

James Naismith Didn't Sleep Here

A Re-examination of Indiana Basketball's Origins

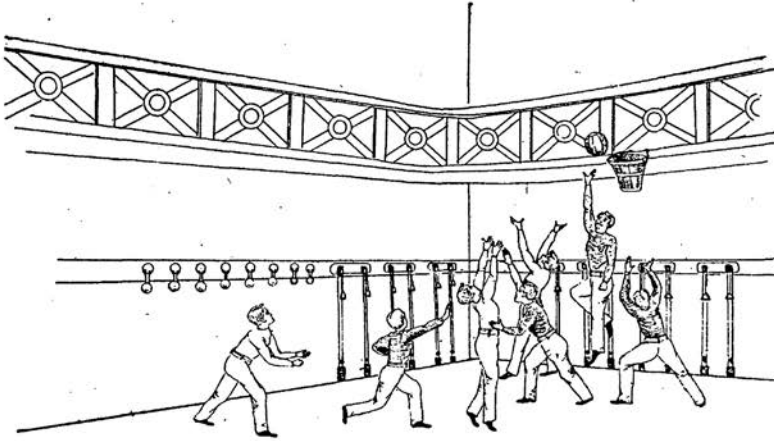
S. CHANDLER LIGHTY

On the Indiana State Museum's façade, the sculpture honoring Montgomery County incorporates an oak branch with acorns and a basketball. The plaque accompanying the sculpture explains the symbols and notes that Crawfordsville was Indiana's nineteenth-century literary center, and that nearby New Richmond served as the fictional town of Hickory in the 1986 movie *Hoosiers*. Those who have read about the dawn of Indiana basketball could interpret the orb in the sculpture differently. According to any number of books and newspaper articles, Rev. Nicholas C. McCay (nearly always rendered "McKay") introduced basketball into Indiana at Crawfordsville's YMCA building in the winter

S. Chandler Lighty is Program Manager for Hoosier State Chronicles: Indiana's Digital Historic Newspaper Program at the Indiana State Library. He would like to acknowledge Jeffrey Monseau, College Archivist at Springfield College, and Ryan Bean, Reference and Outreach Archivist with the Kautz Family YMCA Archives at the University of Minnesota, for fielding research questions and pointing him to the digital collections at their respective archives. A special thank you to Renny McBride, formerly of the Evansville Vanderburgh Public Library, for access to NewsBank for Evansville's recently digitized newspapers.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION ADVERTISER.

FOOT BALL MADE OVER!



BASKET BALL,

A New and Popular Game.

Instead of **KICKING** the ball, **TOSS** it.

Instead of **KICKING** a goal, **THROW** it.

Instead of "**DOWN**S" keep the ball **UP**.

Like Foot Ball it requires "Team-play," "Tackling," "Blocking," and "Passing." **BASKET BALL** can be played Out-doors or In-doors by small or large teams. It is interesting to players and spectators.

Send (10c.) ten cents for descriptive pamphlet containing rules, etc., to

THE TRIANGLE PUBLISHING CO.,
SPRINGFIELD, MASS.

Physical Education, September 1892. YMCA physical directors across the country learned about new games through articles and advertisements—like this one, comparing basketball to football—that appeared in the association's publications.

of 1893-94.¹ McCay, it is said, learned the game under the direct tutelage of basketball's creator, James Naismith, at the Springfield, Massachusetts, YMCA training school during the winter of 1891-92. An *Indianapolis Star* reporter wrote recently that McCay and other Naismith "proteges carried copies of his 13 rules of the game packed neatly under their Bibles as they ventured across the Midwest, missionaries of the basketball movement."² Similarly, other writers have likened McCay to the Johnny Appleseed of basketball.³ The presumption of McCay's impact on Indiana basketball remains so great that John Wooden biographer Seth Davis described an unbroken chain of direct lineage from basketball's creator to one of the sport's greatest coaches: Naismith to McCay to Hall of Fame Purdue coach Ward Lambert to Wooden.⁴ The origin tale concludes with McCay organizing the legendary first basketball game in Indiana on March 16, 1894, between the Crawfordsville and Lafayette YMCA teams.

All of these details make for a great story. The only thing that could make it better would be if Naismith had actually visited McCay in Crawfordsville and slept at the Crawford Hotel. Yet that last statement is no more true than many of the other particulars of the origin story. It is not that many of the details are lies, but there are fatal anachronisms in the tale, most notably that McCay was the first to introduce basketball to Indiana and that Crawfordsville was the site of Indiana's first basketball game.

¹For examples, see Bill Benner, "Game's 'Cradle' Now Only Lives in Memories," *Indianapolis Star*, February 2, 1992, p. C2; Grady Franklin, "Hoosier Hoop Hysteria Started Here," *Indianapolis Star Magazine*, March 14, 1965, pp. 50-51; Todd Gould, *Pioneers of the Hardwood: Indiana and the Birth of Professional Basketball* (Bloomington, Ind., 1998), 2-3; Phillip M. Hoose, *Hoosiers: The Fabulous Basketball Life of Indiana* (New York, 1986), 37; Jason Crowe, "The Cradle of Basketball," *Indiana Basketball History Magazine* (Summer 1996), 24-26; Tom Graham and Rachel Graham Cody, *Getting Open: The Unknown Story of Bill Garrett and the Integration of College Basketball* (New York, 2006), 40-41. Even a more scholarly account such as Clifton J. Phillips, *Indiana in Transition: The Emergence of an Industrial Commonwealth, 1880-1920* (Indianapolis, Ind., 1968), 435, concludes, "Basketball was apparently first played in the state at Crawfordsville, where... McCay taught the newly invented game in 1892."

