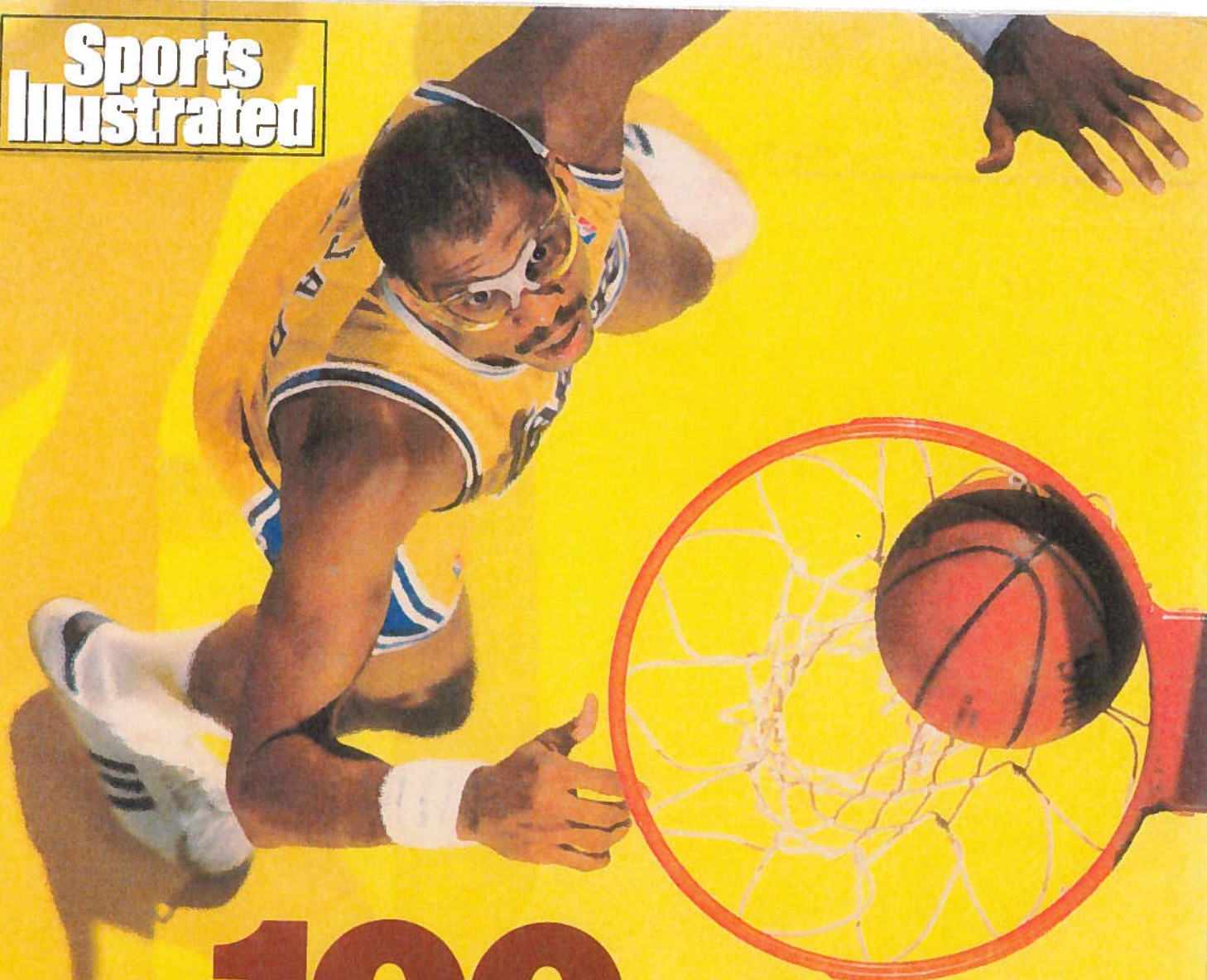
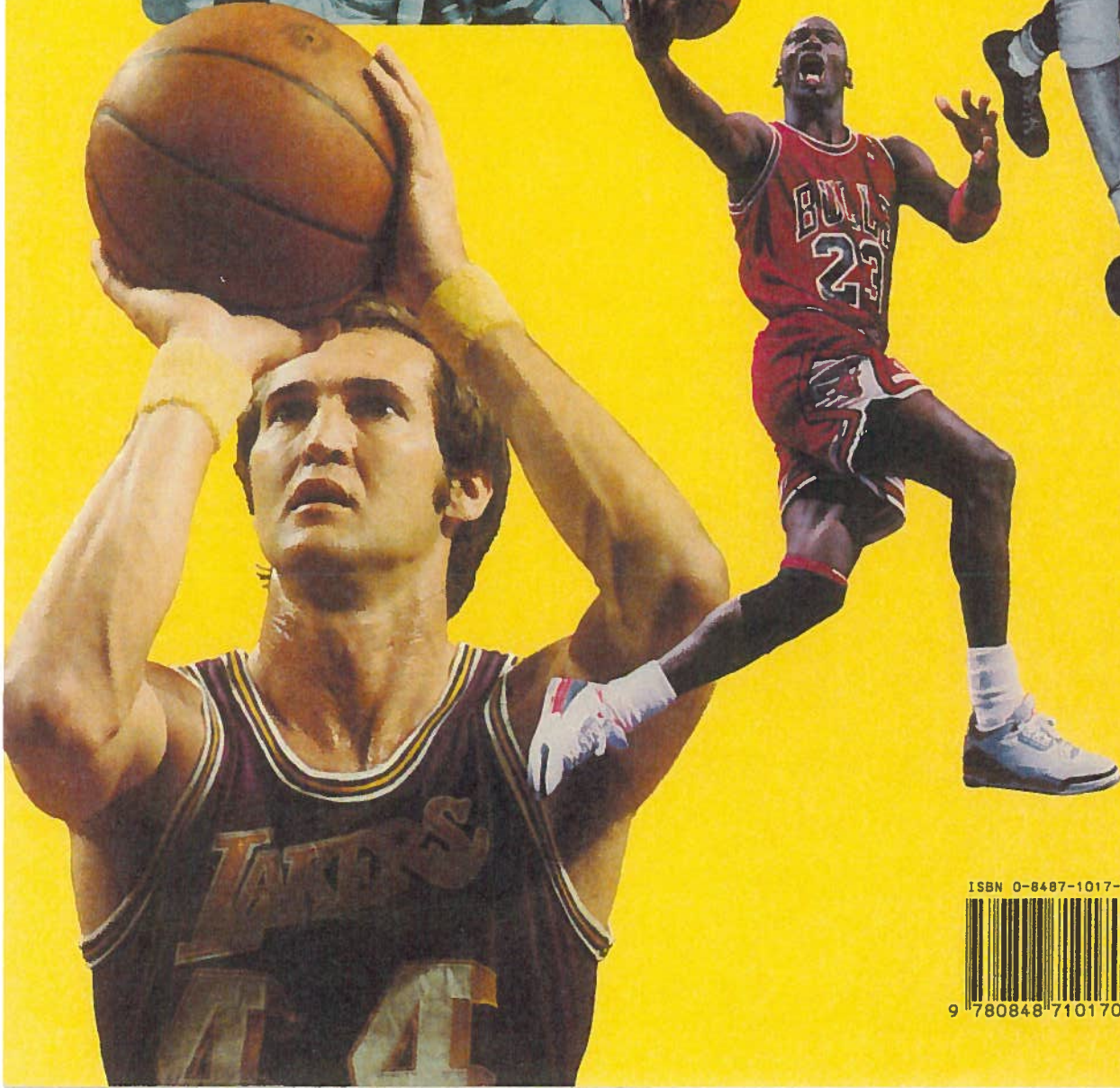
