ROCHESTER HISTORY

The Rochester Royals' Maurice Stokes: Kodak City's (and the NBA's) First Black Basketball Star

By Pat Farabaugh

The Twyman-Stokes award recognizes the NBA player deemed "the best teammate based on selfless play, on and off-court leadership as a mentor and role model to other NBA players, and commitment and dedication to his team." The award was created and named in recognition of the inspiring friendship of former Rochester Royals teammates Maurice Stokes and Jack Twyman. From the National Basketball Association.

Front Cover: During his playing career in Rochester, Stokes emerged as the first African-American star player in the National Basketball League. He also played during an era charged with lingering racial prejudice as American athletics slowly turned towards desegregation. Democrat & Chronicle *File Photograph.*

ROCHESTER HISTORY

Dear *Rochester History* Reader,

It seems especially appropriate that this issue of *Rochester History* focuses on Maurice Stokes, widely considered to be the first black basketball star in the world. A little more than a year ago, the Rochester Public Library celebrated another black sports hero, Jackie Robinson, with the traveling exhibit "*Pride and Passion: the African American Baseball Experience*." That exhibit generated a significant amount of discussion about sports and black athletes in the community. Maurice Stokes' story is one of heartbreak and triumph, discrimination and acceptance, as he demonstrated his skill and abilities on the floor again and again. Today, the importance of sports in building and promoting self-esteem among young men and women is again being recognized in the City of Rochester. The City School District is making moves to reinstate sports programs in our schools, while the City of Rochester works to secure the services of football legend Roland Williams to work with city teens. There can be no doubt that without people like Maurice Stokes and Jackie Robinson, we wouldn't see the Roland Williamses or Derek Jeters or Carmelo Anthonys of today. I think you will find Maurice Stokes' story fascinating and uplifting at the same time.

Patricia Uttaro, Library Director

About *Rochester History*

Rochester History is a scholarly journal that provides informative and entertaining articles about the history and culture of Rochester, Monroe County, and the Genesee Valley. In January 1939, Assistant City Historian Blake McKelvey published the first quarterly edition of *Rochester History*. Subjects researched and written by him and other scholars were edited, published, and distributed by McKelvey with the goal of expanding the knowledge of local history. Studying local history as a microcosm of U.S. history has brought insight and understanding to scholars and researchers around the globe.

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Introduction

In his book *WILT, 1962: The Night of 100 Points and the Dawn of a New Era*, Gary Pomerantz writes that Wilt Chamberlain's 100-point game in Hershey, Pennsylvania, on March 2, 1962, was a "hyperbolic announcement of the rise of the black athlete in basketball."[1] If Chamberlain's performance that evening announced *the rise* of the black athlete in the sport, Maurice Stokes' National Basketball Association debut at the Rochester War Memorial on November 5, 1955, announced *the arrival* of the standout black athlete in professional basketball. In front of a raucous War Memorial crowd of 5,723, the Rochester Royals' rookie recorded 32 points, 20 rebounds, and eight assists against the New York Knicks. "They can talk all they want about the (Bob) Cousys, the (Bill) Russells and the rest," said Stokes' former coach and Rochester basketball icon Bobby Wanzer. "But if you were starting a team tomorrow and had to start it with one guy, it has to be Stokes. A complete team ball player."[2]
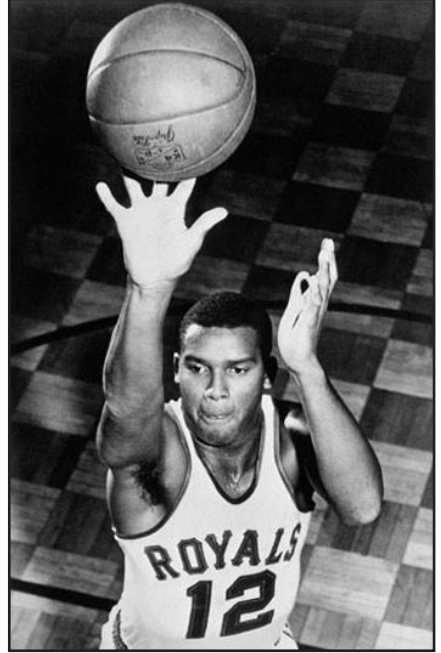
Rochester Royals star Maurice Stokes takes a shot at the basket. Although his playing career was cut short, Stokes nonetheless proved a trailblazing figure in breaking racial barriers, and stereotypes, in professional basketball.
From Saint Francis University Athletics.

On April 13, 1955, Stokes became the first black player drafted by the Royals since the merger of the National Basketball League and the American Basketball Association into the National Basketball Association in 1949. In his three seasons with the Royals, Stokes was voted an NBA all-star three times and earned the league's Rookie-of-the-Year award in 1955. He broke the NBA's single-season rebounding record in 1956 and demonstrated that, contrary to certain popular stereotypes, black athletes could be more than simply "role" players in the league. Unfortunately, Stokes' career was cut short when he was paralyzed after a freak accident less than three years after his professional debut.

Despite his short tenure, Stokes was a catalyst for changing the status of black players in the NBA. Set against a backdrop of an emerging civil rights movement and lingering institutional

segregation—in Rochester and across the country—Stokes' story is a remarkable chapter in the search for racial equality.

The Long Road to Opportunity

When Stokes arrived in Rochester in 1955, black athletes were slowly making in-roads in other U.S. professional sports. That same summer, carrying on the legacy of Jackie Robinson, Ernie Banks and Willie Mays were well on their way to becoming superstars in Major League Baseball. In the National Football League, Joe Perry had led the league in rushing in two of the previous three seasons, becoming the first black player to earn the NFL's Most Valuable Player Award in 1954. And in boxing, Floyd Patterson would soon become the youngest fighter to ever win the heavyweight title, setting the stage for future African-American boxing greats Muhammad Ali and Sonny Liston.

But it was, and would continue to be, a long road for black athletes and, indeed, all of black America. It was only a year before Stokes' arrival in Rochester that the U.S. Supreme Court ordered the integration of the nation's public schools in its *Brown vs. Board of Education*

This Rochester Royals team photograph from 1952 suggests the extent to which early professional basketball teams were predominantly white. There were only five African-American players total in the National Basketball Association during the 1951–52 and 1952–53 seasons.
Democrat & Chronicle *File Photograph.*

decision. In Stokes' second season, Congress passed the first civil rights laws since the Reconstruction Era. The 1957 Civil Rights Act, passed in the same year that Martin Luther King founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, was bolstered by a second act in 1960, designed to ensure that blacks were not denied the right to vote. While these civil rights initiatives resulted in varying degrees of success, they also faced setbacks in the form of fierce resistance. A backlash of bigotry and prejudice met the civil rights impulse at nearly every turn.

Yet a small step forward in the struggle for racial equality in America occurred in the summer of 1955 when Stokes arrived in the Kodak City. Within professional basketball, the game had been "whitewashed" until the 1950s. Almost all of the players, coaches, owners, officials, and fans were white. Pittsburgh's Chuck Cooper—a friend and mentor to Stokes— became the first black player drafted into the NBA when he was chosen by the Boston Celtics in 1950.[3] With Cooper's arrival, the NBA became the last of the four major professional sports leagues in the United States (NBA, Major League Baseball, National Football League, and the National Hockey League) to break the color barrier.

Four black players—Cooper, Nate "Sweetwater" Clifton, Earl Lloyd and Hank DeZonie— saw action in the NBA during the 1950–51 season. They accounted for 3 percent of the 135 players competing in the league. Five blacks dotted the league's rosters in 1951–52 and 1952–53, six in 1953–54, and nine in 1954–55. When Stokes joined the Royals that season, 12 of the 92 players in the NBA (13 percent) were African-American. This included three Rochester players (Stokes, Ed Fleming, and Dick Ricketts), all signed that year.[4]

Steel City Standout

Maurice Stokes was born on June 17, 1933, in Rankin, Pennsylvania, a community roughly eight miles south of Pittsburgh on the edge of the Monogahela River. He and his twin sister, Claurice, were the youngest of Myrtle and Terro Stokes' four children. Stokes' father worked at the Jones and Laughlin Steel Company, pouring molten iron. When Maurice was 5, the family moved to Pittsburgh's Homewood section, where many immigrants—German, Irish, Italian, Polish, Serbian, etc.—also made their home during the first half of the twentieth century. During this time, many Pennsylvania blacks moved into the city from surrounding counties, where they had previously made their livelihoods in the farming and mining industries, joining those migrating north from the Jim Crow South. Both groups of black newcomers settled within already established communities, living side-by-side with their white, fellow-migrant neighbors.

Within a decade, however, the make-up of the neighborhood had changed dramatically. "It was not long before it was a black neighborhood," Stokes recalled. "The transformation was

almost complete by the time I finished high school."[5] Where blacks, Irish, Italians, and others had once lived next door to one another, they now separated to form their own communities. This segregation was "helped" along by racist policies instituted by a number of Pittsburgh real estate agencies that refused to show houses on certain streets to prospective black home buyers. The Federal Government proved a complicit partner in this process through its notorious "red-lining" techniques. Despite the neighborhood's transformation, George Westinghouse High School remained integrated, drawing students from various "re-segregated" neighborhoods. It was roughly 55 percent white and 45 percent black when Stokes graduated in 1951.

Stokes began playing basketball as a sixth grader at Baxter Junior High and quickly discovered that the sport allowed him an outlet for self-expression.[6] At Westinghouse, he served as a reserve during his freshman and sophomore seasons before earning a starting spot. He teamed with his best friend Ed Fleming to lead the Bulldogs to district and city championships and advance to the state semifinals in the 1949–50 and 1950–51 seasons.

