

Robert D. Bole and Alfred C. Lawrence, *FROM PEACHBASKETS TO SLAMDUNKS: A STORY OF PROFESSIONAL BASKETBALL*, Whitman Press, Lebanon, New Hampshire, 1987 pp. 309. \$US15.95.

In the field of professional American sport history perhaps no sport has received less coverage than professional basketball. Baseball, football, boxing and many others have been the subject of several volumes while basketball has mainly been the topic of popular biographies of stars and teams. *From Peachbaskets to Slamdunks: A Story of Professional Basketball*, authored by Robert Bole and Alfred Lawrence, attempts to fill in some of the gaps in basketball history.

The book revolves around the origins of the professional game and the several leagues that existed prior to the creation of the National Basketball Association in 1949. Unfortunately, the book is 'box score' history. Rather than discussing the genesis of leagues and the forces that led to their demise, the stars, their points and rebounds take center stage in the game-by-game review of exciting seasons.

The authors only touch on several key issues that come to mind while reading the book. Why, for instance, did basketball lack widespread fan interest shared by other sports? Only cursory treatment is given the period between the 'first' professional game in 1896 and the waning years of the Eastern League in the early 1920s. The authors also discuss little of the structure of the many leagues, the 'revolving door' franchises, and their administration.

A genuine bias exists in the coverage of the leagues and players as well. Both authors grew up watching the Trenton, New Jersey team of the Eastern League, thus explaining the preponderance of Eastern League

coverage and the lack of information on the several other leagues that existed in Pennsylvania and New York alone, much less other regional leagues that may have existed in the Midwest, West, or South. This Eastern League discussion is one of the few areas in which primary source material is used, citing newspaper game summaries from the Trenton and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, newspapers.

The book's documentation is weak, due to heavy use of secondary sources. Despite all the sources listed, the authors appear to have an over reliance on Zander Hollander's *NBA's Official Encyclopedia of Pro Basketball*. Very little is included by Bole and Lawrence that could not have come from Hollander's work. Bole and Lawrence's chapter on the Original Celtics basketball team of the 1920s and 1930s, in fact, has anecdotes that read nearly verbatim from Hollander's work.

In spite of the criticisms, it must be remembered that this book is a 'popular history', written for the hardcore basketball fan, not for the sports historian. While little new is offered to the historian, the book does help the fan gain some feel for the game as it used to be --- complete with chicken wire cages and jump balls after each made basket --- and the exploits and points per game of an early legend like 6 foot 7 inch (200.7cm) Stretch Meehan -- who was a star of the 1920s.

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