

Historical Pro Basketball Players

Ever since the first players sunk the first hoops back over a century ago, basketball has been one of America's number one sports, and pro basketball players have been making sports history.

American pro basketball history can be traced to a game played in 1896 at the YMCA in Trenton, New Jersey. This game was played as the result of a fallout dispute between members of the YMCA team and a YMCA official. The disillusioned players formed their own professional team and began to play for money. Two years later, a group of New Jersey newspaper sports editors founded the National Basketball League (NBL). The stars of this first pro league were Barney Sedran and Ed Wachter.

As the league progressed into the twentieth century, the first two successful professional teams were the Buffalo Germans and the Original Celtics. The first major national professional league was the American Basketball League. The Harlem Globetrotters and the New York Renaissance, also known as the Rens, the most successful teams of the 1930s. Both of these teams were comprised entirely of black players. There were also women's basketball teams at this time, with the top women players being Nera White, Alline Banks Sprouse, and Babe Didrikson.

The Minneapolis Lakers dominated the pro basketball circuit throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s. The Lakers, coached by John Kundla and led by George Mikan, took the NBA championship titles in 1949, 1950, 1952, 1953 and 1954. Historical pro basketball players of this era were forward Bob Pettit and guard Bob Cousy, who guided the Boston to six NBA titles (1957, 1959-1963). The Celtics commanded due respect in the NBA from 1957 to 1969. During this period the team won a total of eleven NBA titles, including eight in a row. Bill Russell was the star player of the Celtics, while another historically dominant center, Wilt Chamberlain, played for the Philadelphia Warriors.

The undisputed leader of the period from 1963 to 1975 was the University of California, Los Angeles. UCLA won ten national championships in all, including seven in a row. Some historical pro basketball players of this UCLA team were centers Bill Walton and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, guard Gail Goodrich and forwards Marques Johnson and Jamaal Wilkes. Kareem Abdul-Jabbar played an incredible twenty seasons in the NBA before retiring as the league's leading career scorer with 38,387 points.

In 1967, the NBA found a rival in the American Basketball Association (ABA). The ABA gained a fan following for its flashy style and its red, white, and blue basketballs. Without question, the ABA's best player was guard and forward Julius Erving. In 1976 the ABA disbanded and most of its teams joined the NBA.

1979 was a historically important year for major league basketball. That year, Magic Johnson of Michigan State University and Larry Bird of Indiana State revived NBA fortunes. The Detroit Pistons emerged as a late 1980s powerhouse with star players like Dennis Rodman and Isiah Thomas.

Over the past forty years, sports reporters have been kept busy with historical pro basketball players in women's leagues as well. Rule changes in the 1960's brought the sport in sync with men's competitions. Dribbling became fully legal in 1966, and then in 1969 the five-player full-court format was introduced, a format that would become official in 1971. The Basketball Hall of Fame began to recognize the valuable contributions of women's basketball players in 1985, conducting woman players, coaches and contributors. Some of the first players to be honoured with Hall of Fame recognition were Carol Blazejowski, Anne Donovan, Nancy Lieberman-Cline, Ann Meyers and Cheryl Miller.

In the 1990s, the pro basketball spotlight belonged to Michael Jordan as he led the Chicago Bulls to six NBA championships. Other great players of the decade were Charles Barkley, Karl Malone, Shaquille O'Neal, Hakeem Olajuwon, Scottie Pippen, David Robinson and John Stockton. Jennifer Azzi, Cynthia Cooper, Teresa Edwards, Lisa Leslie and Sheryl Swoopes were some of this era's most important women players.

Historical pro basketball players have been bringing excitement to fans and honour to teammates for more than a century. With the continued interest in pro basketball and sellout crowds across the league, there is no sign that the popularity of basketball is slowing down any time soon.