Duquesne University, Niagara University, Penn State University, St. Francis College (now St. Francis University), and Washington and Jefferson College offered Stokes basketball scholarships. Several other schools expressed interest, but some coaches believed he was too slow to play major college basketball. St. Francis coach William "Skip" Hughes wasn't one of them and invited Stokes to a try-out. The Westinghouse graduate made the 90-mile trip eastward to rural Loretto, Pennsylvania, and dominated several pick-up games versus SFC players. Hughes was sold on Stokes, but Stokes was not sold on St. Francis. In order to make the school more attractive, Hughes offered Stokes' high school teammate Eugene Phelps a scholarship, too. Phelps, who had graduated from Westinghouse a semester ahead of Stokes, accepted, becoming the first black student to earn an athletic scholarship to the college.[7] Less than six months later, Stokes became the second.
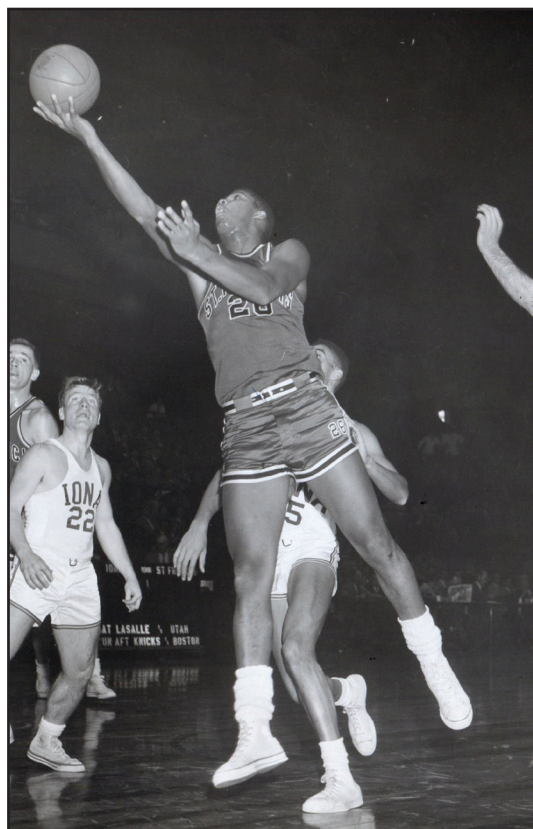
St. Francis Sensation

Stokes and Phelps were the only blacks among the 395 students on the school's campus. Unlike many freshmen basketball players who sat out their first collegiate season, Stokes took to the court immediately. The 6-foot-6-inch, 250-pound freshman averaged 16.8 points per game and led the Frankies to a 23–7 record in 1951–52. He also led SFC in rebounding. These were just two facets of Stokes' game, however. He often led the Frankies' fast break offense, and his quickness allowed him to pressure the ball the length of the court on defense, a feat unheard of for a player his size during this period. His ability to find teammates for open looks near the basket was also unmatched by other "big men" around the country.

Stokes put St. Francis on the nation's college basketball map, leading the tiny school to back-to-back National Invitation Tournament (NIT) appearances during his junior and senior seasons. What he accomplished as a senior in the 1954–55 NIT was nothing short of spectacular. In an opening-round victory over Seton Hall, he recorded 29 points, 20 rebounds, and five assists. In the second-round victory against Holy Cross, he tallied 21 points and 22 rebounds.

Next up for Stokes and the Frankies was a quarterfinal match-up with the University of Dayton. "This absorbing contest," wrote *The New York Times'* Joseph Sheehan, "saw Maurice Stokes stage one of the most dazzling exhibitions ever seen here [at Madison Square Garden]."[8] Stokes finished the game—won by Dayton, 79–73, in overtime—with a career-high 43 points and 21 rebounds. His point total was the highest of any performer at the Garden that season and the second-most for any player in the

An image of Maurice Stokes playing for Saint Francis College, a small Pennsylvania school in the Allegheny Mountains. Stokes led St. Francis to back-to-back National Invitation Tournament (NIT) appearances during his junior and senior seasons. From Saint Francis University Athletics.

history of the NIT. Only DePaul's legendary George Mikan had scored more points in a single tournament game. Sportswriter Lawrence Robinson of the *New York World Telegram* argued that it was not only the finest all-time performance in the NIT, but also the greatest individual effort in the arena's history. "In 20 years of Garden play, court greats of all eras have appeared on its polished boards—[Hank] Luisetti, [Frank] Baumholtz, [Ernie] Calverly, [Harry] Boykoff, [George] Mikan, [Ed] Macauley, [Tom] Gola and others. None could surpass the all-around perfection of the 6 ft., 6 in., Western Pa. giant last night."[9]

With the loss, St. Francis moved into the consolation bracket of the NIT, where it faced the University of Cincinnati and its high-scoring senior forward Jack Twyman. SFC lost the game in overtime, but Stokes finished the contest with 31 points, 24 rebounds, and 10 assists and earned tournament MVP honors by unanimous vote despite his team's fourth-place finish. When

he accepted the MVP award, a Madison Square Garden crowd of more than 18,000 gave him a standing ovation that lasted almost five minutes. New York City had embraced the St. Francis star.

Not everyone, however, rallied around Stokes like the fans at Madison Square Garden. On a road trip during Stokes' junior season, St. Francis traveled to Quantico, Virginia, to play a game against a team of Marine Corps service members. On their way to the game, the Frankies stopped for dinner at a restaurant outside of Washington, D.C. While Hughes and the players waited in the parking lot, the team's manager, Pete Parrish, checked to see if the restaurant could accommodate the group's 16-member travel party. Seating wasn't the problem, Parrish told the team when he returned. The problem was that the restaurant did not serve blacks.

Racism would rear its ugly head again that season. In January 1954, while traveling, one of St. Francis' freshman players—within earshot of Stokes and Phelps—shouted "Eenie, meenie, minie, moe, grab a nigger by the toe." Nobody said anything at the time, but a sense of uneasiness descended upon the team. Upon returning to campus, Phelps—the team's captain—called a players-only meeting without notifying Hughes. He told his coach about what had happened and that he had gotten the players together to discuss the matter. Phelps assured Hughes that the situation had been "resolved."[10]
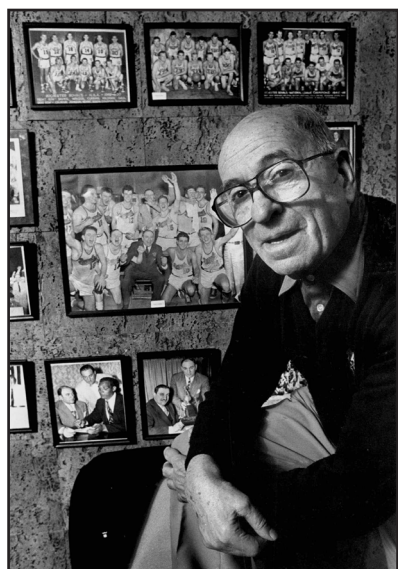
Throughout a long life, "Lucky" Lester Harrison (1904–1997) brought his love of basketball to Rochester, first as a player, then as manager of the Seagrams, and finally as the owner of the Royals. Democrat & Chronicle *File Photograph.*

Rochester's Championship Team

Professional basketball arrived in Rochester in the 1920s, and "Lucky" Les Harrison was front and center right from the start. Born on August 20, 1904, Harrison played basketball at Rochester's East High School and fell in love with the sport. After graduating from East in 1923, he joined a semi-professional team sponsored by the Seagrams Liquor Company and Eber Brothers, a local fruit and vegetable wholesaler. By 1925, he had assumed a managerial role with the team, known as the Seagrams.

The Seagrams enjoyed consistent success, regularly beating some of the nation's top independent and amateur squads. By the time the United States entered World War II, Harrison had assembled one of the strongest semi-pro squads in the country. The team's roster included five All-Americans—Johnny Moir and Paul Nowak of Notre Dame, Gus Broberg of Dartmouth, Jerry Bush
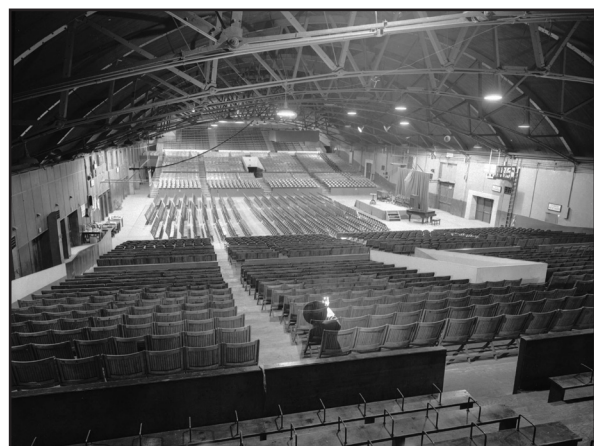
of St. John's, and Jack Ozburn of Monmouth.[11] In 1940 and 1941, the Seagrams competed in Chicago's World Professional Basketball Tournament, one of the premier semi-pro events in the country.

