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The American Basketball Association (1967-1976) gave birth to Julius Erving, Moses Malone, Bob Costas, the Indiana Pacers, the San Antonio Spurs, the Slam Dunk contest, flashy moves, and the three-point basket. During its nine seasons, the ABA generated scorn and laughter--and made a lasting impact on how the game is played. 24 pages of photographs.

Loose Balls: The Short, Wild Life of the American Basketball Association Details

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From Reader Review Loose Balls: The Short, Wild Life of the American Basketball Association for online ebook

William Chanmugam says

In Loose Balls by Terry Pluto, he goes through anecdotes and stories from players who took part in the American Basketball Association (ABA) to form a collage of knowledge that gives the reader a great narration of the league (the ABA was a competitor of the NBA in the 1970s and added a 3 point line, a multi-colored ball, and generally had more athletic but less coached players). The ABA eventually merged with the NBA in 1976. Anyway, the book starts in the late 1960s as the idea of the ABA was being formed and put into place. It is essentially a collection of anecdotes from people who were critical at one point in the ABA (for example, Calvin Murphy and Connie Hawkins were crucial to the early ABA but not so much in the early-mid 70s when Spencer Haywood and the Indiana Pacers were the talk of the town). It details each time period and important players, coaches, and executives, letting the people involved do the storytelling. One thing that works well with this is the chaos of the anecdotes. One moment Roger Brown is being lauded by Bobby Leonard, the next George McGinnis is saying that he carried the Pacers and Roger Brown was his wingman. Different people tell stories about how they were the founder of the league. In not telling a singular narrative, it tells all of them. The book also does a good job not picking too broad of topics, but focusing on one topic from one era to give it detail. Instead of talking about the complicated contract clauses and how ABA players were getting tricked out of money, it talks about Spencer Haywood and his story and how he fell victim to these ploys, making it a more relatable and interesting book.

Tom says

The fascinating story of the short-lived but immortal American Basketball Association. Of course there are stories about Dr. J, and the cult heroes who never had a chance for one reason or another to succeed in the NBA, but it really shines a much-deserved light on those whose success in the ABA justifiably earned them a place in the Basketball Hall Of Fame, such as Roger Brown and Louie Dampier. As the primary source of a league with no national television and little national media coverage, there is often more legend than fact involved, and its oral history format lends itself to repetition, but it is a must-read for any basketball fan.

Barnabas Piper says

If you're a basketball fan this oral history of the ABA is well-worth your time. I never realized how important the ABA was to the current NBA's health and success. The book is equal parts history and and hilarious. It gives first hand accounts of the intricacies and insanity of the ABA. Really enjoyed it and learned quite a bit about how pro basketball in the U.S. got to where it is today.

James Lambert says

Warren Jabali deliberately stomped on a dude's head during an ABA game. Also the Spurs held a Dime Beer Night that ended in a riot. These are the things that are sorely missing from modern basketball.

B. R. Reed says

A very enjoyable and informative book on the American Basketball Association, the league that introduced hoops to the red, white & blue basketball, the 3 point shot and "hardship" players. Being a native of Indiana and a big fan of the early Pacers, I never really knew that the ABA was a league in constant turmoil during its nine year existence. Indiana was a reasonably stable franchise during those years. I vividly recall Roger Brown, Bob Netolicky, Mel Daniels, Freddie Lewis, Billy Keller, George McGinnis, Don Buse, Danny Roundfield, Billy Knight, Darnell Hillman, Coach Bobby Leonard and others on the Pacers team. KY had Gilmore, Issel, Dampier and Carrier. Utah had a talented group led by Zelmo Beaty, Willie Wise and Ron Boone. Other great ABA players were Connie Hawkins, Doug Moe, Spencer Heywood, George Gervin, Jimmy Silas, Moses Malone, David Thompson and the great Dr J. It was a wild and crazy league with some real characters (players, coaches and owners). If you have any interest in the ABA then this is the book to read. Full of facts and anecdotes, often funny and some hard to believe. The league included Pat Boone, Bob Costas, Charlie Finley, "Bad News" Barnes, and enforcers Wendell Ladner, John Brisker and Warren Jabali. Fun read for me. Note: Many of you have probably never heard of Roger Brown, small forward for the Pacers. A New Yorker, he was one of the best basketball players I ever saw. They pulled him off an auto factory job in Dayton, OH in '67 and what a treat to watch him on the court.

Joseph Stieb says

A mildly entertaining listen about the ABA, a weird pro league that existed from 1967-1976. The ABA gave us some incredible players (Julius Erving, Artis Gilmore, Rick Barry, David Thompson, Moses Malone) and some great innovations (the 3 pointer, a quicker pace of play, the dunk contest, and basically any gimmicky promotional thing ever). It was pretty interesting learning about those guys and events, especially many of the really whacky players they had. The league was a real mess, with teams folding and moving constantly, crappy gyms, horrible travel schedules, and poor press coverage. However, you also learn how the ABA gave players way more leverage in getting better contracts. There were some genuinely funny anecdotes in this book too.

However, this book was way too long and the format stunk. Pluto's idea was that the ABA had so little TV or press coverage that most of what we know of it comes from lore, legend, and hearsay. Thus 95% of the book is just passages from interviews arranged chronologically to tell various stories in the ABA's career. To be honest, as a history dude, it's an interesting idea to put a book together as an oral history of a sports league. However, the execution just doesn't work. The segments are way too long and go into mind numbing detail about every dang trade, coaching move, and managerial dispute that happened in this 9 year period. In hindsight, the book would have been much better had it been 25% shorter or just written as a normal 300-pager-or-so fun sports book. That's why I don't really recommend it. If you want a more fun and much shorter hoop book, check out Showtime about the 1980's Lakers. I think you would have to be older or just a hardcore hoop fan (more than me) to really like Loose Balls (kudos on a great title though).

