

50 YEARS OF BASKETBALL

JOE LAPCHICK

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FOREWORD

Nat Holman

Joe Lapchick has been widely praised as a coach who knew what he wanted and knew how to get things done. He ran a tight ship! He knew when to be patient and when to be impatient; when to be tough and when to be gentle; when to be corny and when to be direct. His "down-to-earthness," his fairness, his sympathetic understanding of his player's problems, the charm that he wore not as an occasional cloak but as his everyday garment—these things made him the ideal coach for all seasons.

In 1966, as a well earned climax to a magnificent career, Joe was elected to basketball's Hall of Fame, to take his place among the great luminaries of the sport. His name is now enshrined among the immortals. Around the firesides and in the gymnasiums across the country, now and in the future, wherever basketball talent is recognized and class extolled, his name and his achievements will be recalled by countless generations unborn. No greater epic could have been written into the pages of basketball history.

My personal reason for holding him in high esteem is that I believe the mark of greatness in this man is the fact that despite the position he has achieved in the game of basketball, he never lost the humility which characterized him from his earliest days with the Original Celtics.

Down through the years he put so much into bringing his goals to reality—talent, toil, time. Star as a player of the World Champions Original Celtics, Coach of St. John's University and the New York Knickerbockers, lecturer at basketball clinics, Hall of Famer—these are some of the high points over the years, all tangible matters of record. Then, too, there are high points which are unlisted in record books. He was a

“winner of boys” in the best meaning of the term, as well as “winner of games,” all within the spirit of the rules of fair play.

In all sports, some men have a magnetism which sets them apart from their fellows. Such a man is Joe. To friends, basketball fans, coaches, players, officials, writers, he has made the long trip victoriously with whistles blowing, cameras clicking, and the presses rolling. We have climbed the hill together in this great American game, and as we come to the end of these experiences they melt into a mosaic of beauty like the rays of the sun and the clouds of a beautiful sunset. In retrospect and prospect . . .

*Milestones of old memories
Along sweet friendship way,
Oh, how they brighten up the past
And cheer the coming day.*

A large, elegant handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be "Leo Tolstoy". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Dick McGuire, who played for me with the Knickerbockers. Dick would take off at the free-throw line and float through the air before releasing the ball with the two-hand underhand sweep.

If a player has constant trouble with lay-ups, he should check his "one-two" stride ("one" count on right foot, "two" count on left foot for right-hand shot and vice-versa for left-hand lay-up), his focus of eyes on the imaginary spot on the board, and the shortening or lengthening of his strides so he will leave the floor at the right spot before he goes up for the lay-up.

The one-hand set shot. Hank Luisetti was the first one-hand shooter to visit Madison Square Garden. He came in with a fine Stanford team and was the standout player in a game which saw the Indians upset the LIU Blackbirds and end their consecutive victory streak at 44 games.

The mechanics of the one-hand set, the one-hand free throw, and the jump shot are the same with the exception of the leap in the air for the jumper. In the one-hand set, the right-handed shooter should advance his right foot with his weight evenly balanced. The knees are slightly bent, and the ball is lifted with both hands to a position near the right shoulder with the elbow under the ball. The left hand pushes the ball back and falls away as the right hand is carried upward and out in a smooth, even follow-through to release the ball from the fingertips.

The one-hand jump shot. In 1945-46 Wyoming University came into the Garden with a kid named Kenny Sailors, who unveiled a new weapon—the jump shot. The shot was a sensation and has been basketball's chief scoring weapon ever since. Paul Arizin, former Villanova great, Philadelphia Warrior, and 76'ers star, became an outstanding shooter by using the jump shot almost exclusively during his career. Bill Sharmon, All-American from Southern California and later a star and back-court teammate of Bob Cousy, used the jump shot as *his* chief scoring shot from the field.

The one-hand jump shot is the most popular shot in the history of the game. It was developed on the West Coast and in the Middle West and is a combination of the running one-hander and the one-hand set. With the exception that the feet and shoulders should be squared to the basket before the take-off from the floor, the mechanics of the one-hand set shot apply to the one-hand jumper.

The jump should be as high as possible, and the elbow should be carried forward and out along the line of flight of the ball. Some players extend the ball over the head, but the great majority of the better shooters lift it over the shoulder. The arm must be fully extended and the fingers snapped forward at the last moment to provide spin and control to the ball.

Coming to a quick stop and at the same time "squaring" the shoulders to the basket both add to the shooter's accuracy. A few players employ a kick which flexes the lower legs backward, but the greater number of accurate shooters leap upward from the toes with their legs extending straight down toward the floor.

The great value of the jump shot lies in the deception which precedes the shot. The offensive player can drive toward the basket from any direction, and only he knows when he will attempt a jump shot. The defensive opponent may play the dribbler perfectly on the drive only to find that his attempt to force the dribbler away from the basket left him vulnerable to the jumper. The defensive player's concentration on correct dribble defense results in a delay, and this split-second pause permits the shooter to get the ball away without interference. With the development of the one-hand jump shot the entire concept of the game changed. For the first time, the offense surpassed the defense.

The jump shot changed the offensive game in the early 40's just as Dutch Dehnert, the Celtics' great passer, changed the game in 1926 with his pivot play. Now the jump shot was added to the push shot, and the low scores of 20 to 30 points per team were history. Incorporated with the elimination of the center jump following a score, the jump shot led the way to the high-scoring game of today, where total team points often soar into the hundreds.

In my opinion, the greatest fault in guarding against the jump shot is the effort made by defensive players to block the shot with a downward motion of the hand. This usually results in a foul and a two-shot free throw. "Hip" coaches now find it is wiser for their players to let the shooter get the shot away but to jump straight up as high as possible with arm fully extended above the head.

Leaping straight upward eliminates the forward charge, which usually carries the defensive player into the shooter, and forces the opponent to change the normal arc of his shot to an unfamiliar trajectory.

The team foul which results from a "sucker" defensive play adds to the player's foul total, limits his playing time, and increases the opponents' scoring opportunities. Such a foul often means victory or defeat in the closing moments of a close game.

The free throw. The free throw wins the games you want most to win—the close ones! There are three common free-throw types: the underhand, the one-hand set, and the two-hand set. In my opinion, players should be permitted to use the type they like best and with which they are most accurate and consistent.

Some players use the jump-shot from the free-throw line, but they are very much in the minority. (Hal Greer of the Philadelphia 76'ers uses the jump-shot in attempting his free throws and is quite effective in its use.)