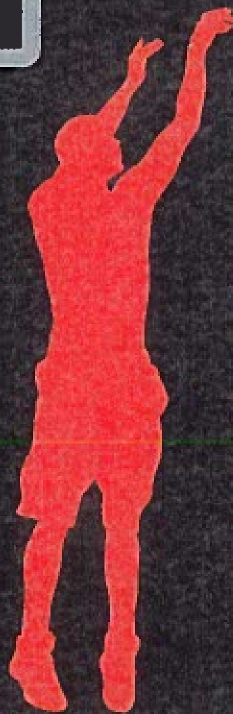
RISE AND FIRE

SHAWN FURY

FLATIRON BOOKS

THE ORIGINS, SCIENCE, AND EVOLUTION OF THE JUMP SHOT—AND HOW IT TRANSFORMED BASKETBALL FOREVER

# RISE AND FIRE



"[*Rise and Fire*] is about one shot, but every basketball fan will enjoy it."
—MIKE KRZYZEWSKI, head coach of the Duke and USA men's national basketball teams

SHAWN FURY

RISE AND FIRE. Copyright © 2016 by Shawn Fury. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. For information, address Flatiron Books, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010.

www.flatironbooks.com

The Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available upon request.

ISBN 978-1-250-06216-1 (hardcover)
ISBN 978-1-250-06217-8 (e-book)

Our books may be purchased in bulk for promotional, educational, or business use. Please contact your local bookseller or the Macmillan Corporate and Premium Sales Department at 1-800-221-7945, extension 5442, or by e-mail at MacmillanSpecialMarkets@macmillan.com.

First Edition: February 2016

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

# CONTENTS

Introduction 1

## PART ONE: IN THE BEGINNING

Chapter One: Origins and Mysteries 9
Chapter Two: Jump Shooting Marines 26
Chapter Three: 1950s: Naysayers and Trendsetters 38
Chapter Four: Buckets, Balls, and Shooter's Gyms 50
Chapter Five: 1960s: Big Shots, Big Men 65

## PART TWO: THE JUMP SHOT TOUR

Chapter Six: Legends, Tragedies, and Families 89
Chapter Seven: Denise, Jeanette, and the Game of the Century 112
Chapter Eight: The Rocket and the Splendid Splinter 128
Chapter Nine: The Miracle, the Movie, and the Miss 151

## PART THREE: GUNNER'S PARADISE

Chapter Ten: 1970s: No Conscience Required 173
Chapter Eleven: The Machine 191
Chapter Twelve: Bob McAdoo: The Revolutionary 200

## PART FOUR: THE MODERN GAME

Chapter Thirteen: 1980s: Small Forwards, Big Scorers 221
Chapter Fourteen: Bird 234
Chapter Fifteen: Instructors: The Shooter, the Lab, and the Rebel 242
Chapter Sixteen: 1990s and Beyond: Land of the Three 265
Chapter Seventeen: The Greatest 284

Acknowledgments 291
Bibliography 295
Index 327

ISBN 978-1-250-06216-1 $27.99 / $32.50 CAN.

It's hard to believe that there was a time when the jump shot didn't exist in basketball. When the sport was invented in 1891, players would take set shots with both feet firmly planted on the ground. Defenders controlled the sport, the pace was slower, and games would frequently end with scores fit for a football field. It took almost forty years before players began shooting jump shots of any kind and sixty-five years before it became a common sight. When the first jump-shooting pioneers left the ground, they rose not only above their defenders, but also above the sport's conventions. The jump shot created a soaring offense, infectious excitement, loyal fans, and legends. Basketball would never be the same.

*Rise and Fire* celebrates this crucial shot while tracing the history of how it revolutionized the game, shedding light on all corners of the basketball world, from NBA arenas to the playgrounds of New York City and the barns of Indiana. Award-winning journalist Shawn Fury obsesses over the jump shot, explores its fundamentals, puzzles over its complexities, marvels at its simplicity, and honors those who created some of basketball's greatest moments. Part history, part travelogue, and part memoir, *Rise and Fire* bounces from the dirt courts of the 1930s to today's NBA courts and state-of-the-art shooting labs, examining everything from how nets and rims affect a shooter to rivalries between shooting coaches to how the three-pointer came to rule the game. Impeccably researched and engaging, the book features interviews and profiles of legendary figures like Jerry West, Bob McAdoo, Ray Allen, and Denise Long—the first woman ever drafted by the NBA—plus dozens more, revealing the evolution of the shot over time.

Analyzing the techniques and reliving some of the most unforgettable plays from the

*(continued on back flap)*

*(continued from front flap)*

greats, Fury creates a technical, personal, historical, and even spiritual examination of the shot. This is not a dry how-to textbook of basketball mechanics; it is a lively tour of basketball history and a love letter to the sport and the shot that changed it forever.

**SHAWN FURY** is an award-winning journalist who has written for newspapers in Minnesota and North Dakota, and is also the author of *Keeping the Faith: In the Trenches with College Football's Worst Team*. He lives in New York City with his wife, Louise.

**WWW.SHAWNFURY.COM**
**WWW.TVFURY.WORDPRESS.COM**
**WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/SHAWNPFURY**
**WWW.TWITTER.COM/SHAWNFURY**

Jacket design by Pete Garceau
Author photograph © Louise Fury

FLATIRON BOOKS
175 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10010
WWW.FLATIRONBOOKS.COM

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

forever. I researched everything involving the jump shot, from the techniques of the most accurate shooters to shooter's gyms. I spoke with as many great shooters as I could find. I spent time talking with players involved in the greatest shooting duels, and players who made thousands of shots but can't forget a devastating miss. While researching I traveled to fourteen states, from Georgia to California, sat in the living rooms of great shooters from the '50s, and worked on drills with NBA shooting coaches. One morning I talked on the phone with Kenny Sailors, an early jump shot pioneer out of Wyoming, one of the last of the original shooters who was still alive when I worked on the book. At ninety-three, hard of hearing, having told his story hundreds of times, Kenny's enthusiasm for the jump shot, which he first took eighty years before our chat, was still obvious. When I finished talking with Sailors, his friend Bill Schrage, who helps him with interviews and operates a Web site dedicated to Kenny's career, told me Kenny sported a smile as he left for lunch at his assisted living facility in Laramie. The grin wasn't because of the meal. Memories of the jump shot still make Kenny smile. Millions know the feeling.

*Rise and Fire* is about the secrets of the shot and the superstitions of the players who live by it. It's a sentimental, historical, personal, scientific, and critical examination of the jumper. This book is not an encyclopedia of every great shooter. That book would run 10,000 pages. But it profiles many of the shot's masters. A path connects the first shooters to modern marksmen, and I wanted to explore that road and show how basketball got from point A to point B, from the set shot to the jump shot and beyond.

