

= George Mikan =

George Lawrence Mikan , Jr . ( June 18 , 1924 ? June 1 , 2005 ) , nicknamed Mr. Basketball , was an American professional basketball player for the Chicago American Gears of the National Basketball League ( NBL ) and the Minneapolis Lakers of the NBL , the Basketball Association of America ( BAA ) and the National Basketball Association ( NBA ) . Invariably playing with thick , round spectacles , the 6 ft 10 in ( 2 @. @ 08 m ) , 245 pounds ( 111 kg ) Mikan is seen as one of the pioneers of professional basketball , redefining it as a game of so @-@ called big men with his prolific rebounding , shot blocking , and his talent to shoot over smaller defenders with his ambidextrous hook shot , the result of his namesake Mikan Drill .

Mikan had a successful playing career , winning seven NBL , BAA , and NBA championships , an All @-@ Star MVP trophy , and three scoring titles . He was a member of the first four NBA All @-@ Star games , and the first six All @-@ BAA and All @-@ NBA Teams . Mikan was so dominant that he caused several rule changes in the NBA , among them , the introduction of the goaltending rule , the widening of the foul lane ? known as the " Mikan Rule " ? and the creation of the shot clock .

After his playing career , Mikan became one of the founders of the American Basketball Association ( ABA ) , serving as commissioner of the league . He was also vital for the forming of the Minnesota Timberwolves . In his later years , Mikan was involved in a long @-@ standing legal battle against the NBA , fighting to increase the meager pensions for players who had retired before the league became lucrative . In 2005 , Mikan died after a long battle with diabetes .

For his feats , Mikan was inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in 1959 , made the 25th and 35th NBA Anniversary Teams of 1970 and 1980 , and was elected one of the NBA 's 50 Greatest Players ever in 1996 . Since April 2001 , a statue of Mikan shooting his trademark hook shot graces the entrance of the Timberwolves ' Target Center .

= = Early years = =

George Mikan was born in Joliet , Illinois , as an American of Croatian descent . As a boy , he shattered one of his knees so badly that he was kept in bed for a year and a half . In 1938 , Mikan attended the Chicago Archbishop Quigley Preparatory Seminary and originally wanted to be a priest , but then moved back home to finish at Joliet Catholic . Mikan did not seem destined to become an athlete . When Mikan entered Chicago 's DePaul University in 1942 , he stood 6 ' 10 " , weighed 245 pounds , moved awkwardly because of his frame , and wore thick glasses for his near @-@ sightedness .

= = DePaul University = =

However , Mikan met 28 @-@ year @-@ old rookie DePaul basketball coach Ray Meyer , who saw potential in the bright and intelligent , but also clumsy and shy , freshman . Put into perspective , Meyer 's thoughts were revolutionary , because at the time it was believed that tall players were too awkward to ever play basketball well . In the following months , Meyer transformed Mikan into a confident , aggressive player who took pride in his height rather than being ashamed of it . Meyer and Mikan worked out intensively , and Mikan learned how to make hook shots accurately with either hand . This routine would become later known as the Mikan Drill . In addition , Meyer made Mikan punch a speed bag , take dancing lessons , and jump rope to make him a complete athlete .

From his first National Collegiate Athletic Association ( NCAA ) college games for DePaul on , Mikan dominated his peers . He intimidated opponents with his size and strength , was unstoppable on offense with his hook shot , and soon established a reputation as one of the hardest and grittiest players in the league , often playing through injuries and punishing opposing centers with hard fouls . In addition , Mikan also surprised the basketball world with his unique ability of goaltending , i.e. jumping so high that he swatted the ball away before it could pass the hoop . In today 's basketball , touching the ball after it reaches its apogee is a violation , but in Mikan 's time it was legal because people thought it was impossible anyone could reach that high . " We would set up a zone defense

that had four men around the key and I guarded the basket " , Mikan later recalled his DePaul days . " When the other team took a shot , I 'd just go up and tap it out . " As a consequence , the NCAA and later the NBA , outlawed goaltending . One of the few opposing centers to have any success against Mikan was Bob Kurland , a seven @-@ footer from Oklahoma A & M.

Mikan was named the Helms NCAA College Player of the Year twice in 1944 and 1945 and an All @-@ American three times , leading DePaul to the NIT title in 1945 , which was as prestigious as the NCAA tournament at the time . Mikan led the nation in scoring with 23 @.@ 9 points per game in 1944 ? 45 and 23 @.@ 1 in 1945 ? 46 . When DePaul won the 1945 National Invitation Tournament , Mikan was named Most Valuable Player for scoring 120 points in three games , including 53 points in a 97 ? 53 win over Rhode Island , equalling the score of the entire Rhode Island team .

