

Philly Hoops

The Magic of Philadelphia Basketball

Staff of the *Philadelphia Daily News*

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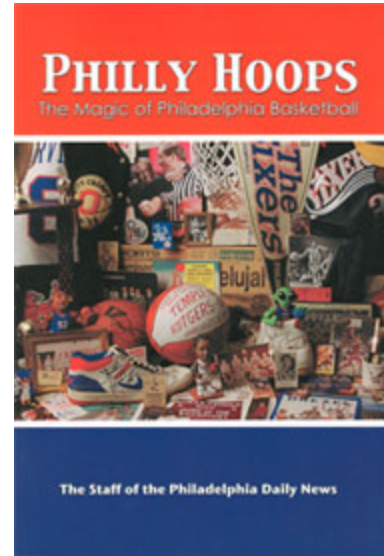
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From Chapter One, "The Heritage"

It is a typical winter weekend in Philadelphia, and your basketball plate can either be full or ridiculously full. Those are the only choices.

Sixers. Drexel. La Salle. Penn. Temple. St. Joseph's. Villanova.

Small colleges. Catholic League. Public League. Rec leagues. CYO.

Girls. Boys. Men. Women. More games than you can count. More games than you can conceivably watch.

This weekend. Every weekend. It is the only place on the continent where one Division I basketball team, the Drexel Dragons, routinely walks to a road game (at Penn).

It is the only big city in America where people make a decision on whether to attend a college game based not upon what teams are playing, but the venue—and if it's at the Palestra, they go.

With the pro team, the Sixers, as the shimmering jewel under the brightest light; with the high schools and the playgrounds and the parish gyms and the rec centers as the institutional underpinning; with all of that, nobody else has what we have. Nobody has a Big 5, for instance. Nobody else has six Division I basketball teams so close together—ancient rivals in some cases, wary friends in others, all playing games that still matter, all joining together in a revival of a tradition that was sometimes dormant but never dead.

From a little first grader playing with a small ball to the Sixers, and with every stop in between, we have the opportunity to see as much basketball in person as anyone in the world, and probably more.

It is our wintertime respite. There will never, ever be anything like the old Palestra doubleheaders, when you walked into the gym on a cold January night and left about five hours later. The wind would bite you as you left. Your back would be just a little bit sore from sitting on those hard benches. And your ears—they would be ringing as you walked out the doors on the 33rd Street side and zipped up your coat, trying to trap some of the warmth inside.

The assault on your senses was unforgettable. You can never let it go. When it comes to basketball—in that way, with that everlasting memory and others—Philadelphia is about the only big city in America that really does have you from cradle to grave.