

OPEN PAPERS

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The NBA Began in Akron!? The Midwest Basketball Conference, 1935-37

This paper examines the roots of the National Basketball League (NBL) that merged with the Basketball Association of America (BAA) in 1949 to form the National Basketball Association (NBA). The NBL grew from the Midwest Conference, an industrially based league formed in 1935 by Frank Kautsky, a businessman from Indianapolis and Paul Sheeks, the recreation director of Firestone Tire & Rubber of Akron, Ohio. Why was the league formed at that particular time and what cultural, economic and social conditions at that place and time led to its success? How was success determined, simply by amount of revenue? Why did the players agree to play for such low wages? Who were the players and how were they recruited to play for this league? How and why did the league repackage itself to become the NBL, a league that continued for 13 years until its merger with the BAA?

The origin and play of the two years of the Midwest Conference are obscured by the lack of research that has been done in this arena. Peterson devotes two pages in his history of professional basketball's early years and Neft, Johnson, Cohen and Deutsch provide one paragraph as an introduction to the National Basketball League in their Sports Encyclopedia: Basketball. Robert Bradley has a passing reference in one sentence in his Compendium of Professional Basketball. Both the Peterson and the Neil et. al. volumes discuss the rules briefly, but say nothing about the league play, the players, the venues, fan support and the media coverage.

Frank Kautsky already had a team playing for him in Indianapolis when the league formed. The Kautskys were very successful in playing around the Midwest and entertaining some of the better barnstorming teams. The Depression had destroyed the American Basketball League, which was the first really national league in geographic scope, after it had existed from 1925 to 1931. A league with that name returned in 1933, but it was a regional

league that remained regional in scope (Northeastern U.S.) and semi-professional in economics until its demise in 1946. The Midwest League, on the other hand, was a mixture of company teams, teams operated by a businessman who saw advertising potential (and was usually a basketball “junkie”) and a couple independent teams. The league was a loose coalition of teams who were to play a certain number of games against their league foes in home and home series with a playoff session at the end of the year. Owners seemed to structure the league’s bylaws as they went along;

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Looking in the Closet: An Examination of the Rhetorical Dimensions of Sport History

For much of the development of the sub-discipline of sport history over the last three decades, the heroic scientific model of history that prioritizes the meticulous, detailed and critical examination of documentary evidence by an objective, disinterested and impartial observer has prevailed. This approach has produced some wonderful individual historical accounts and has done a great deal to generate respectability for sport history within the historical profession and academia more generally. The heroic scientific model of history has, however, been critiqued on a number of fronts, and one aspect of that critique has been its denial of the rhetorical dimensions of the historical process. This paper will examine the rhetorical aspects evident in the production of sport history primarily through the lens provided by Hayden White who has been credited with being instrumental in the “linguistic turn” in history. White’s analysis will be used to encourage sport historians to at least engage with their historical texts as aesthetic objects.

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The Power of Pluto Water: The Chicago Cubs, West Baden, and French Lick Springs

The area of southern Indiana, known as the Springs Valley, encompasses two towns – West Baden and French Lick Springs. Resort hotels in those towns have long been a haven for visitors,