²Zak Keefer, "History of Our Hysteria: How Indiana Fell in Love with Basketball," *Indianapolis Star*, March 16, 2014, <http://www.indystar.com/story/sports/basketball/2014/03/14/how-indiana-fell-in-love-with-basketball/6415971/>.

³Graham, *Getting Open*, 40.

⁴Seth Davis, *Wooden: A Coach's Life* (New York, 2014), 17. Lambert was born in 1888 in South Dakota but grew up in Crawfordsville, graduating from Crawfordsville High School and Wabash College. Yet McCay and Lambert likely never met on the Crawfordsville gymnasium floor—McCay resigned from the YMCA in 1893 when Lambert was five years old.

The purpose of this research note is twofold: First, to survey the sources that created the legend of Indiana basketball's Crawfordsville origins, and second, to share new research on basketball's genesis in the state. The impetus for this new research is the creation, in the last few years, of a growing archive of digitized Indiana newspapers. Evidence that could remain hidden in years of microfilm research can now be unlocked with a few keyword searches. In 2012, the Indiana Historical Society digitized 2.5 million newspaper pages through the commercial firm Newspaper Archive. Since then, the Indiana State Library has contributed nearly 100,000 Indiana newspaper pages to the Library of Congress's Chronicling America website. The two most important developments for the purposes of this research note have been the digitization of the *Indianapolis News* and Evansville newspapers. In November 2013, the Center for Digital Scholarship at Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis uploaded the *Indianapolis News* from 1869 to 1897. In June 2014, the Evansville Vanderburgh Public Library announced the digitization of 2 million pages of Evansville newspapers. The two digitized collections yielded crucial and heretofore unknown pieces of evidence about early basketball contests in the state. This digitized evidence invites Indiana sports and cultural historians, authors, and journalists to rethink the prevailing narrative of Indiana basketball's beginnings. On a broader scale, these findings encourage historians to use digitized resources to find new interpretations and redefine conventional historical narratives.

One of the earlier known journalistic attempts to identify the introduction of basketball into Indiana occurred in 1919. In that year, Indiana newspapers circulated a story out of Crawfordsville that claimed Anthony Chez introduced basketball into the state at Wabash College around 1894.⁵ Chez, however, did not join the Wabash faculty until the 1900-01 school year.⁶

A much more influential source of the Crawfordsville myth was an *Indianapolis Star* article from 1944, clearly adapted from a *Crawfordsville Journal and Review* article published a few days prior. The original article featured interviews with three Crawfordsville men, all of whom were in their late sixties or older, about their basketball playing experience in the town's YMCA in the spring of 1893. The Crawfordsville reporter used the

⁵"High Fives Close Season," *South Bend News-Times*, February 28, 1919. This article attributes the story to "reports out from the Hoosier Athens," Crawfordsville's nickname. However, I was unable to locate a corresponding story in issues of the *Crawfordsville Journal* published around this date. Crawfordsville's other daily from this time period, the *Review*, is not extant.

⁶See *Wabash Catalogue* (Lafayette, Ind., 1901).

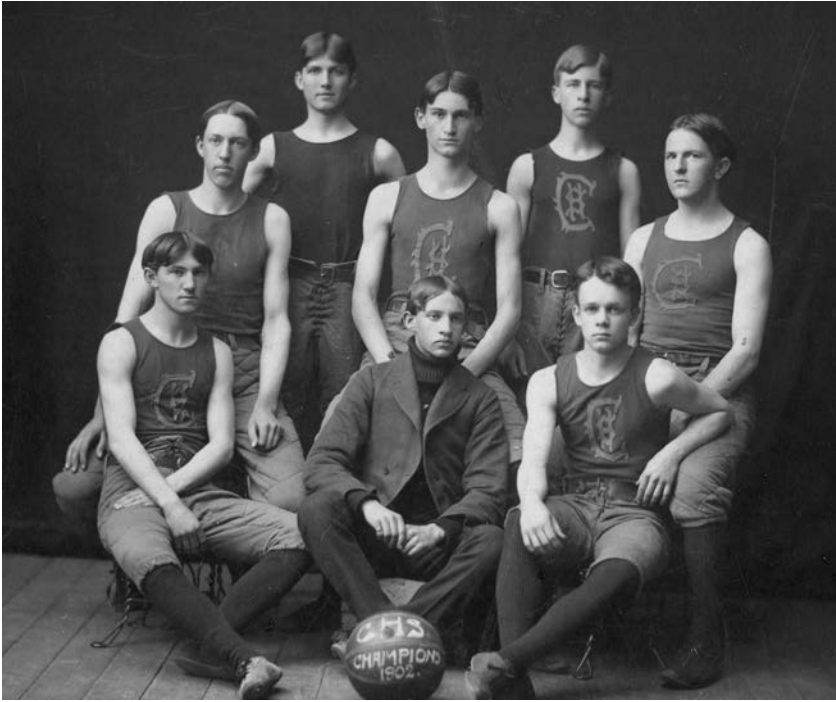
interviews as the basis for his claim: “[The] first basketball played in the United States, outside of Massachusetts, where it originated in 1891, was in Crawfordsville in the spring of 1893.” He also stated that “the game was first introduced in the Middle West by the Rev. Nicholas C. McKay” and linked McCay’s exposure to basketball directly to Naismith’s Springfield class in the winter of 1891-92. The writer concluded with a summary of “one of the first, if not the very first game of basketball played in Indiana” between the Crawfordsville and Lafayette YMCAs.⁷

Indiana basketball historian Herb Schwomeyer popularized these secondary sources in his standard reference work *Hoosier Hysteria*. To Schwomeyer’s credit, he tried to qualify some details of the story: “The exact date that basketball was first played in Indiana is not recorded. However, according to an article in the *Crawfordsville Journal and Review*, the first basketball game played...was in Crawfordsville.” Schwomeyer proceeded to report the 1944 *Journal and Review* story as given, but he also exercised some critical thought about the details. In particular, he questioned McCay’s role as a Naismith disciple and reprinted a letter he had received in response to his research inquiry into the first basketball class in Springfield. The letter revealed that McCay was not among the students in Naismith’s class. Schwomeyer concluded: “McKay was probably not a member of the class which first played the game... [but] the probability that Reverend McKay did attend classes later than 1891 [with Naismith] is very possible.”⁸ Even though Schwomeyer asked questions, and qualified some of his statements, he generally accepted the established narrative. Unfortunately, subsequent authors who employed Schwomeyer’s book as a source have been far less discerning or critical about the foundation account.