The franchise moved into Edgerton Park Sports Arena in 1943 and changed its name to the Rochester Pros. Named after former Rochester mayor Hiram Edgerton, the Sports Arena provided the Pros with a distinct home-court advantage. Constructed in the mid- and late-nineteenth century as a training school for delinquent children, Edgerton Park included a 4,200-seat,


Rochester Royals owner Les Harrison can be seen here, at center, with his arm raised in mid-cheer during a Royals game at Edgerton Park Sports Arena. The stadium was infamous for its loud, often hostile crowds of Rochester fans. Democrat & Chronicle *File Photograph.*

dimly lit arena. The cramped stadium got loud quickly, and raucous Rochester fans were not always the most gracious of hosts, often pelting opposing players with coins when they came on and off the court. Tripping opposing players was not an uncommon occurrence either.[12]

Harrison purchased a National Basketball League (NBL) expansion franchise in 1945 for $25,000. He assumed the role of president, manager, and co-head coach. The new owner

A May 1950 photograph of the interior of the Edgerton Park Sports Arena. The original home stadium of the Rochester Royals could seat 4,200 people. Courtesy of the City of Rochester.

conducted a city-wide competition to find a name for his team. Fifteen-year-old Rochester native Richard Paeth won a $100 bond after suggesting that the team be called the Royals. "What could be more fitting than this as a name for the team Les Harrison is going to send out to bring the crown to Rochester?" Paeth asked.[13] Like the Seagrams, the Royals enjoyed immediate success, capturing the 1946 NBL championship in their inaugural season. The team's roster was loaded with talent, including
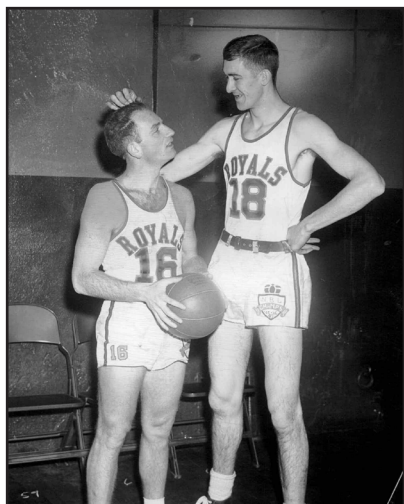
Arnie Risen (#18) and Red Holzman (#16) enjoy a lighthearted moment in this 1948 photograph. These two players were core members of some talented early Royals squads, including the 1951 championship team, which provided Rochester it's only championship in any of the nation's four major professional sports leagues: NBA, NFL, MLB, and NHL. Democrat & Chronicle *File Photo.*

Al Cervi, Bob Davies, Dutch Garfinkle, George Glamack, Red Holzman, Fuzzy Levane, and John Mahnken, as well as future National Football League Hall-of-Fame quarterback Otto Graham. Following back-to-back Eastern Division titles in 1947 and 1948, it appeared that Rochester would be a perennial power in the league.[14]

In May 1948, Rochester and three other NBL teams—Fort Wayne, Indianapolis, and Minneapolis— left the NBL and joined the competing Basketball Association of America (BAA), which had been founded in 1946.[15] Unlike NBL franchises, which were primarily located in small Midwestern cities, BAA teams tended to be established in large Northeastern cities by wealthy arena owners. Most operated successful professional hockey franchises and had gotten into the pro-basketball business as a way to fill their arenas when their hockey teams were away.

Teams in the new league generated decent profits in their first couple of seasons and had first-rate facilities, but the NBL boasted more talented players. To address this problem, the BAA lured several NBL franchises, including Rochester, to switch leagues. The BAA and the NBL consolidated to form the NBA in August 1949. Rochester was one of 17 charter members.[16] In the NBA's inaugural season, the Royals posted a 51–17 record, including a 33–1 mark at home, but were swept in the opening round of the playoffs by Fort Wayne. The following season, the NBA contracted to 11 teams, and Rochester finished three games behind Minneapolis in the Western Division before defeating both Fort Wayne and Minneapolis to advance to the finals. Behind the inside-outside play of 6-foot-9-inch Arnie "Stilts" Risen and Bob Davies, the Royals defeated the Knicks, four games to three, in the first NBA Finals to go seven games. It is the only championship for the city of Rochester in any of the nation's four major sports leagues.

Rochester's "Royal" Royal

In the years following their 1951 NBA championship, the Royals fell on hard times. By 1955, most of the star players from the 1951 title team were past their prime or gone. Holzman retired in 1953, and Harrison traded Risen to the Celtics in early 1955. Davies—the NBL's Most Valuable Player in 1947— retired after the 1954–55 season. By the time Stokes arrived

in Rochester, the only key contributor remaining from the Royals' 1951 NBA championship team was Bobby Wanzer. The 34-year-old point guard had led Rochester in scoring in 1954–55, averaging 13.1 points per game. The Royals selected Stokes with the second pick of the NBA's annual draft in April 1955. With its second- and third-round selections, Rochester chose the University of Cincinnati's Jack Twyman and Niagara University's Ed Fleming, Stokes' best friend and former Westinghouse teammate. Stokes and Fleming became only the third and fourth professional black basketball players to play in Rochester, and the first since the team joined the NBA. The city's first black player, Dolly King, signed with the NBL Royals on October 15, 1946, and played just one season with the franchise. William "Pop" Gates joined the Royals in 1946.[17] "They (King and Gates) were really the first black pioneers in pro sports," Harrison said. "They suffered all the discrimination and slights before Jackie Robinson, Chuck Cooper and the rest."[18]

A 1946 photograph of Les Harrison (left) and his brother Jack (center) signing Dolly King (right) to a contract, making him the first African-American player on the Rochester Royals. Thirty years old when he joined the team, King only played one season with the franchise. Democrat & Chronicle *File Photo.*

The Royals moved into a new building during Stokes' first professional season in 1955, relocating from the Edgerton Park Sports Arena to the 8,000-seat Rochester Community War Memorial. In this photograph from 1954, construction for the new arena is underway. Courtesy of the City of Rochester.

In drafting Stokes, Harrison was looking for a centerpiece player around which to rebuild his franchise. Stokes was looking for a payday. "My folks have been nice to me while I've been in college, giving me spending money and all and I'd like to start taking care of them," he said. "I'd like some big money fast."[19] He got it. Stokes agreed to a $25,000 two-year contract with the Royals, which placed him among the highest paid players in the league. The average annual salary for an NBA player in 1955 was approximately $6,500, and many players earned less than $5,000 per season.[20]

The Royals underwent several changes in Stokes' first year. Harrison retired, and Wanzer assumed the role of player/coach. The Royals also moved into a new building, relocating from the Edgerton Park Sports Arena to the new $7 million, 8,000-seat Rochester Community War Memorial (now the Blue Cross Arena).[21] Harrison was confident that, with a new arena and a marquee player in Stokes, the Royals would soon return to prominence.

Stokes' performance in his pro debut against the New York Knicks on November 5, 1955, grabbed the attention of coaches, fans, and players around the league. The rookie from the tiny school in the middle of nowhere dominated the Knicks' formidable line-up, which included 6-foot-11-inch Ray Felix, 6-9 Ken Sears, and 6-8 Sweetwater Clifton. "He's the best rookie to come into pro basketball since the great George Mikan and Bobby Davies," said longtime Rochester Central High School coach Johnny Murphy.[22] Knicks coach and Big Apple basketball icon Joe Lapchick went even further, responding to a reporter's query about whether a rookie had ever had a better professional debut. "How could it be possible?" he replied.[23]

Stokes' next two games were also impressive: 17 points and 20 rebounds against defending league champion Syracuse and 26 points, 20 boards, and seven assists versus the Philadelphia Warriors. The latter was played at Madison Square Garden, where a crowd of 18,245 turned out to welcome Stokes back to the venue where he had shined in the National Invitation Tournament. It was the largest-ever turnout for an NBA game. "Stokes didn't disappoint the rabidly pro-Rochester throng," wrote Royals beat writer George Beahon of the Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle*. "He played 43 of the 48 minutes, and on the two occasions he was replaced, the fans moaned."[24]

Racism and Respect

Despite his star power on the court, Stokes—as well as Fleming and Dick Ricketts (acquired by the Royals in a midseason trade with St. Louis)—still encountered racism. Trips to St. Louis, the NBA's southern-most franchise, were particularly difficult. "All you heard (in games) was 'nigger,' 'monkey,' 'coon,'" said NBA referee Norm Drucker.[25] Several teammates also recalled racist encounters in that city. "We went out for our pregame meal and the manager came up

