

Basketball's Jump Shot Killing Game's Finesse

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Grayson's Scoreboard

NEW YORK – Dick McGuire of the New York Knickerbockers, who plays it the way they always did, was wondering about the whole business of basketball in this era of three-figure scoreboards.

“You set up a play, pick off a man clean,” he was saying. “You’ve got a guy home free underneath. Feed him and he scores. It took four or five good moves to get it done. But you figure it was worth it. You scored.”

“Then the other team brings the ball down. They make one pass. The guy goes up into the air so high you think he’s looking for somebody in the mezzanine. Then he shoots – and bingo! – he’s got his basket. Now you have to go back and work for yours. Makes you wonder. I mean, these jump shots – they make the whole thing so easy.”

THIS IS A SAMPLE of what has happened to basketball. The finesse is leaving the sport, at all levels, in a hurry. The 24-second rule in the professional game isn’t doing it. Nor are the 6-10 and over pivotmen.

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 two top college scorers - Darrell Floyd of Furman and Robin Freeman of Ohio State – are jump shot artists. Freeman gets up to 46 points a game with him. He does it simply. He just jumps into the air, bends backwards like a playing card and throws the ball with a flipping motion from behind his head. He scores enough with it to drive you crazy.

FLOYD DOES THE SAME thing. The Furman kid throws his so high in the air nobody, Bill Russell of

San Francisco included, would have a chance to block it.

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 sports’ version of the hit-and-run. In the pros, only Philadelphia and New York practices it to any extent. Around the rest of the nation, the jump shot does it all. You leave out San Francisco, of course, because Russell makes them the exception. The Dons play their own way.

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IN GIVE-AND-GO basketball, the play’s object is to work the ball until you’ve got two defense men in a position where, if an offensive man cuts to the basket, they bang into each other. The result usually is the offensive man taking a pass at full speed and laying one in with the same motion.

It is pretty to watch and it made the sport big for spectators. But it’s a thing of the past now.

Some, like McGuire or Bob Cousy of Boston, practice it. But they have to wonder when they see how easy points can be gotten with the jump.

A guy by the name of Hank Luisetti started it all. Today, the high school kid does it with alarming ease. The same kid is a cinch not to have the first idea of what a give-and-go play is.

“I wish somebody would tell me what to do about it,” McGuire says. He’s not alone.