Based upon primary sources, two aspects of the Crawfordsville hypothesis deserve scrutiny. The first concerns Nicholas McCay: Who was he, and what were his associations with the Springfield YMCA training school and Naismith? Secondly, what evidence exists for the 1894 Crawfordsville basketball game, which Schwomeyer and others claim was Indiana’s first?

⁷“Three Crawfordsville Men Recall First Basketball Contest In Indiana,” *Indianapolis Star*, March 26, 1944, p. 42; “It’s Far Cry Back to 1893 When Basketball Came Here,” *Crawfordsville Journal and Review*, March 22, 1944. There is ample evidence to disprove the journalist’s claim. Naismith’s own recollections were that Brooklyn was probably the first place the sport was played outside of the Bay State. See “The Spread of the Game in the United States” in James Naismith, *Basketball Its Origin and Development* (New York, 1941), 109-142.

⁸Herbert F. Schwomeyer, *Hoosier Hysteria: A History of Indiana High School Boys Basketball*, 9th ed. (Indianapolis, Ind., 1997), 11.



Crawfordsville High School basketball team, 1902. After the local YMCA introduced the game in 1894, high school boys began playing the sport and competed against teams from the Y.

Courtesy, Crawfordsville District Public Library Reference Department

Nicholas Craig McCay was born on August 27, 1860, in Belfast, Ireland, and immigrated to America in 1881. He worked as a clerk in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, for four years, and Appleton, Wisconsin, for three years, before enrolling at the School for Christian Workers in Springfield, Massachusetts. He graduated from the school's secretarial program in two years, and presumably began his duties as general or corresponding secretary at the Crawfordsville YMCA shortly after graduation in 1890.⁹

⁹I first published many of these facts about McCay in "How Basketball Made It to C'ville," [Crawfordsville] *Paper of Montgomery County*, March 29, 2008, p. 1. For McCay's date and place of birth, date of immigration, and list of residences from 1881 to 1900, see his passport application; Passport Applications, 1795–1905, NARA Microfilm Publication M1372, roll 555, General Records Department of State, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C., digital image, <http://www.ancestry.com>. See also *Year Book of the Young Men's Christian Associations of the United States, and Dominion of Canada for the Year 1891* (New York, 1891), 112; *Year Book of the Young Men's Christian Associations of North America for the Year 1892* (New York, 1892), 91.

These facts present obvious problems for the Crawfordsville origin tale since McCay graduated from the YMCA school and moved to the Midwest a full academic year before Naismith even arrived on the Springfield campus in the fall of 1891.¹⁰ It is also a curious fact that McCay served as the secretary of the Crawfordsville YMCA, and not as its physical director. Crawfordsville's association did have a physical director in 1892—Oliver R. Fry—and usually the physical director, not the general secretary, would introduce a new sport to the members.¹¹ One of the biggest problems with the foundation myth is that McCay resigned from the Crawfordsville YMCA in August 1893, seven months *before* the alleged first game took place in March 1894.¹² He evidently still kept some connection with the local association after resigning, and he acted as a referee for the March contest. McCay likely resigned in order to pursue vocational ministry, since the Presbyterian Church ordained him in September 1894.¹³ McCay remained around Crawfordsville until 1901 when he emigrated to Stockton, California. He lived the rest of his life in the Golden State and died in Los Angeles in 1938.¹⁴

The anachronisms in the origin story regarding McCay's historical whereabouts are enough to raise doubts. He clearly was not in Springfield when Naismith invented the game. The two men could have met at a later date, as Schwomeyer contends, but that is an argument from silence, since no known correspondence exists between Naismith and McCay. Furthermore, Naismith does not mention McCay in his 1941 book *Basketball Its Origin and Development*, even in his chapter titled "The Spread of the Game

¹⁰1889-90: *Fifth Catalogue of the School for Christian Workers* (Springfield, Mass., 1890), Springfield College Digital Collections, <http://cdm16122.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p15370coll1/id/146>.

¹¹*Year Book of the Young Men's Christian Associations . . . for the Year 1891*, 112; *Year Book of the Young Men's Christian Associations . . . for the Year 1892*, 91.

¹²"Secretary McCay to Leave," *Crawfordsville Daily Journal*, August 3, 1893, p. 4. The article commends McCay for his "thoroughly efficient and satisfactory" service but makes no mention of basketball. Less than a year earlier, in November 1892, McCay addressed the state YMCA at Logansport. Neither the *Logansport Reporter* of November 18, 1892, nor other digitized newspapers in Newspaper Archive, reported on the subject of McCay's address. If McCay had spoken on basketball or the work of the physical department in general, it might strengthen the claim to his being the father of Indiana basketball. However, it is unlikely that he spoke on either topic, since O. H. Palmer of Indianapolis addressed the convention on the physical department's role.

¹³*Manual of the Crawfordsville Presbytery, Synod of Indiana* (Frankfort, Ind., 1900), 6, 9, 10, 12, 30, Internet Archive, <http://archive.org>. The Crawfordsville Presbytery appointed McCay as a stated supply, a sort of interim pastor, to serve small congregations in Parke and Putnam Counties.