Coaches preach about team defense, rebounding, boxing out, sharp cuts, hitting the open man, switching on defense, running the floor, filling the lane, getting a hand up, looking up, fighting through screens, moving the ball, and shuffling your feet. These are all important things, and I'm sure, occasionally, defense, pure defense, wins championships—but only if there's someone capable of making shots. My favorite saying in basketball has always been "Great offense beats great defense." I also believe it, as do many of the shooters featured in *Rise and Fire*. Go ahead and play tight defense—a locked-in shooter won't even notice.

his old paper *The Pittsburgh Courier* covered Smith's funeral—about 200 people attended, including Chicago sports legends Gale Sayers and Billy Williams—its story waited until paragraph seven to reveal Smith's historic achievement on the hardwood: "He earned a bachelor of science degree from West Virginia State College in 1937 and was a star for the basketball and baseball teams. He was credited with introducing the one-handed jump shot to the game of basketball, but it was in the field of sportswriting that he earned his reputation and his living."

Introduced the one-handed jump shot? Took the first jump shot? What day? Where was the gym? Who was the opponent? And did he celebrate when he swished the shot or curse when it rimmed out? The mentions in those stories provide just two hints of the odyssey awaiting anyone who attempts to track down the first jump shooters. Just when you think you've found a unique nugget that perhaps unearths the first shooter . . . four more names of early shooters emerge from the archives. Forget about finding the absolute first. Historians have debated the question of who took the first jump shot for decades, but fresh claims about the original shooters still emerge from old sources, thanks to a newly discovered tattered newspaper from the 1920s or a dusty school yearbook from the '30s. Or a forgotten obituary from the 1970s. A dozen people might have invented the jump shot, or a hundred—but no one patented it. The early shooters operated in isolation, independent of each other, mostly away from what little media existed. We know some names—John Cooper, Joe Fulks, Kenny Sailors, Glenn Roberts—but others like Barney Varnes, Jimmie James, and Belus Smawley also made claims, some of them even legitimate, about being the first jump shooters. But finding the first is impossible. A fourteen-year-old Nebraska boy might have picked up a ball one summer morning in 1930 and jumped into the air while shooting at a basket attached to a red barn and never thought of it again after getting called over to finish his chores. A college player in Maine might have found himself six inches off the ground while shooting with two hands above his head and realized he did something wrong when the coach benched him. A black professional player on a barnstorming tour in the Midwest might have jumped on every 15-foot shot he took in an exhibition game inside a dance hall and thought nothing of it because that's how he played the

showed me the "peg leg" he hobbled around on. After he got sick, doctors warned him the infection could travel to his heart and kill him. "You cut my leg off or I die? Yeah, take my leg off. I don't need it anymore. My jumper went a long time ago."

The eighty-year-old Christgau primarily writes about sports and history (everything from a game between the Lakers and Globetrotters to a history of the P-51 Mustang fighter plane), although he's eager to write a comic novel. But the jump shot book generates the most interest from readers—in the form of compliments and challenges. Christgau happily corresponds, though he doesn't partake in quarrels. "The people I covered were early jump shooters, and they were early within certain regions. The earliest? Who knows?" And their lives were interesting beyond just their on-court accomplishments. Christgau profiled eight players who fit his criteria, men whose exploits he could document through newspapers or by talking to others who observed the pioneers taking a jump shot: His idol Skoog, John Burton from California, East Coast star Bud Palmer, Indiana's Dave Minor, Kentucky's Joe Fulks, Johnny Adams from Arkansas, North Carolina's Belus Smawley, and Wyoming's Kenny Sailors.

Three of the players—Burton, Fulks, and Adams—all carried the same nickname: Jumpin'. It was not a golden era for creative nicknames in basketball, with the only debate being whether they were known as Jumpin' or Jumping Joes and Johns.

Christgau interviewed six of the eight players—Adams and Fulks had died decades earlier. In Christgau's descriptions of each player's first shots, the sense of wonder jumps off the page, as if the shooters were six miles off the ground instead of six inches. Relying on instinct and creativity, they broke free from the invisible shackles that kept players grounded. An accomplished ski jumper, Skoog left the floor in a northern Minnesota high school game in 1944, and "it was as if he had lifted off the lip of a ski jump, and now there was that familiar Boom Lake sensation of both triple-speed and slow motion. At the edge of his vision, instead of the wood palings of the ski jump flying by, he could see the colorful trails left by streaking jerseys. Meanwhile, despite the noise in Memorial Hall, he was in a cocoon of silence and floating."

# CHAPTER TWO

## JUMP SHOOTING MARINES

Without World War II, maybe the jump shot still would have made its way around the country, becoming a national phenomenon instead of a regional rarity. But it would have taken a few more years, perhaps more than a decade for this to happen. Because there was no television coverage, the early jump shooters were unaware of one another, oblivious to their aerial partners spread across the country. The war brought players from across the United States together, and those soldiers competed on military bases in every service branch. Now, often for the first time, the early jump shooters spotted their own kind, each deployment bringing them in contact with others like them. They realized they weren't alone in pushing against the game's tradition. No longer did a player from the South think he was the only player shooting a jumper, not when he played ball on a base with a player from the West who possessed the same shot. And other players in the military, who never saw any jump shots back home, also watched this new breed of shooter. When their time in the service was done, they returned home with tales of the jump shot and, in some cases, a desire to rise off the court themselves. Bob Kuska said the military became a "mixing bowl" of the styles played throughout the country. He interviewed a high school coach in Washington, D.C., who told him, "The first time I saw a jump shot I was in the Navy. We were out in Hawaii. We had this interservices squad. We played a team from the West Coast. Man, those guys were jumping up in the air. We didn't know what the hell to do."

No one kicked ass in those days—on the basketball court and in more important endeavors—like the Marines. Specifically, the basketball team stationed at the Marine Corps base in San Diego. Before sending the men off to war, the Marines cobbled together a strong outfit with some of the top players in the country and faced everyone from college squads to industrial league teams. In 1943–44, the Leathernecks went undefeated in 35 games, clubbing teams such as Southern Cal and a strong Dow Chemical. Two of the great early jump shooters led the Marines—Joe Fulks and Kenny Sailors. In a 1943 preview of the USC game in the military branch's newspaper *Marine Corps Chevron*—enlisted personnel got first dibs on 2,000 available seats—the writer lauded Fulks for "pouring points through the hemp at the rate of 10.7 per game." With two of the great scorers of their time on the team, the success of the Marines surprised no one. Fulks eventually became the first NBA player to dominate with the jump shot, while Sailors, who also enjoyed a fine professional career at stops like Cleveland, Providence, and Denver after the war, is considered the creator of the modern jump shot.