to me and said, 'we don't serve colored people,'" Wanzer said. "So we went to a Chinese restaurant."[26] On another occasion, the Royals sat down to eat at a popular St. Louis restaurant and the waiter told Harrison that Stokes, Fleming, and Ricketts were not welcome. "They
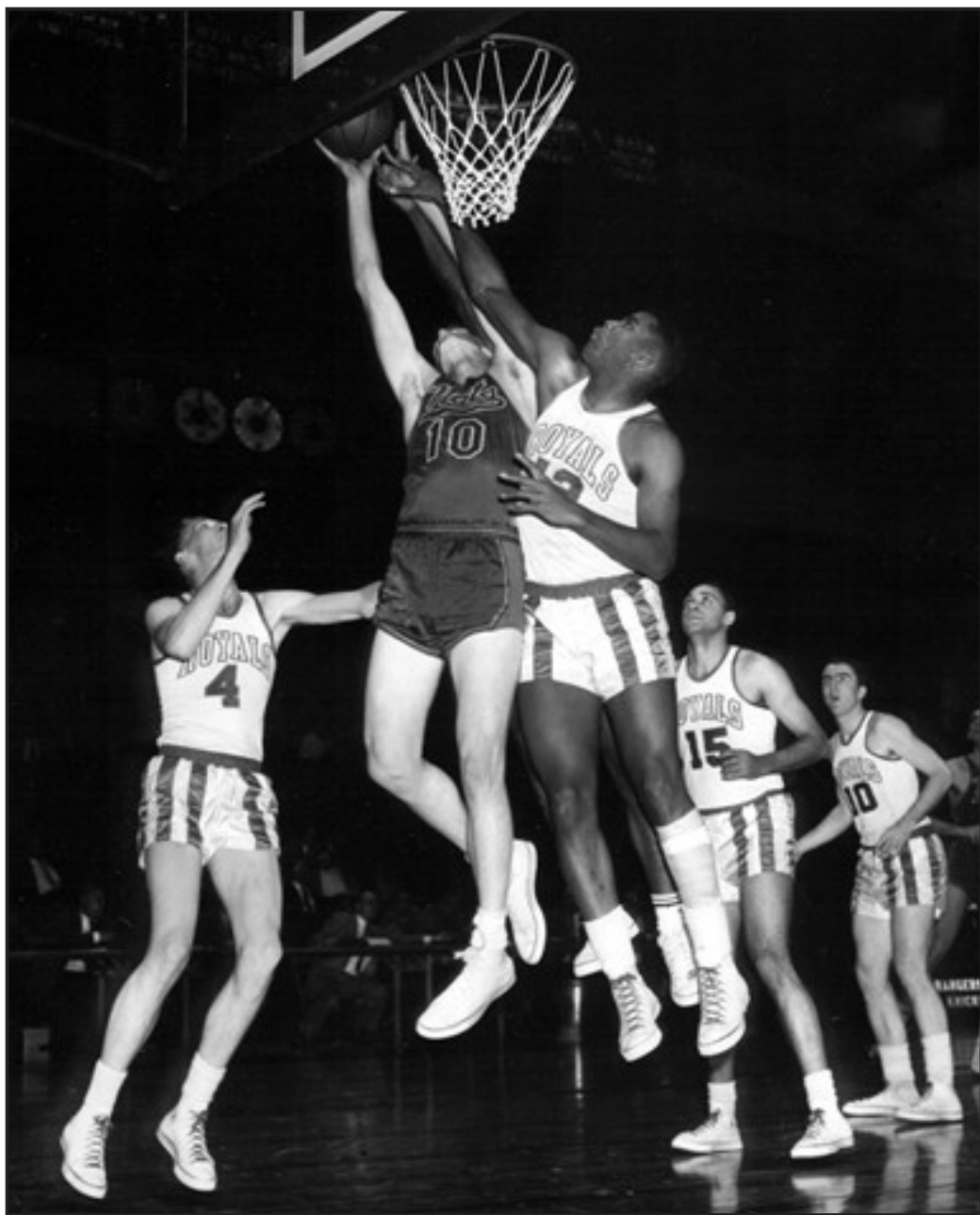
Maurice Stokes made an immediate impact in the NBA. In this photograph from his first professional season, Stokes blocks a shot from Syracuse Nationals center Red Kerr. Stokes earned the NBA's Rookie-of-the-Year award in 1956. From Saint Francis University Athletics.

went outside and the rest of us ordered the most expensive thing on the menu," Ritchie Regan recalled. "When they brought the food out, we told them we had seen a cockroach and we all walked out."[27]

Stokes quickly discovered that discrimination was not unique to the South; it could be found in Rochester, too, making it difficult for Stokes and Fleming to find housing when they first arrived. "We did find one, but it was not what we wanted," Stokes wrote in his autobiography.[28] "The experience of that summer was only a small portion of what the basketball season would be like socially."[29] Like many Midwestern and Northeastern cities during the Second Great Migration, Rochester was experiencing an influx of blacks from the South who were seeking employment. Integration was much slower in Rochester than in most other industrial cities, though. In 1960, African Americans still made up less than eight percent of the city's population.[30] "At the time, they had a section called the 'Black Bottom' and it was like a line through town, below which black people lived," Fleming said. "We were channeled into that area."[31]

Stokes' teammates were not all completely at ease with the integration that was transforming the Kodak City and their team either. The Royals' 1954–55 roster included several players who had been raised in the Jim Crow South. On one occasion, a Southern-born player invited the entire team over to his home for dinner. "The player's wife told my wife how difficult it was for them to invite black people over because they had never done that in their life," Regan recalled.[32]

On January 24, 1956, Rochester hosted the sixth annual NBA all-star game, and Stokes was selected to participate in the contest following a vote by the league's coaches. It was the first and only time the Kodak City hosted the event. With his selection, Stokes became only the second black player chosen for an NBA all-star game.[33] He was humbled. "To be a member of the select few that represent your division is a thrill that cannot be expressed in words," he said.[34] He finished the game with 10 points, 16 rebounds, and four assists to help lead the NBA's Western Division to victory at the Rochester War Memorial.

The Royals finished Stokes' rookie season with a win-loss record of 31–41 and a 14–14 home mark on the Rochester hardwood. Rochester's star player earned the NBA's Rookie-of-the-Year award and garnered second-team all-league honors. Stokes was the only rookie and just the second black player in league history to earn All-NBA honors.[35] He ranked 11th in the NBA in scoring and ninth in assists. Stokes' passing ability was perhaps the most impressive part of his game. NBA big men simply didn't distribute the ball the way he did during this period. "In a game where one's ability to score is of paramount importance," wrote *Pittsburgh Press* sports editor Pat Livingston, "he was constantly one of the league's leaders in assists. His own scoring suffered because of his unselfish zeal to get the ball to an open man with a better shot."[36]

Stokes vs. Russell

Despite Stokes' star power, average home-game attendance was a dismal 2,070 at the War Memorial, a facility that seated 8,000. Because its win-loss record was the worst in the league, Rochester was awarded the first pick in the 1956 NBA draft. Most of the league's owners believed that the University of San Francisco's All-American center Bill Russell was the nation's top player. Russell had led his team to back-to-back NCAA titles. But Harrison questioned Russell's value to the Royals and, for various reasons, chose not to pursue him.[37] With Stokes returning for his second pro season, Harrison believed his team's rebounding situation was solid for the foreseeable future. "We had Stokes," he said, "and he would have been as good as Russell if he hadn't gotten ill."[38] Instead, Rochester drafted Duquesne's Sihugo Green with the top pick in the 1956 NBA draft. Russell ended up in Boston, where he would go on to win the NBA's Most Valuable Player award five times and lead his team to 11 league titles in 13 seasons.

Boston hosted the 1957 NBA all-star game, and Stokes was selected as a starter in the contest. He was brilliant in the game (19 points, 12 rebounds, and seven assists) and nearly

Rochesterians crowd around the War Memorial on October 16, 1955, the first day it opened to the public. Unfortunately for team owner Les Harrison, the Rochester Royals failed to draw large attendance figures. From 1951 to 1957, the team lost an estimated $131,000, including $18,000 in losses in 1956–57, the team's last season in Rochester. Courtesy of the City of Rochester.

walked away with the MVP award, which was presented instead to Boston's Bob Cousy. Playing on his home court, the Celtics point guard recorded 10 points, five rebounds, and seven assists, but he made just four of 14 shots from the field. "It was his (Cousy's) hometown," Wanzer said. "They beat us, so they gave it to the winner."[39] The following evening, perhaps venting a little frustration after being snubbed for the award, Stokes erupted for 31 points against St. Louis. His 33 rebounds marked a Rochester War Memorial record.

Russell made his first appearance in Rochester on January 19, 1957. A crowd of 6,027 turned out to watch Stokes and the Celtics' rookie big man face off. Stokes outscored and outrebounded Russell, but Boston won the game. "Stokes clearly outplayed the widely advertised Russell," George Beahon wrote. "The freshman had a better than average night for any rookie, but he couldn't find the hoop without the aid of radar and had the ball taken out of his hands three times by Stokes. To his credit, Russell blocked three shots in the process of picking up a free tutoring session from Stokes."[40]

In a victory over Boston in early March, Stokes broke the NBA's single-season rebounding record, grabbing 20 rebounds in a nationally televised game. The Royals hosted Philadelphia in the team's final home game of the 1956–57 season four nights later. Rochester Mayor Peter Barry tabbed the evening "Maurice Stokes Night."[41] At halftime, NBA president Maurice

Empty seats were a familiar sight during Royals' home games.
This interior shot of the War Memorial is from December 1955. Courtesy of the City of Rochester.

Podoloff presented Stokes the 1955 Rookie-of-the-Year trophy, as well as the keys to a new car, purchased through contributions from the community.[42] St. Francis College President Rev. Kevin Keelan and New York congressman Kenneth Keating sent telegrams to be read aloud. "It is a privilege and honor to play for the people of Rochester," Stokes told the audience after accepting the honors.[43]

Stokes finished his second NBA season with a league-record 1,256 rebounds (17.4 per game). He had collected an incredible 34.2 percent of his team's total rebounds that year and placed fifth in the league's MVP voting. But Rochester finished with a 31–41 win-loss record for a second straight season.
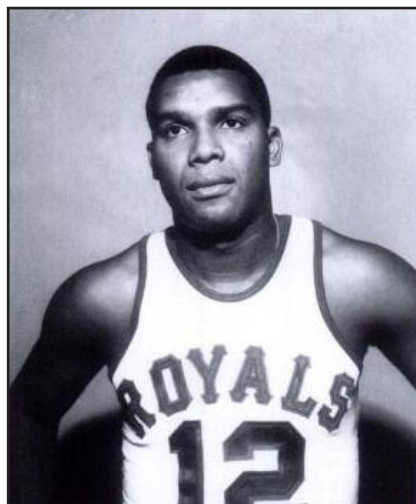
"It is a privilege and honor to play for the people of Rochester," Maurice Stokes declared before receiving his Rookie-of-the-Year trophy in front of an audience at the War Memorial. Rochester Mayor Peter Barry tabbed the evening, the final game of the 1956–57 Royals season, "Maurice Stokes Night." From Saint Francis University's Maurice Stokes Collection.

