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TRIPTOW, RICHARD. *The Dynasty that Never Was*. Lake Bluff, Ill., 1997. Pp. 259. Index.

This is a self-published volume that has no aspirations to be a scholarly publication. It is almost a memoir of the period in the 1940s when the Chicago American Gears existed as part of the National Basketball League (NBL) and the Professional Basketball League of America (PBLA). It is a book that consists largely of narrative with many comments from players and coaches of the time addressed in separate sections rather than incorporated into the narrative flow of the author. The book is in need of structural reorganization and editing.

With all that said, one might wonder why this book should be reviewed at all in a scholarly journal. There are two key reasons, and they can be summed up in two words—passion and resources. Dick Triptow, the author of this volume, did not just observe the professional basketball scene in Chicago in the 1940s, he was enmeshed in it. After graduating in 1944 from DePaul University where he co-captained the basketball team with George Mikan and was selected as an All-America player, Triptow went on to play professional basketball for six years with the Chicago Gears, the Fort Wayne Zollner Pistons, and the Baltimore Bullets before leaving pro ball to coach and teach in the Chicago area for the next 38 years. The story of the Gears' short-lived existence is the parallel story of Dick Triptow finding his life in pro basketball and beyond. The book is filled with his wonder, his disappointment, and his unmitigated passion for basketball and the players with whom he played. His pleasure and admiration for them fills the pages and both warms the reader's heart and serves to fuel the scholar's concern for determining what it was really like to be a professional basketball player before the high salaries and publicity of the NBA.

The second reason for reviewing this volume is for sport scholars to recognize the wonderful array of unusual and rarely seen memorabilia reproduced here. Triptow either saved everything himself or knew from whom to borrow these pieces, and their reproduction in this book will make many sport scholars pleased. Such documents include great photographs of the players in games and at practices so that the clothing and equipment are easily observed; reprinted programs including rosters, advertisements, and line drawings; newspaper advertisements including one from the *Chicago Tribune* that has each player's home address in the Chicago area on it; detailed schedules of the Gears and the entire NBL and PBL, letters from basketball owners soliciting Triptow's services; team personnel data and ticket prices for each home court location in which the Gears performed; box scores of all college all-star and pro champion contests from 1940 to 1950, including officials and most valuable players in each game; rosters and team photos of each team in the 1946 and 1948 World's Championship Professional Tournament held in Chicago and sponsored by the Herald-American; the all-tournament teams for that tournament from 1939 to 1947; an alphabetical listing of all Chicago Gear players, coaches, and trainers with their college affiliation; a complete list of all NBL officials from 1944 to 1947, a description of each venue in the NBL from 1944 to 1947; league compositions of the NBL, PBL, BAA, and NBA from the NPBL from 1944 to 1951 and a chronological listing of Chicago's professional basketball teams from 1925 to today.

Triptow writes in a straight-forward narrative style, chronicling events as they occurred with his personal comments woven around the factual detail. It is not terribly creative, but it is clear and often interesting. His accounts of road trips, including the modes of travel and what kept the players busy on those trips, provide an insight not often found for this sport in that era. Triptow was not much of a drinker or carouser so there is very little of that in this book. That may have gone on, but he neither was a part of it nor mentions it if it did. He does note that some of the players did like to drink, however. He was amazed by Bob

McDermott, voted the top pro player of all time by the NBL coaches in the 1940s. He could down a half dozen beers, then go out and score 20 points and break down his defender consistently.

Triptow notes sadly that many former players can recount numerous instances of Gear-owner Maurice White being so intoxicated that he had no idea what was happening in games or at meetings. This ultimately contributed to his nearly penniless state at death. White is referred to as an enigma by Triptow, a generous, sport-loving man who was also an outstanding businessman in one sense but a visionary flop in another. White built his gear plant and foundry from scratch in the 1930s, and it flourished as the demand for gears, speed reducers, and machine parts became critical during World War II. His plant was, in Triptow's words, always "in immaculate shape," which the players knew because they worked there as Gear employees. Triptow himself first worked inspecting gears for 10 hours a day with time off only for basketball practice and play. Then he worked in the foundry where he processed all the government work orders. In his third year, Triptow worked in the American Gear store selling and filling stock orders. White's intention was that Triptow and at least five other players who followed this procedure move into executive positions for the American Gear company.

The book, more than anything else, is filled with regret that the great Gear team was together for such a short time. George Mikan joined the team right after his season at DePaul ended in March 1946, just in time to play with the Gears in two exhibition games and the World Professional Tournament. The Gears lost in the semifinals to the Oshkosh All Stars in that tournament. The next year the Gears won their division in the NBL, then defeated the Rochester Royals in the NBL playoffs for the championship. They could not compete in the World Pro Tournament because it overlapped the NBL finals. Nevertheless, this was the best team in pro basketball. They would have had an even better record for the year if Mikan had not walked off the team from December 19 to January 31 in a controversial contract dispute with White; it was finally settled out of court. It appeared that the Gears, with the return of Mikan, would be the dominant team in pro basketball for years to come.

All of this became problematic when White, upon being rebuffed by his fellow owners in his attempt to become president of the NBL, decided to withdraw his team from the league and start his own 32-team league—the PBL with four divisions. Before the season began that plan had been altered to two, eight-team divisions which began play on October 24, 1947. Three weeks later, the league folded after losses of \$600,000 largely guaranteed by White, since he propped up the league much like the NBA created and supported the WNBA during its initial season.

With the demise of the PBL, 167 players plus coaches and managers were dropped into the pro market and the players were assigned to various NBL franchises. Triptow went to Fort Wayne and Mikan was assigned to a new Minneapolis franchise in the league. Mikan was reluctant to go since he was still working on his law degree at DePaul but agreed when the terms offered by Max Winter, the general manager of the Lakers were sweetened. Mikan, of course,

went on to lead the Lakers into the NBL, BAA, or NBA championship game for the next seven years.

The Gears unceremoniously died, and the players went on to other teams or left pro basketball altogether. Triptow has done yeoman's work in tracking them down and getting their comments about the team, the game, and their teammates. It is evident how much these players cared for each other and still do. They played for their love of the game and are perplexed and saddened by the financial incentive that has become the apparent *raison d'être* for the basketball lives of many of today's NBA stars. These old-timers do not begrudge their counterparts all their riches today, they just feel that no one can ever enjoy the pro game as much as they did.

Triptow's book will impress few with its narrative style, but for any researcher in sport history interested in basketball, this book will provide great resources and leave a heartwarming glow.

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