Beyond the Game: Understanding 1980s Chicago Through Basketball

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Introduction

In 1891, Dr. James Naismith climbed up 10 feet high on a ladder and nailed a peach basket to the wall of a school gymnasium in Springfield, Massachusetts. In doing so, Naismith created the first basketball hoop and invented the game as a new activity for his physical education students. One can picture a very different scene some 90 years later. It is a hot Saturday afternoon in the summer. Crowds are wrapped along a chain link fence that borders the hot asphalt court at Nat King Cole Park on the South side of Chicago. Amidst the hollering and catcalls from the audience, the players, athletic young black men, are running, jumping, and creating a chorus of their own with jabbering smack talk and the squeaks of their sneakers. On this community stage, they show off their basketball skills with behind the back passes, dribbles through their legs, and alley-oop slam dunks. The court is a proving ground for these players; a place where they can develop a reputation and gain a certain celebrity status in the neighborhood. While Nat King Cole Park and the dozens of other courts around the city are no Chicago Stadium, the crowds and players at these courts act as if they really were at the home of the Chicago Bulls.

By the 1980s, the game of basketball had become an urban sensation in the inner city communities of Chicago. The city game, or street basketball, was fundamentally different from the traditional game Naismith originally created. Street basketball emphasized flair with its fancy plays and trick moves amidst raucous crowds, and reflected a sense of urban swagger and showmanship. The game was very popular, in part because it was easily accessible, a ball and hoop being the only equipment necessary. This helped the game become firmly entrenched in

the poorer neighborhoods of the city. In addition, basketball offered the community a form of

free entertainment around which the crowds would rally. The basketball court became a focal

point in the urban neighborhoods where fans could congregate and players could elevate.

Historiography

At the same time, the city of Chicago, itself, was in the midst of turmoil. Alton Miller's

book, *Harold Washington The Mayor, The Man*, is a leading resource on the Harold

Washington's mayoral legacy. Miller served as the mayor's press secretary and speechwriter

from 1985-1987 and often served as Washington's confidant amidst the political turmoil. As

such, his book is one of the few documents that offers many of Washington's perspectives during

the Council Wars. In the monograph, Miller describes the political shift in Chicago during

Washington's election and the ensuing political crisis following his inauguration.

In 1983, Harold Washington's victory in the mayoral election set off a fierce political

split in the city and marked a clear change in Chicago politics. For years, the city was effectively

governed by what was known as the "Chicago Democratic Machine" or the "Machine" for short.

This moniker referred to the Democrats' strong control over city politics during the mid-20th

century. The Democratic Machine extensively used a system of patronage, in which government

employees were employed and incentivized as a result of their political loyalty to the Democratic

party, to gain and maintain its majority support throughout the city. The Machine was especially

powerful during Richard J. Daley's 21-year mayoral reign from 1955-1976. During Daley's

tenure, the Machine politics emphasized employment, specifically in manufacturing and the

nearby steel mills.[1] Daley faced little opposition in the city council and thus was able to pass his

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[1] Miller, Alton, *Harold Washington: the Mayor, the Man* (Chicago: Bonus, 1989). p. 96.

political measures with relative ease. Upon Daley's death in 1976, however, the Democratic Machine appeared to be in danger as new mayoral candidates sought to change the city's political course.

Following Washington's mayoral victory, the three year period, from 1983 to 1986, came to be known as the "Council Wars," in which the old Machine loyalists and Washington's new republican stance faced off with both sides refusing to budge. Although, Washington held significant power as the mayor, he still needed a majority vote from the fifty-seat City Council in order to pass any of his resolutions. Twenty-nine of the fifty City Council seats formed an opposition group that strategically blocked any of Washington's major plans. Two of the city's most powerful Aldermen, Ed Vrdolyak and Ed Burke, led the opposition group, known as the "Eddies" and voted against Washington's proposals. While the block was enough to void any of Washington's attempt to pass city ordinances, the opposing aldermen, too could not pass a bill: "the anti- administration faction cannot muster the necessary two-thirds vote to ward off Washington's most potent weapon. It takes 34 aldermen to override a mayoral veto."[2] Thus, the city government was effectively in a deadlock, with neither side able to pass a major city ordinance, nor willing to budge on its respective stance.

Alton Miller describes the downfall of the Democratic Machine leading into Washington's inauguration. He notes that the Machine still existed following 1976 but was doomed by the 1979 Shakman decision.[3] The Shakman decision was the result of a lawsuit against Cook County (Chicago's county) in which the City's political leaders were accused of using incentives for employees, and hiring and firing government employees based on their

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[2] Thom Shanker, "Council Wars," *Chicago Tribune*, March 31, 1985.
[3] Miller, *Harold Washington: the Mayor, the Man.* p. 98.

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political preference. Miller points to the U.S. Judge Nicholas Bua's decision, that government could no longer use its patronage system, as the striking blow that ended the Democratic Machine.[4] In addition, Miller notes that "the fact is, the Machine was dead of natural causes. Harold Washington hadn't killed it, didn't claim he had. Patronage had dried up, and the Machine had atrophied."[5] In this description, Miller argues that the change in Chicago's political landscape was not the result of Washington, an anti-machine reformer, taking mayoral office. Rather, he points to the legal decision, in which the Machine's patronage practices were outlawed, as the source of the Machine's downfall.

This is an important claim when considering the Council Wars and the split between Harold Washington and his City Council rivals. Washington's opposition, the Eddies, was comprised primarily of Machine politicians looking to maintain their political strongholds. Miller describes this notion as he summarizes Washington's views on the Council Wars: "he saw the 'Council Wars'...as a simple brute struggle for power...the archrival aldermen, Edward Vrdolyak and Edward Burke...[as] renegades, terrorists, unable to revive the Machine, but willing to hold the city hostage until they got their personal concessions."[6] From this, it is clear that the Washington side of the Council Wars saw the conflict as a political stalemate driven solely by the opposition's resistance to the changing style of politics and a loss of power formerly enjoyed during the Machine era. Furthermore, Miller's examples point out that this change was inevitable and not particular to Washington's new mayoral post. In this sense, Miller appears to depict Washington as a political victim, seemingly attacked and accused for

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[4] Ibid. p. 98-99.
[5] Ibid. p. 98.
[6] Ibid. p. 21.

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changing the Council's political power structure, despite the unavoidable change that was to take place following the Shakman decision.

Also notable in the City Council split, is the makeup of the opposing sides. Sixteen of Washington's twenty-one supporters in Council were black, while twenty-eight of the twenty-nine "Eddies" were white. Herein there existed not only a political divide, but also a contentious split between two races, which had a significant impact on both sides' political strategies and will be discussed further in this thesis.

As the City Council argued about implementing programs, the city of Chicago struggled with growing tension from its citizens regarding the dwindling community conditions and need for community development. The City Council minutes, written in a boilerplate format, do not offer actual dialogue from these meetings and discussions. Journalist and author George Rivlin offers perhaps the detailed accounts and quotes from these political dealings. Covering the Council Wars for his book, *Fire on the Prairie*, Rivlin was one of the journalists closest to the events. His book remains as one of the most thorough and insightful descriptions of the Council Wars.

Rivlin points out that the Council Wars were more than just a voting bloc on certain proposals, rather they were an emotional and racially-charged affair. Alderman Richard Mell, for example is an example of how these dealings were constructed. Mell, a white alderman, was on the fence about choosing to support Washington or the "Eddies." Recounting a phone conversation with Washington, Mell notes how he tried to convince the mayor that this was not a racial issue: "the split doesn't need to be in stone...Eddie's color isn't black or white but green. All you have to do is give Eddie a little green, and you've got everything else you want...don't

make this city suffer for three hundred years of injustice against your people. Don't make me and others pay for it...Let's not make this city another Detroit."[7] After his inauguration, Washington felt attacked by his opposition and believed the blockade to be racially motivated. This would prove to be a guiding force in his mayoral actions and strategies as it pertained to using sports to attract votes.

In a contribution piece to *The New Black Vote*, Abdul Alkalimat and David Gills take a different approach in analyzing Chicago's political atmosphere in the late 1970s and early 1980s. While Miller pointed to legislation as the main reason for a weakened Democratic Machine and the shift in city's politics with Harold Washington, Alkalimat and Gills see the issue as one based in race. They too, describe the patronage tactics of the machine but look at its results among different races. They note that the "jobs and economic favors were differentially and disproportionately allocated, based upon voting strength, which in turn was based on which ethnic groups were represented. Irish votes counted more than those of Blacks, and Blacks were given jobs on the lower levels."[8] This is a noteworthy detail that Miller does not address.

While Miller does describe the Machine's patronage, he does not mention that African Americans received lesser benefits and worse jobs in the political dealings. In addition to the patronage disparity, Alkalimat and Gills point to the black and Hispanic communities' struggles in seven other areas that drove toward a black coalition backing Washington's campaign. The

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[7] Rivlin, Gary, *Fire on the Prairie: Chicago's Harold Washington and the Politics of Race* (New York: Henry Holt:1992). p. 223-224.
[8] Alkalimat, Abdul, and Doug Gills, "Black Power vs. Racism: Harold Washington Becomes Mayor," in *The New Black Vote Politics and Power in Four American Cities*, ed. Rod Bush (San Francisco: Synthesis Publications, 1984). p. 66.

authors list these issues as: health, education, public housing, political representation, business and job opportunity, unemployment and welfare, and private housing development.[9]

In each of these arenas, Alkalimat and Gills offer telling statistics that represent the disparity between blacks and Hispanics and the white majority. They point to the decaying public housing projects and report that 90% of the city's public housing units were inhabited by black citizens.[10] Despite this overwhelming majority, the authors write that blacks were still underrepresented in the Chicago Housing Authority's (CHA) decision-making process and developed a black coalition, albeit an unsuccessful one, to fight for greater representation.[11] According to Alkalimat and Gills, another example of the disparity between whites and minorities existed in unemployment and welfare. They note that "in December 1982 the unemployment rate in Chicago was 13.7%. For Blacks as a whole it was 20.4%, and for Black youth (ages 16-24) the unemployment rate was a staggering 40.1%."[12] These dismal numbers did, however, prompt change from the communities. Alkalimat and Gills write that the social reform group, POWER (People Organized for Welfare Economic Reform) grew in its "number of the poor white, Black, and Latino unemployed, and the expanding number of welfare-dependent family heads in the Chicago area."[13] Furthermore, POWER, a grass-roots reform group, sought political change in the city to accomplish its goals for improved welfare. The authors note that the grass-roots organization's "elements were involved in the particular tactics

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[9] Ibid. p. 68.
[10] Ibid. p. 74.
[11] Ibid. p. 77.
[12] Ibid. p. 79.
[13] Ibid. p. 80.

of the electoral process underpinning Harold Washington's campaign," and "spearheaded the citywide coalition build-up to push the voter registration…to 'protest at the polls.'"[14]

With these examples, Alkalimat and Gills show a clear, growing movement among the struggling black members of the city to push for a change in Chicago politics. In highlighting the dire conditions of these minorities, the authors offer a landscape of the city and point to these problems as the driving force behind the black community's call for political change. Alkalimat and Gills provide a thorough analysis of the community members and their efforts during the election process. This is an important distinction as the authors show what appears to be a break between the minority communities and the politicians. The politicians, according to Rivlin and Miller, were concerned with the power struggle between old Machine supporters and the new opposition. Alkalimat and Gills' analysis offers the notion that the people in the struggling communities focused the political rift in a racial, black vs. white context and sought to win the battle with fervent grass-roots efforts.

Robert Brehm was the Director of community development at the Bickerdike apartments during the 1980s. In his contribution to the book, *Harold Washington and the Neighborhoods*, Brehm, too, echoes Alkalimat and Gills' ideas of grass-roots efforts in Harold Washington's campaign. Brehm points out that "for many years prior to 1983, most progressive community groups stayed far away from any involvement in politics or city government."[15] However, with Harold Washington on the mayoral ballot, that long-existing stance quickly changed. Brehm writes: "the candidacy and subsequent election of Harold Washington changed all that, perhaps

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[14] Ibid. p. 80-81.
[15] Brehm, Robert, "The City and the Neigborhoods: Was It Really a Two-Way Street?" in *Harold Washington and the Neighborhoods: Progressive City Government in Chicago, 1983-1987*, ed. Pierre Clavel and Wim Wiewel (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1991) p. 245.

forever. In the black neighborhoods, Washington's candidacy was a political happening of almost revolutionary proportions."[16] From this description, Brehm offers the notion that Washington served as an iconic black leader which the black community could rally around. In doing so, these minority groups joined the political foray which they had previously avoided throughout the years. Brehm further paints the grass-roots picture and shows its role in the change of Chicago politics noting that "in the black wards, in addition to the fervor Harold himself generated, most of the political ward organizations aligned with the machine switched to support Harold after the primary, and this greatly enhanced the vote totals for him."[17]

With these statements, Brehm offers his belief that a strong grass-roots movement, backed by the black community, and led by Washington, was responsible for the new, political ideology in Chicago and the now weakened Democratic Machine. As a community developer and activist himself, Brehm's position on the issue is to be expected. However, this belief, expressed in the written account of one of the activists, offers a clearer sense of the grass-roots activism that took place. Brehm's account expresses the community members' point of view and depicts their mindset that they were influential in a major political shift in the city. Summarizing Washington's legacy, Brehm notes that "not much of lasting value was accomplished in terms of community involvement in planning and development. In fact, Harold Washington's most meaningful contributions came in his role as a grass-roots political leader."[18] While I will further address the community development issue in chapter two, this is a telling quotation. Washington is again applauded for his grass-roots leadership, a service which, amidst the Council Wars and political deadlock, activists such as Brehm, saw as his lasting legacy.