Writers sometimes called Fulks the Babe Ruth of basketball. The same way Ruth was so far ahead of his time in the 1920s, so Fulks was in the 1940s. His prime only lasted a few seasons, during a time when few people cared about the NBA, years when it wasn't even actually called the NBA.

Born in 1921, Fulks came from Birmingham, Kentucky, in the western part of the state where poverty reigned. The iron-mining industry had died long before, but moonshiners still plied their trade. As a kid, John Christgau wrote, Fulks watched the Birmingham high school team—with fewer than twenty-five boys in the school—make it to the state tournament, led by a player named Robert Goheen who shot a variation of a jump shot with two hands and later returned to the school to coach Fulks and teach him his favorite trick. Because they often couldn't afford real basketballs, Fulks and his buddies stuffed socks with toilet paper, sawdust, or other materials they scrounged up. Fulks developed into a standout player in high school, but he wouldn't finish his career in Birmingham. A TVA-constructed dam on the Tennessee River submerged Birmingham and surrounding towns, eventually erasing them from existence. With the

the tenth anniversary of Fulks scoring 63, the *Sporting News* revisited the record, noting more than 2,500 NBA games had gone by without anyone breaking it. The record fell a few months later, when Elgin Baylor scored 64 points in November 1959. Baylor later broke his own mark with 71 points. Then Wilt Chamberlain came into the league and fulfilled Auerbach's prophecy with 100 points.

Fulks slowed down after 1949, the third straight year he averaged more than 22 points. He retired after the 1954 season—when he averaged 2.5 points. His accomplishments faded from view, and his records disappeared, followed by memories of his innovation. Fulks moved back to Kentucky and worked in a prison. He died in 1976, murdered by Greg Bannister, the twenty-four-year-old son of the woman he was seeing at the time. A night of drinking concluded with a 3:30 A.M. argument about a pistol, a verbal fight that ended when Bannister killed Fulks with a shotgun blast to the neck. Fulks was fifty-four. Bannister claimed the gun went off by accident, and he only served a few years in prison. Christgau wrote that no one from the Warriors attended Fulks's funeral, and he was "buried quietly in a small cemetery just outside the Marshall County town of Briensburg, Kentucky, alongside the relocated graves of the dead from Old Birmingham."

---

By the time I started working on my book, almost all of the early jump shot stars were gone. Glenn Roberts died in 1980, John Cooper in 2010 at the age of ninety-eight. Belus Smawley, Bud Palmer, John Burton—the early pioneers died years or decades earlier. But Kenny Sailors, the man whose jumper most closely resembled the modern jump shot, was still alive, still (relatively) healthy, and still happy to tell his story to anyone who asked. Because he was one of the last of the old jumping guard, more people started talking with Sailors about his impact on the game, especially after the turn of the century. Profiles appeared in New York papers and in *Sports Illustrated* as writers and fans hunted for information about a player whose exploits were forgotten for many years, a shooter whose jumper from 1946 resembled those of players from 1976 or 1996.

Kenny's hearing was failing during our chat in October 2014, but that

was about the only physical limitation in his life—aside from the normal aches experienced by anyone three months away from a ninety-fourth birthday. His mind remained sharp, his humor intact.

Genetics helped Sailors make his remarkable discovery. If he stood just a few inches taller than his brother, Bud, when they were teens, Kenny wouldn't have had reason to leave his feet for a jump shot. The Sailors boys lived with their mom on a Wyoming farm. Bud, five years older, was a star athlete in school. He also stood six-foot-five, which in 1934 made him about seven or eight inches taller than his little brother. Christgau wrote, "How could these two be brothers? Side by side they looked unrelated, the one tall and deliberate in each of his movements, the other darting and spontaneous." Bud and Kenny played ball against each other at their farm, going one-on-one whenever they weren't busy with crops or feeding the animals. They played on a homemade backboard attached to a windmill. Whenever they went at it, Bud, in the tradition of all older brothers, refused to take it easy on Kenny.

Finally, one day in 1934, Kenny dribbled up to Bud. Instead of attempting a set shot Bud could easily block, Kenny jumped and shot. His brother, Christgau recounted, would later "laugh deeply and insist that his little brother's first awkward jump shot hadn't reached the backboard, or even hit the windmill." But the result of the shot ultimately didn't matter—the fact that Kenny even took it was the amazing part. Standing there together, both of them realized that shot was something special. Bud told him, "Kenny, that's a good shot, if you can develop it."

"I started because of that big old bum of a brother of mine," Kenny tells me with a laugh. "Then I became aware of the fact that I could shoot this shot over just about anybody no matter how tall they were."

Bud played at the University of Wyoming and the family moved to Laramie, while Kenny continued to carry the lessons from that day in 1934 with him for the rest of his life. Kenny followed his brother to Wyoming, carrying the Cowboys to great heights behind his jump shot. His jumper didn't just benefit his own point total—when he went in the air Sailors often dumped passes off to teammates for easy shots if a defender turned toward the basket for a rebound. His dribbling skills set up all of

that. Defenders didn't know if he would pass or hit a pull-up jumper, a basic move in today's game, but a startling one in the early 1940s.

Wyoming arrived in New York City for the 1943 NCAA tournament as a relative unknown entity—even after Hank Luisetti opened the eyes of the Eastern basketball world with his performance in 1936, people still doubted teams and players from the West. Western teams were sideshows—curiosities, but not contenders. When the Cowboys came to New York, famous Madison Square Garden promoter Ned Irish liked dressing them up for the big-city folk, putting the basketball players in cowboy hats and boots, just another part of the never-ending Times Square show. But once the Cowboys actually took the court, they schooled the East Coast powers and impressed the basketball establishment—thanks to their jump shooting star. Wyoming defeated Georgetown 46–34 to win the NCAA championship. Sailors, the only player in double figures, scored 16. The Cowboys weren't finished. At the time the NCAA Tournament was nothing like it is today. The National Invitation Tournament (NIT)—which is now only a consolation prize for teams who can't make the NCAA event—had been around longer and ruled the college landscape, thanks to the glamour that came with hosting the event in New York City (the 1943 NCAA tourney was the first time it was held in NYC). St. John's won the NIT title in 1943 and met Wyoming two nights after the Cowboys' victory over Georgetown in a battle for bragging rights. Against another East Coast power, Wyoming won 52–47. Sailors scored 11 in that game, but the points hardly showed his overall impact.

