

LEVELED BOOK • R

Basketball

Written by Larry Millet

www.readinga-z.com



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Focus Question

How has basketball changed over time?

Words to Know

amateur
court
defense
foul shot
offense

opposing
pastime
personalities
professional

Front and back cover: A Portland, Oregon, guard (right) goes for a layup in a game against a team from Orlando, Florida.

Title page: Students in Berlin, Germany play a game for fun in a park.

Page 3: Women compete for the gold medal in the 2008 Paralympic Games in Beijing, China.

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Fountas & Pinnell	N
Reading Recovery	30
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Table of Contents

A Game of Excitement	4
Early Days	5
More Popular Than Ever	7
Global Phenomenon	8
Rules of the Game	10
Dream Teams	13
Naismith's Success	15
Glossary	16



A New York Knicks player attempts a three-point shot with seconds to go in a game against the Houston Rockets.

A Game of Excitement

Basketball is a game of excitement. Things change quickly during games. A few seconds left on the clock can be enough to turn a loss into a win. There is nothing more exciting than watching a player take a last-second shot far from the basket. In that moment, all eyes are on the ball. Everyone wonders if it will fly through the net, bounce off the rim, or be an “air ball” that misses completely.

Early Days

Although basketball is now a global sport, it started small in 1891. Dr. James Naismith, a Canadian-born teacher in Massachusetts, was concerned about how to get his students to exercise enough during the cold winters. He set out to invent a sport that could be played indoors. After a few tries, he hit gold by nailing a peach basket up on the wall. He called his new sport *basket ball*.

James Naismith was born in Canada and studied physical education in Montreal before moving to the United States to teach.





The Yale University men's team poses for a photo in 1901. Yale has had a men's basketball team since 1896. Women's teams became popular at this time as well.



Basketball quickly swept the country, becoming popular at schools. Part of the reason for its popularity was the ease with which it could be played. All you needed was a ball, a basket, and a **court**. Men's and women's basketball started in schools in 1892, and by the 1920s dozens of schools in the United States offered varsity high school basketball teams.