¹⁴California, Death Index, 1905-1939, p. 4438, digital image, <http://www.ancestry.com>.

in the United States.” Even when Naismith attended the Indiana high school basketball tournament in 1936, there is no recorded instance of the sport’s inventor invoking McCay’s name.¹⁵ McCay’s resignation from the YMCA before the “first” Indiana game occurred is also severely damaging to the creation myth. McCay may have introduced basketball *locally* at the Crawfordsville YMCA, as one of the Crawfordsville men interviewed in 1944 contended. However, as other primary sources make clear, McCay was not the basketball emissary he has been interpreted to be.

As for the fabled first game in Indiana, primary sources documenting its occurrence are plentiful. Crawfordsville had four newspapers operating in 1894: the *Journal*, the *Argus News*, the *Review*, and the *Star*. Three of those four newspapers’ issues for March 1894 are extant and carry reports of the Crawfordsville versus Lafayette game played on Friday, March 16, 1894. Before a reported crowd of 300 spectators, two teams of nine players squared off for either thirty or fifty minutes (depending on the source). The Crawfordsville team prevailed 45-21. The *Crawfordsville Daily Journal* reporter predicted that “basket ball is a new game but if the interest taken in the contest last night... is any criterion it is bound to be popular.” No earlier mention of basketball has been found in the Crawfordsville papers, and authors on the subject have unquestionably presumed, based largely upon the 1944 *Journal and Review* article, that this was the first basketball game played in Indiana.¹⁶

Contemporary evidence in Crawfordsville suggested otherwise. On November 17, 1894, the editor of the *Crawfordsville Review* reprinted an article from the *Indianapolis News* regarding the state YMCA convention held at Columbus. The article reported the organization of a state YMCA basketball league comprised of teams from Indianapolis, Crawfordsville, Terre Haute, Lafayette, and Wabash College. The article stated: “Basketball was introduced into the State by the Indianapolis [YMCA] association through its physical director. Two teams were organized in the city and played against one another through two seasons.” The *Review*’s editor did not dispute the claim that basketball began at the Indianapolis YMCA.

¹⁵“Father of Basketball’ Says Game Really Had Its Beginning in Indiana, Leader in the Winter Sport,” *Indianapolis News*, March 28, 1936.

¹⁶“Crawfordsville Victorious,” *Crawfordsville Daily Journal*, March 17, 1894; “The Stars Beaten,” *Crawfordsville Daily Argus News*, March 17, 1894; “Basket Ball,” *Crawfordsville Star*, March 23, 1894. The *Review*, while it had a daily edition, is preserved only in its weekly format, and if the paper had reported on the game it probably would have done so in the daily edition. For additional mentions of the game, see “The City in Brief,” *Lafayette Daily Courier*, March 17, 1894, p. 8; “Basket Ball,” *Lafayette Morning Journal*, March 17, 1894, p. 4; “General State News,” *Indiana State Sentinel*, March 21, 1894, p. 7.

One would expect that if the people of Crawfordsville believed they were the first to play the game, they would have taken exception to the report, especially since the Crawfordsville-Lafayette game had occurred only eight months before. The *Review* editor, however, neither amended nor commented on the article's statements, suggesting that in 1894 Crawfordsville residents made no claim to be the cradle of basketball.¹⁷

Researchers' previous attempts to locate evidence of basketball games in Indianapolis before the Crawfordsville game of March 17, 1894, had proved unsuccessful.¹⁸ The number of Indianapolis titles (the *Sun*, the *News*, the *Journal*, the *Sentinel*, etc.) and the average number of pages in daily editions presented a daunting search task for an individual researcher. Not to mention the fact that while a basketball game in Crawfordsville (1890 population: 6,089) constituted big news in the "Hoosier Athens," the same could not be said of a basketball game in the capital city.¹⁹ The *Sun* was the only Indianapolis daily to offer a regular, devoted sports column in 1893, but even then it concentrated on established, professional sports like boxing and baseball, and did not focus on teenagers playing new, amateur sports in YMCA gymnasiums. As for the *News*, the first notice they gave of basketball played in Indianapolis was little more than a paragraph on March 30, 1893, placed beside an entire column about an acrobatic dog and tucked between articles on the State Board of Health meeting and the Haughville Republicans.²⁰