His overall floor game surprised and thrilled. Writers struggled to describe what they watched. Normal words didn't suffice, not even the overblown verbiage common in the newspapers of the day. Sports reporters expanded their worldview to find comparisons. The *Sporting News* raved after the St. John's game, "He put on a two-night display that was a combination of Sonja Henie in an ice ballet, Sid Luckman quarterbacking and forward-passing and Leopold Stokowski directing a symphony orchestra. One expert left the Garden the night of April 1, exclaiming, 'Sailors is just out of this world.'" The rapturous coverage in the *Sporting News* didn't end with that passage. "He dribbled up the floor with one hand, using the

other to direct his teammates. If it can be said a man has 'beautiful' hands, Sailors has them. Once at quarter-court, he used those hands like a virtuoso, and the Wyoming team responded to every move. Sailors was like a coach in action." He riddled defenses with his passes, disrupted the opposition's offense with his steals, and "sank those amazing one-handed shots from quarter-court."

Sailors grew to about five-ten, meaning he still required the jump shot against bigger opponents. He remembers only having a jump shot blocked once—and that was from behind, never by a defender in front. The jump shot he took a decade earlier had evolved, but still hadn't been refined. But the victory over St. John's was the last he'd play in college for two seasons. Having enlisted in the Marines, Sailors contributed to the unbeaten team at the San Diego base before going overseas. But even in the middle of the war, "I thought about the shot," Kenny says. "Even in the foxhole over there in the South Pacific. I thought about it a lot."

When the fighting ended, Sailors returned to Wyoming to complete his college eligibility. By 1946, the shot he first took in 1934 had been fine-tuned and finely crafted. "The last thing I had to work out," he says, "was to stop my forward movement and go straight up. I was getting called for the offensive foul" as he dribbled and went forward on his shot. Sailors now dazzled with the jump shot that would look more familiar to today's fans, although players are constantly refining and the game's always evolving. Partially influenced by Luisetti, whom he watched in a tournament, Sailors kept his left hand to the side on the one-hander. "I brought the ball up on the right side, and then I held the ball over my head, about four inches over my head and just out in front a little ways." He shot it at "the apex" of his jump, a leap that was about 36 inches by some estimates, his dribble creating a type of rocket fuel he used to launch himself off the court.

Wyoming didn't win another national championship after Sailors returned, but his jump shot became immortalized. In another game at Madison Square Garden, Sailors took one of his normal jump shots in a game against Long Island University. A few weeks later, *Life* magazine published a picture of Sailors in the air, firing the shot. It's a great picture, perfectly timed. At the top of the key, Sailors pulls up for a jumper. The

LIU defender raises his right arm, but Sailors hovers high above. Nothing impedes his view of the basket. His feet look at least two feet off the ground. The other players—teammates and defenders—stare up, waiting for him to release the ball. They look like they're watching someone play a different sport. No one else rose off the floor, not with this grace, honed with twelve years of practice. The picture depicts Sailors at the top of his leap, the ball in his right hand, the guide hand positioned perfectly on the side, right before he'd drop it away. It was a routine jumper for Sailors, but having the photographer capture it at that perfect moment froze it in time, preserved it for history—and changed the future.

*Life* sold millions of copies and all of those readers saw Kenny Sailors taking a jump shot. Kids saw it and tried duplicating the play. The picture in *Life* became the most famous photo of Sailors's jump shot, but it wasn't the only photo that displayed his rare skill. Pictures from a February 1943 game against Brigham Young University show Sailors in midair, firing the one-handed shot as he rises. *The New York Times* ran one after Wyoming's victory over St. John's in 1943 at MSG. It captures Sailors shooting from the wing, perhaps eyeing a bank shot with all eyes again on him as he flies above everyone else. The cameras also filmed Sailors shooting in February 1946, a month after the picture in *Life*, against Utah State. In that one Sailors looks even higher off the ground, perhaps achieving that 36-inch vertical. A Utah State defender trails Sailors but can do nothing to stop him. In the picture it looks like he's trying to shove Sailors on the leg, perhaps hoping to disrupt the form that is practically textbook—despite no one knowing what picture-perfect jumpers actually looked like for another decade.

Unlike many of his fellow innovators, Sailors received mostly encouragement from his coaches when it came to his jump shot. It was only when Sailors became a pro that he encountered resistance. Dutch Dehnert coached Sailors during Kenny's first year with the BAA's Cleveland Rebels. The old coach didn't approve of Sailors's dribbling abilities, and his reaction to the one-handed jump shot was even more extreme. Kenny remembers Dehnert saying, "Sailors, where'd yuze get that leapin' one-hander?" Dehnert benched Sailors, although he offered to teach him the two-handed set shot. At five-foot-ten, Sailors knew he'd have no chance of

getting a shot off in the pros if he remained rooted to the floor and shot with two hands from his chest or above his head. One of Kenny's teammates told him his days in the BAA would end soon if he didn't get a chance to play that first season. Sailors went to the Cleveland GM and asked for a trade. But Dehnert was already on his way out. Under new coach Roy Clifford, who had no issue with Sailors taking his jump shot, Kenny started and averaged nearly 10 points a game as a rookie, and the young guard's career finally took off.

Kenny's best seasons came in 1949 and 1950, when he averaged 15.8 and 17.3 points per game. The fourth-leading scorer in the league in 1950 when he played for Denver, Sailors also averaged four assists, a high number for the era. Many considered him the best ball-handler in the league—people said he was faster going up the court with the dribble than most people were running without the ball.

Sailors retired after the 1951 season. He worked as an outdoors guide in Wyoming, dabbled in politics, and then moved to Alaska in 1965, where he lived with his family for nearly thirty-five years. He coached in Alaska, but he was off the basketball grid. His role in the jump shot received little publicity in the Lower 48. Others got their credit while Kenny lived in the wilderness. But in 1990, Sailors went to the Final Four in Denver and spoke at an event about his old jump shot. He was next to the UNLV team, the eventual national champions. "These kids were looking at me, this little runt, like, how did he ever invent the jump shot?"

Sailors didn't think about being a pioneer when he actually was one. Only years after he retired did people talk with him about it. Only decades later did they recognize his spot in basketball history and how, like so many others from small towns or rural areas, something that came naturally to him seemed like such an unnatural creation. "Eventually I think that got through to me that I was a little bit different with my jump shot," he says. "That it was something that hadn't been used like that before."

Agreeing with historians, Sailors says it's impossible to find the first person who took a jump shot—and he never claimed to be that player. But he was proud of his groundbreaking role as the early owner of a more modern jumper. Others acknowledged his importance, like legendary

coaches Ray Meyer, Bobby Knight, and Joe Lapchick. The early jump shooters could fit on an evolutionary chart, like the one that tracks the progress of humans. On the far left, the set shooters. Players like John Cooper and Glenn Roberts with their twisting two-handers make an appearance, as does Luisetti in 1936 with his running one-hander. A bit farther down on the right we find Kenny Sailors and his one-hander, shooting the ball off the dribble, shooting at the top of his jump.

