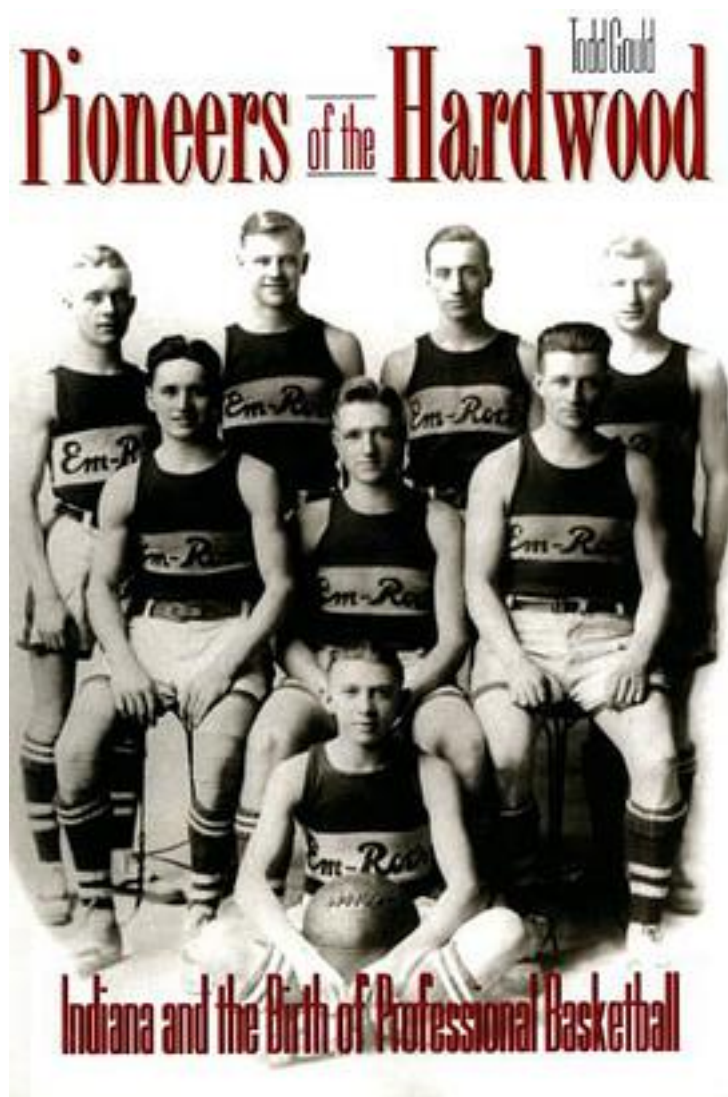


Pioneers of the Hardwood



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'Columbus, Indiana, 1916 - The temperature was well below freezing on this winter night, but citizens inside City Hall were plenty hot. Inside, public officials and local citizens stood and shouted. But instead of sitting through a political debate or town hall meeting, they wildly cheered as two basketball teams squared off in a game played in the wide hall on the second floor'. A local group, the Columbus Commercial, pitted their skills against the Indianapolis Em-Roes, one of the most successful touring teams in the Midwest. The excitement grew as the Em-Roes entered the playing area from their first floor dressing room in the Mayor's office. Admission to the exhibition was one nickel per person. Curious spectators watched from a narrow balcony that encircled the playing floor. Others crowded around the floor, just inches from the action. Amid a swelling wall of screaming fans, the players took the floor. An official tossed what appeared to be an oversized, brown medicine ball with laces into the air. The battle began. The score remained low, but the action was intense. The partisan spectators obviously felt their team was not getting enough favorable calls from the referee. They shared their displeasure by chucking hat pins, bottles, and lighted cigarettes at the vigilant official. Unruly crowds often prompted referees to carry a revolver in their back pocket to help them escape an onslaught of disgruntled locals after a ball game. During the contest most spectators closely watched Em-Roes shooting ace Al Feeney. He led the team in scoring at six points per game. His performance in Columbus was a sight to behold. His two-handed set shots seemed to form a perfect arc on their way to the basket. Opposing players tried to stop Feeney from scoring by pushing him to the floor. Feeney retaliated by pushing back, and a fight ensued. The Columbus fans were incensed. At halftime, a group of local hooligans waited angrily in the hall for Feeney to return to the dressing room. Weary from his scrap in the first half, Feeney, as well as the rest of the Em-Roes, descended the flight of stairs to the Mayor's office and were met by an angry mob. It was a race to the dressing room as the players narrowly escaped the pack of rabid fans. Feeney slipped away as a spectator tore the jersey from his back. Police cleared the scene, and after an hour or so, notified the Em-Roes that it was safe to come out and finish the game. Feeney, bloody and shirtless, entered the playing floor for the second half and led his team to a dramatic victory. At the end of the game, law enforcement officers escorted the Em-Roes out of town. For their winning efforts, Feeney and his teammates each received five dollars' - Todd Gould, From the Introduction. As fire is to prairie or water to fish, so is basketball part of the natural environment in Indiana. Round ball, or Hoosier Hysteria is so much a part of the state's heritage that many people believe basketball was invented in Indiana. Naismith's game is a virtual religion in the state. While everyone knows about the growth of basketball in high schools and in college, the story of Indiana's role in the development of professional basketball has not been told before. It is a fascinating, passionate, lively story of men who loved the game and were willing to play for nickels, of raucous fans, local heroes, and love of the game. Growing out of an award-winning documentary, "Pioneers of the Hardwood" tells the story of the growth of professional basketball in Indiana in the good old barnstorming days. Gould covers the Indianapolis Em-Roes, the Fort Wayne Pistons (later the Detroit Pistons), the Indianapolis Kautskys, and the Indianapolis Olympians. He sets his story within the context of the times and also discusses some of the teams that the local heroes competed against, including the famous New York Celtics (the original Celtics) and the gifted Harlem Rens, the first all black professional team. The book is based on extensive research as well as revealing interviews with former players John Wooden, collegiate all-American Ralph Beard, Pat Malaska, Frank Baird, and others. Indiana teams were frequently 'world champions'. The Fort Wayne Pistons dominated professional basketball for a number of years. "Pioneers of the Hardwood" is an essential part of the story of the growth of professional basketball in the first half of this century. As Gould puts it, 'Before stars such as Larry Bird or Oscar Robertson, before the high-priced basketball shoe advertisements, and before the success of the NBA, before

the Indiana Pacers, the forefathers of professional basketball forged a remarkable legacy as unlikely and as magical as a last-second shot spells a championship. Under primitive conditions, these fabled sportsmen laid a hardwood foundation for others to follow'. This is their story.

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