicago in the spring of each year, 1939-1948. Peterson does discuss aspects of it (and yearly game-by-game results are given in Appendix C) but its full impact needs consideration. While Peterson recognizes the tournament, the *Chicago Herald American's* rival to the *Tribune's* Golden Gloves Boxing Tournament, its organization and promotion need development. Also, the role of industrial teams such as the American Gears and Zollner Pistons in the Tournament could bear research. These companies had wealth from wartime industrial contracts to sign players and could retain these players in wartime jobs. In addition, the reasons the Tournament pioneered integration of Black vs. White teams (1939) and integrated teams (1940) is not clear.

The reasons professional basketball did not prosper on the Pacific Coast (and perhaps have its own league as did baseball) or in other areas of the United States are not addressed. Professional basketball was confined to the northeast quadrant of the country until post World War II and considering the general popularity of basketball, this is puzzling. One final omission, maddening to the researcher wishing to check materials or expand study, is the lack of footnotes.

A casual bibliography is given but citations would certainly solidify Peterson's research.

These omissions do not seriously detract from the book. *Cages to Jump Shots* is to be read and enjoyed by historians and fans alike. It is not meant to be a definitive study but an overall look at the game. Thus it omits many of the statistics and minute analyses so popular in many of today's histories which grind down the reader's interests by the end. The writing flows, is interesting, and as with Peterson's other work, should provide thought for future research in specific areas in the development of professional basketball.

University of Dayton

John R. Schlepfi