The game continued to evolve—it never stops, of course. But as the 1950s arrived, the jump shot finally found a home in basketball, more than sixty years after Naismith invented the game. It arrived on—and off—the hands of John Cooper, Glenn Roberts, John Burton, Wendell Smith, Bud Palmer, Conley Watts, Joe Fulks, and Dave Minor. And, of course, Kenny Sailors. All of those players—and many more—changed the game they loved. But many others hated the shot. They knew with the arrival of the jump shot, basketball would never be the same.

up with the changing game. By the latter part of the decade, players like Joe Fulks and Kenny Sailors had company in their jump shooting fraternity. More players dedicated themselves to learning the jump shot, and as more of them perfected it, scores shot upward, along with the excitement level. But some people thought the jump shot was unfair, that it robbed the game of teamwork. Now a single player dribbled and launched from anywhere. Those early fears of coaches like Nat Holman had come true. In 1956, future Pulitzer Prize winner Jimmy Breslin worked as a humble syndicated sportswriter, and he wanted to know what happened to the game he loved:

> *What's ruining basketball is the jump shot. Nearly all your big scorers have it. It's impossible to stop, and the way the modern player can shoot, you wonder how he ever misses. . . . The jump shot today is the bread and butter part of basketball. It requires no team effort. Just a guy who can jump and shoot with made-in-a-laboratory accuracy.*
>
> *It has driven basketball's main feature almost out of the game. That's the give-and-go play, the sport's version of the hit and run. In the pros, only Philadelphia and New York practice it to any extent. Around the rest of the nation, the jump shot does it all.*

Newspaper Enterprise Association sports editor Harry Grayson took a cue from his colleague and drinking buddy Breslin and delivered his own criticisms in 1957. Under the headline "Jump Shot Leaves Fans Yawning as Cage Scores Mount," Grayson wrote:

> *Basketball today, however, is doing a fine job of killing itself. One word sums it up: repetition. Shoot and score, then throw it up again—that's all they're doing except in isolated cases from coast to coast. The jump shot is the big thing. Kids are coming out today with deadly eyes. They get any place near the basket and up they go. . . .*
>
> *The jump shot is virtually impossible to block. The combatant today in college basketball hardly knows basketball at all. All his practice time is put into this shot. By the time he is a varsity starter, he is a tall, quick-moving boy who can shoot. That is fine, but where*

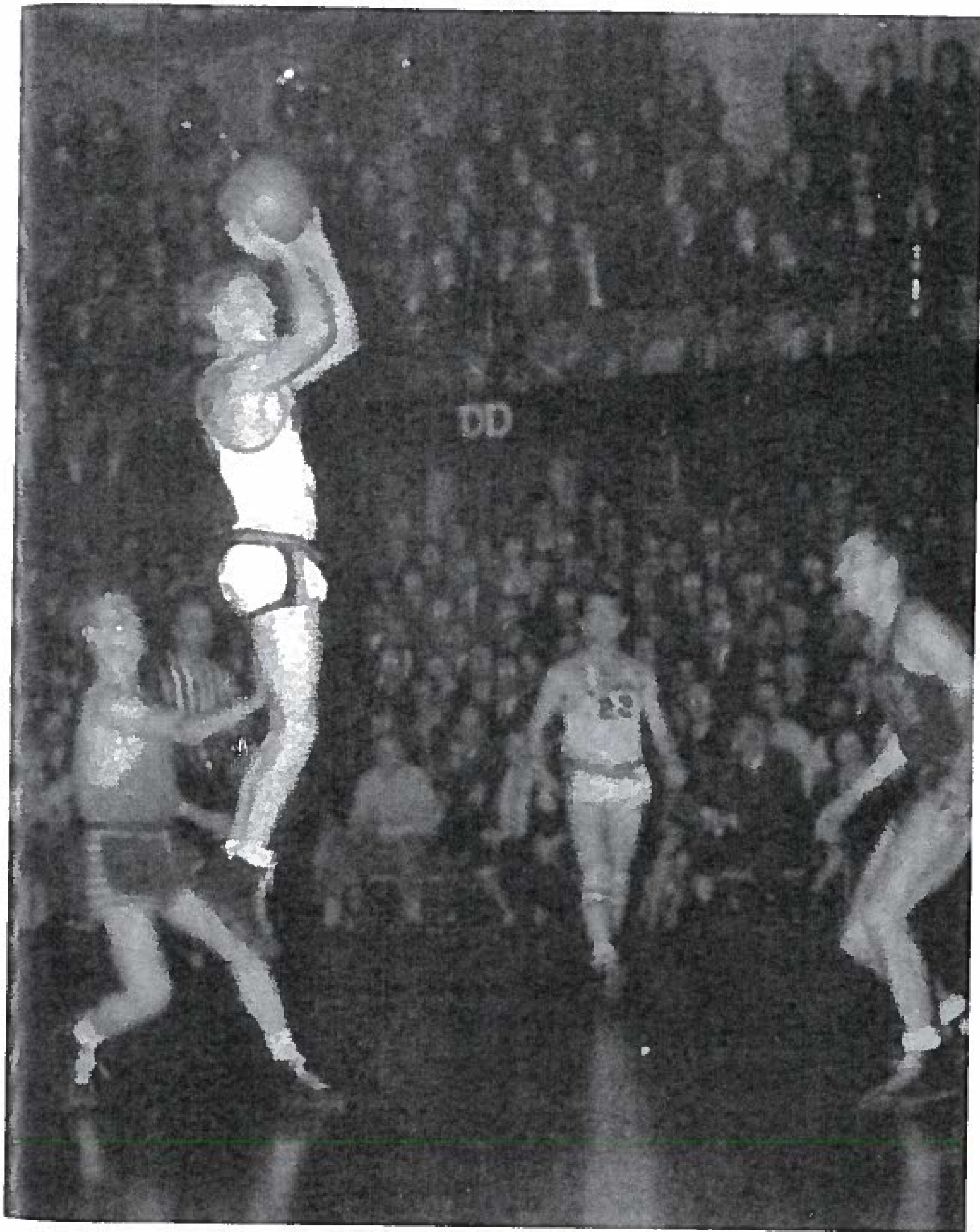
boring for the fans, and our crowds would be cut in half. Sure it's harder on the players. So what? We like it."