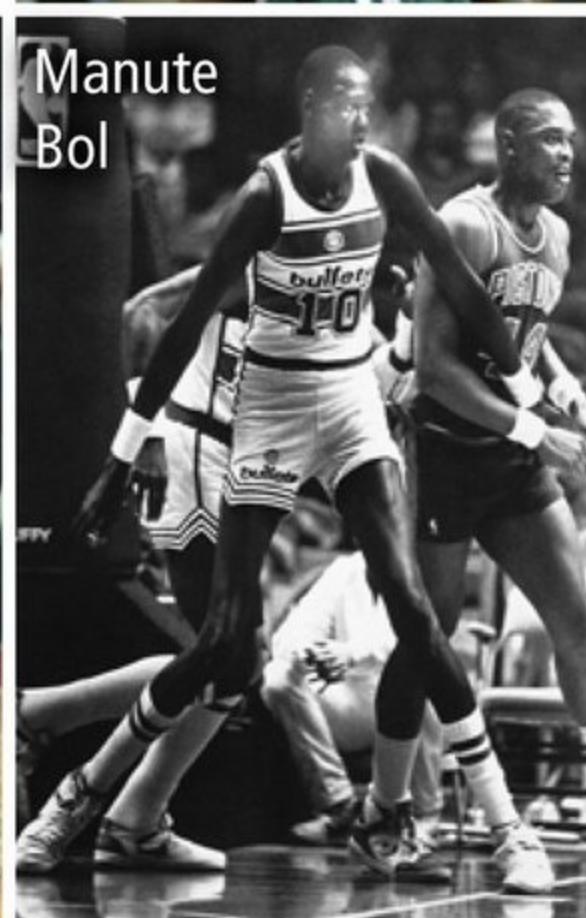
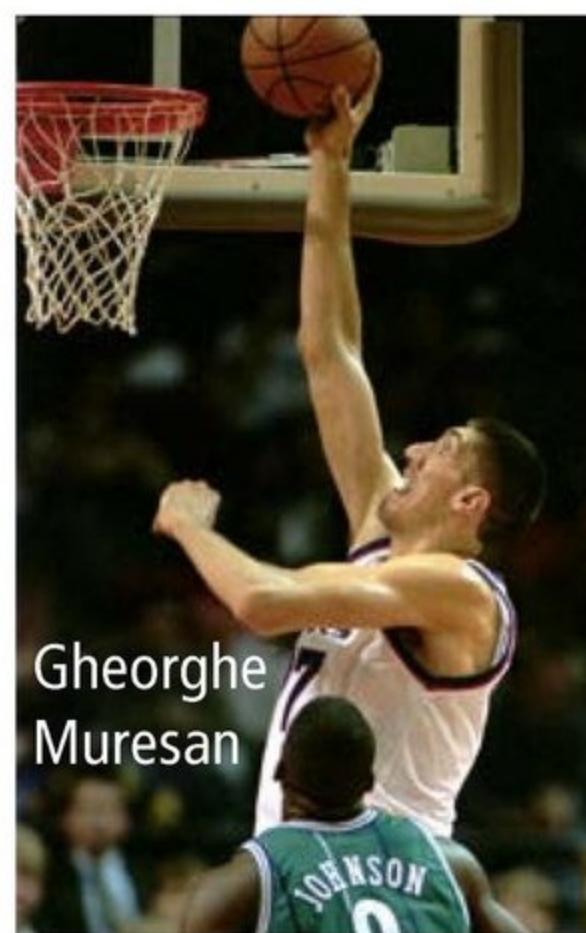
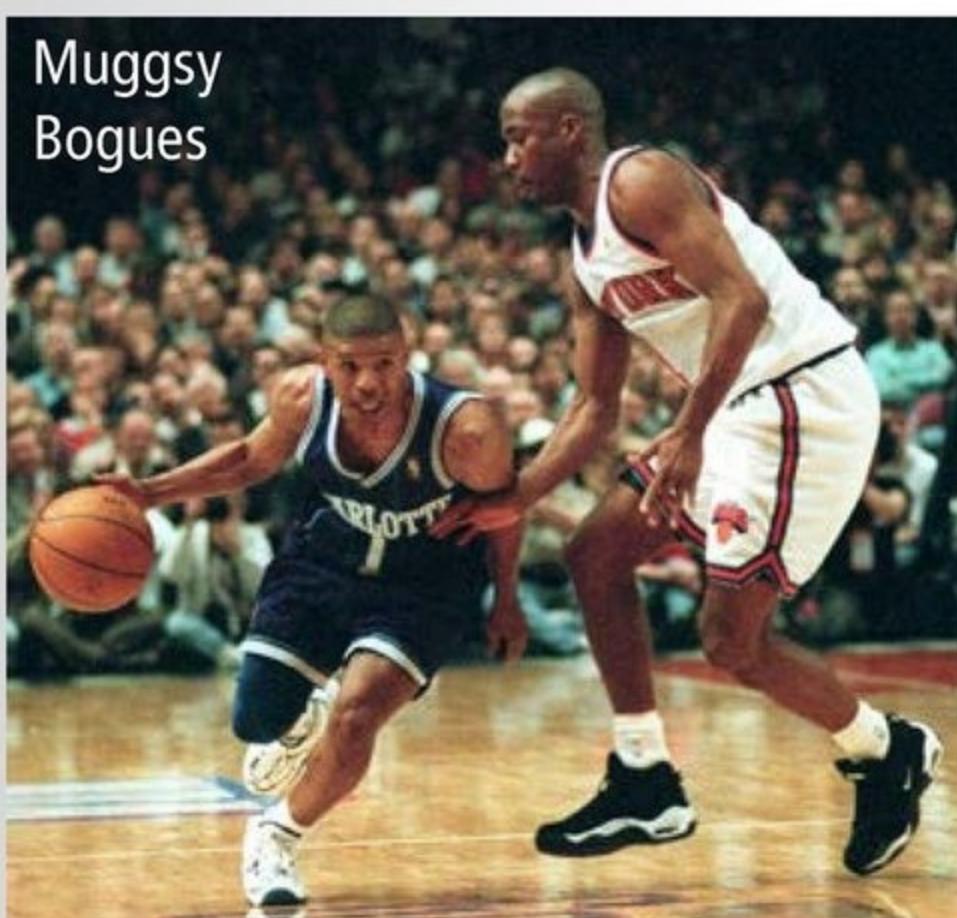
Basketball remained mostly an American **pastime** until 1949, when the National Basketball Association (NBA) began. After the NBA formed, basketball became the major-league sport that it is today.