= = Professional playing career = =

= = = Chicago American Gears ( 1946 ? 47 ) = = =

After the end of the 1945 ? 46 college season , Mikan signed with the Chicago American Gears of the National Basketball League , a predecessor of the modern NBA . He played with them for 25 games at the end of the 1946 ? 47 NBL season , scoring 16 @.@ 5 points per game as a rookie . Mikan led the Gears to the championship of the World Basketball Tournament , where he was elected Most Valuable Player after scoring 100 points in five games , and also voted into the All @-@ NBL Team .

However , before the start of the 1947 ? 48 NBL season , Maurice White , the president of the American Gear Company and the owner of the American Gears NBL team , pulled the team out of the league . White planned to create a 24 @-@ team league called the Professional Basketball League of America , in which he owned all the teams and arenas . However , the league folded after just a month , and the players of White 's teams were equally distributed among the 11 remaining NBL franchises . As a consequence , every team had a 9 @.@ 09 % chance of landing Mikan , who ended up on the Minneapolis Lakers , playing for coach John Kundla .

= = = Minneapolis Lakers ( 1947 ? 56 ) = = =

In his first season with the Lakers , Mikan led the league in scoring with 1 @,@ 195 points , becoming the first and only NBL player to score more than 1 @,@ 000 points in an NBL season . He was named league MVP , and the Lakers won the NBL title .

The following year , the Lakers and three other NBL franchises jumped to the fledgling Basketball Association of America . Mikan led his new league in scoring , and again set a single @-@ season scoring record . The Lakers defeated the Washington Capitols in the 1949 BAA Finals .

In 1949 , the BAA and NBL merged to form the NBA . The new league started the inaugural 1949 ? 50 NBA season , featuring 17 teams , with the Lakers in the Central Division . Mikan again was dominant , averaging 27 @.@ 4 points per game and 2 @.@ 9 assists per game and taking another scoring title ; Alex Groza of Indianapolis Olympians was the only other player to break the 20 @-@ point @-@ barrier that year . After comfortably leading his team to an impressive 51 ? 17 record and storming through the playoffs , Mikan 's team played the 1950 NBA Finals against the Syracuse Nationals . In Game 1 , the Lakers beat Syracuse on their home court when Lakers reserve guard Bob Harrison hit a 40 @-@ foot buzzer beater to give Minneapolis a two @-@ point win . The team split the next four games , and in Game 6 , the Lakers won 110 ? 95 and won the first @-@ ever NBA championship . Mikan scored 31 @.@ 3 points per game in the playoffs .

In the 1950 ? 51 NBA season , Mikan was dominant again , scoring a career @-@ best 28 @.@ 4 points per game in the regular season , again taking the scoring crown , and had 3 @.@ 1 assists per game . In that year , the NBA introduced a new statistic : rebounds . In this category , Mikan also stood out ; his 14 @.@ 1 rebounds per game ( rpg ) was only second to the 16 @.@ 4 rpg of Dolph

Schayes of Syracuse . In that year , Mikan participated in one of the most notorious NBA games ever played . When the Fort Wayne Pistons played against his Lakers , the Pistons took a 19 ? 18 lead . Afraid that Mikan would mount a comeback if he got the ball , the Pistons passed the ball around without any attempt to score a basket . With no shot clock invented yet to force them into offense , the score stayed 19 ? 18 to make it the lowest @-@ scoring NBA game of all time . This game was an important factor in the development of the shot clock , which was introduced four years later . Mikan had scored 15 of the Lakers ' 18 points , thus scoring 83 @. @ 3 % of his team 's points , setting an NBA all @-@ time record . In the post season , Mikan fractured his leg before the 1951 Western Division Finals against the Rochester Royals . With Mikan hardly able to move all series long , the Royals won 3 ? 1 . Decades later , in 1990 , Mikan recalled that his leg was taped with a plate ; however , despite effectively hopping around the court on one foot , he said he still averaged 20 @-@ odd points per game .

In the 1951 ? 52 NBA season , the NBA decided to widen the foul lane under the basket from 6 feet to 12 feet . As players could stay in the lane for only three seconds at a time , it forced big men like Mikan to post @-@ up from double the distance . A main proponent of this rule was New York Knicks coach Joe Lapchick , who regarded Mikan as his nemesis , and it was dubbed " The Mikan Rule " . While Mikan still scored an impressive 23 @. @ 8 points per game , it was a serious reduction from his 27 @. @ 4 points per game the previous season , and his field goal percentage sank from .428 to .385 . He still pulled down 13 @. @ 5 rebounds per game , asserting himself as a top rebounder , and logged 3 @. @ 0 assists per game . Mikan also had a truly dominating game that season , in which he scored a personal @-@ best 61 points in a double overtime victory against the Rochester Royals . At the time , it was the second @-@ best performance in league history behind Joe Fulks ' 63 @-@ point score in 1949 , and Mikan 's output more than doubled that of his teammates , whose output that game totaled 30 points . In the 1952 NBA All @-@ Star Game , Mikan had a strong performance with 26 points and 15 rebounds in a West loss . Later that season , the Lakers reached the 1952 NBA Finals and were pitted against the New York Knicks . This qualified as one of the strangest Finals series in NBA history , as neither team could play on their home court in the first six games . The Lakers ' Minneapolis Auditorium was already booked , and the Knicks ' Madison Square Garden was occupied by the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus . Instead , the Lakers played in St. Paul and the Knicks in the damp , dimly lit 69th Regiment Armory . Perpetually double @-@ teamed by Knicks ' Nat Clifton and Harry Gallatin , Mikan was unable to assert himself and it was more Vern Mikkelsen 's credit that the first six games were split . In the only true home game , Game 7 in the Auditorium , the Lakers won 82 ? 65 and edged the Knicks 4 ? 3 , winning the NBA title and earning themselves \$ 7 @, @ 500 to split among the team .