Arizin, who went by the nickname Pitchin' Paul—you really expected a nickname that didn't start with the letter P?—didn't even play basketball in high school and he attended Villanova mainly to study chemistry. At the time he also played ball in independent leagues around Philly. In the Catholic League, the teams competed on a narrow floor primarily used for dances, which made Arizin slip often when he attempted hooks or drives. "So one day I began jumping and shooting," he said. "I didn't slip, and I was having success with the shots. So you see it was more a matter of expediency than anything else." With the jump shot in his arsenal, Arizin drew the attention of Villanova coach Al Severance, who'd heard about a player with a Joe Fulks–like jumper. He brought Arizin onto the team. Four years later, the player who couldn't make his high school team earned All-American status and led the nation in scoring.

Like Sailors and Fulks, Arizin served in the Marines and dominated on military teams, just as he did at Villanova and in the NBA, where he won two scoring championships and a title with Philadelphia. Arizin bridged the gap between the early stars of the NBA and the players who set records that would never be matched. Pitchin' Paul played with Jumpin' Joe at the end of Fulks's career and teamed with Wilt Chamberlain during the early stages of the Big Dipper's reign. Before joining forces with Chamberlain, Arizin's jump shot helped him dethrone George Mikan as the NBA's top scorer, averaging 25.4 in 1952, and ending Mikan's three-year run as the league's leader.

The great jump shooters of the era led the NBA in scoring for four years in a row in the late 1950s, until Chamberlain entered the league and made a mockery of all previous records. Pettit—the first great big man jump shooter—led in 1956, followed by Arizin. In 1958, Yardley, playing for Detroit, became the first NBA player with 2,000 points in a season, thanks to his jumper, until Pettit again broke that record the following year, with his own accurate shot 15 to 18 feet from the basket.

These scoring eruptions—and how they occurred—bothered more people than just some observers and cranky writers. Even one of the greatest players of the 1950s didn't like the jump shot's influence. Bob Cousy



Wyoming's Kenny Sailors, a player people consider the father of the modern jump shot, launches his jumper in a 1946 game against Utah State.

1946 UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING YEARBOOK, PROVIDED COURTESY OF THE PRIVATE ARCHIVES OF KENNY SAILORS.

If your life was on the line, and you needed one person to make a jump shot to save it, who would you choose? Assume the diabolical mastermind who came up with this sick game and is deciding your fate will set some parameters for this life-or-death jumper. The shot will come from 20 feet, so anyone in the game's history is eligible—set it at 25 feet and it eliminates a lot of shooters from the first century of the game. This gesture allows you a wider pool of candidates who will hold your fate—and the ball—in their hands. But, to make things tougher, a defensive player will challenge the shot. The shooter has to fire over someone with a raised arm. In an act of mercy, the madman says the shooter can come off the dribble or receive a pass.

So who do you pick? Don't worry—any player you choose shoots while in the prime of his career (science does incredible things). So maybe you want Rick Mount dribbling into the corner and launching one of his leaping lofters. Maybe you want Bob McAdoo kicking his legs back—after all, as defensive players testified, McAdoo liked it when a defender put a hand in his face. Anyone would take Curry, a player whose shot is so pure that in twenty years we might have a definitive answer to the question of who was the greatest shooter of all time. But how do you turn down Michael Jordan? He might not care about your life, but he'll want to claim the million bucks he's wagered on the outcome. The Bulls put their fate in his jumper so many times, why wouldn't you? And don't forget Larry Bird. If he ever heard about this event he'd trash-talk anyone you picked and you'd instantly regret not going with the Celtics legend. Imagine the fun of Bird launching a shot, and as it's still in the air, your life in the balance, seeing him raise an index finger—or maybe a middle one to your executioner—because he knows it'll fall and he's saved your life.

One jump shot—who do you got? Me? I'd go a different direction. Ignoring the legends, I'd take the shot myself. As I've learned while talking to dozens of memorable shooters for this book, a shooter has to *believe* he's the greatest to ever be included in the discussion *about* the greatest. Every shooter from Kenny Sailors to Kevin Durant has wanted the ball in his hands if a game came down to one jumper. Call it self-confidence or delusion, but writing about the history of the jump shot has made me believe I'd want that one shot. I could take all of the lessons I've learned

with him about his career. He also helped me set up interviews with his entire family. Thanks to all the McDonalds for meeting, from New York to Minnesota's Iron Range.

Jimbo Rayl not only had a role in the greatest movie of all time—*Hoosiers*—he also set up my meeting with his parents, Jimmy and Nancy Rayl. Thanks to the Rayls for showing me the Kokomo, Indiana, sites, although I still regret not taking Jimmy up on his idea of getting my wife something from Opalescent Glass.

I introduced myself to Rick Mount cold at his shooting camp, but he graciously opened up his schedule and his home to me just a day later and regaled me with his insights on the jump shot and its influence on his life.

I tracked down Bobby Plump, one of the most famous athletes in Indiana history, by wandering into his financial planning company one late summer afternoon, where I found him in his back office. He invited me over to his restaurant, Plump's Last Shot, for an interview a few days later, and sitting with him talking about his famous jump shot from 1954 was certainly one of the highlights of the book.

Bill Schrage arranged my interview with Kenny Sailors, and also served as a patient, wise guide to the way basketball was played in the 1930s and '40s. He provided me with numerous old stories and pictures that helped me understand Kenny's era and jumper, and also sent a video of Kenny in action.

John Simms and Janice Young at West Virginia State helped me with information on Wendell Smith's college days.

Numerous NBA media relations people lined up interviews and meetings. Jon Steinberg with the Atlanta Hawks helped me chat with Dominique Wilkins. Tad Carper and B. J. Evans with the Cavs arranged my Austin Carr interview. Rob Wilson with the Heat lined up a talk with Bob McAdoo. And Golden State's Raymond Ridder helped me set up an interview with one of the best ever—Jerry West. At Turner Sports, Audrey Brees arranged my Dennis Scott interview.

Ted Green took time from finishing up his documentary on Slick Leonard to talk about his film on Roger Brown during a fun lunch in Indianapolis.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

## BOOKS

Allen, Forrest C. *Better Basketball: Technique, Tactics, Tales.* New York: Whittlesey House, 1937.

Ballard, Chris. *The Art of a Beautiful Game: The Thinking Fan's Tour of the NBA.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009.

Bird, Larry. *Drive: The Story of My Life.* With Bob Ryan. New York: Doubleday, 1989.

Caponi-Tabery, Gena. *Jump for Joy: Jazz, Basketball, and Black Culture in 1930s America.* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008.

Christgau, John. *The Origins of the Jump Shot: Eight Men Who Shook the World of Basketball.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999.