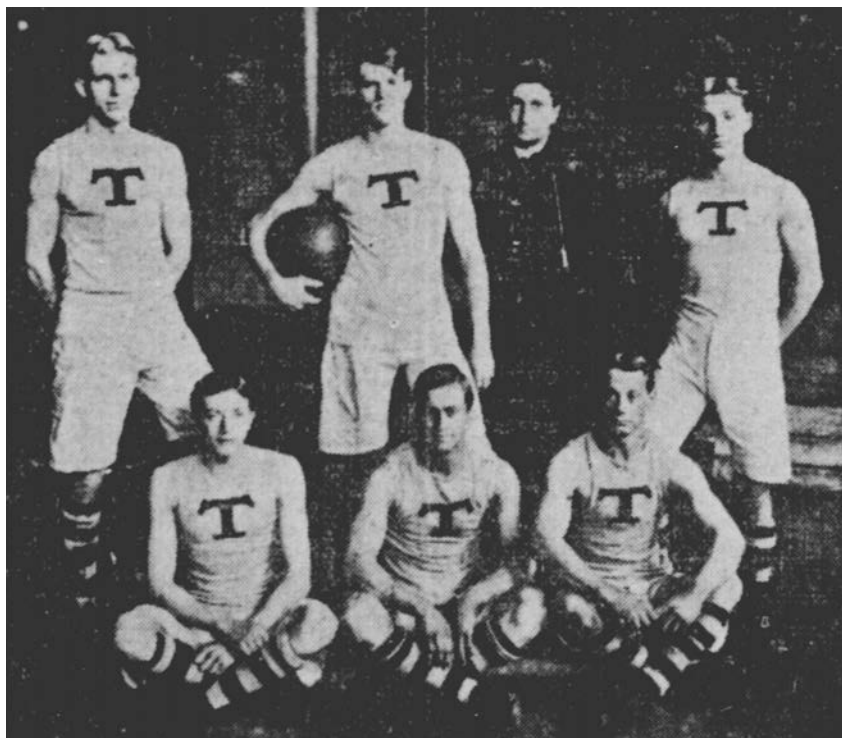
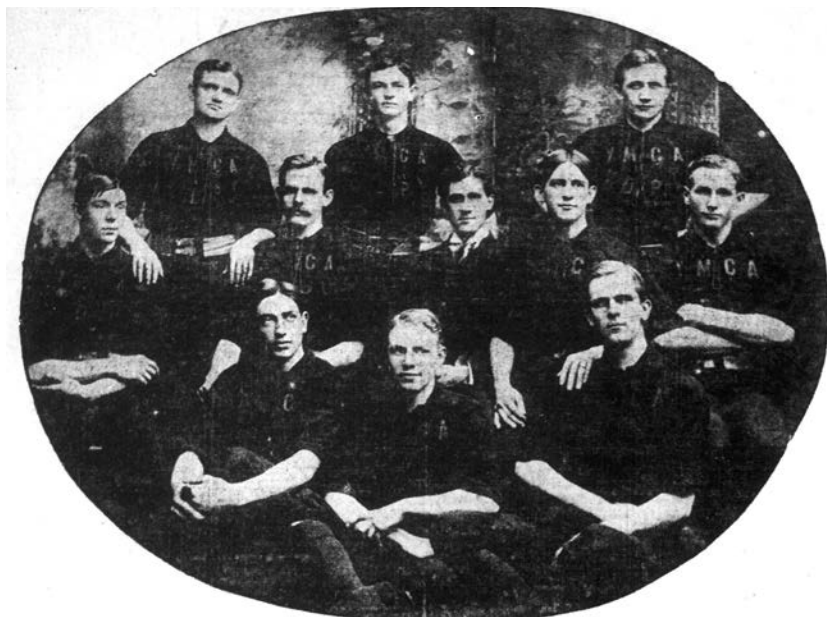
A few days later, on April 1, 1893, the *News* gave more fitting attention to the sport that would become so important to Indiana's cultural heritage. A nearly two-column long, illustrated account described a game that "has taken hold here and is awakening interest and promises to become the all-around game for general fun in the future." This article provides definitive

¹⁷"A Basket Ball League," *Crawfordsville Review*, November 17, 1894, p. 1. The *Indianapolis News* article which the *Review* reprinted originally ran on November 14, 1894. The *Crawfordsville Star* also adapted the *News* article for its November 20, 1894, issue. The *Star*, like the *Review*, let the Indianapolis claim stand. The November 16 issue of the *Crawfordsville Daily Journal* and the November 17 issue of the *Crawfordsville Weekly Argus* also reported on the YMCA convention, but the articles appear to be independently written of the *News* article and make no mention of Indianapolis being the entry point for basketball into the state. However, the *Journal* and *Argus* appear more interested in reporting on the convention generally, rather than basketball specifically.

¹⁸See R. Dale Ogden, "Basketball," in *The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*, eds. David J. Bodenhamer and Robert G. Barrows (Bloomington, Ind., 1994), 303.

¹⁹U.S. Census Office, *Report on Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890* (Washington, D.C.), 1:124.

²⁰"Basket-Ball at the Y.M.C.A.," *Indianapolis News*, March 30, 1893, p. 2, accessed via Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, Center for Digital Scholarship, <http://www.ulib.iupui.edu/digitalscholarship/collections/IN>. Hereafter cited as "accessed via IUPUI."



Indianapolis YMCA basketball team, 1901, and Social Turners team, 1903. In the 1903-04 season, the Turners team, whose home was the German House gymnasium, played a variety of opponents, including Butler College, the Indianapolis YMCA, and Shortridge and Manual Training High Schools.

Indianapolis Journal, January 22, 1901, and December 9, 1903

and corroborating evidence of athletes playing basketball in Indianapolis a full year before the Crawfordsville-Lafayette game. Tomlinson Hall, the home gymnasium of the Indianapolis YMCA, offered more than just a venue for a single game of basketball. It hosted an entire league, with four teams of nine men each that had already played three games each by April 1. The article credited physical director William A. McCulloch with introducing the game at the Indianapolis branch a few months prior. The *News* reporter observed: "The game, if played right, is full of snap, life and vigor, and is without any elements of brutality or roughness. It is increasing in popularity in this city and at the exhibition games, played at the Y.M.C.A. gymnasium, every Wednesday and Saturday evenings, a large number of ladies are present, interested spectators."²¹ The inaugural Indianapolis league likely ran from mid-March to late May, with the league champions receiving "an elegant banner" on June 2.²² A year later, in 1894, the Indianapolis YMCA basketball league was still going strong, and the teams had already played several games that season before the Crawfordsville-Lafayette game occurred.²³

It would be somewhat misguided to replace McCay and Crawfordsville with McCulloch and Indianapolis in the state's basketball origin story. Evidence suggests that McCulloch had greater stature than McCay in Indiana's YMCA network.²⁴ There is also some circumstantial evidence

²¹"The Game of Basket-Ball," *Indianapolis News*, April 1, 1893, p. 7, accessed via IUPUI. The *News* incorrectly spells the name "McCullough." William A. McCulloch (1864-1944) was probably born in Paxton, Illinois. He began his career with the YMCA in 1886 (before the Springfield school opened), presumably in Davenport, Iowa. He became physical director at the Indianapolis YMCA by 1890 and served there until 1894. By 1895, he became physical director at the Springfield, Illinois, YMCA. In 1899, he was the physical director at the St. Joseph, Missouri, YMCA. Information on McCulloch is based upon census records and city directories digitized on Ancestry.com; emails to the Springfield College Archives; and digitized YMCA yearbooks at the University of Minnesota, <http://umedia.lib.umn.edu/taxonomy/term/757>.

