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Chapter 2

IF *KORFBAL* HAD BEEN DEVELOPED IN AMERICA

by

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1. Introduction

Central to this chapter is the question why *korfball* has never become popular outside the national frontiers of the Netherlands, while in this country it has gained such sturdy support, and while its brother – or rather mother – basketball is among the widest spread and most popular sports in the world. It is not because *korfball* as such is less pleasant a sport. Just ask the nearly a hundred thousand *korfball* players in the Netherlands. There are few sports defended with so much zeal by those practising it as *korfball*. To them it is a world sport. To many others it does not appeal at all. And abroad it is virtually unknown.

The differences in appreciation are as such nothing out of the ordinary. No single sport is preferred by all people in the world. While one person may experience skating, or football, or *korfball*, or whatever other sport as wonderful, exciting, many-sided and challenging, that same sport may be boring, dull, unattractive and uninteresting to others. Every game is subject to varied and contrasting interpretation and appreciation. Moreover, the very ideas held about sports appear to change in the course of time, under the impact of changed circumstances.

To understand those ideas we cannot simply refer to the rules of the game itself. For one thing, these rules are themselves, being social products, subject to change; every sport may in principle be continually adjusted to changes in the sports world and society at large. For another, the appreciation of sports appears to (be able to) change ahead of its rules. A few decades ago, the Netherlands had only a few thousand golfers, and golfing was on the whole regarded as a somewhat dull, slow, elite sport for old gentlemen. Nowadays it is the fourth, and the fastest growing, sport of the Netherlands, although its rules have hardly changed.

The popularity of *korfball*, too, cannot be explained from its rules. That this game is hardly practised outside the Netherlands is not because *korfball* should be less fun than other sports. Its appreciation, like that of any other sport, depends on the importance people attach to it.

In general, that importance is related to the identity the sport has obtained in its home country, the way the sport has been dispersed and promoted from that country, and the affinity people in other countries have with the backgrounds, ideas and life styles associated with that sport. That affinity is determined among other things by the social and societal differences between people who practise, appreciate or propagate the sport and those who do not know it, or ignore or denounce it.

The meanings people attach sports can also shift as a result of developments in society at large (such as raised levels of education, raised income, more free time, ageing of the population, enhanced health, rise of new media) and in the world of sports (popularisation of other branches of sports, rise of new sports, et cetera).¹

¹ Van Bottenburg 1991 and 2001; Elling 2002.

In this chapter I will take a close look at the contrast between the popularity of *korfbal* in the Netherlands and its unpopularity in all other countries. To that end I shall compare the development and popularity of *korfbal* with that of basketball, in particular American women's basketball.

Korfbal is to a high degree a derivative from American women's basketball. The similarities in design, rules, game concept and ideology are striking. But at the same time, there are wide differences in status, popularity and dispersal between both sports. How to explain these differences? A part of the explanation can be found in the American and Dutch identity of their followers and the willingness to adjust the sport to changing circumstances. The discussion of these differences gives rise to an intriguing counter-question: what popularity and dispersal would *korfbal* have achieved if it had been developed to an autonomous sport not by a Dutchman (Nico Broekhuysen) but by an American man or woman?

2. Origin and identity

The development of *korfbal* is clouded in mystery. A certainty is that the Dutch teacher Nico Broekhuysen was the first who entrusted the rules of the new game to paper after a visit to the Swedish summer school of Nääs. Here, he became acquainted with “a multitude of gymnastic games”, among which *ringboll*, a game which according to Broekhuysen was “also known as *handboll*, and for the non-Scandinavians referred to as *basketball*“.²

On his arrival home, Broekhuysen was given permission, after consultation with the board of the *Nieuwe Schoolvereeniging* [New School Society], to practise the new *korfbal* game with the oldest students of that school.³ Its rules were issued and published in 1902 by the *Amsterdamsche Bond voor Lichamelijke Opvoeding* [Amsterdam Association for Physical Education] under the title *Korfbal*, the first booklet in a series about the rules of sports and games.

