

The Original Intention of Basketball

Who is James Naismith? Originally from Ontario, Canada and raised by his grandmother after he was orphaned at age 9, James Naismith was a high-school dropout. After joining his uncle in the lumber industry, he became a regular patron at a local bar. James' grandson, Jim, says: *"The story in our family is he was at a bar on payday drinking too much. A man there in the bar once asked him, 'Are you Margaret's son?' He said, 'Yes.' The man replied, 'She'd roll over in her grave if she saw you now.'"*

That conversation changed the direction of his life. He went back to college and got a physical education degree and then a theological degree from Montreal's Presbyterian College. Feeling like he could better serve God through physical education than a pulpit, Naismith moved to Springfield, Massachusetts in 1891 to become a graduate student and instructor at the International YMCA Training School. **On his YMCA application, Mr. Naismith stated his one of his goals in life was to try to help "win men for the Master" to build character and to be an example for the men.**

In the winter of 1891, a blizzard covered Springfield. This caused the school's students to be stuck indoors, which led to complaints of boredom and ultimately, mischievous behavior. The school's director asked Mr. Naismith to invent a game that could be played inside and would focus the energies of the school's young men. In 1939, Mr. Naismith said these words on a New York radio station: *"Something had to be done. One day I had an idea. I called the boys to the gym and divided them into two teams of nine and gave them an old soccer ball. I showed them two peach baskets I had nailed at each end of the gym, and I told them the idea was to throw the ball into the other team's peach basket."*

What's less well-known is that his game also was meant to help build Christian character and to instill certain values of the muscular Christian movement. Made famous by President Teddy Roosevelt, "Muscular Christianity" was a movement (particularly popular from 1880 to 1920) that tied physical health to "manliness" and spiritual health. **At the core of Mr. Naismith's ministry was a commitment to developing the Christian character of young men.** He reserved his formal preaching for when he was a guest minister at area churches, but his approach with basketball was to put Christianity out in front of people and try to influence them through positive character development.

Seven years after he invented basketball, Mr. Naismith was hired by the University of Kansas, where he worked as its basketball coach, athletic director and teacher. Ironically, to this date, he is the only University of Kansas coach with a losing record.

P2R (Point 2 Remember): Honor Mr. Naismith's original intention by using this game to help win men (and women) for the Master.