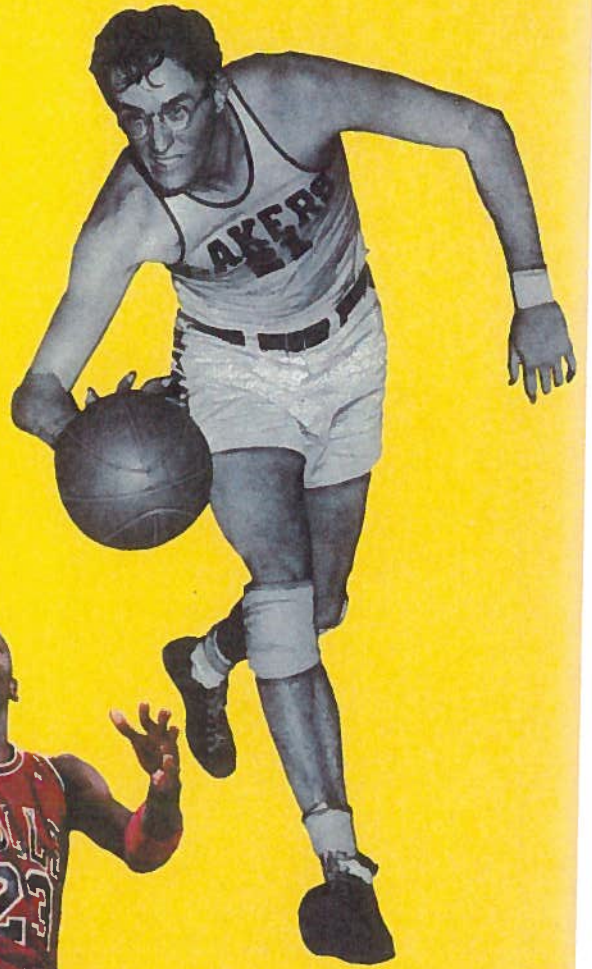