How original those rules were, is unsure. Were they a “pure product of Holland's own soil, with the guarantee of not a single foreign blemish”, as the *Nederlands Korfbalblad* [Dutch *Korfbal* Magazine] had it?⁴ Had the game sprung up in America, as the official organ of the Dutch *Korfbal* Association repeatedly stated in its first few volumes?⁵ Or was the only model for Dutch *Korfbal*, as Broekhuysen himself maintained in 1949, the Swedish *hand-* or *ringboll*, which may in turn have developed under the influence of games from America, Austria and Germany?⁶

² Broekhuysen 1949, p. 12.

³ Broekhuysen 1949, p. 13.

⁴ *Nederlands Korfbalblad* [Dutch *Korfbal* Magazine], vol. 4, number 19, 11 January, 1939, p. 3.

⁵ *Korfbal*, *Officieel orgaan van den Nederlandschen Korfbalbond* [Official organ of the Dutch *Korfbal* Association], for instance volume 1, number 10, 19 May, 1905; volume 1, number 30, 29 December, 1905; volume 5, number 29, 26 September, 1907; volume 5, number 34, 31 October, 1907.

⁶ Broekhuysen 1949, pp. 18-19.

Roland Renson from the university of Leuven in Belgium investigated the origin more closely and came to the conclusion that *korfball* was indeed copied by Broekhuysen from American Basketball,⁷ contrary to all attempts at presenting it as a purely Dutch product. And despite assertions of Broekhuysen himself, who seems to have been a little too eager to present this sport as his own merit. My own further inquiries into the origins of *korfball* supported Renson's conclusion, and completed it by underlining that Broekhuysen went out not so much of Naismith's (male) basketball as of the women's version which had become popular in the United States in several variants, with the designs of Senda Berenson and Clara Baer as dominant types. For what did transpire?

2.1 The invention of basketball

Basketball evolved within the American Young Men Christian Association (YMCA). That organisation aimed for social and moral reform, with sports and other physical exercise among the means to reach those targets. To that end the YMCA built gymnastics halls in many North American cities, and provided for the training of teachers of physical education.⁸

The sports and games these teachers offered, were at the end of the nineteenth century confined to non-competitive activities, such as callisthenics, apparatus work, and marching. That range appealed less and less to the American youngsters, which was due among other things to the increasing popularity of baseball and football. The YMCA observed the tendency with Argus eyes. Because the rising sports were played out of doors, YMCA gymnastics halls were threatened with an exodus. Moreover, baseball and football were inimical to the message the YMCA wanted to spread. The Ys were strongly opposed to commercialism, professionalism, individualism and rough games.⁹

To keep a hold on their young men, Luther Gulick, director of the YMCA Training College at Springfield, stimulated his sports instructors to look for alternative sports which could compete with baseball and football. Among Gulick's associates was the young Canadian immigrant James Naismith, who tried out several games that were adjusted to be played in halls. When none of these was successful, he decided to design a new ball game. To avoid the roughness so much abhorred within the YMCA – especially with respect to an indoor ball game – he preferred the use of a rather big round ball, a high-level goal (in the first instance literally a peach basket and only from 1906 onward the modern net) and the prohibition of physical contact and running with the ball. He had given much serious thought to the rules: basketball was based entirely on a rational concept.¹⁰

⁷ Renson 1996. Some Dutch authors (Broers, and Bogers & Troost) had indeed expressed that possibility earlier. See thereto Bogers & Troost 1984, p. 36-37.

⁸ Johnson 1979.

⁹ Naismith 1979 (originally 1946).

¹⁰ Guttman 1988, p. 72.

Initially, the game was played with two teams of nine players; from 1896 onward the (present) five-to-five became the standard. That same year the dribble was adopted, and the first match with paid players held.¹¹

The new game was introduced in December of the year 1891 and was positively received. Several directors of physical education trained by the YMCA welcomed it, and included basketball in the sports offer of the American colleges and highschools. The new ball game was introduced not only for men but also for and by women. The first basketball match between women was played almost instantly after publication of the rules on 15 January, 1892, in the YMCA magazine Triangle.¹²

Soon, basketball grew out to a popular women's sport at the American colleges. At last there was an alternative for the gymnastics exercises which they had always been obliged to do, with more freedom of movement and a greater game element.

