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Attacking Basketball: **Rethinking the Origins of the Game**

Basketball remains remarkably under-studied by sport historians. This is unfortunate, because through basketball sport historians can address the often-bemusing problem: How does one make the history of sport useful to the larger profession without succumbing to the simple sport-as-a-mirror-of-society argument? Or, stated slightly differently, how does one do justice to the internal logic of sport history while still pursuing an analysis useful to wider questions?

Basketball was a game designed and used by ‘sport professionals’: individuals interested in using particular sorts of sport and recreation to transmit values to those people playing the game. It spread rapidly and soon became popular with widely divergent sorts of players, communities, and institutions, some of whom shared the outlook of the game’s designers and some of whom did not. This study of the game and its spread shows how Progressive-era experts and professionals attempted to use sport as a means to transmit moral values and reform society. It poses the following question: Did players gravitate to the game for the reasons that organizers had in mind? Did men and women put the game to different uses? Did the game play out the same way at high schools and colleges as in YMCAs? What were the reasons that different people with different purposes and agendas gravitated to basketball and found it compelling or useful?