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[16] Ibid. p.246.
[17] Ibid. p.247.
[18] Ibid. p.241.

Plan

With the backdrop of political deadlock and dire conditions in Chicago, I return my focus to the game of basketball. Since its inception, many different groups adopted basketball to spread a message. When the game was first invented, James Naismith sought to use it to instill Christian values in his YMCA students. Later the game was a form of entertainment in conjunction with jazz for blacks in cities like Chicago and New York. Further, basketball was adopted as a tool for political favor and community development among youths. My research question for this thesis is how was basketball used to be more than a game? In answering this question, I will look at these different groups and their messages regarding basketball and their overall goals. Specifically, this thesis addresses this question amidst the turmoil in Chicago during the 1980s. The depictions of basketball and the assumptions about the game made by different groups offer insight into the ways basketball was molded into different roles and held to a higher standard than simply sport. It is through this analysis that I look to make my contribution to historical literature about Chicago in the 1980s. Many different books and perspectives address the end of the Democratic Machine and the Council Wars during this time period. In this thesis, I fuse the Chicago history with an analysis of basketball, a major cultural phenomenon during the time period, and a game with great responsibility from its inception. From the combination of basketball history and Chicago history, I hope to offer a historical perspective on the history of Chicago through a basketball lens.

In analyzing the different uses of basketball, it is important to look at the first stages of the game. The first chapter of this thesis describes the founder of basketball, James Naismith, and his intentions when he invented the sport. As a physical education teacher at a Massachusetts YMCA, Naismith was charged with creating an indoor game that still maintained

the Christian values of the YMCA. This chapter, then, shows the origins of basketball and how, even from its beginning, basketball was held to be more than a game as a tool for youth development. In addition, this chapter looks at how basketball spread beyond the original YMCA. Specifically, it focuses on how basketball grew to become a major part of the black community.

In conjunction with jazz music, basketball in urban black areas, including Chicago, came to use more improvisation and a faster pace. In this setting, fast break basketball and what was known as the "black style" of basketball emerged. These early uses and transformations of basketball show the important cultural influence of the game. The marked difference between a white organizer favoring structured play and the loose, fast-paced black style of basketball sets the stage for the following two chapters and the case study of Chicago between external and internal agents using basketball for different purposes.

Next, I will look begin a test case analysis, looking specifically at basketball and the organized attempts to use the game in Chicago during the 1980s. While City Council members and other community leaders did not exactly mythologize basketball or focus the majority of their political efforts toward the sport, these officials, too, held the sport to be more than just a game. Earlier in this introduction I discussed the grass-roots efforts leading up to Washington's elections and community activists' call for greater community development efforts. Continuing this conversation, this chapter looks at Mayor Washington's use of basketball and community efforts during the Council Wars deadlock. This chapter looks at basketball's role in the mayor's community development plans, as well as organized, grass-roots efforts to use the game for community development.

This is most clearly represented in the city's Midnight Basketball League. I address in this chapter how the Midnight Basketball League in Chicago was an expression of the grass-roots effort and a response to the Council Wars' inactivity to create an organized basketball program used for youth development and anti-crime efforts. This chapter, then, shows how the game, from the perspective of city politicians, was in a way, adopted to be a community tool and a key political instrument during the Council Wars. In addition to the City Council decisions, this chapter addresses other organizations and their use of basketball. The city's professional basketball team, the Chicago Bulls, and their star player, Michael Jordan, had a strong impact on the community and provide another example of the organized agents using basketball. Through this analysis, this chapter provides a deeper understanding of the external agents that organized efforts using basketball to achieve various goals. These characters show how the game of basketball was elevated beyond its role as a sport and pushed to carry more cultural and political influence.

In the third chapter, the analysis shifts toward the internal agents of the sport and takes a deeper look at basketball on the streets. The street game, where thunderous slam dunks and crisp crossovers were commonplace, is an important piece of the basketball study. With the close connection to the crowd and the element of community, pickup basketball played an important role in shaping the use of basketball during the 1980s. With nicknames for different players and word-of-mouth stories that travelled about the community, street basketball, perhaps more than any other form of the game, created the mythology about the sport that still exists today. This chapter describes the unorganized basketball setting in Chicago and gives examples of specific street "legends" who personify the basketball mythologies that were created. In addition, this chapter addresses the persisting crime and drug violence in the city and their ties to the

basketball community. Looking at the game on the individual and street level, this chapter provides an internal analysis of basketball's place in the inner city. From this, the third chapter offers a clear look at how basketball was taken to be more than just a game among community members and the importance it held in the inner city.

Chapter One: The Invention of Basketball and its Early Uses

When Dr. James Naismith climbed up ten feet high in 1891 to nail a peach basket to the gymnasium wall at the Springfield, Massachusetts YMCA, he created the first ever basketball hoop and an incredible sports phenomenon. This monumental moment was the start of what has become one of the world's most popular sports. The game of basketball has transformed immensely since that first, wintery day. It has become a major collegiate, professional, and Olympic sport, generating billions of dollars of revenue each year. Additionally, the game has spread to nearly every country throughout the globe. Yet to effectively study basketball and its uses throughout history it is important to first focus on its origins.

This thesis analyzes the different ways in which basketball has been used as more than a sport and instead held to be a social tool or cultural focal point. In this analysis, it is important then to study the roots of the game itself, in order to recognize the original intentions for basketball and trace its development throughout the 20th century. Thus, this chapter looks at the invention of basketball and the ways in which Naismith hoped to use the sport as more than a game. By recognizing that even from the game's inception, there existed an onus for the sport to serve a greater purpose, we can see how the game further developed and became a strategic tool for other interested groups in the later decades of the century.

Additionally, this chapter will examine how the game travelled throughout the U.S. While the sport was invented in Massachusetts, it quickly spread to other regions of the country. In doing this, the game attracted new members from different races and social classes. One class of particular note were the southern African Americans who adopted the game amidst the Great

Migration. Early black basketball events in the beginning of the 20th century marked some of the distinct racial elements of basketball that had developed. Basketball in the urban Midwest, specifically Chicago, began to take a specifically celebrated role in the black communities. This chapter, then, analyzes this growing phenomenon and looks at these events in light of a greater overall focus on how the game of basketball was adopted to embody characteristics beyond simply that of a recreational game.

James Naismith

James Naismith was born in 1861 in a small town outside of Ontario, Canada. Throughout his youth, Naismith worked on the pioneer farms and remained very active in athletics. As a student at McGill University, Naismith excelled in a number of sports including swimming, track, boxing, and high-jump.[19] This active lifestyle later led him to begin a career as a physical education teacher and coach. However, it should also be noted that Naismith was a devout Christian. Following his graduation from McGill, he enrolled in the University's Presbyterian Seminary, with plans to become a Presbyterian minister. In order to pay for his seminary education, Naismith took a job at McGill as a physical education teacher.[20] Again, it is clear that Naismith maintained a strong interest in athletics, while still pursuing a clerical career.

As Naismith's focus on athletics grew, so too did the tension with his Presbyterian peers. The violence and bruising from his rugby matches appeared to run against the peaceful and virtuous character that those in the seminary looked to cultivate: "His theological classmates, observing his shiners and reminding him that rugby was the tool of the devil, prayed for his soul,

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[19] Webb, Bernice Larson, *The Basketball Man, James Naismith* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1973). p. 31.
[20] Ibid. p.38.

and his professors warned him that ordination was not for such as he." [21] This draws out a notable relationship between sports and religion at that time. Naismith in this case was a devout Christian looking to become an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church. Yet, at the same time, he was a passionate athlete and receiving criticism for his attempts to juggle the two lifestyles. The tension between the two shows a strong opposition to any type of violence from the Presbyterian community. Despite the fact that the contact and bruising was the result of playful competition, rather than intentional violence, Naismith's sports were still looked down upon. This is especially relevant to this thesis as it depicts a time before sports held a prominent role in society. While sports, especially basketball, later became tools for personal and, eventually, community development, in Naismith's experience they appear to have little esteem. Instead, sports, according to Webb's description, were described as "tools of the devil." This is notable as sports during the 19th century were viewed as more than games or activities, but as religious devices, according to the Presbyterians in the text, that promoted violence and evil for the participants.

In his book, *Basketball: Its Origin and Development*, Naismith writes of his early experience with sports and how he came to develop basketball. He offers one particular anecdote from one of his rugby contests in which one of his teammates blurted out some profane curses, yet apologized to Naismith soon afterward. [22] Reflecting on the incident, Naismith writes "This surprised me more than a little. I had never said a word about his profanity, and I could not understand why he should have apologized to me...A few days later...I brought up the point

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[21]Webb, Bernice Larson, *The Basketball Man, James Naismith.* p. 38. Webb's interview with George and Margaret Naismith Stanley; Sept. 3 1963; Gilman, CO.
[22] Naismith, James, *Basketball: Its Origin and Development* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1996). p.23.

that I thought there might be other effective ways of doing good besides preaching."[23] In this Naismith explains his early understanding that perhaps he could achieve a balancing act between religion and athletics began to develop Christian values. According to Naismith, then, it appears that he saw the respect he garnered on the field of play as a positive byproduct of sports, contrary to the criticisms of his Presbyterian peers and professors. The notion that admiration and virtuous principles could result from athletics appears to have had a significant impact on Naismith's view on sports as well as his future plans.

Soon after, Naismith followed up on this idea and became an instructor at the Young Men's Christian Association, (YMCA) in Montreal. In her biography of James Naismith, *The Basketball Man, James Naismith*, Bernice Larson Webb notes that unlike his peers at the seminary, Naismith seemed to believe that sports could promote the message of the church: "He thought that a man who could play a masterful, clean game and help others learn to play it had an unequaled opportunity to gain the confidence of young people, to teach them to become good citizens, and to help them become worthwhile and happy human beings."[24] This mindset was not particular to Naismith at the turn of the 20th century. Proponents of sports, especially basketball, in youth development have argued that athletics offer a unique outlet by which to reach troubled youths. They believe that sports can attract teens and children to join an educational program or setting where a greater message can be taught. Naismith supports this notion with the example of the Hull House in Chicago which "scheduled several [basketball] games with outside organizations and it found that basketball was a material help in keeping

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[23] Ibid. p.23.
[24] Webb, Bernice Larson, *The Basketball Man, James Naismith.* p. 42.

some of the boys off the streets."[25] A prime example of this notion in the 1980s is the Midnight Basketball League which will be discussed later in the thesis.

In 1891, Naismith began working at YMCA in Springfield, Massachusetts. There he worked closely with Luther Gulick Jr., the Springfield YMCA superintendent and a pioneer in the development of the YMCA. In fact, Gulick was the creator of the upside down triangle that remains the key symbol for the association even today. This symbol was meant to represent a unity between mind, body, and spirit, which Gulick believed was essential to the full development of young, Christian men. With this in mind, Gulick pushed Naismith to teach these ideals to his students in his physical education classes. While Naismith was effective in teaching these principals and was succeeding as a physical education instructor, indoor recreation during winter months was becoming an increasing issue for Naismith and Gulick. Gulick grew concerned that indoor gymnastics and calisthenics were becoming too repetitive for students.

Students began to get restless in the classes and rebel against the repetitive exercises. Thus Gulick insisted that the indoor activities become more "recreational."[26] This was a good plan in theory, but proved to be quite difficult for both Naismith and Gulick. They found themselves constrained by the hard indoor surfaces and a lack of space, compared to the outdoor fields that were used in warmer weather. Furthermore, Naismith wanted a new game that would continue his goal of developing his students: "a children's game cannot be successfully adapted to an adult situation: "Those boys simply would not come indoors to play 'drop the handkerchief!'"[27] In this instance it appears that Naismith not only hoped to create a game for the students to enjoy, but also he considered the young men to be in the midst of an important

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[25] Naismith, James, *Basketball: Its Origin and Development.* p.135.
[26] Webb, Bernice Larson, *The Basketball Man, James Naismith.* p. 56.
[27] Ibid .p. 56.

growth process. That he refused to undermine them with a children's game and considered his students adults, shows his belief in the role of athletics in youth maturation. Additionally, Naismith looked to create a game that involved non-violence, again reflecting Christian ideals and promoting good character in his students. Thus, he looked to develop a game in which players could not run with the ball. He recalls this approach noting "if he can't run with the ball, we don't have to tackle; and if we don't have to tackle, the roughness will be eliminated."[28]

Finally, Naismith conceived the idea of an indoor game similar to his favorite sports of lacrosse and rugby that would be safe, yet competitive, in an indoor setting. He came up with an idea where the goal would be elevated above the players' heads and players would throw a soccer or rugby ball to try and score in the goals. This way, he could introduce a game with minimal physical contact, yet still challenge the players with accuracy in attempting to score. It is odd to think, but basketball was close to becoming known as "Box Ball" as Naismith first wanted to hang two boxes in the gymnasium but could not find any.[29] Instead he used round peach baskets as goals and the game of basketball was born.