²²"Y. M. C. A. Notes," *Indianapolis Sun*, June 2, 1893, p. 1, accessed via Newspaper Archive.

²³"Basket-Ball," *Indianapolis News*, April 11, 1894, p. 4, accessed via IUPUI. This article lists the four teams' standings in the league. Each of the teams had played nine games at the time of the article's publication. The Indianapolis YMCA's basketball teams had attained such an early reputation that a rumor circulated that a representative team would play the Cincinnati YMCA. See *Indianapolis News*, February 27, 1894.

²⁴"Hoosier Y.M.C.A.," *Connersville Daily Examiner*, November 1, 1890, p. 3, accessed via Newspaper Archive; "The Y.M.C.A. Officers," *Indianapolis News*, December 29, 1893, accessed via IUPUI. As a brief record of McCulloch's stature in the organization, he published an article(s) in the YMCA's national publication *The Young Men's Era* in February 1891. He addressed the Indiana YMCA convention at Richmond in 1890 on the subject of "Our Physical Department." In 1893, the state convention appointed McCulloch as the advisory member for the subcommittee on athletic work.

that McCulloch introduced basketball at the Columbus YMCA.²⁵ However, basketball's beginning and growth in Indiana involved a more complicated process than one individual introducing the sport at any one location.

YMCA leaders in Indiana first learned about basketball through the *Triangle*, the organization's national newsletter. Naismith published an article introducing the game in January 1892, and he later credited this article, and the correspondence that resulted from it, with spreading the game across the nation.²⁶ By September 1892, the YMCA publication *Physical Education* advertised a "descriptive pamphlet" on the "new and popular game" available via mail for ten cents.²⁷ Theoretically, by that time, any of Indiana's twenty-seven YMCAs could have read Naismith's original article or acquired the pamphlet, and subsequently implemented the game.²⁸ Out-of-state newspapers and nationally circulated periodicals could have also contributed to the spread of the sport outside of official YMCA publications.

In addition to the print media, basketball also spread through networking and lectures at YMCA conventions. At an international YMCA convention held in Indianapolis in May 1893, at least two non-Hoosier delegates referred to basketball in their addresses. James C. Elsom, the physical director at Minneapolis and future basketball coach at the University of Minnesota, noted: "The value of competitive gymnastic games, notably basket-ball, has been everywhere thoroughly demonstrated, and in many points [inter-association] basket-ball leagues have been formed, thus

²⁵"Formally Dedicated," *Columbus Daily Herald*, June 8, 1893, p. 2, accessed via Newspaper Archive. The Columbus YMCA invited McCulloch to speak at the dedication of their new building in June 1893. McCulloch "showed the audience how a gymnasium properly used is one of the finest things imaginable, giving men good, sound, healthy bodies, which give them a cheerful disposition." While the Columbus article did not report that McCulloch mentioned basketball specifically, it may or may not be a coincidence that the Columbus YMCA started playing the sport that winter.

²⁶The original article is available digitally at the Springfield College Digital Collections, see <http://cdm16122.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p15370coll3/id/472>. Naismith, *Basketball Its Origin and Development*, 111.

²⁷"Foot Ball Made Over!," *Physical Education* 1 (September 1892), 21, accessed at Springfield College Digital Collections, <http://cdm16122.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p15370coll3/id/593>.

²⁸*Year Book of the Young Men's Christian Associations. . . for the Year 1892*, 112-13, 140-43, 154-55. In 1892, Indiana cities with YMCAs included Crawfordsville, Evansville, Fort Wayne, Indianapolis, Lafayette, Marion, New Albany, Richmond, and South Bend; all but Marion, New Albany, and Richmond reported that they had gymnasiums. Additionally, fifteen Indiana colleges had YMCA associations: Tri-State in Angola, Wabash, Central Normal in Danville, Franklin, DePauw, Hanover, Butler, Purdue, Union Christian in Merom, North Manchester, Earlham, Rose Polytechnic, State Normal in Terre Haute, and Northern Indiana Normal in Valparaiso. There were also three YMCA railroad departments in Indiana at Elkhart, Fort Wayne, and Logansport, but of these only Elkhart had a gymnasium.

aiding in establishing the game on a firm and popular footing.”²⁹ In the same vein, Missouri delegate (and future U.S. Senator) Selden P. Spencer advocated annual statewide athletic contests, including basketball, which would “tend to strengthen the influence of the association and the loyalty of the men in it.”³⁰

From 1892 to 1894, reports began to appear in multiple Indiana newspapers about basketball being played throughout the state. On July 21, 1892, the *North Manchester Journal* previewed the Field Day program to be held at North Manchester College eight days later. In addition to the usual track and field events, three-legged races, sack races, and a fat man’s race, basketball also debuted on the schedule.³¹ A summary of happenings at Earlham College in Richmond dated February 28, 1893, noted: “A great deal of attention is now being given to basket-ball. This elicits almost as much enthusiasm among the students as foot-ball, but is not nearly so rough a game.”³² The April and May reports of contests in Indianapolis soon followed.

