

***Wartime Basketball: The Emergence of a
Nation Sport During World War II***

Stark, Douglas

The Guy Who Reviews Sports Books

By Lance Smith

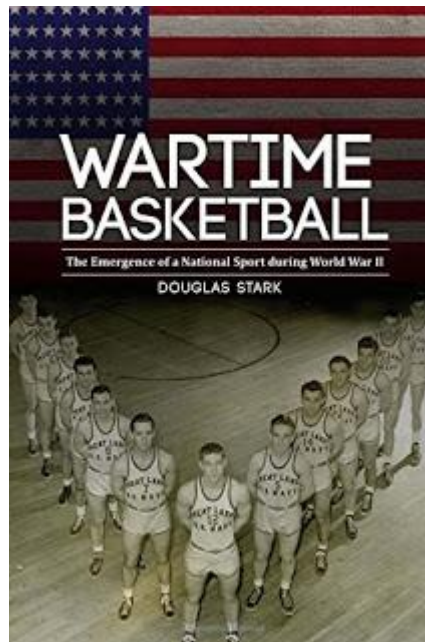
Media Mention

June 3, 2016

Rec'd June 17, 2016

Review of "Wartime Basketball"

With the start of the NBA Finals taking place, it was time to switch up and find a decent basketball book. This one certainly fit the bill, and it was very informative as I was not familiar at all with any level of basketball during this era. Here is my review of "Wartime Basketball."



Title/Author:

"Wartime Basketball: The Emergence of a National Sport During World War II" by Douglas Stark

Tags:

Basketball, professional, college, history, race

Publish date:

May 1, 2016

Length:

384 pages

Rating:

4 of 5 stars (very good)

Review:

Before there was the National Basketball Association, professional basketball was largely a regional game, with leagues who would send teams to the World Professional Basketball Tournament to determine the champion. This tournament, as well as the collegiate tourney many now call "March Madness" both started just prior to the United States entering World War II. How the game changed and adapted to wartime conditions is illustrated in this detailed book by Douglas Stark.

The research is extensive and thorough as Stark writes about the professional leagues that cropped up and had teams in towns that most people don't think of as "professional" when discussing pro sports. For example, one of the best teams in the National Basketball League (NBL) during its existence was the Oshkosh (Wisconsin) All-Stars. There are many stories about this team and its players, as well as others in this league and its counterpart, the American Basketball League. There is another team worth mentioning in the NBL – the Fort Wayne Zollner Pistons, who stayed in business through the turbulent times for the sport after the war, and entered the NBA when it was formed. The franchise still exists today as the Detroit Pistons.

The college game is included in this book and how its tourney and also the National Invitational Tournament grew in popularity, especially in the eastern part of the country. The development of these tourneys and the growing popularity made for good reading.

However, the best part of the book was about teams that formed on military bases and units so that the men who were serving their country during war could have some recreation and keep their games sharp. The best team of this time, at least according to the book, was the one assembled by the Great Lakes Naval Training Center, as this teams was always a winning team against other military teams.

The topic of racial integration is also examined in depth as not only did professional teams in both leagues become integrated, but there were also two all-black teams prominently mentioned in the book – the Harlem Globetrotters and the New York Renaissance, or Rens for short. Their stories, especially those about the Rens, were just as entertaining and informative as the others.

Because of the extensive detail, this is not a quick and easy read. The reader must carefully work his or her way through each chapter in order to get the full picture and detail that Stark is describing. How these teams and the sport adjusted to life during war

and kept restocking players is the underlying topic and that is woven nicely into the basketball writing. While it took me awhile, I am glad I finished this book and highly recommend it to readers who are interested in basketball history.

I wish to thank University of Nebraska Press for providing a copy of the book in exchange for an honest review.