2.2 The adjustment to women's basketball

To render the sport more compatible with the late nineteenth-century ideals of femininity, directors of physical education adjusted the rules of basketball on several points. Senda Berenson of Smith College played a leading part in that respect. Almost instantly after coming into contact with basketball in the spring of 1892 through 'Triangle' and local newspapers, she took its adjustment for women in hand. One source of inspiration was the late nineteenth-century reform movement striving for equal rights for men and women by stressing the perceived differences between them. She was convinced that basketball for women was an appropriate sport, but that Naismith's original variant needed some adjustment.¹³

The most important amendment which Berenson carried through in the common basketball rules was the provision that the playing ground was divided into three courts and that the women players were not allowed to cross the court borders. The diagrams below indicate how Berenson conceived of the division of the field for matches between teams of six and teams of nine players. Just before the turn of the century, teams of nine women became standard, whereas the size of the men's teams was reduced back to five.

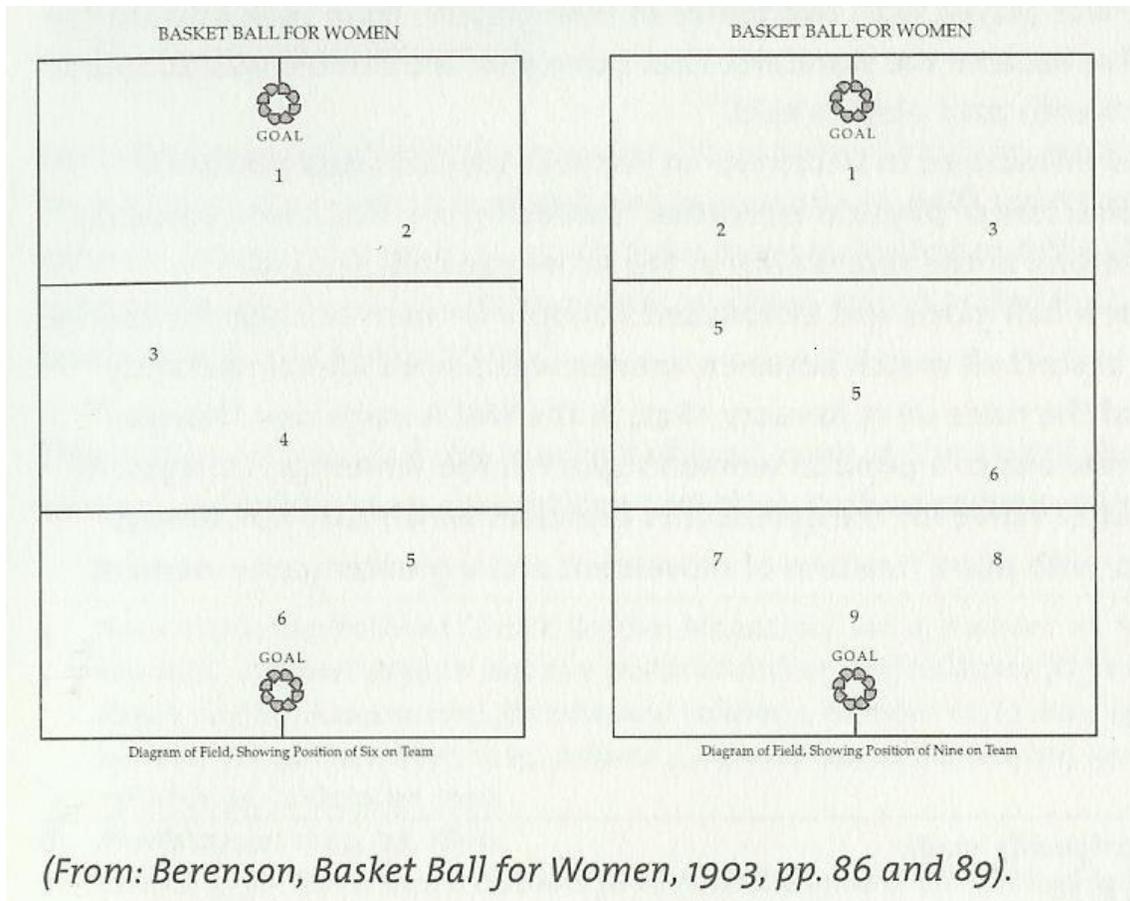
Berenson designed her rules in direct relation to her own vision of women's sports. To discourage masculine behaviour, players were not allowed to beat the ball from the hands of the opponent. To prevent individual players dominating the game and developing into star players, dribbling was restricted to three bounces. To further the smooth progress of the game, she introduced the rule that players were not allowed to hold the ball for more than three seconds.¹⁴

¹¹ Jarrett 1990, p. 6.