Fox, Stephen. *Big Leagues: Professional Baseball, Football, & Basketball in National Memory.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998.

Guffey, Greg. *The Golden Age of Indiana High School Basketball.* Bloomington, Ind.: Quarry Books/Indiana University Press, 2006.

Hobson, Howard: *Scientific Basketball.* New York: Prentice-Hall, 1949.

Hoose, Phillip M. *Hoosiers: The Fabulous Basketball Life of Indiana.* Indianapolis: Guild Press of Indiana, 1995.

Hoover, Paul. *Pro Shooting Secrets: The Only Shooting System That Unlocks the Hidden Truth Behind Today's Greatest Shooters.* E-book, Columbus, Ohio: Paul Hoover, 2014.

Hopla, Dave. *Basketball Shooting.* Champaign, Ill.: Human Kinetics, 2012.

Johnson, Earvin "Magic". *My Life.* With William Novak. New York: Fawcett Books, 1992.

Krenz, Joel B. *Gopher State Greatness: A Thirty-Year History of Minnesota Boys High School Basketball.* Richtman's Printing, 1984.

Associated Press. "Lamar Playing for Pay?" *Anniston Star*, February 11, 1973. http://www.newspapers.com/image/19384478/.

Associated Press. "Long Practices Pay Off for Bernard King." *Kentucky New Era*, December 26, 1984. https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=266&dat=19841226&id=xQksAAAAIBAJ&sjid=cG0FAAAAIBAJ&pg=2937,7674855&hl=en.

Associated Press. "'Lucky Old Sun' Unlucky For Brandeis Hoop Team." *Newport Daily News*, January 4, 1954. http://www.newspapers.com/image/59278025.

Associated Press. "Marines Trounce Dow Chemical." *Ogden Standard Examiner*, March 8, 1944. http://www.newspapers.com/image/27101314.

Associated Press. "McAdoo Has Hot Hand." *Reading Eagle*, November 27, 1974. https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1955&dat=19741127&id=7Q0rAAAAIBAJ&sjid=LZoFAAAAIBAJ&pg=2475,4124970&hl=en.

Associated Press. "McAdoo Scores 49." *Reading Eagle*, January 22, 1975. https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1955&dat=19750122&id=tQ5XAAAAIBAJ&sjid=MkMNAAAAIBAJ&pg=4409,3571724&hl=en.

Associated Press. "McAdoo's 50 Keys Win." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, April 19, 1975. https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1129&dat=19750419&id=7KlRAAAAIBAJ&sjid=h20DAAAAIBAJ&pg=5603,2330573&hl=en.

Associated Press. "Mikan Issued Challenge by Joe Fulks." *Nebraska State Journal*, January 27, 1949. http://www.newspapers.com/image/42103489.

Associated Press. "Milan Opens Gates for Victory Celebration." *Kokomo Tribune*, March 22, 1954. http://www.newspapers.com/image/17823115.

Associated Press. "Missouri Cager Masters Shot Defying All Legal Guarding." *Moberly Monitor-Index*, February 18, 1932. http://www.newspapers.com/image/19562690.

Associated Press. "NBA Continues to Debate 3-Point Goal." *Kokomo Tribune*, October 27, 1979. http://www.newspapers.com/image/2730588/.

Associated Press. "'Out-of-Shape' Wizard a Near-Perfect Shooter." *Lawrence Journal-World*, January 14, 2008. https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2199&dat=20080114&id=epcyAAAAIBAJ&sjid=sOcFAAAAIBAJ&pg=6260,2124500&hl=en.

Associated Press. "Philadelphia Cager Sets Scoring Mark." *Times Recorder*, February 11, 1949. http://www.newspapers.com/image/19394223.

1972. http://www.si.com/vault/1972/11/27/619145/a-time-to-bless-the-beasts-and-freshmen.

Kitchell, Dave. "Rayl Helped Make Kokomo 'King of Basketball.'" *Kokomo Tribune*, February 28, 1979. http://www.newspapers.com/image/2598795/.

Kornheiser, Tony. "Knicks: Behind Big Mac Attack." *New York Times*, January 30, 1978. http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9F04E5DA1E3EE632A25753C3A9679C946990D6CF.

Kritzer, Cy. "Ken Sailors' Play Helps Wyoming to Sail to Cage Titles." *Sporting News*, April 8, 1943.

Kuska, Bob. "Talley the Terminator, He Gave You Buckets." *DC Basketball*. http://www.dcbasketball.com/Talley-the-Terminator.php.

Layden, Tim. "Rick Mount: This Indiana Schoolboy Star Flopped as a Pro, and Is Only Now, at 54, Coming to Terms With Life After Hoops." *Sports Illustrated*, July 2, 2001. http://www.si.com/vault/2001/07/02/306832/rick-mount-this-indiana-schoolboy-star-flopped-as-a-pro-and-is-only-now-at-54-coming-to-terms-with-life-after-hoops.

Leighton, Tim. "High School Basketball: Bob McDonald, the Good Shepherd." *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, January 21, 2014. http://www.twincities.com/sports/ci_24952317/high-school-basketball-bob-mcdonald-wrapping-up-six.

Leonhardt, David. "Keeping Score; The Lost Art of Shooting Is Being Found." *New York Times*, February 27, 2005. http://www.nytimes.com/2005/02/27/sports/basketball/27score.html?pagewanted=print&position=&_r=0.

Levitt, Ed. "Sex and the Hoop." *Oakland Tribune*, February 11, 1970. http://newspaperarchive.com/us/california/oakland/oakland-tribune/1970/02-11/page-41.

Littwin, Mike. "Georgetown Wins as Price Is Wrong for Georgia Tech." *Los Angeles Times*, March 24, 1985. http://articles.latimes.com/1985-03-24/sports/sp-30262_1_georgia-tech.

———. "Lakers—'This McAdoo's for You.'" *Victoria Advocate*, May 23, 1982. https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=861&dat=19820523&id=FmVfAAAAIBAJ&sjid=GV4NAAAAIBAJ&pg=6904,6105123&hl=en.

———. "A League of His Own: Former Pacers Star Roger Brown Left Behind a Legacy as the Ultimate ABA Player." *Sports Illustrated*, March 17, 1997. http://www.si.com/vault/1997/03/17/224218/a-league-of-his-own-former-pacers-star-roger-brown-left-behind-a-legacy-as-the-ultimate-aba-player.

&dat=19630114&id=IQ5OAAAAIBAJ&sjid=660DAAAAIBAJ&pg=6853,856840&hl=en.

Plaschke, Bill. "Urban Legend." *Los Angeles Times*, February 14, 2001. http://articles.latimes.com/2001/feb/14/sports/sp-25258.