Based upon the digitized evidence now available, Evansville seems to have been the site of the earliest competitive (non-exhibition) basketball games in the state. On November 23, 1892, the *Indianapolis Sun* reported that “Evansville athletes are playing ‘basket ball’ a sort of indoor foot ball that is almost as murderous as the original game.”³³ On Thanksgiving Day, the Evansville YMCA presented a game between the Seniors and the Business Men’s Association.³⁴ These two teams developed quite a city rivalry and planned a series of five games over the following months. In February 1893, a crowd of 200 watched the two teams face off, as the Seniors won the game with three goals to their opponent’s one.³⁵ A second game between the two rivals also ended with 3-1 goals scored, but the

²⁹“Physical Department,” *Indianapolis News*, May 12, 1893, p. 5, accessed via IUPUI.

³⁰Selden P. Spencer attended the convention as a member of the Missouri YMCA committee. He also served on the board of the YMCA training school in Chicago. Spencer delivered a paper to the convention entitled “The Co-operation of Our Members in Extending Our Work Outside of Their Own Local Fields.” See “The President Here,” *Indianapolis News*, May 11, 1893, pp. 2, 7, accessed via IUPUI.

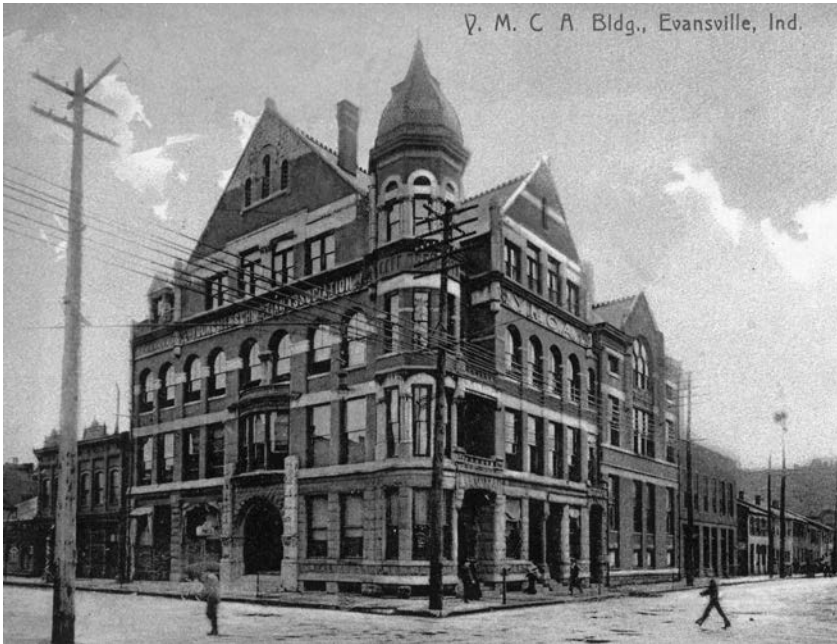
³¹“At the College,” *North Manchester Journal*, July 21, 1892, accessed via Newspaper Archive.

³²“Earlham College,” *Indianapolis News*, March 1, 1893, p. 5, accessed via IUPUI.

³³“He Was Mesmerized,” *Indianapolis Sun*, November 23, 1892, p. 4, accessed via Newspaper Archive.

³⁴“At the Y. M. C. A. To-day,” *Evansville Courier*, November 24, 1892, p. 3, accessed at Evansville Vanderburgh Public Library via NewsBank (hereafter cited as “accessed via NewsBank”).

³⁵“Y. M. C. A.,” *Evansville Journal*, February 14, 1893, p. 8, accessed via NewsBank.



The Evansville YMCA headquarters, c. 1915. One of the earliest games of basketball played in Indiana took place on November 23, 1892, between two local YMCA teams, the Seniors and the Business Men's Association.

Courtesy, Evansville Vanderburgh Public Library and the Geiss family

Business Men ended the game in protest, charging that one of the Seniors was "a foul player."³⁶ The following winter, the YMCA fielded "two crack teams," the Stars and the Crescents, who regularly engaged in contests of "science and muscle."³⁷ The physical director selected the best seven players from the Stars and Crescents to represent the Evansville YMCA in an inter-city game with the Terre Haute YMCA on January 27, 1894.³⁸

³⁶"Basket Ball," *Evansville Journal*, March 18, 1893, p. 5, accessed via NewsBank.

³⁷"Y. M. C. A.," *Evansville Courier*, November 29, 1893, p. 8; "Worth Seeing," *Evansville Journal*, January 20, 1894, p. 4; both accessed via NewsBank. The Stars and Crescents became so dominant in the Evansville YMCA that the physical director, Professor Helmer, proposed resurrecting a Business Men's team to counteract their competitive monopoly. See "Business Men's Team," *Evansville Courier*, February 1, 1894, p. 4, accessed via NewsBank.

³⁸Thus, the Crawfordsville-Lafayette game, played the next March, cannot be considered even the first inter-city basketball game played in Indiana.

On that date, “the gymnasium was crowded with admirers of the sport, the majority being ladies, who manifested intense excitement and delight throughout the interesting game. There is a spirit of enthusiasm awakened by these contests similar to the wild hilarity accompanying football, and this first rival encounter with Terre Haute brought forth all the animation in a spectator’s nature.”³⁹ Evansville won the contest 26-15. The YMCAs scheduled a return game for February in Terre Haute.