**Sports
Illustrated**



100 Years of **HOOPS**

**A fond look back
at the sport of
basketball as it
celebrates its
first century of
existence. Happy
100th, hoops!**



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The Shot

1936 Hank Luisetti of Stanford brings the one-hander to Madison Square Garden and forever alters the course of the game. "It seemed that Luisetti could do nothing wrong," writes *The New York Times*. "Some of his shots would have been deemed foolhardy if attempted by any other player, but with Luisetti doing the heaving, these were accepted by the crowd as a matter of course."

1940 Kenny Sailors of Wyoming is credited with being the first player to use the jump shot in college competition. Sailors will be tournament MVP as the Cowboys win the 1943 NCAA title.

1944 With three seconds to play in overtime of the NCAA championship game against Dartmouth, Utah guard Herb Wilkinson

There are only two great plays—South Pacific, and put the ball in the basket.
—former NBA coach and referee Charley Eckman

Set, jump, hook. Scoop, tap, layup. Runner, bank, follow. Distill basketball to its elements, and the shot sits at the top of the game's periodic table. No sport has at its core a simpler and more ubiquitous act. Hitting a baseball is vexatiously problematic; stickhandling a puck and throwing a tight spiral are only slightly less so. Ah, but to a basketball player, shooting a shot—shooting *your* shot—is that most life-affirming of skills, most fundamental of fundamentals, as quotidian a task as sleeping, eating or breathing.

Perhaps the shot transcends so because it may be honed alone, with the practitioner's thoughts his own. Or perhaps it's because, when a shot is squeezed off in competition, the shooter has rendered the abilities of the other nine players on the floor—for the life of the ball's flight, anyway—irrelevant. If you sink your shots, get on a roll, start cooking, *feel it*, your private little game detaches itself from the larger one, and the larger one becomes momentarily moot.

The shot can be reduced to mathematical formula, but before it can properly take flight it must be given voice in the exhortations of thousands of coaches, whose mantras—elbow in, follow through, eye on that spot just over the front of the rim—apply whether the hand (nay, the *fingertips!*) from which a shot is launched belongs to the most wizened professional or the most callow biddy tyro. To all this, one must add the proper attitude. "My own philosophy is to keep missing shots until I score one," said Jeff Fryer, the superb jump shooter on Loyola Marymount's teams of the late '80s, "and then keep making shots until I miss one."

In its evolution the shot has climbed up the human body, like a frisky dog. It began as a two-hander, released underhand from between the legs. Since then the shot has come to be sighted from points progressively higher—from the waist, then the chest, then the eyes or the shoulder, and ultimately from above or behind the head. Stanford's Hank Luisetti introduced the one-hander (a.k.a. "the stab"), and Wyoming's Kenny Sailors is widely credited with birthing the jumper (later to be called the J). But former Murray State and Philadelphia Warriors star Joe Fulks was their equal as a pioneer, the first player to bring the ball behind his head to good effect. With

uncommon strength in his upper body, he would leap and hang until a defender could stay up no longer. Another Philadelphian, Paul Arizin, would take Fulks's antigravitational principles and apply them to the one-hander. By 1958 players were releasing their jumpers from points so high that Bill Roeder of *The New York World-Telegram* wrote, "Today's two-handed shooter looks like a subject being frisked. He lifts both hands over his head, lets the guard go through his pockets and casually flips a soft line drive toward the basket.

"It's our prediction," Roeder added, "that if basketball lasts another 25 years, the boys will be shooting with no hands."

Thirty-three years later, it only sometimes seems that way, what with all the idiosyncratic shooting styles the game has spawned. Jerry West and Geoff Petrie were masters of that last hard dribble, the better to propel the ball up into the sling of their hands for release. Cult shooters like Joe Hassett and Rick Mount made jumpers the sine qua non of their games. Ron King, Jamaal Wilkes and Jerry Lucas let fly an amazing array of misbegotten-looking shots that, nonetheless, found the mark with confounding frequency.