More Popular Than Ever

In the United States, there are **professional** and **amateur** players of all different ages. The NBA has 30 teams. The WNBA (Women's National Basketball Association) has 12 teams. There are 336 national college teams. Almost every high school has a basketball team. Basketball camps are available for younger students, and just about every park with a court has regular pickup games going.

wowser!

- The tallest players ever in the NBA were Manute Bol and Gheorghe Muresan, who were both 7 feet 7 inches (231 cm) tall.
- Muggsy Bogues was the shortest NBA player in history, at 5 feet 3 inches (160 cm).





Members of the 1992 Men's Olympic team pose with their gold medals in Barcelona, Spain.

Global Phenomenon

While it is not yet as popular as soccer, the sport of basketball is growing around the world. The tipping point came in 1992 when the United States sent the “Dream Team” to the Olympic Games. The Dream Team was the first Olympic team made up of NBA players. The whole world saw some of the greatest players ever win the gold medal.

Do You Know?

- The backboard was invented to stop spectators in the balcony from knocking away shots!
- Basketballs weren't always the orange balls used today. Before the 1950s, they were brown.





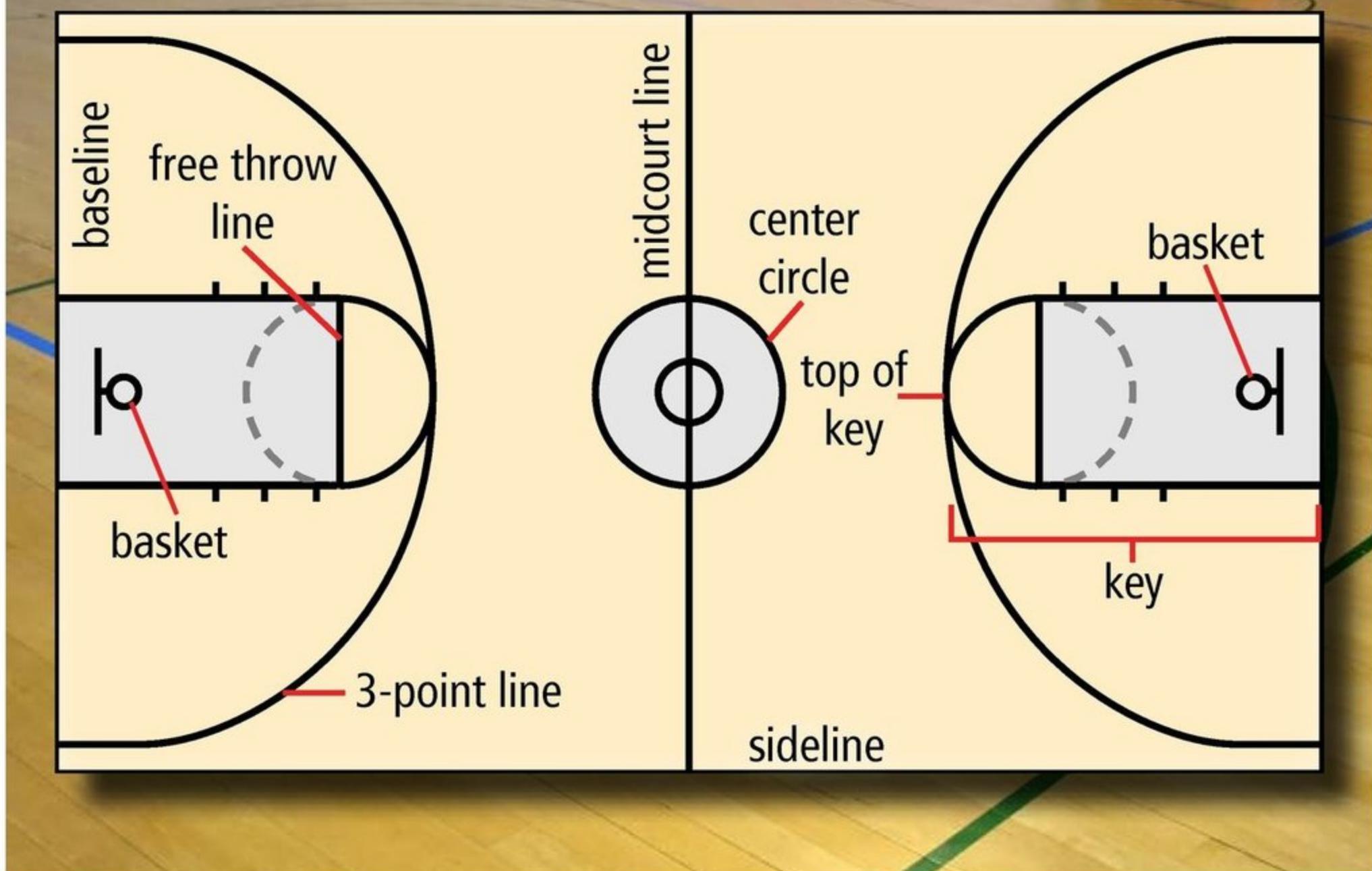
NBA star Yao Ming (red) began his career in China before he was selected to play with the Houston Rockets in the NBA.