During the 1952 ? 53 NBA season , Mikan averaged 20 @. @ 6 points and a career @-@ high 14 @. @ 4 rebounds per game , the highest in the league , as well as 2 @. @ 9 assists per game . In the 1953 NBA All @-@ Star Game , Mikan was dominant again with 22 points and 16 rebounds , winning that game 's MVP Award . The Lakers made the 1953 NBA Finals , and again defeated the Knicks 4 ? 1 .

In the 1953 ? 54 NBA season , the now 29 @-@ year @-@ old Mikan slowly declined , averaging 18 @. @ 1 points , 14 @. @ 3 rebounds and 2 @. @ 4 assists per game . Under his leadership , the Lakers won another NBA title in the 1954 NBA Finals , making it their third @-@ straight championship and fifth in six years ; the only time they lost had been when Mikan fractured his leg . From an NBA perspective , the Minneapolis Lakers dynasty has only been convincingly surpassed by the eleven @-@ title Boston Celtics dynasty of 1957 ? 69 . At the end of the season , Mikan announced his retirement . He later said : " I had a family growing , and I decided to be with them . I felt it was time to get started with the professional world outside of basketball . " Injuries also were a factor , as Mikan had sustained 10 broken bones and 16 stitches in his career , often having to play through these injuries .

Without Mikan , the Lakers made the playoffs , but were unable to reach the 1955 NBA Finals . In the middle of the 1955 ? 56 NBA season , Mikan returned to the Lakers lineup . He played in 37 games , but his long absence had affected his play . He averaged only 10 @. @ 5 points , 8 @. @ 3 rebounds and 1 @. @ 3 assists , and the Lakers lost in the first round of the playoffs . At the end of

the season , Mikan retired for good . His 10 @, @ 156 points were a record at the time ; he was the first NBA player to score 10 @, @ 000 points in a career . He was inducted into the inaugural Basketball Hall of Fame class of 1959 and was declared the greatest player of the first half of the century by The Associated Press .

= = Post @-@ playing career = =

In 1956 , Mikan was the Republican candidate for the United States Congress in Minnesota 's 3rd congressional district . He challenged incumbent Representative Roy Wier in a closely fought race that featured a high voter turnout . Despite the reelection of incumbent Republican President Dwight Eisenhower , the inexperienced Mikan lost by a close margin of 52 % to 48 % . Wier received 127 @, @ 356 votes to Mikan 's 117 @, @ 716 . Returning to the legal profession , Mikan was frustrated , after hoping for an influx of work . For six months , Mikan did not get any assignments at all , leaving him in financial difficulties that forced him to cash in on his life insurance .

Problems also arose in Mikan 's professional sports career . In the 1957 ? 58 NBA season , Lakers coach John Kundla became general manager and persuaded Mikan to become coach of the Lakers . However , this was a failure , as the Lakers endured a 9 ? 30 record until Mikan stepped down and returned coaching duties to Kundla . The Lakers ended with a 19 ? 53 record , to record one of the worst seasons in their history . After this failure , Mikan then concentrated on his law career , raising his family of six children , successfully specializing in corporate and real estate law , and buying and renovating buildings in Minneapolis .

In 1967 , Mikan returned to professional basketball , becoming the first commissioner of the American Basketball Association , a rival league to the NBA . In order to lure basketball fans to his league , Mikan invented the league 's characteristic red @-@ white @-@ and @-@ blue ABA ball , which he thought more patriotic , better suited for TV , and more crowd @-@ pleasing than the brown NBA ball , and instituted the three @-@ point line . Mikan resigned from the ABA in 1969 .

In the mid @-@ 1980s , Mikan headed a task force with a goal of returning professional basketball to Minneapolis , decades after the Lakers had moved to Los Angeles to become the Los Angeles Lakers , and after the ABA 's Minnesota Muskies and Minnesota Pipers had departed . This bid was successful , leading to the inception of a new franchise in the 1989 ? 90 NBA season , the Minnesota Timberwolves .