Farewell to Rochester

The Royals relocated from Rochester to Cincinnati before the start of the 1957–58 season. Harrison wanted to keep the team in his hometown, but mounting financial losses forced him to make the move. The Royals were failing to draw fans to the War Memorial, with the team averaging just 2,300 spectators a game in 1956–57. That same season, the Rochester Americans, the city's new minor league hockey team, shared the War Memorial with the Royals. Hockey games outdrew basketball games at the arena by a two-to-one margin. "If I get the right offer, I have to go out of town," Harrison announced. "How can I change my mind in the face of continued losses? I am a businessman. I have to operate the same as a man running a department store."[44]

Rochester simply was not big enough to compete financially with organizations based in larger cities. Rochester failed to generate a profit in any of the six seasons between 1951 and 1957, losing an estimated $131,000. Only Fort Wayne ($246,000 in losses) and Minneapolis ($160,000) lost more money over this six-season stretch.[45] In the 1956–57 season—the Royals' last one in Rochester—the franchise ranked fifth in the eight-team NBA in home attendance, drawing 122,502 fans to its games. The Boston Celtics, by contrast, led the league in home attendance at 288,998.[46]

Shortly after reaching his decision to sell, Harrison found a prospective buyer in Rochester.

Norman Shapiro believed he could keep the team in the city and reverse the franchise's financial fortunes. Harrison agreed to sell the team to the Rochester businessman for $200,000 on one condition—that he be retained as a consultant and scout at a salary of $10,000 a year. Shapiro agreed. There was, however, a fly in the ointment: NBA President Maurice Podoloff was a strong proponent of moving the Royals out of Rochester, and he convinced the other league owners to veto the deal Harrison had reached with Shapiro.[47]

Podoloff feared that the NBA would not be able to secure a network television contract if it continued to sponsor teams in "minor-league" cities. The Fort Wayne Pistons had already relocated to Detroit, and the Syracuse Nationals would move to Philadelphia in 1963. "If you have a rich set of tulip bulbs," he asked, "and they barely exist in one plot of ground, and you know they will prosper in another area, what would you do?"[48] With the Shapiro deal blocked, Harrison sold the franchise to a Cincinnati group headed by Frank Wood for $225,000. The sale generated disappointment among Royals fans, but for most of the Rochester community, the team's departure went largely unnoticed.

A Freak Accident

Expectations were high for the Cincinnati Royals entering the 1957–58 season. The vaunted *Dell's* basketball preview called Wanzer's team "the most improved in the league" and predicted that the Royals would be "right on the heels" of St. Louis in the Western Division.[49] In early December, the Royals were within a game of the Hawks for first place in the West when Stokes tore cartilage in his left knee. He missed nine of Cincinnati's next 11 games; the team posted just one victory during that stretch, sinking to last place in the West. Cincinnati rebounded upon Stokes' return to the line-up, however, qualifying for the playoffs for the first time in the third-year player's career.

When he awoke before his team's last regular season game in Minneapolis on March 12, 1958, Stokes had no way of knowing that his life's course would be dramatically altered that evening. Before the game, Stokes and Ricketts met former teammate Fleming, who had been traded to Minneapolis before the season, for dinner. "Maurice was walking with his head titled back a bit and I said, 'What's wrong with you?'" Fleming recalled. "He said he had a cyst or boil on his neck."[50] It had been there since February. Royals team doctor Ben Hawkins had examined the lump and told Stokes that it was nothing to worry about, even as it continued to grow larger. But Stokes told Ricketts he had less energy and was more easily fatigued since the lump had appeared. He had also begun suffering headaches regularly. The boil, which was warm to the touch, concerned Stokes enough that he sought a second opinion from a private doctor in
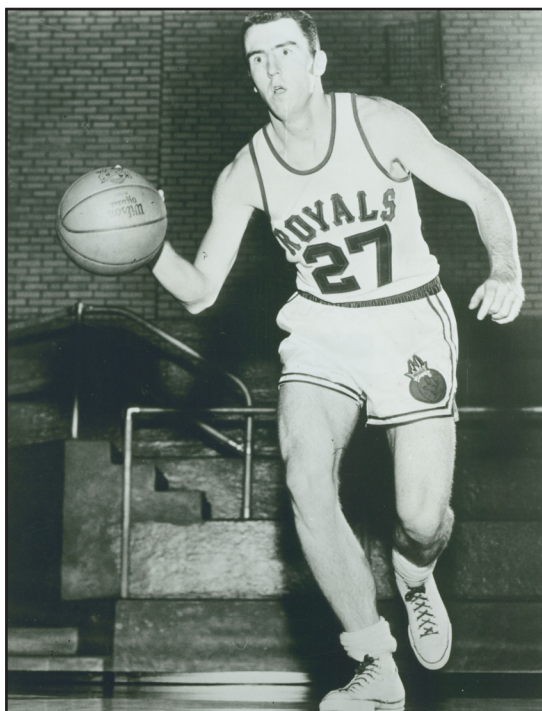
Cincinnati.[51] This doctor recommended that it be removed and scheduled the procedure for the morning following the Minneapolis game.

During the game that night, Stokes drove hard to the basket and put up a shot that was off the mark. After releasing the ball, he collided with Lakers star Vern Mikkelsen and crashed to the floor. His head whipped backward and struck the court. "He made a sound [when he hit the floor]," said Lakers guard Bob Leonard. "A thud." Stokes was unconscious for about three minutes.[52]
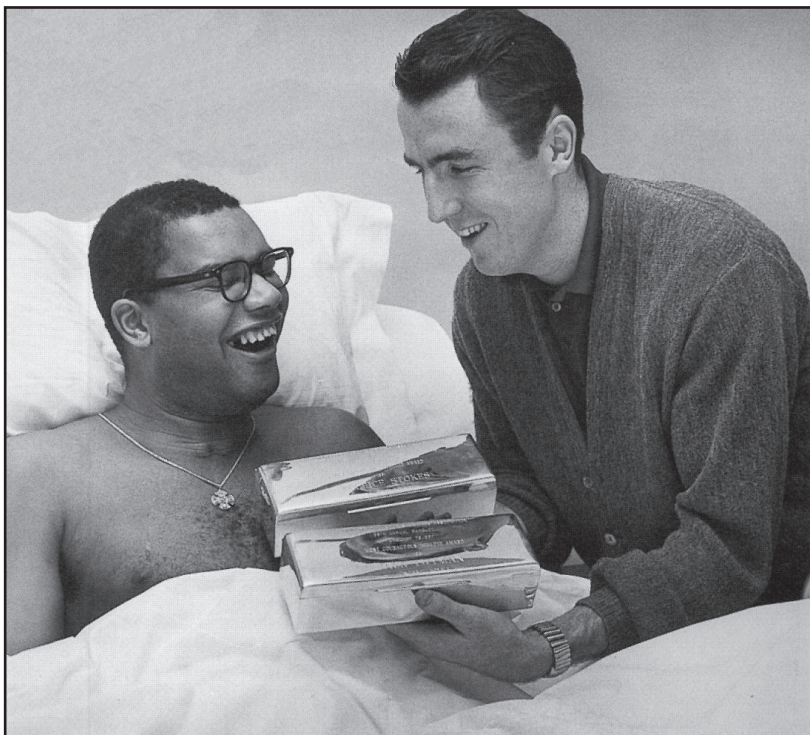
Medical staff revived Stokes with smelling salts. He got up on his own and walked slowly to the Royals bench, trying to clear out the mental cobwebs. He returned to action after a short break. Stokes never would have been cleared to return to action minutes after such an accident in today's NBA. Instead, he would have been sent to

Jack Twyman, along with Wilt Chamberlain, became the first player in NBA history to average more than 30 points per game in a season when he netted 31.2 ppg in 1959-60 with the Cincinnati Royals. From Saint Francis University's Maurice Stokes Collection.

the locker room, administered a concussion test, and closely monitored over the next several days before being allowed to return to action. But this was not standard operating procedure in the league during the 1950s. Stokes told Wanzer he wanted to go back in the game less than 15 minutes after he had regained consciousness and gathered himself off the floor. His coach obliged.

"I'd seen him many times take raps, get knocked into baskets, get knocked over scoring tables, and get right back up again," said Royals player Richie Regan. "So it didn't dawn on us at the time—the significance of the injury."[53] Stokes posted game-highs in scoring (24) and rebounding (19), and the Royals prevailed, 96–89, clinching a tie with Detroit for second place in the West. With the score tied, 82–82, with three minutes to play, Cincinnati outscored the Lakers, 14–7, to seal the victory. Stokes and Twyman (16 points) both converted on three-point plays in the game's final moments; the team's center, Clyde Lovellette, chipped in 21 points. Following the game, referee Jim Duffy conducted a coin toss that determined that Detroit would host the opening game of the first-round playoff series. "Doesn't matter," Harrison boasted. "We can beat them up there and in Cincinnati."[54]

Jack Twyman visits Maurice Stokes in the hospital. Despite the severity of Stokes' condition, Twyman believed that laughter was one of the best medicines. He always tried to get Stokes to laugh during his visits, and almost always succeeded. Democrat & Chronicle *File Photo.*

Stokes' Final Game

Stokes' teammates proceeded to the Minneapolis train station and on to Detroit; Stokes headed back to Cincinnati to have the boil on his neck removed.[55] By the time Stokes met up with his teammates in Detroit after his procedure, he was suffering from flu-like symptoms. About a half-hour before tip-off Saturday, March 15, Stokes and Royals guard Jim Paxson both became nauseous and vomited. Lovellette also complained of an upset stomach. Given that three of his players exhibited similar symptoms, Wanzer assumed they were suffering from a stomach virus or perhaps food poisoning. As tip-off neared, Stokes did not feel much better and appeared lethargic during warm-ups.