¹² Miller & Horky 1970.

¹³ Lannin, 2000, p. 12.

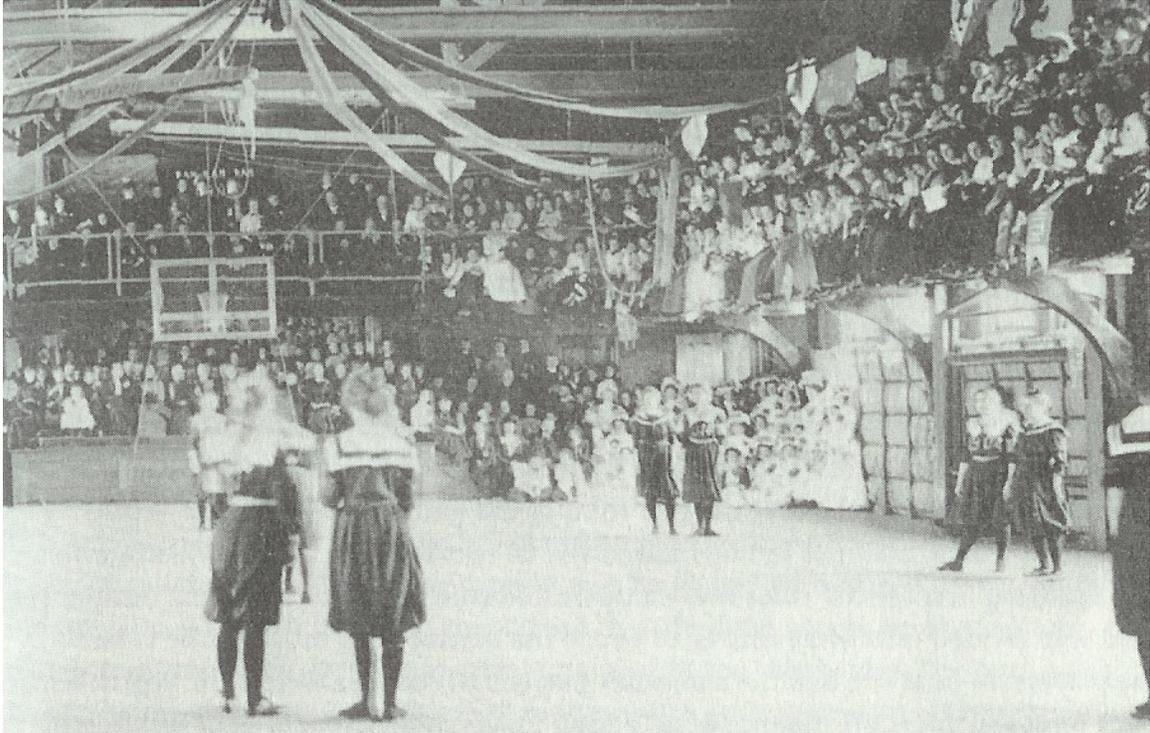
¹⁴ Berenson (ed.) 1903, p. 41.



Moreover, Berenson gave attention, from ideological motives, to the context in which basketball was practised. To prevent too much competitiveness, she avoided intermural competitions, continuously changed the team's composition, initially admitted only restricted spectator crowds, and forbade shouting and cheering. As women's basketball gained popularity, the policy of limited spectators could not long be kept up. The spring matches between school classes at Smith College (and other colleges and highschools) soon grew out to great social events, attended by hundreds of spectators (admittedly mostly girls and women) (see photograph).¹⁵

Other colleges also adapted the official rules of (male) basketball with a view to female participation. Thus, Clara Gregory Baer of the Sophie Newcomb Memorial College in New Orleans devised her own version – entirely independent from Senda Berenson, in an attempt to meet the objections of her students' parents to 'unfeminine sports behaviour.' After consultation with Naismith she printed, in 1895, a pamphlet with her rules of the new game, which on his advice she called Basquette.