In 1994 , Mikan became the part @-@ owner and chairman of the board of the Chicago Cheetahs , a professional roller hockey team based in Chicago , Illinois , that played in Roller Hockey International . The franchise folded after their second season .

In his later years , Mikan suffered from diabetes and failing kidneys , and eventually , his illness caused his right leg to be amputated below the knee . When his medical insurance was cut off , Mikan soon found himself in severe financial difficulties . He fought a long and protracted legal battle against the NBA and the NBA Players ' Union , protesting the \$ 1 @, @ 700 / month pensions for players who had retired before 1965 , the start of the so @-@ called " big money era " . According to Mel Davis of the National Basketball Retired Players Union , this battle kept him going , because Mikan hoped to be alive when a new collective bargaining agreement would finally vindicate his generation . In 2005 , however , his condition worsened .

= = Legacy = =

Mikan is lauded as the pioneer of Modern Age basketball . He was the original center , who scored 11 @, @ 764 points , an average of 22 @. @ 6 per game , retired as the all @-@ time leading scorer and averaged 13 @. @ 4 rebounds and 2 @. @ 8 assists in 520 NBL , BAA and NBA games . As a testament to his fierce playing style , he also led the league three times in personal fouls . He won seven NBL , BAA , and NBA championships , an All @-@ Star MVP trophy , and three scoring titles , and was a member of the first four NBA All @-@ Star games and the first six All @-@ BAA and All @-@ NBA Teams . As well as being declared the greatest player of the first half of the century by The Associated Press , Mikan was on the Helms Athletic Foundation all @-@ time All @-@

American team , chosen in a 1952 poll , was inducted into the Basketball Hall of Fame in 1959 , made the 25th and 35th NBA Anniversary Teams of 1970 and 1980 and was elected one of the NBA 50 Greatest Players in 1996 . Mikan 's impact on the game is also reflected in the Mikan Drill , today a staple exercise of " big men " in basketball .

When superstar center Shaquille O 'Neal became a member of the Los Angeles Lakers , Mikan appeared on a Sports Illustrated cover in November 1996 with O 'Neal and Kareem Abdul @-@ Jabbar , calling Abdul @-@ Jabbar and Mikan the " Lakers legends " to whom O 'Neal was compared . Since April 2001 , a statue of Mikan shooting his trademark hook shot graces the entrance of the Minnesota Timberwolves ' Target Center . In addition , a banner in the Staples Center commemorates Mikan and his fellow Minneapolis Lakers . He is also honored by a statue and an appearance on a mural in his hometown of Joliet , Illinois .

= = = Rule changes = = =

Mikan became so dominant that the NBA had to change its rules of play in order to reduce his influence , such as widening the lane from six to twelve feet ( " The Mikan Rule " ) . He also played a role in the introduction of the shot clock ; and in the NCAA , his dominating play around the basket led to the outlawing of defensive goaltending . Mikan was a harbinger of the NBA 's future , which would be dominated by tall , powerful players .

As an official , Mikan is also directly responsible for the ABA three @-@ point line which was later adopted by the NBA ; the existence of the Minnesota Timberwolves ; and the multi @-@ colored ABA ball , which still lives on as the " money ball " in the NBA All @-@ Star Three @-@ Point Contest .

= = Personal life = =

In 1947 , he married his girlfriend Patricia , who remained his wife for the next 58 years until he died . Mikan fathered six children , sons Larry , Terry , Patrick and Michael , and daughters Trisha and Maureen . All his life , Mikan was universally seen as the prototypical " gentle giant " , tough and relentless on the court , but friendly and amicable in private life . He was also the older brother of Ed Mikan , another basketball player for both DePaul and the BAA .

= = = Death = = =

Mikan died in Scottsdale , Arizona , on June 1 , 2005 , of complications from diabetes and other ailments . His son Terry reported that his father had undergone dialysis three times a week , four hours a day , for the last five years . He was interred at Lakewood Cemetery in Minneapolis .

Mikan 's death was widely mourned by the basketball world , and also brought media attention to the financial struggles of several early @-@ era NBA players . Many felt that the current players of the big @-@ money generation should rally for larger pensions for the pre @-@ 1965 predecessors in upcoming labor negotiations . Shaquille O 'Neal paid for Mikan 's funeral . He said : " Without number 99 [ Mikan ] , there is no me . " Before Game 5 of the 2005 Eastern Conference Finals between the Heat and the Detroit Pistons , there was a moment of silence to honor Mikan . Bob Cousy remarked that Mikan figuratively carried the NBA in the early days and single @-@ handedly made the league credible and popular . The 2005 NBA Finals between the Pistons and the San Antonio Spurs was dedicated to Mikan .