

= Mendy Rudolph =

Marvin " Mendy " Rudolph ( March 8 , 1926 ? July 4 , 1979 ) was an American professional basketball referee in the National Basketball Association ( NBA ) for 22 years , from 1953 to 1975 . Regarded as one of the greatest officials in NBA history , Rudolph officiated 2 @, @ 112 NBA games ( a record held at retirement ) and was the first league referee to work 2 @, @ 000 games . He was also selected to referee eight NBA All @-@ Star Games and made 22 consecutive NBA Finals appearances .

Following his career as a referee , he was a color commentator for CBS Sports 's coverage of the NBA on CBS for two seasons from 1975 to 1977 and he appeared in a television advertisement for Miller Lite . He was a member of the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame Class of 2007 .

= = Personal life = =

= = = Early life and family = = =

Born in Philadelphia , Pennsylvania , Rudolph was raised in Wilkes @-@ Barre , Pennsylvania . His father , Harry Rudolph , was a prominent basketball referee and baseball umpire . Mendy Rudolph played basketball as a child and eventually chose the same profession as his father . Upon graduating from James M. Coughlin High School , he began officiating basketball games at the Wilkes @-@ Barre Jewish Community Center and later worked scholastic games . At age 20 , he was recruited to referee games alongside his father , who served as Eastern Professional Basketball League ( Eastern League ) President from 1956 to 1970 . During his career in the Eastern League , he officiated his first Eastern League President 's Cup championship series in 1948 and was selected as a referee in at least one game in every President 's Cup playoff and championship series between 1949 and 1953 . At the same time , he also served in the United States Air Force during the Korean War .

Rudolph was married twice during his life . His first marriage was to his childhood sweetheart and together they raised three children . But the relationship became troubled and eventually ended . In 1961 , Mendy Rudolph met Susan , a receptionist at the WGN office in New York City , while both worked for the station . At the time , Rudolph worked at WGN as an additional job outside of officiating , which was common among referees from his era . Mendy and Susan Rudolph were married in 1973 . Two years later , their first child , Jennifer Rudolph , was born .

= = = Gambling problem = = =

Throughout his life , Rudolph suffered from a gambling problem and was labeled a " compulsive gambler " . He would often spend his leisure time placing bets at race tracks and Las Vegas , Nevada and Puerto Rico casinos . At that time , NBA referees were allowed to gamble , but this practice has since been prohibited . As he incurred gambling losses , Rudolph was once offered by a Las Vegas gambler to erase his outstanding debt by participating in point shaving . However , he refused to accept the offer and said to his wife , " It goes against all my principles . I love the game too much , respect it too much . I couldn 't do it to you . I couldn 't do it to the memory of my father , and I couldn 't do it to myself . If I have to go into bankruptcy , something I 'd hate to do , I 'd do it , " according to in a 1992 New York Times interview with Susan Rudolph . Rudolph had cashed in his \$ 60 @, @ 000 pension fund to pay debts and he still owed an additional \$ 100 @, @ 000 . While he refused to seek professional help , Rudolph cut back on his gambling habit later in his life .

= = NBA officiating career = =

= = = Early years = = =

Rudolph was recommended by Eddie Gottlieb , coach and owner of the NBA 's Philadelphia Warriors at the time , to then @-@ NBA commissioner Maurice Podoloff , after observing Rudolph officiate an exhibition game . Rudolph was hired by the NBA in February 1953 , midway through the 1952 ? 53 NBA season and he became the youngest official in the league . In his early years with the NBA , Rudolph quickly became an established official as he worked playoff games within his first two years in the league .

= = = Memorable NBA Finals games = = =

Rudolph officiated the 1955 NBA Finals between the Syracuse Nationals and Fort Wayne Pistons , which was notable for its actions by fans , fights between players , and attacks on referees . Game 3 of the series , played in Indianapolis , Indiana , was interrupted by a fan who threw a chair on the floor and ran on the court to protest calls made by Rudolph and referee Arnie Heft . Six years later , he made history by officiating the entire 1961 NBA Finals between the Boston Celtics and St. Louis Hawks with his colleague Earl Strom .

Rudolph and Strom officiated another notable game in the 1964 NBA Finals . In Game 5 of the championship series , Wilt Chamberlain , playing for the San Francisco Warriors , knocked out Clyde Lovellette of the Boston Celtics with a punch . Celtics head coach Red Auerbach stormed onto the court and demanded that Chamberlain be thrown out of the game . The latter told Auerbach if he did not " shut up " , he would be knocked down to the floor with Lovellette . Auerbach countered the threat , " Why don 't you pick on somebody your own size . " Rudolph intervened the discussion and told Auerbach , " Red , do you have any other seven @-@ footers who 'd like to volunteer ? "

= = = Head of officials = = =

As his career progressed in the league , Rudolph took on responsibilities beyond officiating . In 1966 , he was named referee @-@ in @-@ chief and worked alongside Dolph Schayes , who was hired as the league 's supervisor of officials that year to replace Sid Borgia . In this position , he oversaw areas that pertained to referee mechanics , techniques , and rule interpretations . It was in this role that he authored the NBA Official ? s Manual and Case Book .