In creating the game, Naismith wrote the thirteen original rules of basketball to serve as set guidelines for how the game should be played. Upon examining these rules, one can see the traces of the Christian, nonviolent undertones, which Naismith promoted. This is evident in the second rule: "The ball may be batted in any direction with one or both hands (never with the fist)."[30] Here, Naismith makes an important distinction that player may never use their fists, implying a type of precautionary measure against a possibly wayward fist catching another player or some form of violence. In rule number five, Naismith writes "No shouldering, holding,

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[28] Naismith, James, *Basketball: Its Origin and Development*. p.46.
[29] Ibid. p.52-53.
[30] Ibid. p. 53-54.

pushing, tripping, or striking, in any way the person of an opponent shall be allowed; the first infringement of this rule by any player shall count as a foul, the second shall disqualify him until the next goal is made, or, if there was evident intent to injure the person, for the whole of the game, no substitute allowed."[31] In this rule, Naismith explicitly outlaws any violence, intentional or otherwise, and continues on to say that if the violence was intentional, then the offender is ejected from the game. In this, Naismith's rules show a direct stress on keeping the game from becoming too physical and makes distinct provisions in case the game does become violent, and strays from his Christian-teaching intentions.

Another rule, number thirteen, alludes to the ideas of respect and communication: "The side making the most goals in that time shall be declared the winner. In case of a draw, the game may, by agreement of the captains, be continued until another goal is made."[32] By noting that the captains may reach an agreement regarding an overtime period, Naismith denotes an emphasis on respect between competitors and a willingness to cooperate with each other. This is also notable in the fact that, in order to continue playing the game, the opposing captains must agree together. That is, this rule forces opponents to maintain some basic level of respect in order to preserve the right to keep playing a game that quickly became so popular.

After the first game in 1891, basketball quickly spread throughout the country. Naismith points out that "at Christmas vacation a number of the students went home and some of them started the game in their local YMCA's (sic)."[33] In January, the game also spread to other YMCAs after Naismith's Springfield YMCA printed and distributed the rules of basketball in its

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[31] Ibid. p. 54.
[32] Ibid. p. 54.
[33] Ibid. p. 59.

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newspaper, the *Triangle*.[34] This was due in large part to the far reaching effects of the YMCA. Because the YMCA held such a strong emphasis on physical development, almost all YMCAs had a gymnasium.[35] As a result, once the YMCA nationally introduced the game in its newspaper, *The Triangle*, in 1892, people picked up the sport across the country at their local YMCA.

Beginning of "Black Basketball"

In discussing the spread of basketball and the sport's growing popularity, it is important to also note the rise of basketball in among the black communities. Initially, many YMCAs, despite their Christian values and focus on character, did not allow black members. As a result, all-black YMCAs began to emerge in the beginning of the 20th century. One of the most well-known black YMCAs was the Wabash Avenue YMCA on the South Side of Chicago. The Wabash YMCA was first opened in 1914 and provided housing and job training for blacks in the surrounding poor communities.[36] It was especially helpful during throughout the 1910s and 1920s as a haven for blacks new to Chicago following the Great Migration. Because of its prominence and success, the Wabash YMCA is listed on the National Register of Historic Places

The Wabash YMCA is also notable for its basketball history. The official basketball encyclopedia of the NBA, Hoopedia, lists the Wabash YMCA as one of its landmark YMCAs because its basketball teams held a "preeminent reputation."[37] While the Wabash teams struggled in their opening years, they quickly became a powerhouse among black YMCAs. According to

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[34] Ibid. p. 59.
[35] Webb, Bernice Larson, *The Basketball Man, James Naismith. p. 68.*
[36] United States Department of the Interior. National Registry for Historic Places-Inventory Nomination Form. Nov. 7, 1985. p.10.
[37] "Wabash Avenue YMCA." *Hoopedia.* Available at: http://hoopedia.nba.com/index.php?title=Wabash_Avenue_YMCA. (Viewed Feb. 17, 2011).

the encyclopedia, beginning in 1916 and "for the next four years, the Wabash YMCA team was the premier amateur African American team in the city and competed against the top amateur teams in the Midwest and the East."[38] Following its successes in the late 1910s, the Wabash YMCA shifted its focus. It instead concentrated on its youth basketball programs, rather than fielding teams to compete in regional competitions.[39]

Henry R. Crawford played an important role in developing the Wabash YMCA's youth basketball initiative. Like Naismith, Crawford arrived at the Wabash YMCA in 1915 as a physical education teacher. There he organized the center's first basketball leagues. While literature on Crawford is limited, prominent black newspaper, *The Chicago Defender*, ran a telling article upon Crawford's retirement in 1950. The article points to his success in mentoring the youths under his tutelage noting that "there have been so many, many youngsters who have been literally snatched from the juvenile home or perhaps the county jail and shoved on the road to respectability and success by Crawford."[40] Additionally, Crawford, too, upheld the principles of teamwork and respect of the YMCA. The *Defender* article notes that Crawford would, at times, kick out troublesome youths "because they put their own personal gain and advancement ahead of the interests of the Wabash Ave. Y."[41] Crawford's focus on youth development and the Wabash YMCA's shift to youth basketball programs are particularly noteworthy. These goals represent an emphasis on youth development through basketball, a plan similar to that of James Naismith.

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[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] "Henry R. Crawford," *Chicago Defender,* Nov. 4, 1950, p. 17.
[41] Ibid. p. 17.

In these early stages of basketball, it is clear to see how the game, though relatively new, was given major responsibility as a social tool. Naismith invented the game as an activity to promote the physical wellbeing of his YMCA students and develop a certain masculinity preached by Presbyterian Christianity. Crawford, too, used basketball as an activity to attract young men on Chicago's dangerous South Side to the Wabash YMCA. Through basketball, then, Crawford was able to teach the youths the YMCA principles. Naismith repeatedly mentions in his book that he was amazed at how popular basketball became and its rapid spread beyond his own Springfield gymnasium. From this, Naismith appears to point out that the game's popularity was instrumental in attracting young men to join the YMCA. His comments about the Hull House in Chicago using the game's popularity to keep teens off the streets, further support his belief that the game was an adequate tool for youth development. Both Naismith and Crawford are examples of the external agents discussed in the introduction. As organizers of games or leagues, Naismith and Crawford used basketball to attract young men to their respective YMCAs. From there, they taught the organization's Christian principles and are seen as influential youth development characters. This external agency is further discussed in the second chapter, however it is important to note that even in the early years of basketball, the game was held by some organizers to be more than a sporting activity.

One of Naismith's understudies was particularly influential in the further development of basketball. John B. McLendon Jr. was a physical education major at the University of Kansas, where Naismith had moved and was coaching basketball.[42] McLendon, a black student, was unable to play for the Kansas team, because of his race. However, he was a successful player in junior college and at Kansas, focused his abilities on coaching basketball. He analyzed

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[42] Caponi-Tabery, Gena, *Jump for Joy: Jazz, Basketball, and Black Culture in 1930s America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2008). p. 85.

Naismith's rigid philosophy involving set plays and a very conservative approach. He refuted these older styles and "saw no reason why his team couldn't move to the basket as soon as they had retrieved the ball after a score. He called this move the 'fast break.'"[43] With this style, McLendon's teams employed a very fast-paced and high scoring attack that looked to use athleticism to defeat the opponent.

In his book, Naismith discusses the changes to the game he invented as basketball evolved. While he mentions that he appreciates, and is even awed, by the skill of the players in his contemporary time, it is also clear that Naismith did not wholly agree with some of his game's evolutions. Naismith writes: "In the process of planning the game, I decided that certain fundamental principles were necessary...2. There shall be no running with the ball."[44] While the rule still stands today, in that players cannot move with the ball without dribbling, Naismith's original game stressed a slower pace and placed an emphasis on teamwork. In this style, players could only move the ball down the court by passing.[45] Additionally, he preferred his original rule in which there was a tip-off or "center jump" following each basket, rather than the contemporary format in which the ball is automatically given to the defending team following a score.[46] Gena Caponi-Tabery, an American Studies scholar and author of *Jump for Joy: Jazz, Basketball, and Black Culture in 1930s America*, points out that the center jump slowed down the players and led to a more controlled half-court game.[47] This in conjunction with Naismith's repeated emphasis on avoiding roughness and violence among the players, shows Naismith's original conception of basketball to be an exciting sport, yet one which stressed skill and self-

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[43] Ibid. p. 86.
[44] Naismith, James, *Basketball: Its Origin and Development.* p. 62.
[45] Ibid. p. 47.
[46] Ibid. p. 86.
[47] Caponi-Tabery, Gena, *Jump for Joy: Jazz, Basketball, and Black Culture in 1930s America.* p. 84.

control. Naismith did not explicitly criticize the fast break style of basketball or many of the other changes to his game. However, in analyzing his original intentions for the sport and comparing the original game to the fast break game that later developed, Naismith appeared to favor his original sport.

If the original basketball rules stressed self-control and organization through a slower style of play, then the fast break basketball, conversely countered these lessons. Instead, the fast break style that McLendon introduced was not a teaching tool, but simply a strategy for on-court success. Caponi-Tabery notes that McLendon used this style of play as a strategy of explosive offensive to make up for a weak defense.[48] It should be noted that a major criticism of today's street basketball is a lack of defense and emphasis on slam-dunks and fast play. Analyzing McLendon's original fast-break theory, I would contend that these street basketball elements trace back to the origins of the fast break. Nevertheless, with the slow and controlled original style and the uptempo fast break approaches to basketball, there marked a departure from Naismith's original intention for basketball to be a structured exercise activity that teaches moral lessons. With McLendon there existed a greater focus on winning and performing an exciting style of play.

The "fast break" style of basketball soon developed as the "black style" of basketball. It was adopted by many black college teams playing in the CIAA, and all-black college league.[49] This style of play also placed a great deal of emphasis on improvisation and style. Because the fast break strategy depended on speed and quick decisions, many of the moves and plays were improvised. Caponi-Tabery writes that these fast break basketball elements were linked to black

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[48] Ibid. p. 86.
[49] Ibid. p. 87.

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culture: "the principles of improvisation and stylization are fundamental to an African American Aesthetic."[50] This was not generally seen as a negative element of basketball, however. In fact, black basketball players were often credited for their influences and innovations to the game. The jumpshot, rather than the set throw associated with Naismith's original game, was invented by black players in the fast break style of basketball.[51] Amidst the fast drives and quick cuts to the hoop, players began to jump in the air to shoot at the goal. Caponi-Tabery uses the example of Bob Davies, a white, standout player for Seton Hall as an example of a white player who credited blacks for their innovations in basketball. She quotes Davies saying "I'd see these great black players *jump in the air*, throw the ball, hit somebody with a pass, or *shoot the ball*, and I guess that stuck in my mind. I think that's what helped me to become a playmaker.[52] In addition, she mentions NBA Hall of Famers Pete Maravich and Bob Cousy as similar early, white jumpshooters who "readily admit to have copied it from the black players they admired."[53]

In addition to the innovative nature of the fast break style of basketball, "black" basketball came to offer a very popular form of entertainment. The improvisational qualities of the game drew many comparisons to black jazz music and the two activities were closely linked in the early 20th century. In fact, basketball games became a part of entertainment events for spectators: "As early as 1923 the *Kansas City Call* advertised a 'Basket Ball-Dance' at the Labor Temple, with music after the game."[54] In Chicago, the Savoy Ballroom, a jazz concert arena actually boasted one of the best basketball teams in the city in the Savoy Big Five.[55] In addition the YMCAs, both black and white, were finally convinced by members to allow for open

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[50] Ibid. p. 90.
[51] Ibid. p. 92.
[52] Ibid. p. 99.
[53] Ibid. p.100.
[54] Ibid. p. 11.
[55] "Savoy Cagers to play Motor City," *Chicago Defender, Oct. 24, 1931. p. 9.*

dancing on the courts, following basketball games.[56] In this way, it is evident how basketball began to take on a meaning of entertainment. It held close musical ties and audience members saw basketball as a spectacle to watch and also a precursor to nights of dancing and their own physical activities.

The basketball and jazz parallel is a very strong one that illustrates the early black influences on the game. While the "fast break" was relatively young, it was also highly entertaining. Without organized plays, the game moved much faster and was not slowed down to set up specific formations. In this fast-paced environment there existed a greater opportunity for creativity. Improvisation was the only way to play without the set plays and thus, players displayed a constant, unexpected exhibit of athleticism. This style of play has led numerous writers to compare the game to jazz music, in which improvisational solos and self-expression are fundamental to the sound. Jazz journalist Larry Blumenfeld explicitly focuses on this phenomenon in his article "Hoops, Kareem, and All That Jazz; Links Between Basketball, Jazz Run Deep." Blumenfeld points to specific similarities between the two, noting that "anyone with knowledge of both basketball and jazz recognizes natural affinities between the two pursuits: a marriage of form and improvisation, of individualism with teamwork; a primacy of rhythm (watch how basketball players dribble the ball before taking foul shots to re-establish a sense of tempo); and a requirement that players respond to one another's choices and to rapidly changing situations in real time."[57] This poignant description shows that the two seemingly unrelated activities, actually share many similar virtues. Much in the way jazz musicians responded to and played off each other, street basketball players reacted and played harmoniously, with both

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[56] Ibid. p. 9.
[57] Larry Blumenfeld, "Hoops, Kareem, and All That Jazz; Links Between Basketball, Jazz Music Run Deep," *Times Picayune,* Feb. 17, 2008.

groups catering to a highly entertained crowd. Also, it should be noted that this phenomenon between basketball and jazz had developed over many years.

