

Bounce. Bounce. Bounce. Swoosh! Those were the sounds that echoed outside of our house every morning, every night, from the time I was born. As I grew up, I discovered that this was the sound of my big brothers practicing a game called basketball. Throughout my childhood years, I spent many hours on the sidelines at their basketball games cheering them on. Needless to say, this game became a part of me. By the ripe old age of six, I was on my first basketball team, with my father as my coach, trying desperately to perfect the skills of this amazing game. Basketball was definitely a family affair for us! Even my dad and my grandpa played basketball in high school and college and always tell me their stories. Now, at the age of ten, I have developed the same passion for this sport! As I've learned more about American history this year, I realize that life is like a puzzle, one thing causing another to happen. When we study the history of something and the people involved, our appreciation and understanding of that thing seems to grow. As my love of basketball has increased, so has my desire to learn about basketball's origin. Who discovered this great game?

In researching the beginnings of basketball, one name stands out – Dr. James A. Naismith. James was born in 1861. When James was a small child in Ontario, Canada, he used to play outdoors a lot with a group of boys at a place called Bennie's Corners near their one-room schoolhouse. They would play games like tug-of-war, wrestling, high jumping – even fighting. In the evening, one of their favorite games to play was called “Duck-on-a-Rock.” In this game, one boy would “guard the duck” which was placed on a large rock. Other players would try to throw small rocks at the duck to knock it off. Little did they know that this childhood game would later inspire James to invent the game of basketball!

However, James may not have invented basketball if he hadn't had many childhood experiences that developed important character traits within him. By the time he was nine years

old, his beloved grandfather died, the family's sawmill burnt down, and his mother and father died of typhoid fever – all in four months! His life changed completely. He moved in with his Uncle Peter. However, he never forgot his Scottish heritage and the work ethic his parents had taught him.

In his childhood, James learned to be self-sufficient and creative. One example is when James watched his friends ice skating one night. He desperately wanted to skate. So, he worked all night in his uncle's blacksmith shop making his own skates out of some old files, two pieces of hickory wood and a piece of leather. The next night, he showed up with his new homemade skates! Another example is when James took a shortcut across an icy river to get hay for his uncle. On the way back, his team of horses hit a spring hole and fell in the water. James had to figure out how to save the horses himself. Later, after successfully getting them out of the water, he saw his uncle watching from a distant tree. His uncle wanted to teach him to be self-sufficient.

All of these experiences prepared James for his greatest invention ever – basketball! In 1891, he was a physical education teacher at a YMCA Training School in Springfield, Massachusetts. He was asked to develop an indoor athletic game for the kids to play during the cold Massachusetts winters. James wanted to create a game of skill rather than just strength. He remembered the childhood game he loved so much called “Duck-on-a-Rock.” That would be his inspiration! He made up thirteen rules for the game. He asked the janitor to find two boxes and attach them to the balcony railings on opposite sides of the gym. But, the janitor could only find two peach baskets. That is how it got the name “Basket – ball!” Then, he found a soccer ball. Players could throw the ball in any direction with one or both hands, but could not run or dribble

with the ball. If players made a basket, someone had to climb up on a ladder to get the ball because the peach basket was not open at the bottom!

Basketball became popular very quickly because of its simple equipment, indoor play, competitiveness and easy rules. Many changes continued through the years to perfect the game. The peach basket was replaced by a metal rim with a net hanging below. By 1903, they used open nets like we have today. In 1916, players could finally shoot after dribbling! By 1942, the molded basketball was introduced to give more consistency to the size of the ball so players could more easily perfect their skills. Basketball spread very quickly to schools, colleges, armed forces and athletic clubs all over the United States and abroad. By 1925, thirty-seven states even had high school varsity basketball teams for women! In 1936, three years before James died, he was flown to Berlin to watch his sport played for the first time in the Olympics!

With today's focus on the physical fitness of children and preventing childhood obesity, it is very important that we have interesting games like basketball to play and enjoy. Little did James Naismith know how much he would help people by developing a simple game to keep kids entertained in the winter for physical education class. I know that basketball has played a big part in the physical fitness of my family. I'm glad I have learned about its history, because, now, I have an even greater appreciation of the sport. I want to make Mr. Naismith proud at my next basketball tournament!

Bounce. Bounce. Bounce. Swish! That sound continues to echo in the driveway outside of our house, but now, it's ME who is practicing this awesome sport that James Naismith invented – BASKETBALL!!

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