While he served as head of officials , the NBA lost four veteran officials ? Norm Drucker , Joe Gushue , Earl Strom , and John Vanak to the rival American Basketball Association ( ABA ) in 1969 over salary and benefits . At the time of transaction , Rudolph told Strom , " ( Deputy Commissioner ) Carl [ Scheer ] , ( NBA Commissioner ) Walter [ Kennedy ] , and I were prepared to offer you guys the greatest contract in the history of pro basketball . "

By the early 1970s , Rudolph successfully encouraged the league to adopt a plain gray referee uniform over the traditional " zebra " shirt to de @-@ emphasize the presence of officials in games .

= = = Final years = = =

By 1975 , Rudolph 's health condition began to deteriorate and he was forced to retire after suffering a blood clot in his lung during a 1975 NBA playoff game between the Buffalo Braves and Washington Bullets , played April 25 , 1975 . In his final game , he had to be carried off the court . On November 9 , 1975 , Rudolph officially ended his career as a referee in the NBA , in which he officiated more games ( 2 @,@ 113 ) than any official in league history at the time . Earl Strom later broke Rudolph ? s record and officiated over 2 @,@ 400 games in his 30 @-@ year career .

= = Post @-@ officiating career = =

= = = Broadcasting = = =

Following his officiating career , Rudolph transitioned to a career in broadcasting . During the 1975 @-@ 76 and 1976 @-@ 77 NBA seasons , he worked as a television analyst for CBS Sports covering The NBA on CBS . During his first season , he was paired with Brent Musburger and Rick Barry for the 1976 NBA Finals . This championship series was most memorable for a triple @-@ overtime Game 5 , which has been labeled the " greatest game " in NBA history . In this game , Celtic John Havlicek made an apparent game @-@ winning field goal at the conclusion of the second overtime . The game clock had expired , but Rudolph , along with Musburger and Barry , noted that the shot was made with two seconds remaining . Referee Richie Powers , however , decided that one second remained in the second overtime period .

= = = Television commercial = = =

In 1976 , Rudolph was featured in a Miller Brewing Company television advertisement along with then @-@ Celtics head coach Tom Heinsohn to promote Miller Lite 's " Tastes Great , Less Filling " advertising campaign . Rudolph and Heinsohn debated whether Miller Lite was less filling or tastes great in a bar room scene . After Heinsohn refused to agree that Lite was , first and foremost , less filling , Rudolph threw his thumb in the air and screamed , " You 're out of the bar . " This advertisement popularized Miller 's campaign slogan and the campaign was named eighth best of the 20th century by Advertising Age in 1999 .

= = Legacy = =

Rudolph died on July 4 , 1979 from a heart attack in New York City . Mendy and Susan Rudolph were standing outside a movie theatre entrance when Mendy collapsed . After unsuccessful attempts at mouth @-@ to @-@ mouth resuscitation , he was taken to a hospital where he died an hour after arrival . At the time of his death , then @-@ NBA Commissioner Larry O 'Brien said of Rudolph , " Mendy 's contributions to the integrity of pro basketball are legendary . " Officials wore a patch with Rudolph 's uniform number , 5 , on their sleeves the following season after his death , the 1979 @-@ 80 NBA season , to honor him . No other official in the NBA has worn this number to the present day .

Known for his charisma , personality , and iconic stature on the court , Rudolph symbolized NBA officiating during the early years of the NBA to fans of professional basketball and became the most recognizable official during the NBA 's first four decades . Bob Ryan of The Boston Globe said of Rudolph , " If any man other than Red Auerbach ever earned the title of NBA institution , it was certainly Mendy Rudolph . " Upon retirement , he set a precedent for the standards that future referees are judged . Early in his officiating career , Joe Crawford ( later hired by the NBA in 1977 ) attended games that Rudolph worked in Philadelphia , Pennsylvania and studied his style and approach . Earl Strom credited Rudolph for being an influence on the development of his career in the NBA . In his autobiography , Calling the Shots , Strom described Rudolph as " one of the most prominent referees because of his style , courage , and judgment . He had excellent judgment . He made the call regardless of the pressure , whom it involved , or where it was . " Strom later told The New York Times that " Mendy Rudolph was simply the greatest referee of all time . "

Strom was also an advocate to get Rudolph enshrined into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame . On April 2 , 2007 , Rudolph was announced as one of the seven members of the Basketball Hall of Fame 's Class of 2007 to be enshrined in September 2007 , twenty @-@ eight years after his death . It was reported that the length of time for Rudolph to become elected was the result of his gambling lifestyle . He became the thirteenth referee to be inducted into the Hall of Fame .