In his book *Elevating the Game: Black Men and Basketball*, Nelson George, an African-American culture critic, describes two icons from the 1950s who pioneered the link between basketball and jazz. Marques Haynes, according to the *Chicago Defender*, was a master dribbler and famous for his creative basketball skills while playing in Chicago.[58] According to George, he was the main influence and idol for Magic Johnson, an NBA Hall of Fame inductee, known best for his trick passes and dribbles that resembled the street game. George notes that "Haynes' flamboyance...echoed the best player in the eighties and nineties [Johnson] much as the bebop innovations of a post-World War II player in another game, Charlie "Bird" Parker, still resonate in contemporary jazz."[59] In this quote, George notably points out that not only were basketball and jazz related, but they both developed over the years in a similar fashion.

American music journalist Ken McLeod offers one of the best studies of the connection between basketball and jazz in his article "The Construction of Masculinity in African American Music and Sports" in the *American Music Journal*. While many see the connection between basketball and jazz as a notable comparison, perhaps by chance, McLeod argues that the two activities are linked with a much deeper history. He points out that "Basketball and jazz share several stylized nuances of African American culture derived from the musical, dance and performance traditions associated with slavery and

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[58] "Basketball Fans will eye Marquez Haynes," *Chicago Defender,* Oct. 23, 1948. p. 9.
[59] George, Nelson, *Elevating the Game: Black Men and Basketball,* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992). p. 53.

minstrelsy. Both come to prominence in the 1920s when touring black teams were formed and musicians converged on the northern industrial cities of Chicago and New York.

Underscoring this relationship is the fact that jump bands would often tour on the same bus as basketball teams—with players and musicians regularly fraternizing and attending each other's events."[60] Because players and musicians were often in the same venues black audiences would thus frequently exposed to both activities and, as McLeod believes, develop an appreciation and recognition for the two activities as an interwoven form of entertainment.

This is a notable viewpoint because it looks at the link between basketball and jazz beyond the similarities of improvisation and tempo and refers to a deeply-rooted history that developed in American cities following the end of slavery. McLeod then, argues that basketball and jazz both became a significant part of the urban black culture, starting with the physical presence of the different performers and later manifesting into distinct cultural connections. This is evident as he describes the 1960s and 1970s when "many athletes adopted the Afro hairstyles, a symbol of militant black pride since the late sixties but popularized by musicians such as Jimi Hendrix and Sly Stone. Similarly, both Hendrix and Stone influenced the adoption of headbands worn by many basketball players from Julius Erving to Wilt Chamberlain."[61] McLeod shows in these examples that basketball and jazz not only became intertwined throughout the 19th century, but by the 1980s had become influential focal points of the urban black culture.

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[60] Ken McLeod, "The Construction of Masculinity in African American Music and Sports," *American Music Journal*, Volume 27, Issue 2. Summer, 2009.
[61] Ibid.

From its inception in the Springfield, Massachusetts YMCA in 1891, to the professional teams and entertainment shows in urban centers across the U.S., basketball quickly spread and developed in the decades after it was first invented. While the game's movement across the country and innovations to the game's rules and styles are notable, the different roles of basketball offer a more telling story. Basketball was invented originally as an indoor activity to help restless, young men physically develop and at the same time, learn Christian values. The game was initially used as a tool to capture the attention of young men and keep them interested in exercise. By instilling these good morals, Naismith helped to reshape the Presbyterian notions that athletics and evils of the Bible were inseparable, as evidenced by the YMCA's support for his game nationwide.

Following the invention of basketball, the game became a major urban influence in cities throughout the U.S. The black style, specifically, of basketball marked one of the most drastic changes to the style of play and its effects are evident even in today's basketball games. The growing connection between basketball and the black community further developed with the game's connections to jazz music as the two spread with the Great Migration. In this sense, basketball became a form of entertainment for the black community and a fixed element of black culture, as it grew rooted in the Midwestern cities. In Chicago specifically, the game's enormous popularity led to the formation of successful teams such as the Savoy Big Five and important youth development programs like the Wabash YMCA basketball program. These early basketball landmarks helped establish the game in the city and set the stage for the later basketball developments of the 1980s, towards which I turn my focus.

Chapter Two: Basketball and Community Development

As discussed in the introduction, Chicago during the 1980s was in the midst of serious political turmoil. It is during this period that I focus a test case analysis of Chicago and various uses of basketball to develop a history of Chicago through a basketball lens. This chapter first takes a closer look at the Council Wars that persisted with Harold Washington's rise to the mayor position. In depicting these events, I will show the how the city government became stagnant during the political crisis and the effects of this deadlock on city projects. Specifically, this chapter focuses on the problem of community development. Community development was a priority for the black community leading up to Washington's election and was the driving force behind the grass-roots movement that helped him win the mayoral seat.

However, with the Council Wars blocking and major political action, Washington appeared to be unable to implement significant community development programs. Thus, Chicago toiled with a need for political action and the frustrating inactivity in the City Council. Herein, I look to the application of basketball in various forms as a solution or effort to help remedy some of the city's community development problems. This is primarily addressed through Washington's uses of basketball and the Midnight Basketball League. It should also be noted that this chapter analyzes the external agents of basketball. That is, the organizers and leaders, rather than the players themselves, and their objectives when making use of the game.

Harold Washington became the city's new mayor, and first black mayor, in April of 1983. With this, Washington represented an end of the Democratic Machine era that had controlled Chicago politics for the past three decades. This transition, however, was hardly a

smooth one. Many of the old Machine loyalists still maintained their seats on the City Council and acted as a tough opposition to the mayor, leaving the city's government in a rigid stalemate. Although, Washington held significant power as the mayor, he still needed a majority vote from the fifty-seat City Council in order to pass any of his resolutions. Twenty-nine of the fifty City Council seats formed an opposition group that strategically blocked any of Washington's major plans. Two of the city's most powerful Aldermen, Ed Vrdolyak and Ed Burke, led the opposition group, known as the "Eddies" and voted against Washington's proposals. While the block was enough to void any of Washington's attempt to pass city ordinances, the opposing aldermen, too could not pass a bill: "the anti- administration faction cannot muster the necessary two-thirds vote to ward off Washington's most potent weapon. It takes 34 aldermen to override a mayoral veto."[62] Thus, the city government was effectively in a deadlock, with neither side able to pass a major city ordinance, nor willing to budge on its respective stance.

In his contribution piece to *Harold Washington and the Neighborhoods*, Doug Gills points out that race played a significant role in the Council Wars and Washington's struggles to advance community projects: "racism persisted under the Washington administration. We saw that in the "council wars."...The adverse reaction of party leadership was dramatic...and a source for racial polarization."[63] With this quote, Gills notes that with the racial split in the City Council polarized the (predominantly) black and white sides and added to the existing political tension between the opponents.

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[62] Thom Shanker, "Council Wars." *Chicago Tribune*.
[63] Gills, Doug, "Chicago Politics and Community Development: A Social Movement Perspective," in *Harold Washington and the Neighborhoods: Progressive City Government in Chicago, 1983-1987*, ed. Pierre Clavel and Wim Wiewel (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1991). p. 57.

First, analyzing the split between Washington and the opposition block, it is evident that the tension extended beyond simply voting against and vetoing each other, as numerous personal clashes between the mayor and the aldermen took place during the Council meetings. In July, 1984, only 18 of the 50 Council members showed up for the meeting as most of the Washington opposition boycotted attending. Mayor Washington began to read a statement and according to E. R. Shipp of the New York Times, "Alderman Edward M. Burke, a copy of the Council bylaws in hand, tried to shout him down. Mr. Washington plunged ahead, as those assembled laughed. Mr. Burke shouted 'This is a joke!' threw up his hands in exasperation and sank into his seat."[64] While the meeting only lasted about ten minutes and was rescheduled for a later date, this small clash offers a clear picture of the tension between Mayor Washington standing up at the podium and an angry Alderman Burke arguing from his council chamber. Another notable dispute went beyond political disagreement and involved personal jabs. During one hotly contested council meeting in June, 1985, opposition leader Aldermen Burke challenged Washington to step down from his podium and debate him on the council floor. Washington angrily responded "don't give me any orders, buster," exhibiting his frustration yet also offering a reminder that he was still the mayor, and highest in rank, despite the council deadlock.[65] These personal jabs and outbursts show the frustration of the opposing sides during the Council Wars and further depict how little hope existed for a possible reconcile.

These episodes and the continued voting stalemate garnered the Council Wars national attention. Newspapers including the New York Times, Boston Globe, and Wall Street Journal reported on Chicago's council, pointing out that the city's turmoil was especially severe. John

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[64] E.R. Shipp, "Chicago 'Council Wars' Drag Into Intermission," *New York Times,* Jul. 14, 1984.
[65] James Strong and Manuel Galvan, "Council Wars Flare Again; Block Grant Plan Put Off," *Chicago Tribune,* Jun. 27, 1985.

Helyar and Robert Johnson of the Wall Street Journal, aware Chicago's history of political

turmoil, noted that: "other cities have their share of squabbles and stalled projects, certainly, but

the national spotlight on Chicago's political wars, together with the contrast between the city's

old reputation and the new reality, worsens the problem here. It used to be called 'the city that

works.' Now, it is more often known as 'Beirut on the lake.'"[66] This well-known moniker,

comparing Chicago to the embattled Lebanon capital rife with civil war and fighting, was picked

up across the U.S. and shows the tenacity of such a heated political rivalry.

By the middle of the decade the murder rate in Chicago was climbing to an all-time high.

With a prominence of gangs in the inner city, murders, drug activity, and other forms of crime

made these city areas some of the most decrepit in the country. As the Council Wars continued

in political office, tensions rose regarding these inner-city communities. Community leaders and

activists called for action to help curb the violence and crime, and protect the youth generation

that appeared to be most at risk. One of Washington's most passionate goals was in fact

community development and anti-gang efforts. After all, the grass-roots efforts by coalitions in

the black and Latino communities were instrumental in Washington's election victory.

In June, 1985, Washington fought to gain City Council approval for a plan to use federal

grant funds to fight crime in the poorer neighborhoods of the city. He defended his stance noting

"I don't have to tell you how serious the problems of gang and youth crime are in this city,

especially in minority and low-income neighborhoods…With the temptations of summer and

freedom upon us, it is imperative that we offer our young men and women alternatives that will

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[66] Jon Helyar and Robert Johnson, "Brawling City: Chicago Political Rift Deepens, Worsening City's Many Problems-Black Mayor's Election Fails to Lessen the Tensions; Is it 'Beirut on the Lake'?" *Wall Street Journal*, Aug. 6, 1984.

enrich, rather than erode their lives."[67] This is a notable quote as it offers insight on

Washington's emphasis on community development and one of the clearer cases where he notes

that programs curb gang violence. Noting the "temptations of summer and freedom,"

Washington appears to express a belief that programs outside of the school were vital to youth

development and the anti-gang movement. Despite Washington's proclamations though, his

proposal was denied. The City Council's Finance committee, led by opposition leader Edward

Burke, voted 17-5 against Washington's plan to apply $2 million of federal community

development grants toward fighting youth crime."[68] Burke defended the vote though, noting that

the mayor was unwilling to negotiate with the bloc about distributing the funds. This is a clear

example of the political stalemate that existed during the Council Wars. Despite a need for anti-

crime funds and community development programs, these political dealings stagnated

government progress.

City of Chicago Efforts to Support Recreation and Basketball

A clear example of Mayor Washington's efforts to help the struggling black community

can be seen through his dedication to parks development. One of his first decisions was to

appoint Walter Netsch Jr. as president of the Chicago Park District. Alton Miller notes in his

book that leading up to the election, the city's parks had become a public concern: "A *Sun-

Times*/BGA series showed how Chicago parks, particularly in minority neighborhoods, had been

allowed to deteriorate, contrasted them with the beauty of the parks in the 47th Ward. (sic)"[69] It

should be noted that the 47th Ward was considered one of the white wards at the time. Here

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[67] James Strong and Manuel Galvan, "After Months of Wrangling War on Gangs to Begin," *Chicago Tribune,* Jun. 25, 1985.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Miller, Alton, *Harold Washington: the Mayor, the Man.* p. 259-260.