¹⁵ Berenson-Abbott, about 1914; Lannin 2000, p. 14.



(from: Lannin, A History of Basketball for Girls and Women. From Bloomers to Big Leagues, 2000, p. 15.)

Baer limited the freedom of movement of the players even more. She divided the court into several rectangles, their number depending on the number of players. She also forbade any walking movements with the ball (including dribbling) and did not permit obstructing the opponent in his attempt to score. Besides she laid down that attacking and moving players had to change courts after each point scored, so that none of the players would be able to put herself forward as the star of the team.

Entirely in contrast with all this, at several universities on the American west coast such as Stanford and Berkeley, basketball variants developed which offered women far more freedom of movement and permitted fanaticism and aggression. That type of basketball played by women according to male rules met with much opposition. It was supposed to be too free and too rough and exert a bad influence on the health and emotions of the participating girls. Several parents forbade their daughters to take part and physical educators seriously discussed the question 'how to tame girls' basketball.'¹⁶

By the end of the nineteenth century a committee formed itself under the leadership of Senda Berenson, which during a YMCA-convention in June 1899 tried to agree upon standard rules for women's basketball. Complaints about the roughness of some variants were one reason, controversial interpretations of the rules in matches between colleges and highschools another. Two years later this committee published the first 'official'

¹⁶ Lannin 2000, p. 18-31.

rules of the game under the title ‘Women’s basketball Guide’ with the famous publishers of sports books and sports materials, A.B. Spalding. The official rules meticulously followed Berenson’s original design. The field was divided into three courts, of which the border lines must not be crossed by the players. To beat the ball from another player’s hands was forbidden. Restrictions were imposed upon the defence of attacking players. Participants in possession of the ball were not allowed to bounce the ball more than three times nor to hold the ball for longer than five seconds.

The arguments the pioneers of women’s basketball offered for the division of the field into three courts would be echoed later in various *korfball* publications. In 1903, Berenson explained:

“The division of the gymnasium or field into three equal parts, and the prohibiting of the players of one division from running into the domain of another seems an advantage for many reasons.

It does away almost entirely with ‘star’ playing, hence equalizes the importance of the players, and so encourages team work (...). The divisions, then, concentrate energy, encourage combination plays, equalize team work and do away with undue physical exertion.”¹⁷

Her colleague Augusta Lane Patrick remarked along the same lines with respect to the three-court system that:

“the play degenerates less easily into individual work. (...) The interval of quieted motion gives the heart the necessary respite which acts as a preventive to strain.”¹⁸

2.3. Broekhuysen’s acquaintance with women’s basketball

On the basis of a study by Hans Thorbjörnsson, Renson has shown that in 1897 American course attendants taught basketball to European colleagues in Nääs, the small place in Sweden where Broekhuysen got to know this game five year later. The rules of the game of basketball were published in the same year (1897) in the *Slöjdundervisningsblad från Nääs* [Handicraft Teaching Magazine from Nääs], a professional journal for educational folk art and outdoor games. The article was titled *Korgboll*, with ‘Basket ball’ added in brackets.

This article pointed out that *korgboll* could be seen as an American game that lent itself for practice by either sex and could also be played with mixed teams, both indoors and outdoors. The rules prescribed that the field was to be divided into three equal courts by drawing two lines parallel to the short sides. The goal poles had to be placed opposite each other, in the centre and somewhat within the lines of the short back sides. The teams should, under normal court dimensions, consist of nine players. The article went on to say that there were two variants of *korgboll*; one with the right to beat the ball from the hands

¹⁷ Berenson (ed.) 1903, p. 41.

¹⁸ Berenson (ed.) 1903, pp. 49-50.

of the opponent, and one without that right. An additional remark was that the Americans talked about ‘basketball with or without interference’. The former variant was, according to this article, mostly suitable for men, the latter for women or in mixed matches. Besides, in the latter variant players were not allowed to run with the ball.¹⁹

By unearthing this Handicraft Teaching journal, Renson had probably found the missing link in 1996 which showed that *korfbal* has been derived directly from basketball. The odds are that the game of basketball as Broekhuysen got to know it in 1902 observed the rules which five year earlier had been published in the *Slöjdundervisningsblad från Nääs*. The Swedish translation of basketball, *korgboll*, makes it understandable that Broekhuysen translated the name of the game on into Dutch as *korfbal*, even though according to him it was in 1902 played not with baskets but with rings, and *ringboll* was used as an alternative title.