Countries such as China, India, and Australia are playing more and more basketball every year. The game has been hugely popular in the Philippines for many years, though. In fact, the largest basketball venue in the world is the Philippine Arena, which can hold fifty-five thousand fans.

People wait to enter outside the Philippine Arena. The huge arena is used for basketball as well as other sports and entertainment events.



Basketball Court



Rules of the Game

Two teams of five players play a game of basketball. The game takes place on a court. There is a hoop at each end attached to a backboard 10 feet (3 m) above the floor.

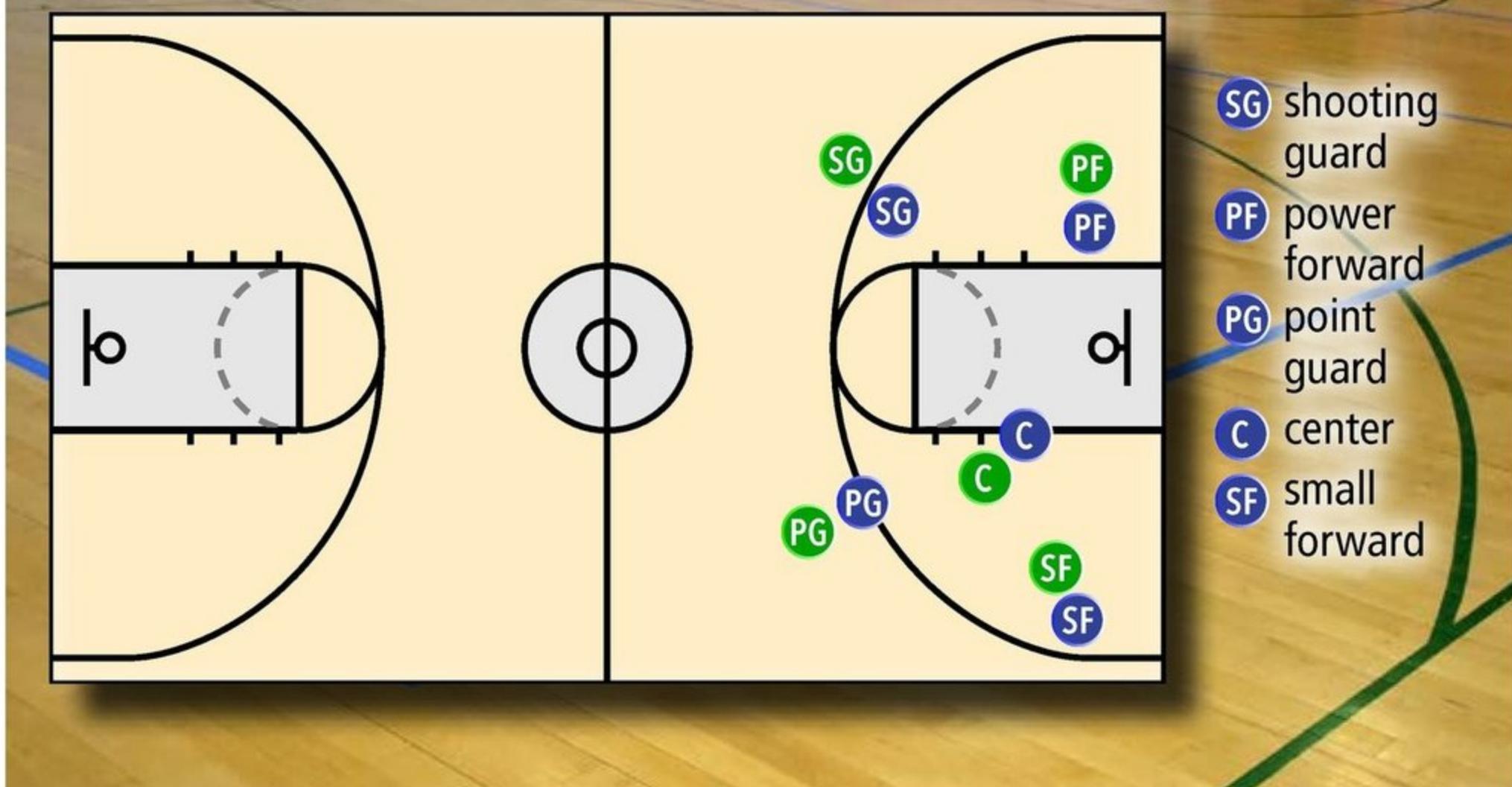
The object of the game is to throw, or shoot, the basketball into the **opposing** team's hoop. A team earns two points for making a shot, three points for making a shot from behind the three-point line, and one point for each **foul shot**. A game is made up of four quarters, which in the NBA are each twelve minutes long.

Play is fast. Teams change between playing **offense** or **defense** as the ball moves quickly back and forth on the court. The ball can only move if it is being *dribbled* (bounced) by a player or *passed* (tossed) to another player. Passing the ball to a team player in the right position at the right time can result in scoring a basket.



A Seattle player (left) dribbles the ball while charging up the court during a WNBA game. A college player (right) jumps high for two points during a game in Texas.