Whether it was because of the illnesses, playoff jitters, or simply a lack of execution, the Royals played one of their worst halves of the season in front of a nationally televised audience, falling behind, 22–5, just seven minutes into the game. By the time the two teams reached the half, Detroit had built a 56–36 advantage. Stokes, Twyman, and Lovellette combined for only

nine first-half points, and as a team, Cincinnati converted on a woeful 29.2 percent of its shots before the break. At halftime, Wanzer implored his team to "get in there and scrap!" The Royals responded, outscoring the Pistons, 16–3, during the first five minutes of the second half to pull within seven points, 59–52.[56]

Detroit star George Yardley, however, proved to be too much. He scored 10 straight points to open the fourth period—stretching the Pistons' lead to 85–70—and finished with a game-high 29 points in a 100–83 victory for Detroit. The Royals' Big Three never established any rhythm. Twyman managed just 13 points, all in the second half, and Lovellette netted 15, well below the 22.1 points he averaged against Detroit during the regular season. Stokes scored 12 points, with six of them on free throws, and grabbed 15 rebounds. "Their shots went in," Wanzer said. "Ours fell off the hoop. That was the difference."[57]

Harrison recognized early in the game that there was something wrong with Stokes. Stokes appeared sluggish throughout the game, bungling a number of passes and failing to run the court on several fast breaks. He also struggled while guarding Yardley. "He looked very weak," Harrison said. "He shot a few airballs, had no energy on the boards. This was a guy who could jump over Bill Russell, and he wasn't leaving his feet."[58] Paxson and Wanzer both agreed that Stokes "wasn't himself."[59] He wore a bandage over the spot on his neck where the boil had been removed but told a reporter after the game that it had not bothered him, although he did complain of a splitting headache during the game.[60]

In the locker room after the loss, Stokes tried to lift his teammates' spirits. "The game was very disappointing," Stokes admitted.[61] But he encouraged the team to "forget about it and start thinking about how we're going to lick them in Cincinnati tomorrow."[62] The Royals boarded a bus for the airport to catch a flight to Cincinnati; they were scheduled to meet the Pistons on their home court for game two of the series on Sunday afternoon. When he boarded the bus, Stokes appeared fine. "He didn't say anything about being ill," Ricketts said. "It was just more or less talk about the game."[63]

As the trip progressed, however, Stokes began feeling uneasy. "Halfway out to the airport, he asked me if he could sit next to the window because he was feeling bad," Ricketts recalled. "He was woozy, just like a guy who was drunk."[64] Some of Stokes' teammates suggested he stay in Detroit, see a doctor, and catch a flight to Cincinnati early Sunday morning. But the flight from Detroit to Cincinnati was only an hour and 15 minutes; Stokes thought he could make it. He took a seat in the rear of the plane. "Once the plane was airborne, he started perspiring profusely," teammate Don Meineke recalled. "He started bleeding through the mouth and ears."[65] He vomited repeatedly and began suffering convulsions.

"He had broken out in a tremendous hot sweat," Twyman said. "It was as if someone had grabbed him by the head and dunked him in a swimming pool."[66] Stokes' breathing also became shallow. "His eyes rolled back in his head," Paxson said.[67] Stokes' teammates laid him down across the back seat of the plane, loosened his tie, wrapped him in blankets, and placed cold compresses on his forehead and neck. Stokes began gagging on saliva and mucus, prompting a flight attendant to administer oxygen through a mask.

Harrison, Wanzer, and Podoloff, who was traveling with the team, had to decide whether to return to Detroit or continue on to Cincinnati. They chose to proceed to Cincinnati because the hospital there was only a five-minute drive from the airport, whereas Detroit's airfield was 30 miles from the city and its emergency room.[68] The pilot radioed ahead and asked that an ambulance be standing by. "We made the decision, rightly or wrongly, that we would go ahead to Cincinnati," Twyman said. "The doctors later told me that this was the right decision."[69]

Arriving at the hospital shortly before midnight, Stokes was packed in ice bags to battle a 106-degree temperature. Doctors performed a tracheotomy so he could breathe; the fluid that had been collecting in his throat was choking him. Another tube was inserted into one of Stokes' nostrils and pushed down through his esophagus and into his stomach for feeding. A third tube was placed in his mouth to suction out the fluid collecting in his throat.

Curwood Hunter, a doctor at St. Elizabeth's Hospital, diagnosed Stokes with encephalitis, an inflammation of the brain caused by a virus, usually transmitted by an insect bite, and concluded that the condition might be related to the procedure to remove the boil from Stokes' neck.[70] Royals team doctor Ben Hawkins was skeptical. He suspected that Stokes' fall in the game against Minneapolis had caused his brain to swell and that the change in the airplane's cabin pressure on the flight from Detroit to Cincinnati had worsened this condition. Subsequent blood tests supported Hawkins' diagnosis.

Without Stokes, the Royals lost game two against the Pistons and the playoff series, two games to none, ending their season. The 24-year-old Stokes fell into a coma. He awoke in early April, but the swelling on his brain had caused extensive damage to his motor control center. While Stokes' mind was not affected, his body could no longer respond to commands delivered from his brain. He was paralyzed from the neck down and could not speak. "He's one of the premier athletes in the United States on Wednesday and, by Sunday, he's paralyzed," Twyman said.[71]

Stokes worked tirelessly for the rest of his life to regain limited speaking ability and physical mobility, but his improvements were negligible. He spent the next 12 years under hospital care in three different Cincinnati-area hospitals before dying of a heart attack on April 6, 1970, at age 36.

Stokes' Legacy

From the moment he stepped onto the hardwood floor of the Rochester War Memorial on the cool, autumn evening of November 5, 1955, Maurice Stokes was a catalyst for changing the role of the black player in the National Basketball Association. He forced owners around the league to look at black players differently. Before Stokes, the handful of African Americans who had made it to the league had been role players assigned the game's "dirty work"—setting screens for the white stars on their teams, getting the ball to their team's white playmakers, and playing defense against the league's white stars. In Stokes, NBA owners saw the first black player with the skills to play every position on the court, someone who could contribute in every facet of the game.

Others would soon follow. In the fall of 1958, the NBA's rookie class of black players included future stars Elgin Baylor, Wayne Embry, Hal Greer, and Guy Rodgers. Five years following Stokes' accident, roughly one-third of the players in the NBA were black. When Stokes finished second behind St. Louis' Bob Pettit in the NBA in rebounding during his rookie season in Rochester, he became the first black player to ever rank among the league's top 10 rebounders. Just six years later (1961–62), seven of the league's top 10 rebounders were black, and each NBA team had at least two black players. That same season, the Chicago Packers (today's Washington Wizards) became the first NBA team to put five black players on the floor at the same time.[72]

Stokes (left) and Roy Campanella (right) became friends following accidents less than two months apart in early 1958 that left both sports stars paralyzed. Campanella was a three-time National League Most Valuable Player as a catcher with the Brooklyn Dodgers. He and Stokes are seen here at one of the Stokes Benefit Games at Kutsher's Resort. In the back row, left to right, are NBA stars Oscar Robertson, Dave DeBusschere, Gus Johnson, Wes Unseld, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Wilt Chamberlain.
From Saint Francis University Marketing and Public Relations.

By 1965, half the league was black, and African-American players accounted for two-thirds of the NBA's starting line-ups and three-fourths of its all-stars.[73] Opportunities for black players in the league had come a long way since Stokes' arrival in Rochester a decade earlier. Although his career was short-lived, Maurice Stokes must be given credit for helping to blaze the path that these players—and the black stars of today's NBA—followed. That path began in the Kodak City.

Epilogue

After averaging an NBA-worst 3,500 fans per home game in the 1971–72 season, the Cincinnati Royals relocated to Kansas City/Omaha, where they were renamed the Kings. For three years, the franchise played two-thirds of its home games in Kansas City and its remaining home schedule in Omaha. The team made Kansas City its exclusive home in 1975, but it turned a profit just twice in 10 years. In 1985, the franchise relocated again, this time to Sacramento, where it remains today.

Les Harrison stayed closed to the game after selling the franchise, serving on the NBA Rules Committee. In 1963, he organized the Kodak Classic Collegiate Tournament (now known as the Rochester Basketball Classic) and ran it for 30 years. The tournament regularly drew some of the top college programs in the country to Rochester. Harrison was inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in 1980. He died from complications following a stroke in 1997. In 2013, the Les Harrison Memorial was unveiled in the upper atrium of the Blue Cross Arena at the Rochester War Memorial. The basketball court at the arena is named in his honor.

Bobby Wanzer was fired from his job as head coach of the Cincinnati Royals 18 games into the 1958–59 season. He returned to Rochester and worked as an investment counselor for several different companies before returning to coaching. In 1962, he was named the first men's basketball coach at St. John Fisher College in Pittsford, New York, and coached the Cardinals for 24 years. He also served as the suburban college's athletic director and golf coach. Wanzer was inducted into the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame in 1987. He resides in Pittsford.

Stokes is one of only three former Rochester Royals (along with Bob Davies and Jack Twyman) to have had his jersey number retired by the franchise. Following Stokes' accident, Twyman became his legal guardian and worked tirelessly to raise money for his former teammate's medical bills. He successfully sued the NBA for worker's compensation benefits for Stokes and organized the "Maurice Stokes Benefit Game" at Kutsher's Hotel and Country Club in the Catskill Mountains. During Stokes' lifetime, 11 benefit games (1959–1969), generated roughly $750,000 for Stokes' medical bills. After Stokes' death in 1970, proceeds from the

games went to help former NBA players and their families with medical needs. Over time, it became increasingly difficult to recruit players for the game, and it was converted into a golf outing—the Maurice Stokes/Wilt Chamberlain Celebrity Pro-Am Golf Tournament.