Pluto, Terry. "A Proud Papa Denny Price Shares His Son's Dream." *Akron Beacon Journal*, May 5, 1988.

Podolsky, Rich. "Sixers Stopped by Refs." *Delaware County Daily Times*, April 19, 1976. http://www.newspapers.com/image/19368276.

Porter, David. "Paul Arizin Pioneered the Jump Shot While Playing in NBA." *Oskaloosa Herald*, December 19, 2006. http://newspaperarchive.com/us/iowa/oskaloosa/oskaloosa-herald/2006/12-19/page-9.

Powers, Ian. "Kenny Sailors and the Jump Shot Heard 'Round the World." New York *Daily News*, March 23, 2014. http://creative.nydailynews.com/jumpshot.

Ralstin, Rick. "Jim Rayl 'MVP' in Rochester Tourney." *Kokomo Morning Times*, July 4, 1966. http://www.newspapers.com/image/32529024/.

Ralstin, Dick. "Lebanon Is Edged, 59–58, at Night by E. Chicago . . . After Mount & Co. Edged Logan, 65-64." *Kokomo Morning Times*, March 13, 1966. http://www.newspapers.com/image/32511487.

Ramsay, Dr. Jack. "Winning Game 5 on the Road Not Easy." ESPN.com: NBA Playoffs 2002, May 2, 2002. http://a.espncdn.com/nba/playoffs2002/columns/ramsay_drjack/1377040.html.

Ramsey, David. "'Lethal Weapon 3' Wrecks Minnesota's Dream." *Sporting News*, April 2, 1990.

Reed, William F. "Good Times Come to Cajun Country." *Sports Illustrated*, December 20 1971. http://www.si.com/vault/1971/12/20/667756/good-times-come-to-cajun-country.

———. "Man of the Century Frank Selvy's 100-Point Game Secured Him a Spot in College Hoops History." *Sports Illustrated*, February 6, 1995. http://www.si.com/vault/1995/02/06/133238/man-of-the-century-frank-selvys-100-point-game-secured-him-a-spot-in-college-hoops-history.

Reidenbaugh, Lowell. "Peerless Pettit Powers Hawks to Pro Cage Prize Over Celtics." *Sporting News*, April 23, 1958.

Web sites. Record books for NCAA Division I, Division II, and Division III basketball were also helpful, as was the NAIA record book. For a complete list of videos used in the research, please visit shawnfury.com.

## INTERVIEWS

Gary Addington; Dana Alexander (Long); Steve Alford; Bill Boyd; Jim Calhoun; Austin Carr; Craig Carse; John Christgau; Brad Clark; Keydren Clark; Bobby Cremins; Paul Culpo; Randy Echols; Andy Enfield; Ed Ferguson; Howard Garfinkel; Dick Garmaker; Gerald Glass; Travis Grant; Ted Green; Carol Gunderson (Hannusch); Norm Held; Paul Hoover; Dave Hopla; Tom Konchalski; Bruce Kreutzer; Bob Kuska; Ray LeBov; Jeff Lensch; Troy Lewis; Jeanette Lietz (Olson); Doug Lietz; Cyndy Long; Bob McAdoo; Bob McDonald; Joel McDonald; Mike McDonald; Paul McDonald; Tom McDonald; Rick Mount; Ray Pavy; Bobby Plump; Ryan Polomski; Dean Prator; Mark Price; Judy Racek; Ed Ratleff; Jimmy Rayl; Nancy Rayl; Dan Rife; Denise Rife (Long); Bevon Robin; Johnny Rogers; Tony Rosa; Bob Ryan; Jack Ryan; Kenny Sailors; Bill Schrage; Dennis Scott; Dan Shaw; Purvis Short; Elmore Smith; Archie Talley; Sue Tesdahl; Dan Touhey; Kiki Vandeweghe; Peter Vecsey; Jerry West; Dominique Wilkins.

Plump, Bobby, 4, 111, 151, 170
  *Hoosiers* and, 158–61
  Lewis, Troy, and, 166
  Milan Miracle and, 152–58
  Mount, Rick, and, 130
Plump, Jenine, 157
Plump, Lester, 153
Plump, Mabel, 153
Pluto, Terry, 257
Podolsky, Rich, 208
Polomski, Ryan, 93, 100
Popovich, Gregg, 270, 282
Populous, 58
Posey, Cumberland, 23
practice, 257
Prator, Dean, 93, 100
Price, Brent, 257
Price, Denny, 252, 257
Price, Mark, 250–57
Price, Matt, 257
*Pro Shooting Secrets* (Hoover), 263
Pro Shot Shooting System, 243, 258–64
Procell, Greg, 90
Providence College, 272
PSI 91, 54
Purdue University, 139–41, 168
pure shooters, 234
  shooting instructors and, 244–50
push arc shot, 12

Qatato, Joe ("Meat"), 241
Quicken Loans Arena, 179

Ramsay, Jack, 72, 204, 206–8
Ramsey, Cal, 244
Ratleff, Ed, 96, 184–85
Rayl, Jimmy, 111, 128–50
Rayl, Nancy, 129, 147, 149
rebounds, 43, 210
*Red on Roundball*, 164
Reed, Willis, 200, 212
*Rescue Me*, 102
Rice, Julian, 266
Rickey, Branch, 9
Rife, Dan, 117
Riley, Pat, 203, 214, 217
rims, 62–63
  flex, 63
  tight, 59
Roberts, Glenn, 10, 13, 15–16, 18, 31, 37, 44
Robertson, Oscar, 48–49, 65–66, 72–75, 128, 134
  Maravich, Pete, and, 176
  McAdoo and, 211
  Plump, Bobby, and, 153–54
Robertson, Scotty, 183–84, 186
Robin, Bevon, 104–5
Robinson, Jackie, 9
Romar, Lorenzo, 93–94
Roosevelt, Gary, 73
Rosenstihl, Jim, 136, 138
Rosier, Bob, 197
Ross, Diana, 97
Ruby, Craig, 11–12
Rucker Park, 1, 287
*Runnin' Rebel* (Tarkanian), 91–92
Rupp, Adolph, 44
Russell, Bill, 13, 75–77, 79, 85, 240
  Bird and, 235
  blocks of, 65
  Boston Celtics and, 47–48
  Chamberlain and, 75
  McAdoo and, 211
  nerves and, 116
  rebounds and, 43
Russell, Bryon, 4
Ruth, Babe, 27
Ryan, Bob, 42, 76, 80, 222, 224, 239, 277
Ryan, Jack, 102–3
Ryan, Nolan, 284

Sailors, Bud, 32
Sailors, Kenny, 5, 10, 19, 27, 31–37, 288