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again, a racial split arises between black and white wards, and is a case where Washington believed he could close the gap with a zealous new CPD President. Washington looked to Netsch to vastly improve the parks in the poorer black and Hispanic areas and in turn maintain his political support in those communities: "One place the mayor can demonstrate progress in redressing minorities' longstanding complaints of neglect is by improving their neighborhood parks."[70] Previously these communities saw their parks and other city services neglected, which played a role in their deteriorating condition. Thus "Netsch [wa]s trying to shake up one of the city's most entrenched, powerful, patronage fiefdoms, a bureaucracy long accused of skimping on services for the poor, blacks and Hispanics."[71] Amidst the Council Wars deadlock, it appears that Mayor Washington was looking to gain a political higher ground via his emphasis on Parks and Recreation. In this case, community parks, and in turn, basketball courts, were a political point of emphasis. Washington used these efforts to secure his community support in these areas, while at the same time, the communities themselves enjoyed improved facilities. To be fair, Washington did not explicitly name basketball as his focus during this appointment. However, now with a better understanding of the importance of basketball in the urban black communities from chapter one, it is fair to suggest that the parks, and courts, beautification initiative represented a support for these communities where basketball was prominent.

With the mayor's later appointment of Walter Netsch and the focus on the park district in 1986, Washington again showed his belief that the parks were an essential part of winning support in black and Hispanic communities as well as the important role parks and recreation held in the targeted communities. With over 200 outdoor basketball courts in the city of

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[70] Kevin Klose, "Chicago: City That Works On Its Parks," *Washington Post,* Sept. 28, 1986.
[71] Ibid.

Chicago, basketball was an integral part of the Park District's rebuilding initiative.[72] One example of this was Horner Park in the northwest section of the city. One of the largest parks in the city and a prominent basketball haven with four courts, it received multiple maintenance upgrades throughout the 1980s.[73]

In addition to building these parks and funding maintenance upgrades, there existed a perceived link between recreation and crime. In 1983, an ordinance was passed that police officers patrol the courts and recreation areas. According to the City Council minutes, the ordinance proposal urged "that police officers be assigned to all City public parks and be provided with three-wheel motorcycles, where possible, so that they can cover wider areas of the park while on duty, etc."[74] This limited information, coupled with Washington's public calls for anti-crime efforts show a perceived link between crime and the public park areas in that the council would propose new police officer assignments. The city courts were a central common ground for community members, yet the call for police support shows a belief that these communal areas were also a place for crime. The ordinance to assign officers at all of the parks shows the City Council's attempts to manage the court areas and protect the community members around the parks and basketball courts.

Beyond supporting the parks and playgrounds where street basketball existed, Mayor Washington continued his emphasis on basketball by supporting organized play in high schools. While high school basketball was already governed and supported by the Illinois High School Sports Association (IHSA), Washington still encouraged the basketball programs. As mayor, he

[72] "Horner Park" Chicago Park District available online at: http://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/index.cfm/fuseaction/parks.detail/object_id/d078ccc6-7a69-45b3-ada9-a5002db4ddb7.cfm. (Viewed Mar. 13, 2011).
[73] Ibid.
[74] Chicago City Council Journal of Proceedings. Dec. 15, 1983.

introduced the 7-Eleven/Mayor Washington High School Basketball Tournament. Furthermore, the City Council noted a formal resolution to congratulate the victorious Chicago high schools in the tournament. In the City Council meeting, he invited the team members and coaches to receive honorary distinctions to celebrate their championship efforts. In the City Council minutes, Washington noted that the teams "by their spirit, dedication, hard work, and enthusiasm...represent the highest ideas of the 1985-86 7-Eleven/Mayor Washington High School Holiday Basketball Tournament theme, 'Chicago Basketball—We Play It Well!'[75] In addition, the Mayor presented the winning teams with a $1,500 ($500 for runner-up) check and plaques commemorating the event. The mayor also held an awards banquet following the holiday tournament. The mayor's tournament is notable in that, despite his limited abilities for change in the City Council, Washington still maintained a focus on youth development in the city neighborhoods. That he would present monetary rewards (albeit small compared to his grant money proposals) and formally recognize teenagers for their basketball success, shows Washington's continued support and emphasis on youth development, even if his political proposals were rejected.

Similarly, Mayor Washington later invited the team from Chicago high school Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. HS to congratulate them for their State championship victory. Washington acknowledged the team and made a point to celebrate the team's two mottos: "Rise Above The Ordinary," and "If It Is To Be, It's Up To Me."[76] These formal Council notes were accompanied by other resolutions mainly expressing gratitude to fallen police officers and prominent, retiring city officials. That a resolution specifically noted basketball tournaments and successful

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[75] *Chicago City Council Journal of Proceedings.* Jan. 6, 1986.
[76] Ibid.

Chicago teams alongside such high honors demonstrates the city's commitment to basketball, among other sports, as well as strong sense of pride in efforts to support the game.

Also, in these City Council acknowledgments one can see the importance Mayor Washington placed on basketball, beyond the sport itself. He celebrated the ideals of "spirit, dedication, hard work, and enthusiasm" and pointed out team slogans that preached a sense of accountability and ambition. In doing so, Washington and the City Council portrayed basketball to be an effective method for self-improvement. The ideals they specify portray basketball as a practice to develop life skills that can be applied in the workplace or in school. It should be noted that the language used in the City Council recognition statements is very similar to that of James Naismith. Championing ideals of "spirit" and "hard work," Washington appears to offer a similar understanding of basketball's role in youth development. He too, appears to see the game as a tool to teach these ideals and his statement suggests that the champions of the tournament best displayed these values. In this sense, basketball again appears to hold a greater meaning for Mayor Washington. While Parks and Recreation, including basketball, broadly served as a political tool for Washington during the Council Wars, high school basketball served as an educational and community development tool. These ideals, notably, echo the original sentiments about the game when it was first invented by James Naismith.

A major link between Chicago's government and basketball was actually born out of tragedy. On November 21st, 1984, Ben "Benji" Wilson, was walking to a convenience store on the city's South Side, just a few blocks from his high school, Simeon Vocational. As he neared the store, he accidently bumped into another teen, a member of one of the South Side gangs, on the sidewalk, then as one reporter noted "words were exchanged. Shots were fired. Two pierced

Wilson's aorta and liver."[77] Though he was rushed to the hospital, Wilson died early the next day. The death of Wilson, like any teen, was definitely tragic. Yet Benji's death struck especially deep at the community because of his basketball abilities. Ben Wilson, then nearing his senior season at Simeon, had recently been named the top high school basketball player in the country. Wilson's potential for greatness captivated the community. He forever earned their approval after leading Simeon to a state championship in March of 1984 and subsequently was recruited by all of the top-ranked college basketball programs in the country.

Ben Wilson's legacy is also notable when looking at the link between basketball and crime in the inner city. Because of Wilson's potential to be a college and professional star, the community's outcry against gang violence rippled throughout the city and the country. Wilson's Simeon basketball coach, Bob Hambric, described the reaction saying "You know, kids get shot down every day in Chicago and, as Jesse Jackson said, become the forgotten kids. But the begotten kid, when that happens, it wakes everybody up."[78] Following Wilson's tragic death, Mayor Washington offered a tribute to Wilson in the City Council's November 28 meeting. In the council notes, Washington proclaimed that "Ben Wilson was one of America's most promising high school basketball players…This act of murder that ended Ben Wilson's life should serve as a reminder to all of us to rededicate ourselves to making our streets safe."[79] Furthermore, Washington, just two weeks after Wilson's death, announced plans to crack down on gang activity with more police raids and petitions for federal funding to aid the police force.[80]

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[77] K.C. Johnson, "Ben Wilson's Death Resonates 25 Years Later," *Chicago Tribune*, Nov. 15, 2009. Johnson played basketball for one of Simeon's rival schools, Evanston. While his article is a reflection on Wilson, his experience provides a valuable insight. His Evanston team played Simeon just hours after Wilson was proclaimed dead. His personal interactions and competitions against Simeon, as well as his familiarity with the are,a make this an important piece of source material.
[78] Ibid.
[79] *Chicago City Council Journal of Proceedings*. Nov. 28, 1984.
[80] "Chicago Mayor Announces Plan to Curb Street Violence," *New York Times*, Dec. 4, 1984.

In addition to political efforts against the gangs, the community resolved to change and preach

nonviolence. Memorials and graffiti paintings throughout the South Side neighborhood

commemorated Benji and served as a reminder of the tragedies of gang violence. Even Nike

later honored Wilson in a television commercial. During the commercial an older man

reminisces on Wilson and his lasting legacy:

> "One out of every five black men die before they reach the age of twenty-five. Hah.
> That was Benji's number. Benji was the first in Chicago history to ever be named top
> high school player in the nation, right before he was gunned down. But you know what?
> Benji's not dead; Benji's spirit lives on in every jump shot. Remember: Shoot over
> brothas, not at them."[81]

This short, yet powerful clip captures the hope, despair, and lasting lesson from the Ben Wilson

story. The city embraced him as a basketball hero and mourned his sudden murder, yet most

importantly used the event as a tool for improving the community. Remembering to "shoot over

brothas, not at them" sheds light on the longstanding connection between basketball and gangs in

the inner city, and also calls for a break from that tradition and an end to the violence. With

Wilson's death, we can see again Washington's emphasis on youth development and his

connection with basketball. Albeit under tragic circumstances, the story of Ben Wilson offers a

clear example of the ties between basketball and the city government and its call for youth

development efforts.

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[81] *Benji.* Commercial. Dir. Jean-Louis Bompoint. Nike, 1997.

Midnight Basketball League Hopes and Assumptions

One of the most well-known basketball programs was the Midnight Basketball Program instituted in Chicago in 1989. The program was a basketball league in which young males played games and practices from 10 PM to 2 AM throughout the week. Rather than holding the sessions during the daytime hours, the late night basketball took place when most criminal or gang activity would occur: "The idea is to keep the young men, especially the gang leaders, off the streets at a dangerous time and give them extra support and leadership in an effort to steer them straight."[82] The Chicago program, started by Gil Walker, not only offered basketball experience but served as an educational tool for the at-risk youths. Supporters of the program noted that it was especially effective as it not only kept young men from being situated in violent situations, it also offered educational and career support. Walker noted that "he was not alarmed by the prospect of rival gang members crowding into a gymnasium to watch or play.'One thing I've found is that sports transcends gang feuding,' he said. 'I've seen them lay their pistols down, play basketball, then pick up their pistols and leave.'"[83] This is a telling statement, similar to the City Council acknowledgments, as Walker, too, believed basketball to be a type of tool for community development. Noting that sports "transcend" gang violence, Walker depicted basketball to be a powerful force that could bring about peace between violent feuds. The Midnight Basketball League, then, acknowledged a strong correlation between violence and gang life in the inner city and the championed the importance of basketball among young males.

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[82] "Chicago Housing Agency Plans Night Basketball League for Gangs," *New York Times*, Dec. 2, 1989.
[83] Ibid.

Another tactic employed by the Midnight Basketball League was that it embraced the NBA dream that many inner city youths held. NBA hopes have often been disregarded as pipe dreams and a negative influence on teens because of the incredibly small success rate of actually making it to the professional level. However, Walker used the popular idea of the NBA and created a simulation effect to draw more participants to his program: "'Everything the NBA does, we do,' Walker said…160 young men are chosen to receive satin jackets, jerseys, practice and game outfits, warm-up suits, socks and high-tops. An awards banquet is held at the end of the 16-week season, and an all-star team travels to the national championships."[84] By creating a similar luxury life to that of an NBA star, Walker appealed to teenage ambition and directed young men toward his Midnight Basketball cause. In doing this, Walker showed a belief that basketball can not only be an effective educational tool, but also that the NBA glitz surrounding the game could similarly be used to connect with teens.

Additionally, the rhetoric about the Midnight Basketball League noted that the program was impressively successful. In a league made up of gang members and troubled youths from the most dangerous areas of the city, "27 players got jobs during the season," and one Chicago police officer noted that "we don't have the number of problems that we had that time of night before the program started."[85] In this 1991 article, Journalist Rebecca Patterson believed the league and inasmuch, the game of basketball was an effective way to help troubled youths assimilate to the "real world." She notably references a police officer, to qualify her beliefs that the league was the cause for violent and gang crime reduction.

The Midnight Basketball League has been a notable area of focus for scholars looking at the struggling inner city and the programs that attempt to remedy the situation. Contributing to

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[84] Rebecca Patterson, "Fighting Crime With a Basketball," *St. Petersburg Times*, Nov. 26, 1991.
[85] Ibid.

the book *Paradoxes of Youth and Sport*, Jay Coakley notes that using sports programs for youth development in troubled areas could be effective at several different levels. He offers that in one sense the youth programs, such as midnight basketball, are realistic in their approach. They do not try to completely fix the inner city, but rather simply focus on the individual: "it focuses on increasing self-esteem among youth sport participants so that they can pull themselves up by their athletic shoelaces and escape the conditions that led others to label them as *at-risk*, mark them as problems, and seem them in need of control and socialization."[86] From this view, the Midnight Basketball League was successful in providing youths with an organized program that could develop ideals such as teamwork and communication through the use of sports and instill a sense of confidence in its participants that was otherwise lacking due to the players' dismal surroundings.

However, other scholars have argued against the effectiveness of sports programs and the Midnight Basketball League. Brian Jacob and Lars Lefgren are among those who believe that the program was actually ineffective. They note that their "findings may have significant ramifications for other youth activities that do not have an explicit educational component, such as midnight basketball or other programs designed primarily to keep youth busy and 'off the streets.' The increased violence generated by bringing together youth may more than off-set any societal gains associated with reduced property crime."[87] This work is an important study because these authors thus address the issue of idleness in the city streets.

