



Hall of Fame

Heads of the class

National Collegiate Basketball Hall of Fame inductees who attended Sunday night's ceremony included Earl Monroe, Jim Host, Kenny Sailors, Joe B. Hall, Patrick Ewing, Clyde Lovellette and Dave Robbins.

Jump shot was calling card

Former star at Wyoming is credited by some as inventing the modern shooting technique.

By BLAIR KERKHOFF
The Kansas City Star

Thankfully for basketball, Kenny Sailors, 92, never grows weary of telling the story.

Not the one where he was coaching a girls cross-country team in Alaska and stood guard on the route with a rifle to protect his runners against bears, although that's a good one.

No, the jump-shot story.

As far as he knows, Sailors, a former All-American at Wyoming, was the first to leave his feet to shoot. Others have claimed it, and perhaps the most accurate way to assign credit is to suggest Sailors was among the pioneers who began to revolutionize a plodding game in the 1930s.

It's known that a few others in different parts of the country were jumping and

shooting at that time, but like finding the origin of the forward pass in football, pinpointing a precise moment of the first jumper is impossible.

The NCAA has recognized John Cooper, a Missouri Tiger who led the Big Six in scoring in 1932, as the first to use a jump shot in a game. Cooper used two hands to shoot as he jumped.

Sailors had been jumping and shooting since the 1930s, and necessity was the mother of this invention. Jumping was the only way Sailors could compete with his brother, Bud.

"He was five years older than me and stood 6 foot 5," Sailors said. "At the time, I stood about 5 feet 7."

The hoop was attached to a windmill on the family farm. No net, just a rim.

"He loved to slam that ball down in my face," Sailors said. "He said I was too small and should find another game. He called me a little runt."

Trash talking, 1930s style. But Sailors' response was timeless. He got motivated.

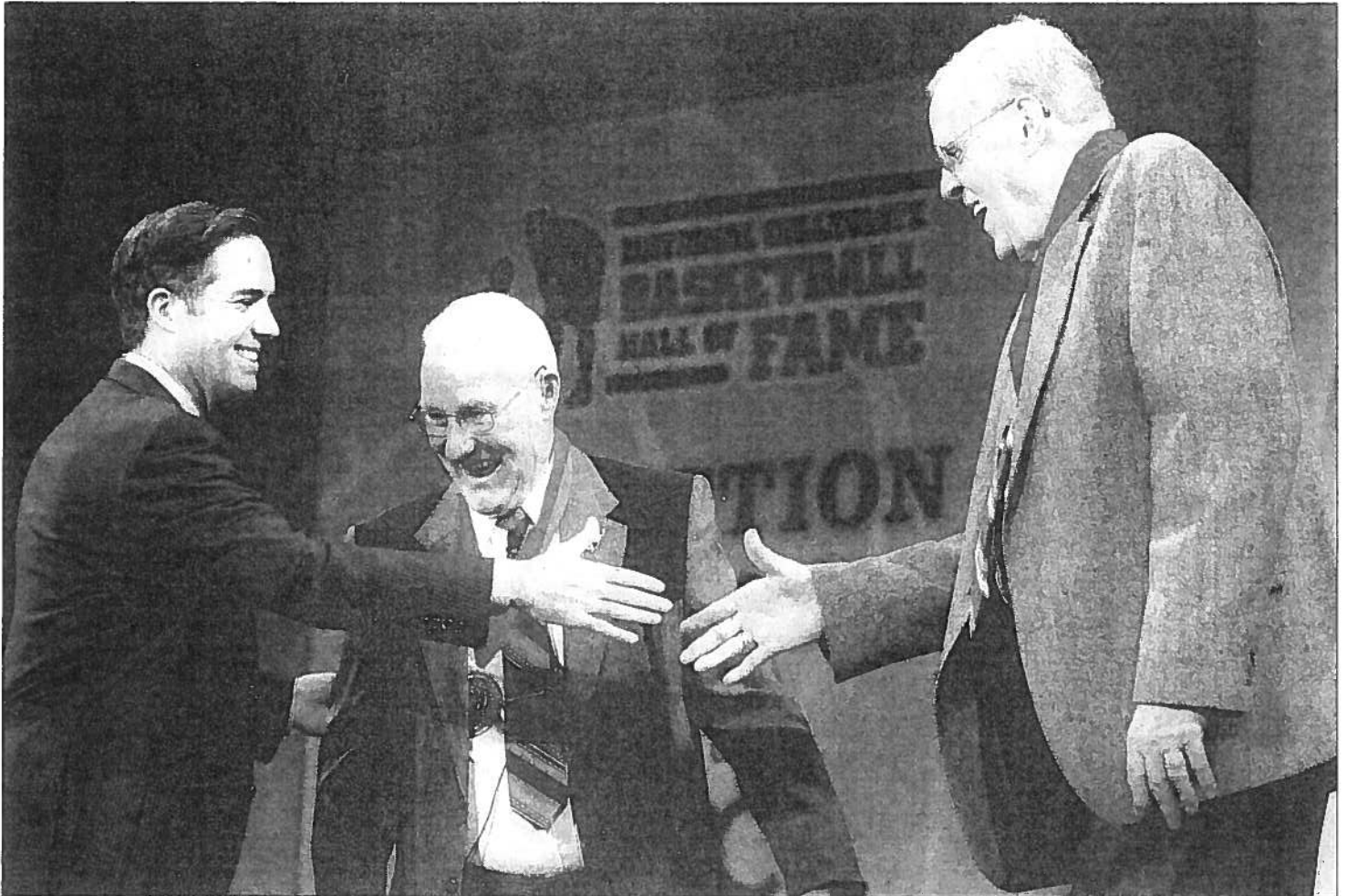
"Now, I could high jump and broad jump pretty good, and I got to thinking the only thing I could do to get above him was to jump," Sailors said. "So I dribbled up to him, and I remember the first time I did it. I jumped and shot it, and the crazy thing went in."

Bud was impressed and encouraged his brother to work on the shot.

Sailors did, and took his game to the best place to be seen: New York City, in the 1943 NCAA Championship. Wyoming defeated Georgetown for the title, and metropolitan sportswriters were amazed by this Wyoming Cowboy with the jump shot.

Sailors was praised for his ball handling and leadership in the tournament. But what especially impressed the New York crowds was how this guard could compete against the taller opponents — because he could jump while shooting.

KENNY SAILORS



RICH SUGG | THE KANSAS CITY STAR

Inductees Kenny Sailors (center) and former KU great Clyde Lovellette were congratulated by Matt Winer (far left) after receiving their medals during ceremonies Sunday night for the National Collegiate Basketball Hall of Fame.