The “exhilarating sport” debuted in Connersville on September 28, 1893. Interestingly, Connersville did not have a YMCA, but it did have a temperance-focused Blue Ribbon Club that fulfilled essentially the same functions in the community. On September 28, nearly 300 young men converged at a Blue Ribbon Club event held in Roots’ Hall to hear an orchestra and quartet, enjoy refreshments, and witness or partake in two indoor baseball games, and two basketball exhibitions. The *Connersville Times* described the basketball contests as the “feature of the evening.” Nearly two months after being first played in Connersville, basketball became such an attraction that the Blue Ribbon Club arranged a Thanksgiving Day social featuring three basketball games, with four teams of eleven players taking part.⁴⁰

During the winter of 1893-94, basketball continued to spread throughout the state. It became “the favorite game” at Columbus’s recently dedicated YMCA gym. Columbus YMCA members organized four teams and competed regularly.⁴¹ In Randolph County, the town of Ridgeville, with a population of 922, premiered the game at the town’s opera house on New Year’s night.⁴² Ridgeville’s basketball manager then ventured to the county seat of Winchester to find more competition. The editor of the *Winchester Journal* asserted that the town would have “no trouble in organizing a first-class Basket Ball team.”⁴³ No reckoning of the earliest emergences of basketball in Indiana would be complete without mentioning the sport’s genesis on Indiana University’s campus, where, in late January 1894, “the

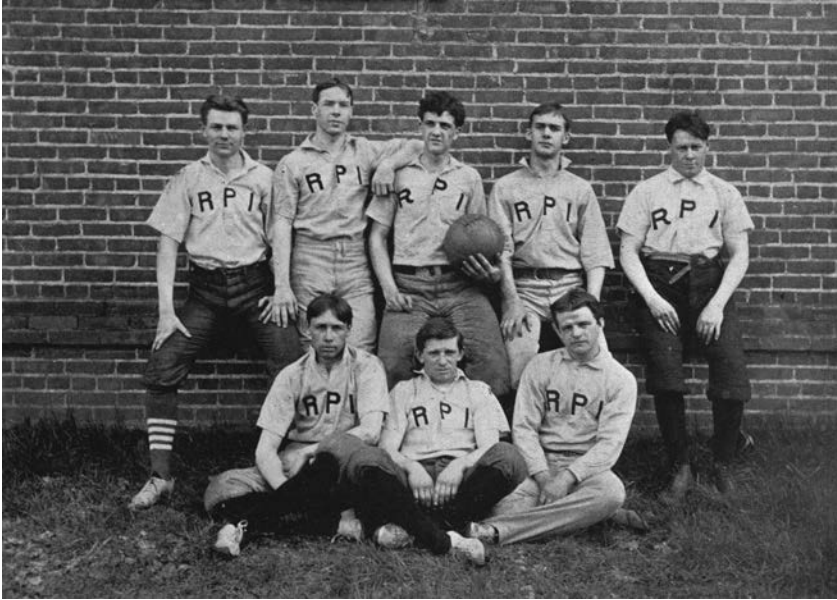
³⁹“Basket Ball,” *Evansville Journal News*, January 28, 1894, p. 4, accessed via NewsBank.

⁴⁰“Our Boys,” *Connersville Daily Examiner*, September 29, 1893, p. 2; “The Blue Ribbon Club,” October 4, 1893, p. 1; *Connersville Daily News*, November 24, 1893, p. 2; “Blue Ribbon Entertainment,” *Connersville Daily News*, December 1, 1893, p. 2; *Connersville Daily Examiner*, December 1, 1893, p. 4; all accessed via Newspaper Archive.

⁴¹“Y.M.C.A. Notes,” *Columbus Daily Herald*, December 30, 1893, p. 5, accessed via Newspaper Archive.

⁴²*Portland Daily Commercial*, December 27, 1893, p. 1, accessed via Newspaper Archive.

⁴³“Winter Foot Ball,” *Winchester Journal*, January 24, 1894, p. 5, accessed via Newspaper Archive.



Rose Polytechnic Institute basketball team, 1898. In the early years of the sport, teams from YMCAs, high schools, and colleges competed against each other, as did the Rose Poly team against the Terre Haute YMCA.

The Modulus Yearbook, 1898

first of a series of basket-ball games was played between the third and fourth hour classes of the men's gymnasium....The game was witnessed by a large crowd of students and members of the faculty. The game was very lively contested on the part of the players."⁴⁴

By the winter of 1894-95, basketball had gained a greater foothold in the state through the YMCA's organization of a state basketball league including teams from Indianapolis, Columbus, Terre Haute, Lafayette, and Crawfordsville. Basketball continued growing on college campuses, debuting at Notre Dame in 1894 and DePauw in 1896. Purdue and Wabash even played an intercollegiate game in February 1897. While the sport remained strongest in YMCAs, several high schools, including Indianapolis's Shortridge and Manual Training, and Crawfordsville High School, began fielding teams around the turn of the twentieth century. High school girls

⁴⁴"Indiana University Notes," *Bloomington World*, January 25, 1894, p. 8, accessed via Newspaper Archive.

also learned the sport. Shortridge's female students organized a team in October 1898 and played against Knickerbocker Hall Boarding and Day School for Girls the next January.⁴⁵

Clearly, the March 16, 1894, basketball game between the Crawfordsville and Lafayette YMCAs was hardly the first time Hoosiers played the sport. Perhaps earlier instances of basketball in Indiana are yet to be uncovered. Yet even then, the attempt to identify the "first game" is a questionable endeavor, focusing on when and where the game happened, at the expense of more interpretive questions: How did basketball emerge in Indiana; why did it become so culturally important to the state; why did mid-twentieth-century journalists feel the need to create a basketball origin story; and how have successive generations understood that rural-based story as it relates to Hoosier identity?

What Indiana historian James Madison acknowledged in 1982 remains true today: "Basketball has not yet received the scholarly history it deserves, one that sets the game in its full context."⁴⁶ Newspapers are the most important primary source for early basketball research. As more Indiana newspapers are digitized, professional and amateur historians should utilize these resources to explore more deeply the social, economic, religious, gendered, and even political contexts in which basketball emerged to become the state's pastime.



⁴⁵*The Daily Echo*, October 14, 1898, p. 1, and January 16, 1899, p. 3, accessed via Newspaper Archive.

⁴⁶James H. Madison, *Indiana through Tradition and Change: A History of the Hoosier State and Its People, 1920-1945* (Indianapolis, Ind., 1982), 427.