On December 8, 1972, St. Francis College dedicated the "Maurice Stokes Athletics Center," which serves as the school's physical education and intercollegiate athletics hub. Portraits of Stokes and Twyman overlook the court. On September 10, 2004, Stokes was inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame. Among NBA and American Basketball Association players in the Hall whose careers started in 1955 or later, Stokes played the fewest number of games (202). On June 9, 2013, former NBA commissioner David Stern presented the inaugural "Twyman-Stokes Teammate-of-the-Year Award" to Los Angeles Clippers guard Chauncey Billups. The award recognizes the NBA player deemed "the best teammate based on selfless play, on and off-court leadership as a mentor and role model to other NBA players, and commitment and dedication to his team." Former Miami Heat guard Shane Battier was the 2014 recipient of the award.

Endnotes

1. Gary Pomerantz, *WILT, 1962: The Night of 100 Points and the Dawn of a New Era* (New York: Random House, 2005), 24.

2. Bobby Wanzer, interview with author, March 6, 2012; Quoted in Paul Pinckney's "Mighty Man: Mo Stokes," *Democrat & Chronicle*, April 8, 1970.

3. Nelson George, *Elevating the Game: Black Men and Basketball* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992).

4. Ron Thomas, *They Cleared the Lane: The NBA's Black Pioneers* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 251–252.

5. Maurice Stokes, *Personal Journal,* 1. From the Maurice Stokes Collection, St. Francis University Archives, Box 1.

6. Ibid.

7. There was only one other African-American student enrolled at Saint Francis when Phelps arrived in Loretto. Shortly after Phelps' arrival, this student left SFC and entered the Army.

8. Joseph Sheehan, "Royals Drawing Attention," *The New York Times*, March 18, 1955.

9. Lawrence Robinson, "So NIT Pairs Dayton, Dukes: Maurice Seems Cinch After All-Around Performance," *New York World Telegraph*, March 18, 1955.

10. Jack Kelly, "St. Francis Basketball Star Maurice Stokes," an unpublished essay in possession of the author. In 1992, Kelly conducted interviews with St. Francis players as part of an assignment for a course at George Mason University.

11. Robert W. Peterson, *Cages to Jump Shots: Pro Basketball's Early Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 22.

12. Michael Schumacher, *Mr. Basketball: George Mikan, the Minneapolis Lakers, and the Birth of the NBA* (New York: Bloomsburg, 2007).

13. "Schoolboy, 15, Names Pro Hoopmen 'Royals,'" *Democrat and Chronicle*, November 9, 1945.

14. Kevin Cook, "The Rochester Royals: The Story of Professional Basketball," *Rochester History*, 58, no. 1 (Winter 1996).

15. Ibid., 3–6.

16. The Eastern Division included the Baltimore Bullets, Boston Celtics, New York Knicks, Philadelphia Warriors, Syracuse Nationals, and Washington Capitols; the Central Division comprised the Chicago Stags, Fort Wayne Pistons, Minneapolis Lakers, Rochester Royals, and Saint Louis Bombers; and the Western Division was made up of the Anderson Packers, Denver Nuggets,

Indianapolis Olympians, Sheboygan Red Skins, Tri-Cities Blackhawks, and Waterloo Hawks.

17. Red Holzman and Harvey Frommer, *Holzman on Hoops* (Dallas, TX: Taylor Publishing, 1991). Gates signed with the Royals but ended up playing with the Buffalo Bisons, 11.

18. Terry Pluto, *Tall Tales: The Glory Years of the NBA* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 63.

19. Quoted in Milton Gross, "Speaking Out," *New York Post*, March 18, 1955.

20. Ed Linn, "Is the NBA Big League?" *Sport* (February 1963), 10–11.

21. The team played several of its home games at the Edgerton Park Sports Arena in 1955–56, but the majority of the home contests were conducted at the War Memorial.

22. Quoted in Matt Jackson, "Murphy Says Royals' Maurice Stokes is Great Now, and Will Get Better," *Rochester Times-Union*, November 7, 1955.

23. Quoted in Bruce Koch, "Knicks Laud Rookie Stokes; Royals 'Made Mistakes," *Democrat and Chronicle*, November 6, 1955.

24. George Beahon, "Warriors Edge Royals, 89–84; 18, 245 Watch as Stokes Stars," *Democrat and Chronicle*, November 11, 1955.

25. Quoted in Aram Goudsouzian, *King of the Court* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010), 68.

26. Bobby Wanzer, interview with author, March 6, 2012.

27. Liz Arnstein, "Interview with Richie Regan" (January 1994). From the Maurice Stokes Collection, St. Francis University Archives, Box 2.

28. Maurice Stokes, "The Making of One Professional Basketball Player," 15. From the Maurice Stokes Collection, St. Francis University Archives, Box 1.

29. Ibid.

30. Blake McKelvey, "Rochester's Ethnic Transformation," *Rochester History* 45, no. 3 (July 1963), 22–23.

31. Quoted in "Sports Century Classic: Maurice Stokes." Documentary by *ESPN* Television Network, 2000: http://espn.go.com/classic/000802mauricestokes.html.

32. Arnstein, "Interview with Richie Regan" (January 1994). From the Maurice Stokes Collection, St. Francis University Archives, Box 2.

33. Don Barksdale was the first black all-star. He played in the league's 1953 all-star game as a member of the Baltimore Bullets. Barksdale was also the first consensus black All-American as a senior at UCLA in 1947 and the first African American to play on a U.S. Olympic Basketball Team (1948).

34. Stokes, *Personal Journal*, 1. From the Maurice Stokes Collection, St. Francis University Archives, Box 1.

35. The 1955–56 All-NBA first team included Philadelphia's Paul Arizin and Neil Johnston, Boston's Bob Cousy and Bill Sharman, and Saint Louis' Bob Pettit. The second team consisted of Stokes, Minneapolis' Clyde Lovellette and Slater Martin, Philadelphia's Jack George, and Syracuse's Dolph Schayes.

36. Pat Livingston, "Maurice: A Model," *Pittsburgh Press*, April 8, 1970.

37. Shortly before the draft, Russell announced that he would not play for any of the NBA's small-market teams, including Rochester, and threatened to sign with the Harlem Globetrotters if he were drafted by one. Harrison and Russell met shortly before the draft. The Royals owner had seen Russell play at an all-star game at Madison Square Garden a month earlier and questioned the college superstar's pro potential. "This was my first time to see him," Harrison said, "and Russell looked like a bum." Russell told Harrison he wouldn't sign with Rochester for less than $25,000 a year. Even if Harrison could have afforded Russell—which he could not—it is doubtful that the Royals owner would have drafted him. See Pluto, 120, and Arnold "Red" Auerbach and Joe Fitzgerald, *Red Auerbach: An Autobiography* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1977), 51.

38. Pluto, 121.

39. Bobby Wanzer, interview with author, March 6, 2012.

40. George Beahon, "Home Club Drops 5th in Row," *Democrat & Chronicle,* January 20, 1957.

41. Members of the Stokes Night Committee included co-chairmen Tony Giambrone, Lloyd Hurst, and Fred Blum and members James Sheehan, Hy Mandell, Bob Anderson, Truman Coles, Mel Neisner, Joseph Kaplan, Thomas Corbett, Arnie Johnson, Stanley Thomas, Reuben Davis, Bertrand Boddie, Gene Lester, George Kruger, Jerry Flynn, Thomas LaVerne, Angelo Rose, and Justin O'Brien.

42. Stokes was also given a clock-barometer, a radio, two checks (one from War Memorial ticket takers and ushers' donations, the other from contributions by his teammates) and a spare set of tires for his new car.

43. Quoted in Dave O'Corr, "Royals Stay In It on 'Mo' Stokes Night," *Rochester Times-Union*, March 7, 1957.

44. Quoted in George Beahon, "In This Corner…,"*Democrat & Chronicle*, March 13, 1957.

45. David George Surdam, *The Rise of the National Basketball Association* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 186.

46. Ibid., 174.

47. The only team owner who supported the sale of the Royals to a Rochester group was Danny Biasone of the Syracuse Nationals.

48. Quoted in Beahon, "In This Corner…," *Democrat & Chronicle*, February 18, 1957.

49. "Royals Take on Celtics in 'Title Tilt Preview?'" *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, October 3, 1957.

50. Thomas, *They Cleared the Lane*, 180.

51. John Edgar Wideman, *Hoop Roots: Basketball, Race, and Love* (New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 2001), 38.

52. Ralph Hyman, "Stokes Never Gave Up Fight," *Rochester Times-Union*, April 7, 1970.

53. "Sports Century Classic: Maurice Stokes."

54. "Royals Defeat Lakers, Gain Second-Place Tie," *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, March 13, 1958.

55. Jeff Hause, "Mo Stokes: The Greatest Basketball Player You've Never Heard Of": http://www.sportshollywood.com/stokes.html; Wideman, 63.

56. Jim Schottelkotte, "Detroit Cops, 100–83, as Frigid First Half Sinks Cincinnatians," *The Cincinnati Enquirer,* March 16, 1958.

57. Ibid.

58. Pluto, 82.

59. Ralph Hyman, "Stokes Never Gave Up Fight," *Rochester Times-Union,* April 7, 1970. See also "Sports Century Classic: Maurice Stokes."