However, two important points must be added to Renson’s historical analysis. First, *korgboll* such as Broekhuysen got to know it, was based not so much on James Naismith’s ancient basketball²⁰ as on the American women’s basketball, for which by then a divergent specific system of rules had been evolved. Which variant of women’s basketball stood model for *korgboll* was unclear thus far, but on the basis of my historical analysis I hypothesized that the rules were those of Senda Berenson. The fact is, that in a biography of her it is written that she made a study trip to Sweden in 1897, the same year in which according to Thorbjörnsson basketball was demonstrated in Nääs for the first time. Berenson arrived there in the spring and was to stay all summer to work under Dr. Törngren at the Central Institute in Stockholm. There she studied among other subjects the famous Swedish gymnastics, in which she had been trained.²¹ Although I could find no evidence that Berenson during that stay also visited the annual summer school of Nääs, it stands to reason, I assumed, that it was during Berenson’s sojourn that the Swedes got acquainted with women’s basketball. After reading this, Renson travelled to Sweden and did find evidence of her visit to Nääs in support of my hypothesis (see chapter [...] of this book).

Second, *korfbal* cannot yet be equalised with basketball. Without knowledge of the pre-history of basketball, Broekhuysen gave his own interpretation to the few simple rules (he himself speaks of three or four) under which he had practised the game at Nääs. He also added a few unwritten rules ‘to prevent degeneration of the game.’²²

As a result of his adaptations a new variant evolved, which differed just that little bit from the women’s basketball of Berenson. In the course of time this new variant grew out to an independent sport, whose American roots were soon quite forgotten. It was not just an imitation, but was given contents of its own.

The rules by which *korfbal* in the long run distinguished itself explicitly from basketball, are the position of the basket, the three-court system, the prohibition of dribbling and the mixed character with personal opponents. With the exception of the position of the

¹⁹ Thorbjörnsson 1990 and 1992; Renson 1996; Troost 1997.

²⁰ Renson 1996, p. 59.

²¹ Hill 1941.

²² Broekhuysen 1949, pp. 12-13.

basket, *korfbal* initially differed hardly from women's basketball. But by amendments of the rules, notably in women's basketball, the two variants grew apart in the course of time.

- *The three-court system*

For a long time, as pointed out earlier, the three-court system remained common practice in American women's basketball. Only in 1938 was the division changed into two courts, after which in 1971 the male rules were taken over almost everywhere, on the basis of five to five and a 'full-court game'.²³

- *Prohibition of dribbling*

Initially, dribbling was forbidden in American basketball. In men's basketball it was after all admitted in 1896, while in the several variants of women's basketball it remained forbidden or constrained. While Clara Baer entirely prohibited dribbling, Senda Berenson permitted a maximum of three bounces by one player. The official rules, which were published in 1901, corresponded in that respect to Berenson's rules. The dribble remained a point of discussion, however. In response to complaints about rough play, in 1910 dribbling was forbidden outright. After complaints about stagnant and unattractive matches, the committee once more permitted one dribble, after which in the course of the 1920s here and there various rules from men's basketball found their way into the women's game, among which the unlimited dribble. Officially, that rule came into force in women's basketball as late as 1966.²⁴

In the initial rules of Dutch *korfbal* nothing was stated about dribbling. Broekhuysen laid down only that it was forbidden to walk with the ball, a prohibition that also prevailed in American women's basketball. Another rule forbade "deliberately to avoid team play". Only at a later stage was the non-run rule worked out and sharpened.²⁵

- *The mixed game with personal opponents*

In the United States, basketball was a sport for men as well as women but which was never played as a mixed game. However, to learn how to play the game, the adult male and female students at Nääs did in the first instance practise basketball together. Back in the Netherlands, Broekhuysen based his rules on the American routine.

