

Roland Renson
Leuven, Belgium

Basketball and Korfbal: Siblings or Stepchildren?

James Naismith is known world-wide for having invented the game of basketball at Springfield College in 1891. The Dutch promoters of korfbal claim on the other hand that their game was invented by Nice Broekhuysen in 1902 and that it is of genuine Dutch origin. 'Korfbal' is Dutch for basketball. Broekhuysen, who was a school teacher, admitted that he got acquainted with a game called 'ringboll' during a summer course in Sweden in 1902. He stated that it was an outdoor game in which iron rings were attached

to vertical poles and was called 'basketball' by the non-Scandinavian course-members. Back in Amsterdam, he claimed to have invented the game of korfbal by replacing the iron rings with bottomless baskets and by turning it into a co-ed team game. Some recent research on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of korfbal in Belgium (1921-1996) has proved, however, that another kind of korfbal had already been promoted in Antwerp by Oscar Delaive before 1921, namely from 1911 onwards. This teacher of gymnastics had learned to play the game in Germany. Further research has in the meanwhile shown—both through texts and photographs—that the American game of basketball had been introduced in Sweden as early as 1897. This was called 'korgball' which is Swedish for basketball. Bottomless potato baskets were used and the game could be played either separately by males or females or in mixed teams. Broekhuysen's contention that he invented the game with baskets instead of rings, must therefore be rejected. Broekhuysen pedagogically-engineered basketball into a hybrid new type of game: korfbal. Korfbal now leads a life of its own. This leads to the biologically heretical conclusion that basketball and korfbal once were siblings at their origin, but have since become stepchildren.