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PLUTO, TERRY. *Tall Tales: The Glory Years of the NBA*. 1992. Reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Bison Books, 2000. Pp. 397. Index, brief bibliography, 16 pages of b&w photographs. \$17.95 pb.

I started off on the wrong foot with this book and was determined to not like it as much as I did, but the early years of the National Basketball Association are so fascinating that I simply could not help myself. The full subtitle of the book is "The Glory Years of the NBA in the Words of the Men who Played, Coached and Built Pro Basketball," and these men tell their tales with humor, love, bluntness and insight. This is, then, oral history almost totally, with Terry Pluto connecting certain sections as needed and providing introductory explanations of one to five pages for each of the seventeen chapters. As oral history the book is not sufficient to be a history of the National Basketball Association from inception to 1970. This is a mixed blessing. On the positive side there are details and comments that would almost never enter into any large history of the league. On the other hand, there are enormous gaps and the history of the NBA is presented in a very selective manner in terms of events and people. This is both Pluto's book in his decision about what to include as well as the book of those whom he chose to interview as they speak in an often candid and disarming manner.

I noted that I was determined not to like this book; the reason for that was Pluto's overuse of sarcasm from the beginning of the volume, a tone which was simply not justified, at least at first, and one which he used in a heavy-handed manner. Pluto is a longtime writer for the *Akron Beacon Journal* and his style is reminiscent of sports writing columns, but it doesn't always fit a more scholarly volume, which I wished this could be. A statement like "the very athletic Fulks also was 6-foot-5, the size of most early centers, who were more like clumsy cows than pivotmen" simply is not that funny in a book like this. Part of that is my own prejudice, but part is also that a university press, I believe, should have some obligation to place intellectual pursuit on at least as high a plane as amusing prose. Nevertheless, Pluto's style and, certainly, the contents of the book grow on the reader, and I found the book entertaining, informative and useful.

There were areas that would need expansion or updating to make this book more useful for scholarly pursuit. The most glaring need is either a bibliographic essay or a list of when and where he interviewed each of the men quoted in the book. There are many instances in the book when Pluto has a quote from one person followed by a very complementary quote by another individual. Did the second one hear the first one's comment, or was this just Pluto's editing of audio tapes that led to this very easy flow of conversation? Were these interviews taped at all and can they be listened to by others, or did Pluto take notes and present those in a quoted, conversational style? Knowing the answers to such questions and the overall circumstances of the interviews would make this a much more rewarding book for scholars of sport history. A bibliographic essay on the nature of the interview process, the people involved and the compression of the data into the form presented in the book would be much appreciated and the kind of section I would find most appropriate in a book published by a university press.

Another need is for an updating of the “Cast of Characters” listed early in the book, that is the people whom Pluto interviewed and their positions today. This book was originally published in 1992 by Simon and Schuster, and this new edition under the Bison imprint of the University of Nebraska Press is copyrighted eight years after that. What results is a lot of outdated information that editors should have updated. Of the men listed, at least four have died and no fewer than fifteen have different jobs than those listed in the “cast.” Certainly, this cannot be totally accurate or up-to-date, but no effort was even made to improve this section.

As for the content, he makes some great choices and omits many things others might have included. He has a brief chapter on the origins of the NBA, another on the first small towns in the NBA like Fort Wayne and Syracuse, and a very useful chapter called “Crossing the Line” on the first African American players in the league beginning in 1950. Interviews with Don Barksdale and Earl Lloyd, two of the first African Americans in the league are interspersed in the chapter, though Chuck Cooper and “Sweetwater” Clifton had died before they could be interviewed for this book. This chapter, among others, illustrates the problem of relying on oral history without a proper crosscheck of other sources. Pluto notes that the NBL (before the merger with the BAA to form the NBA in 1949) integrated before the NBA in 1946 when Dolley King and Pop Gates were signed by the Rochester Royals and the Buffalo Bisons (later the TriCities Blackhawks), respectively. This is based on an interview with Les Harrison who was a curmudgeon until the day he died. In that capacity he, like most people, remembered history in the way that seemed correct to him. In fact, as early as 1943, there were African Americans in the NBL. Another omission in this section is any mention of the last year of the NBL when the New York Rens played in the league as the Dayton Rens, compiling a record of 14-26 before the franchise folded.

Let me make clear that there is very much to like about this book—a chapter on Wilt Chamberlain and the Warriors; one on the great Celtics teams anchored by Bill Russell; a subsequent chapter called “Chamberlain vs. Russell” in which various players, coaches, owners and referees argue the relative merits of each giant; one on the “Class of 1960”—West, Robertson and Lenny Wilkens; another chapter on the move west of the Lakers as well as one on forgotten stars of the NBA like Dolph Schayes, Bob Pettit, Johnny Kerr, Frank Ramsey and Jerry Lucas. Of course, these latter stars are well known, but to the less rabid fan or serious scholar the memories of their accomplishments may have become obscured.

Pluto is dealing with rich material here and his informants are eager to speak. The result is an entertaining volume with some useful insights for sport historians.

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