Dale Hansen says

I was aware of the ABA growing up through the basketball cards my older brother collected in the early

1970's. And of course, Dr. J was my first favorite basketball player but that was when he was with the 76ers. At first, I was a little skeptical about reading a book that was essentially an oral history, but was hooked the minute I started to read the book. I couldn't put it down. Who can forget teams with names like the Anaheim Amigos, the Pittsburgh Pipers, the Oakland Oaks, the New Orleans Buccaneers, the Minnesota Muskies and the San Diego Conquistadors/Sails. Or, the players like LaVern (Jelly) Tart, Marvin (Bad News) Barnes, Fly Williams. Warren Jabali and greats like Connie Hawkins, Roger Brown, Mel Daniels, Dan Issel, Artis Gilmore, Dr. J, or David "Skywalker" Thompson. From beginning to the end this book was a joy to read.

Phil Overeem says

HANDS DOWN THE FUNNIEST BOOK ABOUT PRO BASKETBALL EVER WRITTEN! It helps that it's about the brief, crazed history of the ABA, but the chapter about the St. Louis Spirits (with Marvin "Bad News" Barnes, Fly Williams of Austin Peay, and a first-year sportscaster named Bob Costas) is worth the price of the book alone. Pluto's book on the Cleveland Indians, *The Curse of Rocky Colavito*, is almost as funny, and ranks with *Seasons in Hell: With Billy Martin, Whitey Herzog and "The Worst Baseball Team in History"--The 1973-1975 Texas Rangers*, by Mike Shropshire, and Jim Bouton's *Ball Four*, as the funniest book about major league baseball ever written.

Kurt says

I've been wanting to read this book for quite some time. I was feeling a bit of nostalgia lately, so I picked this book up to read. It was a great read with some fantastic insights into the characters that were part of the ABA.

Brian says

The story of the ABA is a great one - a league that flew by the seat of its pants, had a lot of characters, and was a great innovator. A lot of players like Dr. J and Moses Malone got their start in the ABA. It also introduced the slam dunk contest and the unique red, white, and blue basketball.

Pluto essentially takes a huge amount of content from interviews and weaves them into a series of chapters that capture the chronology of the ABA, its teams, and some of the core themes. He does a pretty good job of weaving together different voices to keep it interesting.

Clayton says

I am so glad this book exists to capture some of the great stories of the ABA. When I was 10 years old, I loved the Dallas Chaparrals of the ABA. If you follow basketball, you will enjoy this oral history of the ABA.

Cupboard Horsington says

It quickly becomes apparent that an oral history is quite possibly the only way to teach the lessons of the ABA.

I an interesting read with a great collection of sources, however it tends to drag on a bit. It could have been 2/3 as long without losing any of the key concepts. Be prepared to have 4 people verify the same story which I understand is important to a historian, but as a casual reader it can become frustrating.

Damien Cowger says

Loose Balls is a highly enjoyable account of the wild days of the American Basketball Association. I'm an off and on NBA fan and a long time fan of the game of basketball. I can tell you stats and stories about many NBA players, but until I read this book, I basically knew nothing about this short-lived league other than the fact that it birthed the San Antonio Spurs. The book chronicles the several years in the Seventies that the league burned bright and how strongly it affected the NBA that we know today.

One odd aspect of the book is that it is told in a non-linear fashion, in an atypical way. Rather than stick to a chronological form, the book is divided into compartments to follow particular players (Like Moses Malone) or teams (The fabled Indiana Pacers). The tale is also told from a patchwork of quotes from a wide variety of players, coaches, owners, and even journalists who experienced the ABA. This style ends up leading to lots of repetition, which at times can be maddening. I listened to this on Audible, so I imagine that it would be a different experience on the page. Every fan of the basketball pro game should be required to spend time with Pluto's loving look at the days when afros and red-white-and blue balls captured the imaginations of fans young and old.

Benoit Lelièvre says

What makes LOOSE BALLS great is that the ABA is the last great American myth. There is little to no evidence of if any of the stories it engendered are true, but the book lives up to its strange, yet engaging legacy of being both the epitome of what the 1970s were about (afros, free spirited excess, drugs, guns) and the birth of contemporary, fast-flowing basketball.

I didn't know the ABA all that well before getting into LOOSE BALLS, but the oral history structure of the book was perfect to get me introduced and become familiar with some of its key names such as Mike Storen, Carl Scheer, Joe Mullaney, Larry Brown, Dick Tinkham, Bob Bass, Slick Leonard, etc. Not sure who among these guys is still alive, but let me tell you something: they will all live forever because the ABA was the most media-friendly thing in a world where they was no media to cover it and therefore it has found its place in our common imaginary.

David says

An intriguing behind the scenes look at the American Basketball Association, but in the introduction chapter

Terry Pluto includes the line ... 'True Stories? Who knows?' and you get that sense in this book. Pluto did a great job interviewing a bunch of players/coaches/announcers/owners from the ABA days, but he spills everything out into this book, and I got the sense that little effort was made to back up claims that were made, etc.

It is written in that lazy transcription style where Pluto simply gives you the dictation from his tape recorder rather than put any effort into crafting the information he gleaned into a story.

I enjoyed the insights from Bob Costas the most, and was impressed at the number of voices Pluto tracked down, I just wish he had organized it better. Many parts of the book become repetitive and you get disjointed chapters that go from telling behind the scenes stories to a simple list of facts/stats from a season.

Despite my frustrations with the style of the book, as a basketball fan, I enjoyed a look at an era of basketball that pre-dates me.

C'mon NBA ... adopt the red, white and blue ball.