Basketball Player Positions



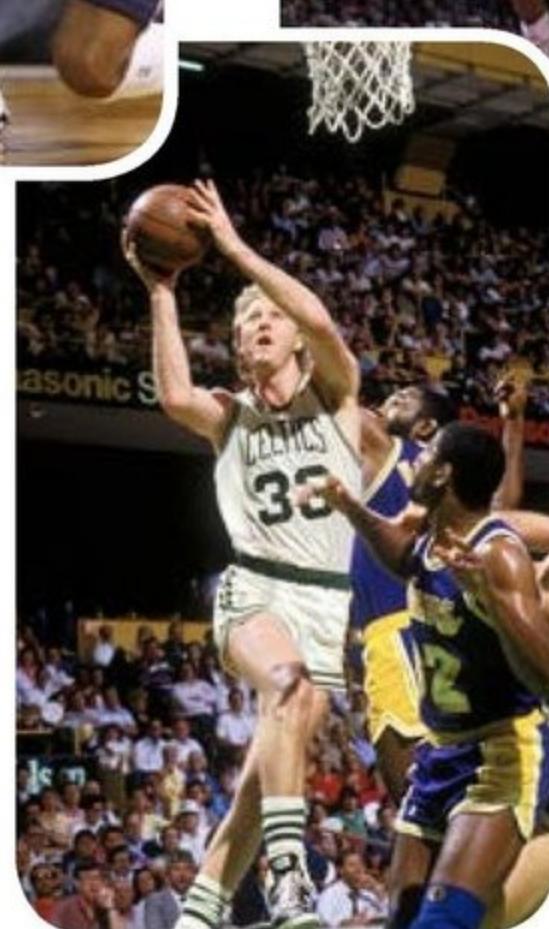
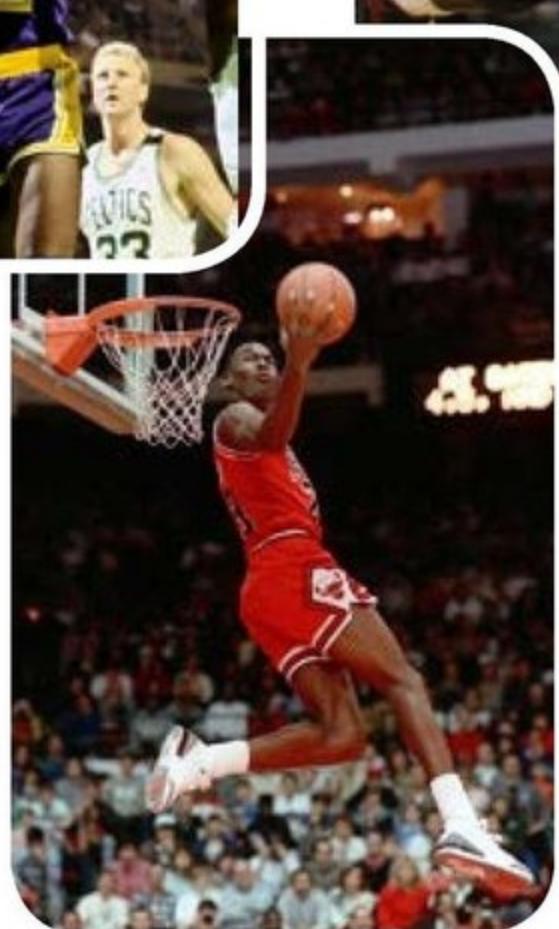
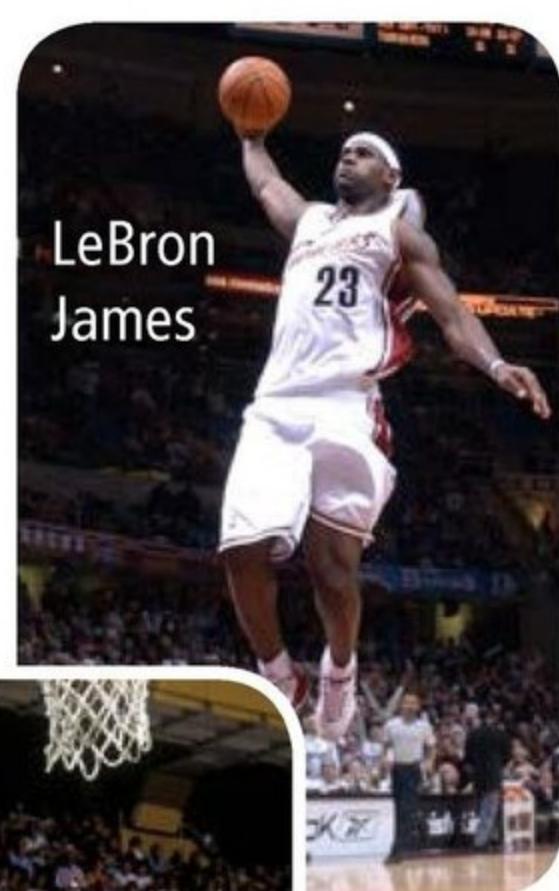
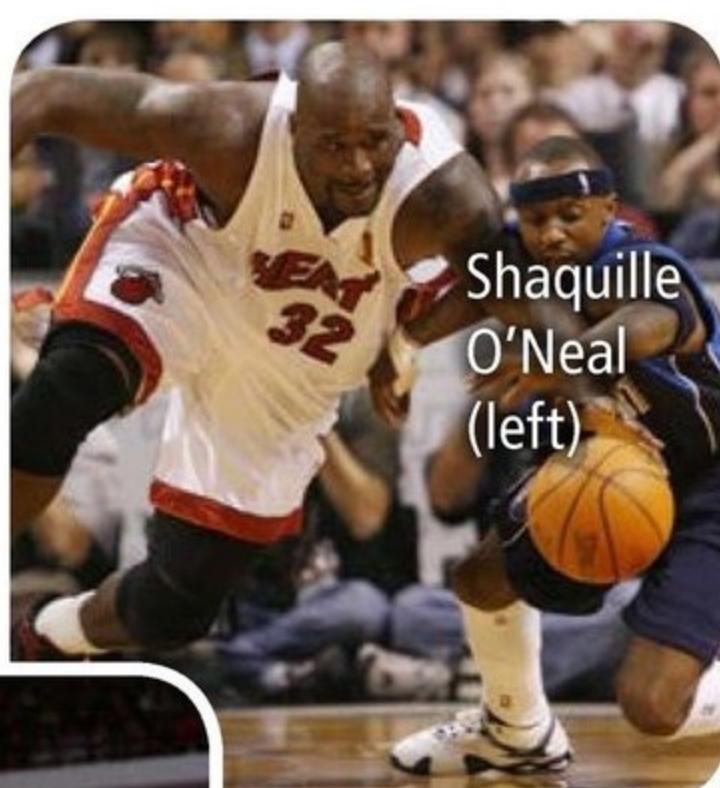
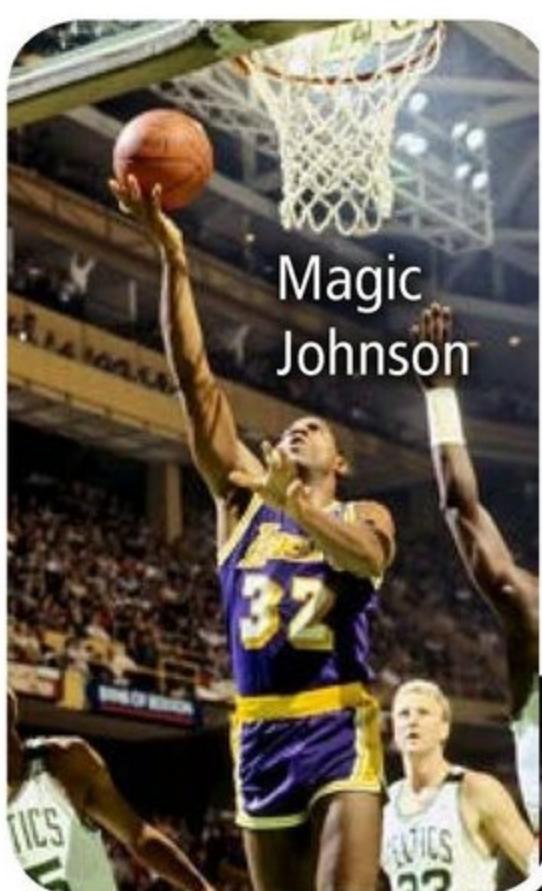
Teams are often organized so players play the same positions, or roles. The *point guard*, who is usually the best ball handler, controls the ball and makes sure it reaches the right player at the right time. The *shooting guard* handles long shots while on offense. The *small forward* uses speed to steal the ball from the other team and to make shots close to the basket. The *power forward* plays with his or her back to the basket while on offense, staying open for a pass. The *center* uses his or her height to score when on offense and to protect the basket when on defense.