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[86] Coakley, Jay "Using Sports to Deviance and Violence among Youths: Let's be Critical and Cautious," in *Paradoxes of Youth and Sport*, ed. Gatz, Margaret, and Michael A. Messner, (Albany: State University of New York, 2002). p. 16.

[87] Brian Jacob and Lars Lefgren, "Are Idle Hands the Devil's Workshop? Incapacitation, Concentration and Juvenile Crime," *The National Bureau of Economic* Research, Nov. 5, 2010.

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Idleness was a major concern for program directors, including Gil Walker, because the thinking was that idleness was what led to crime. They believed that if at-risk youths did not have some organized activity such as school, midnight basketball, or some other initiative, then the teens, in their free time, would most likely slip into criminal activities. This longstanding concern can be traced back even to Naismith's era and his example of the Hull House using basketball to "keep boys off the streets." Yet, Jacob and Lefgren, through an in-depth statistics study disagree with this notion: "While the intuition behind such policy prescriptions is sensible, the actual short-term effect of school or youth activities on juvenile crime is far from clear... there is no definitive evidence on the causal impact of youth programs on crime."[88] These authors found little connection between organized programs and any sort of clear decrease in criminal activity in the inner city, and thus saw the problem as related to the communities as a whole, rather than just idleness.

Douglas Hartmann and Brooks Depro echo this belief writing that midnight basketball could not take responsibility for any reductions in crime rates. In their statistics they note that "for violent crime rates, midnight basketball cities saw a drop of approximately 90 offenses per 100,000 compared to nonmidnight basketball counterparts."[89] However, despite these favorable numbers, the authors dismiss basketball's impact arguing that "midnight basketball programs were not the only crime prevention initiatives undertaken in these communities but rather part of a whole package of risk-reduction and crime prevention programs of which midnight basketball was one high-profile component."[90] Thus, these authors, despite even admitting a reduction in

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[88] Ibid.
[89] Douglas Hartmann and Brooks Depro, "Rethinking Sports-Based Community Crime Prevention — Journal of Sport and Social Issues," *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*. Available at: http://jss.sagepub.com/cgi/content/short/30/2/180. (Viewed Nov. 9, 2010).
[90] Ibid.

crime where midnight basketball existed, believe that basketball was simply a part of a larger crime initiative. They note that other crime prevention measures, in conjunction with basketball, appear to make the game only seem like an effective means of crime reduction.

From these studies the true effectiveness of basketball as a means for community development cannot be clearly defined or described in specific statistics. For every proponent of midnight basketball and other basketball-driven initiatives, there is an opponent who points at other factors surrounding the environment to disagree with the belief that the game could be so helpful in the community. Yet despite this uncertainty, there is little debate that basketball played a prominent role in the inner city communities of Chicago. For the purposes of this analysis, it is important to see not necessarily the effectiveness of the program, but rather its assumptions. The Midnight League is another example in which the role of basketball was taken beyond simply that of a sport. Using basketball to attract the troubled youth in the city, Walker portrays basketball as a type of magnet that drew in city youths because of its popularity. From there, Walker could offer his educational lessons and keep them from being on the street late at night.

Also, the Midnight League grew to exist in cities across the country. Walker started the Chicago program shortly after the first League began in Washington D.C. This is notable in that the program's rapid growth and community support echoes to the grass-roots movement that helped Harold Washington become mayor. In the introduction, Robert Brehm is quoted as saying that he considered Washington's lasting legacy was that of a grass-roots leader. With the grass-roots movement and growth of the Midnight Basketball League, we can see a parallel to Washington's election victory. In terms of Chicago's political history during this time then, this case serves as an example of the fervor behind the black

community's initiatives in the city. By first helping Washington become the city's first black mayor, and later adopting Walker's Midnight program, the black community in Chicago exhibited a notable cohesiveness in achieving grass-roots success.

The Chicago Bulls and Basketball's Portrayal

Basketball's popularity in Chicago grew rapidly with the rise of the hometown Chicago Bulls and superstar Michael Jordan. In Jordan, the basketball culture in the city could embrace a new, successful icon with whom it could identify. The Bulls' stadium location in one of the poor, gang-ridden areas of the city especially helped inner city youths and basketball players identify with their local icons and the team expressed sentiments of a relationship with the community.

In the inner city communities of Chicago, basketball was more accessible than other sports and rife with the mythological rhetoric surrounding local icons. This led to its huge popularity in the urban communities. Unlike other sports involving expensive equipment, one needed only a basketball to accompany a free outdoor court and thus anybody could pick up the game. For those not playing, street basketball was a free form of entertainment for visitors and members of the community to enjoy. The playground setting allowed for youths to mimic their NBA idols while developing their own basketball skills. This concept was especially popular in Chicago at this time, as Michael Jordan was helping transform the entire city into a basketball-crazed town. Jordan quickly became one of the most successful and marketable players in the NBA almost immediately after being drafted by Chicago in 1984. He was championed for "his high-flying, exciting style of play, his equally electric personality and his All-American image as the star of the 1984 United States Olympic basketball team," and thus was a magnetic presence

among the younger generations in his team's home city.[91] Furthermore, Jordan's on-court marvels were used to excite the city in the midst of its political power struggles: "Now in Chicago, the mayor and city council are announcing cooperative ventures into urban renewal and the Bulls already are on their way to making some very big noises in the NBA. At least the second accomplishment can be credited to a quiet 21-year-old who likes the idea of being a decoy for his new team."[92] In this quote, the language describing Jordan and the Bulls appropriates basketball as a type of apolitical force that transcended the politics of the time. The sports article did not need to mention the city's latest political news, yet in doing so, the newspaper offers a notion that the Bulls and the city government are on an equal level of importance to Chicagoans. While the newly elected Mayor Washington began his efforts to help development (which would prove to be futile amidst the Council Wars), the Bulls' basketball success was portrayed as a similar major event for Chicago. Thus, basketball was taken as a form of professional spectacle, as journalists praised its important influence on the city.

The notion of professional basketball as a major entertainment source in Chicago further shed light on its connections to the inner city communities. At the time, the Chicago Bulls played in Chicago Stadium, an old arena built in 1929, that was located in the west side of the city. The area surrounding the stadium was made up of public housing projects, decaying buildings, and significant poverty and crime. Despite the Bulls' playoff and championship successes in the late 1980s and early 1990s, there still existed a stark contrast between the bright lights of the stadium and the neighboring projects: "A recent visit [to the Henry Horner Homes projects] revealed a powerful stench of urine in hallways, elevators that rarely worked and

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[91] Phil Patton, "The Selling of Michael Jordan," *New York Times*, Nov. 9, 1985.
[92] Anthony Cotton, "In Chicago, Jordan Is The Prince of the City; North Carolina's Favorite Son Is the Talk of the Bulls' Town -- and of the NBA," *Washington Post*, Nov. 4, 1984.

stairways so dark that a flashlight was needed in midday. Gangs such as the Renegade Vice Lords, Disciples and Four Corner Hustlers battle to control the decrepit buildings."[93] For proponents supporting basketball as a positive impact on the city, this description raised important questions regarding the game's positive, or lack thereof, impact on inner city communities.

While through the Bulls' professional success, basketball was portrayed as an uplifting distraction, the struggling communities still existed. Community members echoed this sentiment, specifically criticizing Michael Jordan: "'I see Michael in the suburban shopping malls,' says Al Clark, a former professional football player and principal at Cregier Vocational School. 'I don't see him where it counts, for free…Talk about, did he get his degree? Tell 'em to stay in school. Tell 'em to listen to their mother…The kids would walk out with glassy eyes."[94] In Clark's statements, it is evident that some of those concerned about the inner city youths at the time saw basketball as a vehicle by which to reach the otherwise distant youth, similar to Gil Walker and Midnight Basketball's approach. They believed that by harnessing the popularity and fame of professional basketball, players could more easily get their message across and help to provide some structure in the dangerous areas of the city.

It is important to note, however, that the Chicago Bulls did make important contributions to its struggling neighbor community. After starting construction on a new arena to replace the Chicago Stadium, the Bulls and the Chicago Blackhawks, the city's hockey team, agreed to "build replacement housing for 19 families displaced by construction and finance building

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[93] Michael Abramowitz and David Aldridge, "On Chicago's Near West Side, Poverty Surrounds the Bulls; Team's Success Has Mixed Impact on Neighborhood," *Washington Post*, Jun. 9, 1992.
[94] Ibid.

another 75 homes in the first private investment in the neighborhood in years."[95] The goal of this project, according to Bulls' owner Jerry Reinsdorf was to spur the local economy and generate more energy and development in the poverty-stricken area. Reinsdorf explained that "the new stadium could be the catalyst for the Near West Side's long-delayed renaissance. 'It just takes a few new houses, and it starts to fill in.'"[96] This was an important justification as it again raised the idea that basketball could act as a rallying point in the community. The Bulls and their basketball success which was lifted so generously by city media again pushed basketball's role beyond that of a simple game. Instead, it was even a focus for urban renewal with the belief that by focusing development around the Bulls and their new home, the west side could become a more progressive area and move away from its crime-riddled stigma.

In addition, the Chicago Bulls also utilized basketball as a tool for community development in helping to repair courts throughout the city. The team acknowledged its location in a difficult area as Reinsdorf noted: "'"We play in Chicago Stadium, an inner-city stadium. The community has been good to us,'" and in turn donated $1 million to the city to repair "more than 100 basketball courts in Chicago's Park District."[97] The goal behind this massive donation was one that has often been endorsed by basketball supporters in urban communities as Reinsdorf explained: "'If kids have an opportunity to play ball, they're not likely to be out stealing, doing drugs, anything like that.'"[98] This quote again raises the issue of idleness and points to the belief that basketball could act as an outlet to distract teens from criminal activity while growing up in violent areas.

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[95]Ibid.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ron Beaton, "Bulls donate $ 1M to repair Park hoops," *USA Today*, Jan. 31, 1990.
[98] Ibid.

The belief was that street basketball was a healthy, safe alternative to gang activity, drugs, or other dangerous temptations in the inner cities. Also, for gifted players it was more than just a protective blanket from the area around them. Basketball was seen to be, in fact, a ticket out of the inner cities and into an NCAA university, or even the National Basketball Association, an idea that especially resonated in Chicago, with the Bulls playing in a nearby arena. Proponents have pointed out that street basketball provided an outlet for constant practice and competition during off-seasons from organized leagues. The easily accessible street game meant that street players always had a place develop their skills on the streets and, in turn, later impress college coaches during the high school season to hopefully gain a college scholarship.

The Chicago Bulls' generous donation also serves as another example for examining the interpretations of basketball. One could argue that the donation was a political move by Reinsdorf himself to gain favor with the local communities around Chicago Stadium. With the team's wealth soaring from its professional success juxtaposed against the decaying neighborhood in which it played, tension grew from community members in the nearby, poor areas. In making a large donation, through the guise of basketball, Reinsdorf effectively quelled some of this tension and used a basketball as a vehicle by which to show the team's support.

Basketball in Chicago was a major point of emphasis for City Council members and community leaders alike. The game was portrayed as a tool for community development in several different forms. From a vehicle to encourage life values in the Mayor Washington Tournaments, to a form of attracting youths in the Midnight leagues, or promoting economic and structural development near the home of the Chicago Bulls, it is clear that the game was held by many interested parties to an elevated status. These different goals, for the most part, are a far cry from Naismith's original intentions regarding basketball. However, the mindset across these

characters is similar. These different parties were all external agents to the game. They were organizers and leaders with specific goals in mind and sought basketball as a vehicle to achieve those goals. In examining this, we can see the different priorities and assumptions that these agents held during their positions in the city. This analysis offers a better understanding of the different external agents to basketball in Chicago during the 1980s and is a valuable contribution to the overall historical analysis of the city through a basketball lens.

Chapter 3: Basketball and Individual Analysis

In the first two chapters of this thesis, I have looked at basketball in Chicago during the 1980s through an institutional lens. Analyzing the game as it pertains to organizations and programs, and the external agents behind these projects, is important when exploring basketball's different roles in the city. These basketball programs, initiatives, park construction, and the City Council meetings behind them give a framework for how basketball fit in the city on a large scale.

But what about the players themselves? While the study of basketball from a bird's eye view carries its own weight, one must also look at the game of basketball on an individual level. Basketball, especially the streetball game, is unlike any other sport in terms of character and emotion. Basketball scholar Jeffrey Lane describes in his book *Under the Boards: The Cultural Revolution in Basketball,* the "bragging rights" and "raucous crowd" that accompany a street basketball game.[99] In fact, players have been known to bet their own shoes on the game in which they were playing.[100] The energetic culture that accompanied the game offers a greater insight on the internal agents of basketball, the players, and offers further historical perspective in the study of Chicago during the 1980s.

