

# A Look At S-O-M Basketball <sup>4</sup>

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Strat-O-Matic Game Co.

I first saw the new Strat-O-Matic Basketball game in the spring of 1972. I had picked up my boss, Mr. Harold Richman, on this particular morning and I noticed he had a small box with two pieces of cardboard with him and knowing that he had been working on the basketball game, figured that this was it. Having confirmed my suspicions, I sneaked a peek into the box when he went into a store to buy the morning paper. To my disappointment, the long awaited game consisted of some three-by-five cards, a bunch of pawns and four dice, one of which was completely foreign to me. Naturally, I couldn't make heads nor tails of it.

That morning, after the paperwork was done, James Williams and I were summoned into a small ante-room just off our office area where we have enough privacy to test products in the only way possible--by playing them! Mr. Richman started explaining the game, after spreading the parts out on a table. "This game is different from other basketball games on the market in that you can move your defensive players either close or back to the man they are guarding" (so that's what those rectangles on the board were for) and "each player has a shooting rating which would prevent a player from taking too many shots and possibly distorting the game."

The peculiar die I had noticed before is used to test the rebounding abilities of the players, but a "rebound situation" would only be coming up approximately one-third of the time.

The first two teams made up to do the testing with were the finalists in the 1971-72 NBA championships, the Lakers and Knicks. Games were to be played on a round-robin basis with James and I alternately going up against Mr. Richman, then against each other. We would play a series of 10 games with statistics being kept in every possible way. After the first series of games, however, we changed the rebounding procedure to eliminate the extra die. Every time an "8" came up on the dice roll, there would be a "battle on the boards". An additional rule was that a pass situation would come up after every foul shot was taken.

In all, I would say that approximately 400 games were played for the complete testing. The testing was done with six teams only, in order to get as much of a team variation as possible. The six were the Lakers, Knicks, Atlanta Hawks, Seattle Supersonics, Cincinnati Royals and Portland Trail Blazers. Statistics kept included field goal percentage for outside and penetration shots, with the defender close, back and double-teaming; foul shooting percentage, turnovers, fouls and offensive fouls, and both rebounds and offensive rebounds in regular play and rebound situation play. In the case of pass situations, statistics were kept for turnovers, dazzlers and good passes (now known as percentage shots although at the time they were not in the same form). With all the testing that was done, we had to come up with some interesting happenings, and we did.

The first memorable game was just the second one tested. Mr. Richman had the Knicks and had a one-point lead over James' Lakers on the last play. James moved Chamberlain outside on offense and Mr. Richman moved Jerry Lucas outside to stop a possible outside shot. However, using the trickery that he is known for, James drove with Bill Bradley and a center's defensive inside (make that Jerry West driving) came up, so the winning basket scored.

There are two games that I played that were my favorites because they involved individual efforts by two players not noted as superstars, although I lost one of those games. The first involved Jim McMillian of the Lakers, who, after a horrendous first three quarters against James' Knicks, hit 12 of 15 last period shots and gave me an easy win after I had trailed by 10 points going into the final quarter. McMillian when he was in college, incidentally, was my favorite player. That's why I stayed with him--I knew he'd snap out of the slump.

The second individual performance involved the Royals and Matt Guokas

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who suddenly went wild against the Supersonics. After being used sparingly early in the 10-game series, I decided to use him more often, even with James guarding him closely. The first two times I shot Guokas, I rolled "3s" (good) on his card. I followed that with a "5" (good, close and back) then two more "3s". By the time the first half ended, Guokas had hit seven of eight shots. Guokas single-handedly kept me in the game as Spencer Haywood, who always plays well for James, was as hot as a five-alarm fire. Knowing that James played Guokas close every time, I started driving in the second half. Before fouling out in the fourth quarter, Guokas scored an amazing 38 points--including 80 per cent shooting and netting 15 of 16 outside shots guarded close. Hayward, however, wound up with 48 points on "only" 60 per cent shooting. Seattle won by 10 points, but to this day James and I still talk about the time Matt Guokas turned into a gunner.

Probably the most intriguing match-up was the Knicks and Lakers. West-Frazier and Barnett-Goodrich matched up well but the real fun was when Flynn Robinson and Earl Monroe went at each other, with defense being thrown

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out the window.

High point honors in the testing went to Jerry West and Walt Frazier as each once scored 50 points in a single game, while one player I'll never forget is Dave DeBusschere since no matter where I play the game, at home or at the office, I always throw an "8" for him.

The overall results of the players was amazing, despite a couple of cases where players not superstars went on rampages. Walt Frazier scored with, in one point of his average in the testing; Lou Hudson, of the Hawks, hit his field goal percentage on the head; Nate Archibald of the Royals was within two points of both his average and shooting percentage. Combined shooting percentages of both teams in each ten-game series were never more than two or three points off and the percentage after all the games were done was within four-tenths of a point!

The final testing phase of the game took place in May, with the time of the game being reduced from a previous hour and a half to less than an hour-- and that included keeping complete statistics. The last two days of the testing, James and I played 10 games, finishing in an average of 45-50 minutes for each game and concluding with one that lasted only 40 minutes.