60. Stokes, Personal Journal, 1. From the Maurice Stokes Collection, St. Francis University Archives, Box 1.

61. Ibid.

62. Maurice Stokes (with Harry Paxton), "I Woke Up Helpless," *Saturday Evening Post* 231, no. 37 (March 14, 1959), 75.

63. Jack Murray, "Big Mo' Film Stokes Warm Memories," *The Cincinnati Enquirer,* March 5, 1978.

64. Ibid.

65. Quoted in "Gone But Not Forgotten," NBA Retired Players Association Newsletter (2001), 1–2.

66. Jack Twyman, interview with author, June 8, 2011.

67. "Sports Century Classic: Maurice Stokes."

68. Hause, "Mo Stokes."

69. Jack Twyman, interview with author, June 8, 2011.

70. Bobby Wanzer, interview with author, March 6, 2012.

71. Jack Twyman, interview with author, June 8, 2011.

72. Pluto, 79.

73. Goudsouzian, 89.

Appendix

Maurice Stokes

High School: Westinghouse (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania)

College: Saint Francis

Drafted By: Rochester Royals, 1955 in first round

Career Accomplishments: National Catholic Invitational Tournament Most Valuable Player (1952); United Press International All-East selection (second team in 1954, first team in 1955); All-National Invitation Tournament Team selection (1954, 1955); NIT Most Valuable Player (1955); East-West All-Star Game Most Valuable Player (1955); Second-team Associated Press All-American selection (1955); NBA Rookie-of-the-Year (1956); NBA Rebounding Leader (1957); Three-time second-team All-NBA selection (1956, 1957, 1958); Three-time NBA All-Star Game selection (1956, 1957, 1958); Selected to NIT's 50th Anniversary Team (1985); Selected to NIT's All-Time Team (1997); Elected to Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame (2004).

Statistics Abbreviations

Ast: Assists; **FGM-A:** Field Goals Made-Field Goals Attempted; **FTM-A:** Free Throws Made-Free Throws Attempted; **G:** Games; **Min:** Minutes; **PF:** Personal Fouls; **Pts:** Points; **Reb:** Rebounds**;** **W/L:** Won/Lost

College Statistics—Saint Francis

Season	G	FGM-A	Pct.	FTM-A	Pct.	Reb.	Avg.	Pts.	Avg.
51-52	30	206-450	.458	93-166	.560	NA	NA	505	16.8
52-53	18	170-331	.513	77-125	.616	397	22.1	417	23.2
53-54	25	234-549	.426	132-190	.695	689	27.6	600	23.1
54-55	28	302-707	.427	156-218	.715	733	26.2	760	27.1
TOT.	**102**	**912-2,037**	**.448**	**458-699**	**.655**	**1,819**	**25.3**	**2,282**	**22.4**

- **Rebounding statistics were not recorded at Saint Francis before the 1952-53 season**

Professional Statistics—Rochester/Cincinnati Royals

Year	G	Min.	FGM-A	Pct.	FTM-A Pct.	Reb.	Avg.	Ast.	Avg.	Pts.	Avg.
55-56	67	2,323	403-1,137	.354	319-447.714	1,094	16.3	328	4.9	1,125	16.8
56-57	72	2,761	434-1,249	.347	256-385.665	1,256	17.4	331	4.6	1,124	15.6
57-58	63	2,460	414-1,181	.351	238-333.715	1,142	18.1	403	6.4	1,066	16.9
TOT.	**202**	**7,544**	**1,251-3,567**	**.351**	**813-1,165.698**	**3,492**	**17.3**	**1,062**	**5.3**	**3,315**	**16.4**

NBA All-Time Career Rebounding Average Leaders (through 2012-13 season)

Minimum of 200 career games

Player	G	Reb.	Avg.
Wilt Chamberlain	1,045	23,924	22.9
Bill Russell	963	21,620	22.5
Maurice Stokes	**202**	**3,492**	**17.3**
Bob Pettit	792	12,849	16.2
Jerry Lucas	829	12,942	15.6
Nate Thurmond	964	14,464	15.0
Wes Unseld	984	13,769	14.0
Walt Bellamy	1,043	14,241	13.7
Dave Cowens	766	10,444	13.6
Elgin Baylor	846	11,463	13.5
George Mikan	520	4,167	13.4
Dennis Rodman	911	11,954	13.1
Dwight Howard	697	9,017	12.9
Willis Reed	650	8,414	12.9
Gus Johnson	581	7,379	12.7

**Most Points in First Game of an NBA Season by a Rookie**

Player	Pts.	Opponent	Date
Wilt Chamberlain (Philadelphia)	43	New York	October 24, 1959
Maurice Stokes (Rochester)	**32**	**New York**	**November 5, 1955**
John Drew (Atlanta)	32	Chicago	October 18, 1974
Isiah Thomas (Detroit)	31	Milwaukee	October 30, 1981
Dan Issel (Denver)	30	Indiana	October 22, 1976
Willie Anderson (San Antonio)	30	L.A. Lakers	November 5, 1988
Allen Iverson (Philadelphia)	30	Milwaukee	November 1, 1996
Lamar Odom (L.A. Clippers)	30	Seattle	November 2, 1999

About the Author

Pat Farabaugh is a faculty member in the Department of Communications at St. Francis University. In March 2014, he published *An Unbreakable Bond: The Brotherhood of Maurice Stokes and Jack Twyman* (Haworth, NJ: St. Johann Press). He served as sports information director at St. Francis from 1999-2005 and was in attendance when Stokes was inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, Massachusetts, on September 10, 2004. He is currently working on his third book, which will explore the legacy of the 1977 flood that ravaged Johnstown, Pennsylvania.

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A View of Edgerton Park, Rochester, N. Y.
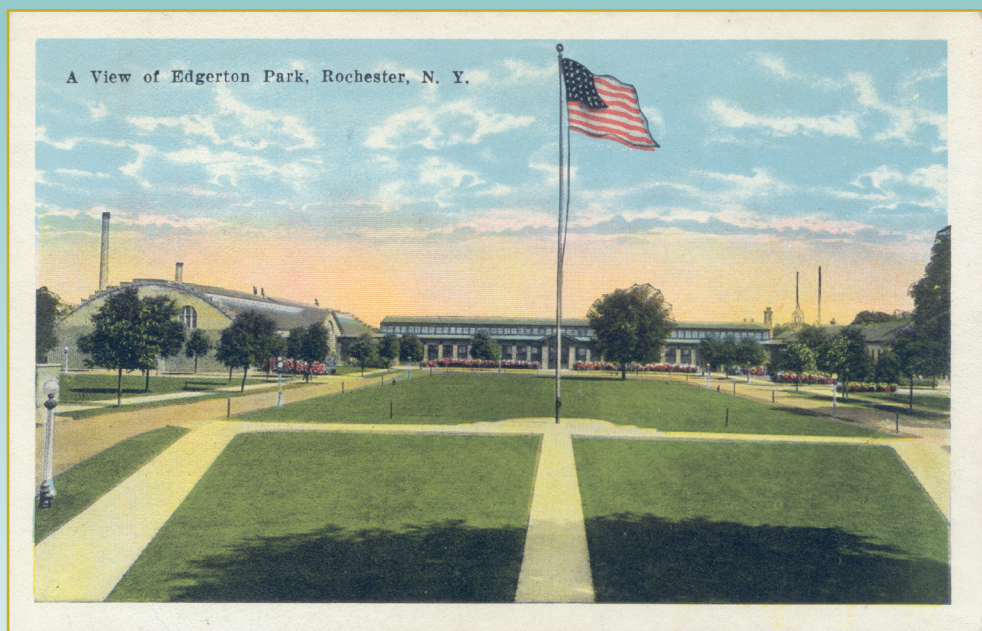
A postcard of Edgerton Park. The Edgerton Park Sports Arena located on these grounds was the original home stadium of the Rochester Royals. It was the home court of the 1951 championship season Royals team. From the Rochester Public Library Local History & Genealogy Division.
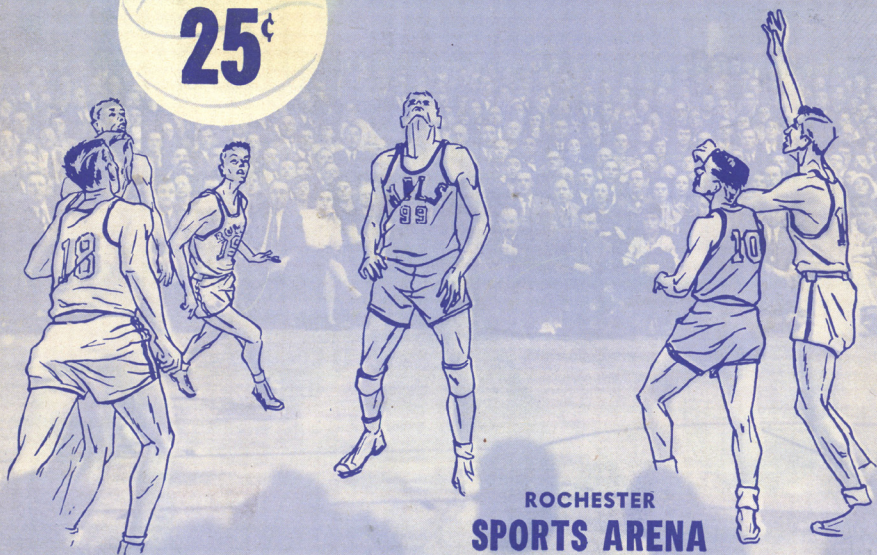
OFFICIAL PROGRAM

Rochester Royals

BASKETBALL CLUB

Member National Basketball Association

SEASON 1949-50

PRICE
25¢

ROCHESTER
SPORTS ARENA

*A program from the 1949–50 Rochester Royals season. The 1949–50 squad posted a 51–17 record.
From the Rochester Public Library Local History & Genealogy Division.*

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CITY OF ROCHESTER, N.Y.