This chapter then, looks at the individual level of basketball. In understanding the emotions of street players, we gain a clearer sense of the mindset of the inner city players and the decisions they made. While crime and youth development were discussed in the political circles of Chicago, as mentioned in chapter two, this chapter shows those temptations and evils as they

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[99] Lane, Jeffrey, *Under the Boards: the Cultural Revolution in Basketball,* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2007), p.4

[100] A street basketball player actually told me this when I was playing in Chicago in summer, 2006.

affected individuals. Also, this chapter depicts the aspirations of young players and the pressures they faced growing up in a struggling, urban neighborhood. This understanding of the individuals, then, also offers an insight on Chicago's historical characters, using a basketball focus.

<u>Billy Harris</u>

Looking at the individual nature of basketball, I start with Chicago's greatest street player, Billy Harris. Harris was a Chicago street basketball legend who embraced the Chicago toughness and flair perhaps more so than any other player. Reminiscing on his youth years, his famous confidence was clear as he was quoted: "Between the ages of 16-30, there is no player that could ever beat me. Jordan, Doc, Bird, Oscar, Magic, any of 'em. I would have f----- them up. I'd give them 22 points in a game to 24. They would never beat me."[101] Referring to the some of the NBA's greatest players of all-time, Harris simply brushes off their talents. Regardless of the truth of the statement, it is the confidence and brashness of Harris that contributes to this analysis. Harris exhibits a proud, almost attacking demeanor. This style of talking harkens to Lane's description of the loud crowds and "bragging rights" that can be earned on the court. As such, pride appears to have played a prominent role among Chicago players. Furthermore, these sentiments are a notably different from the values of teamwork and self-sacrifice that Naismith preached. [102] This discrepancy is further illuminated in that Naismith, as discussed earlier, could be characterized as an external character to the game, concerned with the sport's organization and teaching values. Harris, as an actual player of the game, represents an internal character to the game and instead appears more concerned with performance and pride.

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[101] Scoop Jackson, "Gone, Never to be Forgotten," *ESPN*, Jan. 8, 2010.
[102] Naismith, James. *Basketball: Its Origin and Development.* p.197.

Harris was unequivocally regarded as the best Chicago street basketball player in the city's history. He was the city's leading scorer for three straight years in high school, but more importantly in street basketball, he was the subject of folklore tales across Chicago.[103] The tales of his huge scoring totals in pickup games and exploits of fellow Chicago greats made him a legendary icon in the city. This is a notable element of the street basketball genre. The unorganized basketball game did not keep copious statistics or boxscores. Rather, players' performances were only witnessed and recounted by spectators in the community. One example of this notion came from a fellow street player: "The SOB never had a bad game and he didn't lose. I can say that I have seen every great ballplayer that's ever played in this city -- played against most of them -- and there is no one like Billy."[104] While with a lack of hard evidence it is difficult to determine if Harris was truly the best in the city, though it is important to note how the informal style of the street game translated to informal summaries of the contests. Furthermore, the language used in these tales depicted the folkloric mystique of street basketball. These tales helped to grow the interest in basketball and as they were passed on, served as motivation for younger players to continue the tradition in hopes of being the city's next folk hero.

Basketball Forms

Basketball has mainly existed in two forms: organized and unorganized. In the organized form, the game is carefully managed. Certain plays are drawn up and run with specific motions for each player. This type has existed since the game's first inception and took place in organized settings such as high school, college, or the professional arenas. Because of its

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[103]Scoop Jackson, "Gone, Never to be Forgotten."
[104]Ibid.

emphasis on timing and knowing where other players should be in certain instances, critics of the game have described this structured format as the "white game."[105] Conversely, the "black game" was much more of a free forming style.[106] As mentioned earlier, the black game was born out of the fast-break style which emphasized speed and reaction, rather than organized plays. This type is where the flair developed and flourished. The street game, without coaches or referees, was thus structured in a similar way. Without coaches insisting on specific passes, as with a set play, and often looking to impress community members in the stands, the game was focused more on individual drives and flashy plays like fancy crossovers and slam dunks. I argue that the organized game and the fast-break style are clearly different, but the cause of this split was not a racial one. Rather the discrepancy appears to lie in the external vs. internal divide. In the external context, agents, such as the program directors or coaches used basketball as a means to achieve their personal goal. This was exemplified through characters such as Naismith, Washington, and Walker. In the internal context, the agents were allowed more freedom and focused on the game itself, as evidenced by John McLendon or Billy Harris. Basketball author and player Thomas McLaughlin, adds to this discussion in his book: *Give and Go: Basketball as a Cultural Practice*. He writes that in the street game, where referees are non-existent, enforcing the rules is a much more subjective practice: "Certainly there are official rules of the game, but in pickup ball what matters is how the local decisions tend to go...Pickup games are willing to sacrifice the consistency of official rules for the more personal subtlety of

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[105] Taylor Bell, "City basketball comes of age Coaches work to dispel 'showtime' image," *Chicago Sun –Times*, Jan. 18, 1988. p. 23.
[106] Ibid.

negotiated settlements."[107] In this sense, McLaughlin points out that the general consensus

regarding rules in street basketball has been that they are not rigid and could be up for debate.

Also, in the unorganized street form, with no referees, the games were much more

physical. Games consisted of much more contact and calling fouls was looked down upon,

inferring a type of weakness.[108] Players have noted that if the foul "isn't hard don't call it"

because in the street game is a "test of manhood."[109] These fundamental differences may seem

minor but they reflect a bigger picture of the ideals in the urban community. A contempt for

fouls shows that there existed an understood emphasis on toughness among the players. This

appeared to reflect a virtue of toughness in players born out of the poor neighborhoods of

Chicago, where violence and crime was prevalent.

Furthermore, this tough mindset would remain as players moved into the organized

leagues with referees and coaches. Chicago basketball player and journalist Ira Berkow

describes this case in his *New York Times* article, "Hoops, Chicago Style." Berkow offered an

example, writing that "in a park district game, a player once got angry at a call by a referee and

left the game. He went home, but it wasn't to pout. That's not Chicago style. The player went

home to get a pistol. He returned to the game."[110] He proudly closed the tale noting, "such was

the environment in which some of today's N.B.A. All-Stars and legends grew up, flourished, and

lived to tell the tale."[111] While Berkow did not explicitly support violence as a part of street

basketball in Chicago, he did acknowledge the toughness of city players. Pointing out that

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[107] McLaughlin, Thomas, *Give and Go: Basketball as a Cultural Practice*, (Albany: State University of New York, 2008). p. 27.
[108] "Street Basketball" available at: http://hoopedia.nba.com/index.php?title=Streetball_Overview. (Viewed Oct. 29, 2010).
[109] Paul Coro, "Hard courts, hard fouls; Pickup basketball is rough and raw, but would it be such fun any other way? Unwritten laws of pickup basketball," *Kansas City Star*, Jun. 4, 1995.
[110] Ira Berkow, "Sports of The Times; Hoops, Chicago-Style," *New York Times*, Feb. 7, 1988.
[111] Ibid.

pouting was not "Chicago style" Berkow showed how the violent neighborhoods of Chicago taught youths to fend for themselves and furthermore that that grit translated into their style of play. It is also notable that Berkow neglects to adequately address the issue of violence in his piece. With the growing sentiment for anti-crime efforts in the 1980s and story of Ben Wilson, Berkow simply notes that this particular player left his game in search of a gun, and does not comment on the greater issue of violence. Given the tragedy of Wilson, a well-known basketball legend throughout the city himself, Berkow's description of the "Chicago style" seems incomplete. The description does paint a clear picture of the violence attributed to the game, and in this sense, portrays the Chicago game as one laced with crime and violence. To complete the picture though, Berkow would need to address the larger issues regarding violence and basketball.

Berkow's proud description of his city's basketball style leads to another facet of basketball at the individual level. One of the most important elements of street basketball was the idea of reputation. It was the motivator behind the tough fouls and scathing trash talk on the streets. But reputation also is what drew players in to love the game. This idea is especially evident at the Entertainer's Basketball Classic, a street basketball tournament at Rucker Park in Harlem, New York. The tournament began in the early 1980s, and though in New York, the example still supports the earlier point that pride and reputation were of utmost importance among basketball players at the individual level. Since its inception, the tournament has exhibited amateur players and NBA stars playing together and competing in front of huge crowds that pack the chain link "arena." Why did NBA players play in a pickup tournament on a street court though? With fame and fortune it seems they could find better surroundings in which to practice during the offseason. A major reason for these players though, according to street

basketball fans, is reputation. Basketball scholar Jeffrey Lane describes this notion in his book *Under the Boards: The Cultural Revolution in Basketball.* In the book he describes the EBC tournament and the NBA presence: "The EBC is all about street credibility. Legendary EBC coach Tony Rosa explains 'You've got NBA guys there because they want to be known in the 'hood. An NBA player...goes from city to city and the connection with the fans feels so distant – the fans are white, most of the players are black – I'm sure they love the adulation but there's something about the 'hood: everybody wants to be known in the 'hood."[112] In this description, Rosa describes a certain urban connection that he believes exists between players and the street game. This allure appears to be a connection of respect and adoration that is more substantive than that of in NBA arenas. Rosa notes that there is a racial connection between the black players and the (presumably) black fans at the street games as he notes that the fan connection is closer or more genuine than with the white customers at NBA games.

This distinction offers insight on the elements of the street game in contrast to organized basketball. It alludes to the notion that street basketball was a predominantly black game. In addition, Rosa views the street game as a much more emotional setting in that the players and fans share a connection. With the NBA games, fans were in the stands because they paid money to see the game. In the street games, as Lane implies, however, fans were in the stands because they shared a commonality with the players: having a passion for the game itself and growing up in tough, city neighborhoods. With these common elements and the idea of reputation or credibility, Lane offers the idea that street basketball can provide a more intimate setting for the sport. Here again, the external vs. internal dichotomy is addressed. The professional games offered a type of external setting in which basketball was experienced in accordance with a

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[112] Lane, Jeffrey. *Under the Boards: the Cultural Revolution in Basketball.* p. 4.

business. The street games, with the close connection between fans and players described by Lane, created an internal feeling with the basketball game.

Basketball and Crime

One of the most prevalent problems in inner city communities was drug use. Drug problems are especially important for study in regards to street basketball because they often were a gateway to other criminal activity and also, physically debilitating for promising players. Many city members saw basketball as a major contributor to the drug problems of the urban areas. From this, arose the notion that street basketball and its popularity, in fact, fostered the connections between teens and drug dealers. Keeping in mind that the public basketball courts were prominent community areas, dealers looking to sell drugs to younger teens or recruit teens to help sell the drugs themselves all of a sudden had an organized location where they knew teenagers would be present.

Furthermore, some argued that the game's attraction to the drug dealers created an almost impossible environment for gifted teens to capitalize on their potential for college and professional careers. This is because in a basketball-based neighborhood, successful players were also the most recognizable characters in the community. Drug dealers, themselves awed by the on-court feats, would fuel the drug temptations by giving drugs to players as favors. Such was the case with street legend, Earl "the Goat" Manigault, as "drug dealers would give him heroin for free, 'because I was the Goat, …and they didn't want to see me stealing for it.'"[113] In this instance, basketball players were rewarded with drugs for their skills on the court. Unlike other community members who would buy drugs at the playgrounds, players did not even need

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[113]Pete Axthelm, "A Fallen King Revisits His Realm," *New York Times*, Jun. 16, 1989.

money; they paid for heroin or crack cocaine simply by playing the game they loved. What is ironic about this setup is that the best players were the most likely to receive something that diminished their physical capabilities. Sadly, with this arrangement, those with the most promise of a life outside of the inner city, in fact, were the easiest to target with dangerous temptation.

While drug addiction was a dangerous byproduct to success on the basketball court, other pitfalls also existed and, again, affected the most promising players in these inner city communities. As noted earlier, the city courts were where legends were made. A star street basketball player could quickly develop an iconic status as stories of his play traveled around the city. The biggest success stories were of course about city players who hit the pinnacle of basketball greatness and were drafted into the NBA. Players like Isaiah Thomas and Doc Rivers in Chicago and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Jamal Mashburn from New York acted as living proof that talented players could actually play professionally or at least obtain a scholarship to play and attend college and eventually move out of the ghetto area. While many people associated these college scholarships with an opportunity for education, often teenagers' motivations were elsewhere.

This sentiment is clearly expressed in Darcy Frey's *The Last Shot: Streets, Basketball Dreams* as he chronicled several Coney Island high school players hoping for an NCAA scholarship. During a discussion about recruiting and talking with college coaches, one of the teens, Stephon, exclaimed to his teammate "You mean you're just gonna sign? ...All these coaches coming around and he ain't asking for anything. ...The schools promise to take care of them and their families. They say the magic word—money."[114] Education was, thus, not always

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[114] Frey, Darcy, *The Last Shot: City Streets, Basketball Dreams* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994). Cited in "In Coney Island, Nowhere to Go but Out," *Washington Post*, Jan. 2, 1995.

the main concern for teenagers looking to use basketball as a means to get to college. Despite NCAA regulations against such gifts, there existed among teens the notion that "just signing" a scholarship was not acceptable. Instead, these players were more motivated by material goods like cars and money. This marks a notable departure from the view of the external agents of the game. Program leaders such as Gil Walker looked to emphasize education through basketball leagues, whereas these players exhibited an interest in basketball driven by money. Another example of the popular, lofty, yet unlikely, goals of teen street basketball players is apparent in Steve James' documentary *Hoop Dreams*. In the first line of the film, 14 year old William Gates proclaimed "Right now, I wanna, you know, play in the NBA, like anybody else would wanna be."[115] Gates' quote shows that for some teens playing basketball and growing up in the inner city, the ultimate goal was to play professional basketball. While it is an admirable goal, it is also one that is so rare that the benefit of street basketball comes into question.

