

College Basketball Milestones

Basketball is a favorite pastime of kids and adults alike. American kids grow up with dreams of earning scholarships and reaching fame in the college league.

Basketball owes its origin to Dr. James Naismith, who invented the sport in 1892. Before long, the popularity of the game caught on and it was being played in American colleges. The first official game involving a college team was played between Geneva College and the New Brighton YMCA in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania on April 8, 1893. On February 9, 1895, the first intercollegiate game was played between the Minnesota State School of Agriculture and Hamline College. Minnesota won that game, 9 to 3.

The introduction of the five-player format was the next major college basketball milestone. This happened during an intercollegiate game in Iowa City on January 18, 1896. By the early 1900s, the basketball was being played in ninety colleges, mostly in the East and Midwest. This number continued to swell, and by 1914 as many as 360 colleges were playing college basketball.

In 1915, the Amateur Athletic Union of the United States, the NCAA and the YMCA banded together to streamline the game. A committee was organized to frame rules and during this time, a number of regional conferences were formed.

The first NCAA Men's College Basketball Championship tournament was organized by the National Association of Basketball Coaches and held in Evanston in 1939. A crowd of 5,500 cheering basketball fans watched the University of Oregon with the game. After this, the NCAA took over the national basketball championship tournament, and another college basketball milestone was realized.

In 1940, college basketball made it to the small screen. The first televised college game was played between Pittsburgh and Fordham at Madison Square Garden. This was the beginning of a national obsession with basketball and since then, the game has drawn huge crowds. The most-watched event in the United States is March Madness, when nearly 350 American colleges come together to compete for the NCAA basketball crown.

The NCAA tournament had relatively humble beginnings, with just eight teams competing against each other representing each of the eight NCAA districts. In 1951 the number of teams doubled to sixteen. In this format, ten conference champions qualified automatically, while the remaining six teams were chosen on the basis of their performance. In 1954, the number of teams went up to 24, and a 32-team bracket was adopted in 1975. Further increases saw the number of teams jump to 48 in 1980, and to 64 in 1985.

Over the years, college basketball has gone through remarkable changes. Many players have showcased their talents on campus courts and risen to become basketball superstars, and most NBA stars trace their origins to college basketball.

More than 120 years after it was first invented, the game of basketball is more popular than ever. Who knows what college basketball milestones lay ahead?