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Home Town League: The National Basketball League Begins

This paper examines the beginning years of the National Basketball League (NBL). The league evolved from the Midwest Conference, a loosely knit league of eight teams that operated from 1935-37, largely in the upper Midwest, but also encompassing, at times, Buffalo, New York; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Windsor, Ontario. The league set rules for a minimum number of games and league playoffs, but these rules were broken early and often, as the league adjusted to the reality of the social and economic conditions of the Depression. Teams came and went in the two years of the league's existence.

In 1937, the National Basketball League was created from the remains of the Midwest Conference. The League lasted until 1949 when it merged with the Basketball Association of America (BAA) to form the National Basketball Association (NBA). The league was, thus, successful in sustaining itself in one form or another for twelve years through the remainder of the Depression and World War II. This paper addresses a number of questions

about the leagues formative year(s). What constituted the league's members and owners? How did the teams and players manage to make economic ends meet? What "marketing strategies" were utilized in each of the cities that had teams to appeal to local fans and how successful were these strategies? How did the players and the teams integrate into the social and economic fabric of the communities in which they played?