Though street basketball helped some teens attend college and develop their aspirations, more often it contributed to an often unrealistic hope. In his <u>Newsweek</u> article "The City Game Grows Up," Pete Axthelm noted that "for all its exhilaration, basketball can stir up some cruel illusions. For every athlete who achieves fame and good living through college or pro ball, hundreds fall short."[116] In this sense, street basketball was both praised and criticized. Axthelm pointed out that street basketball could actually lead to fame and fortune through success on the college or even pro level. At the same time, however, this glamorous success was very rarely achieved and thus created a significant dilemma. For the many teens, like Stephon and William Gates who focused their future hopes on basketball, when that goal was not realized they were left with nothing on which to rely. Thus, a major effect of street basketball was that it created a

[115]Dir. James, Steve, *Hoop Dreams*, Fine Line Features, 1994. DVD.
[116] Pete Axthelm, "The City Game Grows Up," *Newsweek*, Apr. 11, 1975.

misguided ambition. More often than not, the game left an inner city youth with an unfulfilled dream and few options to survive in the urban community.

In the wake of the failed basketball dream, the drug culture reemerged as the next easiest alternative for youths. Great players enjoyed the iconic aura that developed out of nicknames and admiration from the crowded stands. Without basketball though, many teens still maintained the hunger for material success that they carried in their hopes for a college scholarship. When their playing days ended, often teens found drug sales as the new avenue for wealth. Axthelm observed this phenomenon and described the youths whose playing days had ended. As he wrote: "as their neighborhood reputations fade, they often turn desperately to the only other lifestyle with ghetto glamour – pushing and bustling."[117] Selling drugs offered this ghetto glamour because it was much more lucrative work than a standard job in the inner city. The article "The Black Slums: Burying Ground for the American Dream" paints the picture of a typical drug dealer in the inner city: "Wesley J. has chosen to 'get over' as a self-employed businessman. He is a 31-year-old entrepreneur who wears fine suede and leather, walks in a springy, athletic manner. Wesley J. sells marijuana, pills, cocaine."[118] With a strong materialist mindset, former players could sell drugs and use the large profits to purchase "fine suede" and other elegant items to regain their "ghetto glamour." In essence, players who had formerly been stars in the community because of street basketball suddenly found themselves lost and slowly forgotten. As a result, the fallen players looked to recreate their persona through drug sales.

While the game can elevate teenagers to local celebrities, the repercussions were often greater than the rewards. Here, street basketball was portrayed as a tool for unrealistic

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[117] Ibid.

[118] "The Black Slums: Burying Grounds for the American Dream; The Black Slums: Where the American Dream Disappears; A Guided Tour of Cities Where Troubles Abound," *Washington Post*, May 7, 1978.

ambitions, that when unfulfilled, lead to a dangerous life of crime. The "fall from grace" for these athletes is especially hard because, when planning so persistently on reaching the NBA, the teens left little hope for the actually significant chance that they were unsuccessful. Earl Manigault, the street legend of Rucker Park, was immortalized for his basketball talents but possibly more so for his incredible and unfortunate fall: "Part of the Manigault mystique is that he never made it, that he succumbed to the street life...the man Kareem Abdul-Jabbar [an NBA Hall of Famer] once called 'the best basketball player his size in the history of New York City' became a drug addict and a thief, not an N.B.A. star."[119] The example of Manigault is especially notable because he had the talent to beat the long odds and actually go to the NBA. Yet drug use and academic failure led to Manigault dropping school, and effectively killed the NBA dream. Similar to earlier notions, Manigault "realized basketball would take him no further than the playgrounds" and he "started messing with the 'white lady."[120] This desperate attempt to regain the "ghetto glamour" or salvage one's neighborhood reputation in fact only accelerated the demise, as witnessed by Manigault.

The worry over neighborhood reputation did not only apply to Manigault. It proved to be a mindset expressed by others, such as William Gates. Gates offered a notably powerful expression as he claimed: "People always say to me, 'when you get to the NBA, don't forget about me.' Well, I should've said back, "if I don't make it to the NBA, don't you forget about me.'"[121] Gates' sentiment showed a mature wisdom that despite his hopes and promising potential, he realized his unlikely odds. Furthermore, Gates was aware of the trouble that lay ahead if in fact his basketball days came to an end.

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[119] Pete Axthelm, "A Fallen King Revisits His Realm," *New York Times.*
[120] Ibid.
[121] Dir. James, Steve. *Hoop Dreams.*

Herein lay a fault of the street basketball system. It created the "ghetto glamour" mentality and thus the perception that basketball and drugs were the only two viable options for teens growing up in the inner city. Despite efforts to correct the system with programs like the Midnight Basketball League, and others, the problem still remained. Awareness about other job opportunities and the dangers of drugs could only go so far. One drug dealer from the South Side of Chicago noted that though other jobs may have been more admirable, they were not nearly as practical: "Why...should I waste my time going to school so I can get a $13,000-a-year job at the post office? Hell, man – I can *steal* that much."[122] In the economically troubled inner cities, teens held little regard for normal, legal professions, opting instead for the glamorous and illegal trades that promised more pay. One Detroit high school graduate described the inner city mindset as he exclaimed "you ask a little white boy what he wants to be...and he may say some kind of big-time executive. You ask a little black child the same question, and he may say, 'I want to be a pimp.'"[123] This was more than an observation, though. The article continues on and points out that while some youths aspired to be "pimps," others looked to take advantage of drug sales: "most profitably of all, a drug dealer: one apprentice currently circulating in Oakland, Calif., is said to be pocketing $200 a week running narcotics – at age 10."[124] Because street basketball placed such a strong emphasis on flashy style and "ghetto glamorous" reputations, the game only made basketball teens crave material luxury even more. Unfortunately, this emphasis on material success, in fact, complimented the drug sales culture, instead of law-abiding professions, leading teens to pursue the drug trade's lucrative profits.

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[122] Peter Goldman, "Black Youth; A Lost Generation?" *Newsweek*, Aug.7, 1978.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid.

Gangs acted as the organization behind the prevalent drug activities in the inner city. Two of the most prominent gangs Chicago's South Side, were El Rukn and the Black Disciples, both of which used drug sales as their main source of financing. In their Newsweek article "Gangs of Chicago, 1981," Aric Press and Sylvester Monroe described how the El Rukn got their start in Chicago, largely because of drug sales. They note that after first forming in 1978, members of El Rukn "purchased a headquarters building for $10,000 – all in cash, no bill larger than a twenty."[125] Drug sales on the streets were strictly a cash business and sales were in low increments, so it could easily be inferred that the gang's headquarters was financed via its drug profits. The authors also note that while gangs and drug sales existed all throughout the city, the effects were most felt in the South Side, poorer communities: "Nowhere has the gangs' influence been felt more strongly than in the city's massive housing projects, where El Rukn and Disciples bands have fought over recruiting and drug sales. When they aren't warring on each other, the members terrorize innocent tenants."[126] From this, it is clear that gangs played a significant role in the poor communities of Chicago during the 1980s; a role, which often instilled fear in community members.

Yet despite the grim gang activities, youths were often attracted to these criminal groups. Author Useni Eugene Perkins describes the appeal of gangs in his book *Explosion of Chicago's Black Street Gangs: 1900 to Present*. In the book, he points to identity as a major factor that draws youths to gangs: "When Black street gang members boldly shout out the name of their gang, they are letting everybody know who they identify with. ...Without this sense of identity,

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[125] Aric Press, and Sylvester Monroe, "Gangs of Chicago, 1981," *Newsweek*, Jan. 12, 1981.
[126] Ibid.

individuals are grouped with the masses, receiving no special recognition."[127] Perkins also

points out other important factors such as a "sense of belonging" and a "sense of discipline"

where black youth "are willing to relinquish their personal egos in the interest of the gang."[128] In

studying the makeup of the Chicago gang, it is important to again notice the link between the

gangs in the community to basketball and its role in the area. The very principles Perkins uses in

his analysis of gang members are the ideals that basketball proponents, such as Midnight

Basketball's Gil Walker, preach as benefits that are born out of basketball programs. These

notions are very similar; the sense of identity a player could develop from earning a nickname on

the court was not unlike the feeling a gang member felt when flashing a gang-specific symbol

with his curled fingers. Also, it should be noted that while Walker and others boasted that

basketball education programs were instilling values of teamwork and discipline, and helping

youths move away from solely an individual, material focus, gangs were developing those same

characteristics, as Perkins points out. These strong similarities show how youths easily could fall

into the trap of gang activity following the end of their basketball careers and their search to

preserve a type of ghetto glamour.

Basketball at the individual level was intensely tied to emotion. The game served as a

major influence in shaping reputations among players and community members. Through

basketball, individuals could achieve an iconic status among their peers. This status could, at

same time be dangerous, as evidenced by the downfalls of greats like Billy Harris and Earl

Manigault. In terms of understanding Chicago in a historical sense, the analysis of the uses of

basketball offers historians a better understanding of poor, black community members, at the

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[127] Perkins, Useni E, *Explosion of Chicago's Black Street Gangs: 1900 to the Present* (Chicago, IL: Third World, 1987). p. 55.
[128] Ibid. p. 55-58.

ground level. This leads to a more colorful understanding of the drug and crime culture that

prevailed at the time.

Conclusion

Since its first invention in 1891, the game of basketball has grown immensely in popularity and cultural importance. From a simple point of view, basketball is just a sport, a game where people run around, trying to throw a ball through a hoop. However, throughout history, numerous people have ascribed a greater purpose to the sport. In fact, the game itself was invented to serve a greater purpose than just sport, as evidenced by Naismith and his Christian values. With this in mind, I have attempted to unpack the different uses and meanings of basketball, as it pertains to different agents. In developing these analyses, it is clear that uses of basketball not only shed light on the different characters of the game, but also the general time period and environment as well. As such, I have framed my thesis as an analysis of the different uses of basketball during the 1980s, to contribute to the existing historical literature about Chicago at that time.

To conclude this analysis I address the uses of basketball in the external, organizational sphere and also the individual, internal sphere. First, the external or organizational level in this thesis pertains to organizations, policymakers, and program developers. I addressed these characters as external because they, in their different relations and uses with basketball, used the game as tool for a larger or institutional goal. I will concede that because this organizational level deals with large ambitions, I, as a historian, am forced to draw more conclusions, based on the existing literature and my interpretations. Mayor Harold Washington is a primary example of this notion. His political battles in the Council Wars and connection to the black community are well-documented. However, the Mayor's uses and connections to basketball were at times less explicit. The public parks reform is an example of this, in which I drew upon my knowledge

of the surroundings, Mayor's actions, and the historical roots of basketball. From this, I concluded that Washington employed a community development plan for the struggling neighborhoods that was especially well-received, as it improved, among other things, basketball courts, which held importance in the communities. Washington's other uses of basketball, followed a more linear approach, as they were written clearly in the City Council Journal of Proceedings. The mayor's formal acknowledgements of tournament winners echo Naismith's belief that the game could teach important life values. Amidst the rhetoric calling for more youth-development programs and the Council Wars stalemate, I concluded that the mayor's formal recognitions of basketball in the Council notes, though small, still acted as a youth development imitative and notable reference to Naismith.

Analyzing the internal sphere of basketball uses in Chicago also offered its challenges. Addressing basketball at the individual level is important to my overall thesis because the players and emotions of basketball add an incredible touch of reality, which cannot be replicated in the larger, institutional, focus. The quotes and stories from different basketball icons offer a much clearer sense of what basketball meant and had created at the street level. The challenge with analyzing the individual level of the game and its uses is that every individual's account is different, and can make it difficult to confidently draw a conclusion. For my conclusion, I used the examples of several different main characters: Harris, Manigault, and Gates and looked to see if there existed a link between the three and other sentiments on basketball among individuals. My conclusion for this section is that basketball, used at the individual level, was a very emotionally charged game. Out of this, multiple outcomes were possible, as evidenced by NBA dreams, troubles with drugs, or simply fading into obscurity. The game at this level was also used for status within the urban community. Whether by bragging rights or achieving an iconic

status, reputation was of great importance to these inner city young men. Furthermore, they used basketball as a tool to obtain a certain reputation or image.

For the most part, Chicago's history is well-documented. Numerous books describe the city's changing political arena and the battles inside City hall. After reading, analyzing, and synthesizing these materials I have looked to add my own contribution to the historical literature about Chicago during the 1980s using the cultural phenomenon of basketball. While on the outset this may appear to be a difficult approach, basketball, when analyzed closely, proves to offer exciting and notable information about the city and its various agents. The various ways in which the game was used to achieve different individuals' goals offer historians a greater understanding of these individual characters and the landscape in which they operated. James Naismith invented the game of basketball with the specific goal of teaching Christian values to his YMCA students. Though the sport had changed immensely from when Naismith first hung his peach baskets in the gymnasium, basketball throughout the 1980s still remained, for many, an important tool, beyond just a game.