Referees enforce the rules of the game and call fouls when players make unfair contact.

Dream Teams

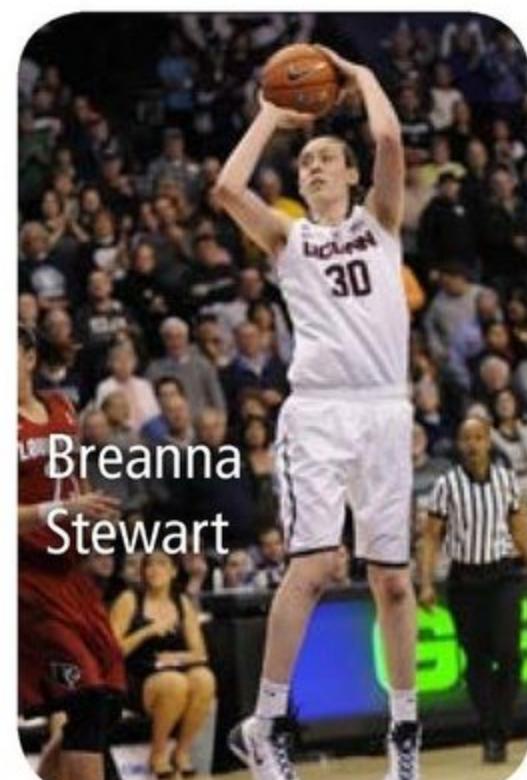
Professional basketball is full of some of the most exciting people in sports. These players draw fans to the sport who often talk as much about the players' lively **personalities** as they talk about their talent.

Players such as Michael Jordan, Larry Bird, Shaquille O'Neal, Magic Johnson, and LeBron James were human record-breaking machines. Off the court, players often become famous personalities, but on the court, few stars fail to prove their amazing basketball skills.





In the WNBA, Brittney Griner overcame her early difficulties to break records and attract attention as one of the best female athletes in the sport. Four-time United States team member and University of Connecticut star Breanna Stewart has been named Player of the Year more than once and has helped United States national teams win four gold medals.



These players and many more have given a lot to the sport, but perhaps one player helped to shape modern basketball more than any other. In the 1950s, a 6-foot-10-inch (208 cm) player named George Mikan brought to the game great ability and love



of the sport itself. He was the first of the “big men” who changed basketball from being a sport of small and quick players into that of giants. Present-day basketball would be very different without Mikan’s talent.



The United States men's and women's teams have dominated the Olympic Games.

Naismith's Success

No matter how talented the player, everyone must work together to get the balance that makes for success. Watching a team play like a well-oiled machine is the reason most fans pack arenas everywhere.

Tomorrow's basketball stars are practicing now on basketball courts around the world. Whether they are competing in school leagues or simply shooting hoops with neighbors in the park or a driveway, the more they play, the better they will get. Anyone who wants to play basketball can just pick up a ball and look for the nearest hoop.

Glossary

amateur (<i>adj.</i>)	not professional; done as a hobby (p. 7)
court (<i>n.</i>)	a rectangular area used for playing ball games, such as basketball or tennis (p. 6)
defense (<i>n.</i>)	the action of attempting to keep an opposing team from scoring; players who attempt to keep an opposing team from scoring (p. 11)
foul shot (<i>n.</i>)	a free throw from the foul line on a basketball court given to a player after another player has broken a rule (p. 10)
offense (<i>n.</i>)	the action of attempting to score against an opposing team; players who attempt to help their team score against an opposing team (p. 11)
opposing (<i>adj.</i>)	of or relating to competition or conflict with someone or something (p. 10)
pastime (<i>n.</i>)	a hobby or activity (p. 6)
personalities (<i>n.</i>)	sets of qualities or ways of behaving that make people different from one another (p. 13)
professional (<i>adj.</i>)	earning money for taking part in an activity, rather than doing it purely for pleasure (p. 7)

Basketball

A Reading A-Z Level R Leveled Book

Word Count: 993

Connections

Writing

Imagine being Dr. James Naismith and coming up with the idea of basketball. Write a journal entry describing your new game and why you created it.

Social Studies

Using the book and outside resources, make a timeline showing the development of basketball, starting in 1891 and continuing to today.



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