With the ascent of the jumper and one-hander came the decline of the hook. Once even forwards, men like Ed Macauley, Tom Heinsohn and Cliff Hagan, knew the utility of this shot that, in its grace and rarity, remains the spiritual polar opposite of the slam dunk. But as the game quickened, more and more shot opportunities came in the open floor and on the move. In this new order, the hook became as antiquated as the set—except, of course, in the environs of the Forum in L.A., where Kareem Abdul-Jabbar let fly his majestic skyhooks.

Bob Houbregs, who spent his college career at Washington launching graceful parabolas from deep in the corners, mastered the hook because a childhood case of rickets stripped him of his jumping ability. Necessity mothered the invention of Sailors's seminal jumper in the backyard of his childhood home in Hillsdale, Wyo.; older brother Bud stood eight inches taller, and Kenny had no choice but to jump before shooting. And in the college towns of the Midwest during the '50s it was said that, from watching where Indiana's Jimmy Rayl launched his curious-looking shots, and from the trajectory each one traced, you could recreate the architecture of the barn in which he learned the game.

To each his own shot; behind every shot a story.



West's quick release made him one of the league's most dangerous jump shooters, particularly in the clutch.

launches a shot from just beyond the top of the key. It hangs on the rim for what seems an eternity, then drops through, giving the Utes a 42-40 victory.

1947 Howie Dallmar of the Philadelphia Warriors goes 0 for 15 in a game against the New York Knicks.

1948 Howie Dallmar goes 0 for 15 again, this time against the Washington Capitols.

Flight

1891 After each basket scored in the original game in Springfield, the ball must be taken out of the peach basket, whose bottom is still intact. School custodian Pop Stebbins has the chance to become the game's first high flyer, but chooses to do the honors while standing on a ladder.

1933 Kenny Sailors, growing up in Hillsdale, Wyo., discovers that he can successfully shoot over his taller, older brother by jumping before letting fly.

1949 Using a jumper that was commonly referred to as an "ear shot," "Jumpin' " Joe Fulks of the Philadelphia Warriors scores 63 points against the Indianapolis Jets.

1957 Seattle's Elgin Baylor blocks a layup attempt by Temple's Guy Rodgers in such a way that the ball caroms to teammate "Sweet" Charlie Brown for a layup. "Elgin," said

It doesn't happen. Can't be done. *Basketball players don't fly.* O.K.? *There's no such thing as "hang time."* It's an illusion. With regard to all that soaring and swooping we see, or think we see, listen up:

A basketball player's center of gravity follows the path of a parabola determined by the amount of vertical thrust he generates at the moment of takeoff. It helps to have high muscle mass and low body fat, but the only thing that determines how long a human being will stay in the air is how efficiently he converts horizontal momentum into vertical force. The majestic spreading of arms and raising of knees make it *seem* that a player is flying. But the only way to actually stay in the air longer is by jumping farther and jumping higher.

The preceding dissertation notwithstanding, who can deny that a select few basketball players *can* rise, levitate, hang, hover and otherwise cut Isaac Newton up?

As does so much else in basketball, flight traces its origins to Hank Luisetti. Out at Stanford, basketball's Kitty Hawk, he became the first college player to leave his feet and only then decide whether to pass or shoot. A few years later Wyoming's Kenny Sailors would leave his feet specifically to shoot. Then, in the NBA, Joe Fulks and Paul Arizin began showcasing the art of going up for shots—and staying there. "I never really thought about my 'hang time' because I didn't know what it was and nobody wrote about it," Arizin has said. "All I know is other players used to say to me, 'How do you stay up there so long?'"

The original levitator, Elgin Baylor, fielded that question disdainfully, always dismissing the notion that he hung in the air. He simply shot on the way down, he said, thereby seeming to hang. More recent practitioners have their own explanations. "Sometimes on a straight rise," Julius Erving once said, "you sort of put your air brake on and wait for the defense to go down." Michael Jordan added this: "I spread my legs pretty wide in the air. Maybe they're just like wings, and they hold me up there a little bit." Maybe. And maybe not. Such scientific musings aside, what is *not* in doubt is how dominant the black player has been in this category; generations who have witnessed the likes of Gus Johnson, "Pogo" Joe Caldwell, Darnell Hillman, "Jumpin'" Johnny Green, Billy (the Kangaroo Kid) Cunningham and Joey Johnson know why basketball people of all colors speak unself-consciously about "white man's disease." As Baylor has noted, "All of us are black except Cunningham, and maybe you'd better check on him."