The participants can be either of the male or of the female sex.²⁶

In the elaboration of this routine, Broekhuysen formed at the (mixed) *Nieuwe Schoolvereeniging* (mixed) teams of boys and girls, whereas in the United States the principle was that teams were either all male or all female. Broekhuysen did not make the mixed character of *korfbal* teams mandatory. In 1906 the *korfbal* journal of the Dutch

²³ The take-over of the three-court system motivated the Dutch *korfbal* player of the first hour, Godefroy, to point out "that the game is also playable by ladies. (...) Because now the players may move only within one court (...) there is no chance of a few excellent players taking hold of the ball and fail to involve the less perfect in the game." In the same line of thought he mentioned as another advantage the "rest periods" thus built-in, which make the game less wearying (Godefroy 1919, pp. 11-12).

²⁴ Lannin 2000, p. 32.

²⁵ Troost 1997, p. 2.

²⁶ Broekhuysen 1949, p. 16.

Korfbal Association made mention of the “new decision” (..) “that at a match one half of the players must be female”.²⁷

In the draft for the official rules published one year later in the association magazine, both options were still kept open, however:

A player may only be covered and obstructed by one player. In a mixed game, obstructing may be done only by a lady against another lady and by a gentleman against another gentleman.²⁸

Separate *korfball* has never entirely disappeared. In the eastern parts of the country there functioned for some time a separate gentlemen’s *korfball* association, while women’s *korfball* as a separate sport is still practised in the south of our country. In the year 2001, the Dutch Catholic Sports Federation counted 10,562 female *korfball* players among its members.

With respect to the process of adoption and adaptation, the development of *korfball* is not unique; indeed it has much in common with the evolution of American football and Australian football. Both these sports are variants of English football, introduced on the two other continents at a time several variants of football still existed in England and the rules of present-day football had by no means crystallised here. For lack of official, written rules or a general all-including association to enforce them in and outside England, the regulation of football in the United States and Australia proceeded relatively independently from the further regulation of the football sport in England, so that in the two ‘new’ worlds, varieties developed which were to survive as autonomous sports.²⁹

As regards basketball, adoption and adaptation proceeded in England as well as in the Netherlands. While in the Netherlands the result was *korfball*, in England the end product was netball. Basketball was introduced to England in 1895 at Martina Bergman-Österberg’s Physical Training College by an American. Two years later, an American woman renewed the acquaintance with this sport. About the rules then prevailing we know very little. They were not written down, but transferred by word of mouth. Since the school was a girls’ college and the basketball field was divided into three courts, we may assume that it was again one of the variants of women’s basketball. After completing their studies, several graduates dispersed this variety of basketball to other schools in England. Just as in the United States, there arose a growing need to put down the rules on paper and to standardise them. That happened in 1901 by the Ling Association (nowadays called the Physical Education Association of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.). This association took the most recent American rules for a starting point, but adapted them to the customs which had by then evolved at home. The resulting game was called netball.³⁰ This sport had basketball as ‘mother’ and remained closely related to it, but developed into an autonomous sport, which is now practised in over

²⁷ *Korfbal*, Official organ of the Dutch *Korfbal* Association, volume 1, number 22, 22 October, 1905.

²⁸ *Korfbal*, Official organ of the Dutch *Korfbal* Association, second page appended to volume 1, number 40, 22 November, 1906.

²⁹ Van Bottenburg 2000

³⁰ Jobling & Barham 1991, p. 30.

forty countries, in particular in Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. Illustrative of the interwovenness as well as the independence of the two games is that netball was known in Australia as women's basket ball until 1970, when the word 'women's' was struck off and the word 'basketball' replaced with netball. The two games now exist side by side, enjoying great popularity, netball especially among women and basketball among both sexes.³¹

2.4. The Dutch identity of *korfbal*

Although Broekhuysen never confirmed the American origin of *korfbal*, it did repeatedly come up in the first few volumes of the official journal of the Dutch *Korfbal* Association. An article in the first volume states that *korfbal* was invented by James Naismith and that it was introduced by the "heads of gymnasiums for young women". The author goes on to say that several colleges and universities made their own rules, after which a committee drew up new rules which were published as 'Basket-ball Guide for Women'.³² In a separate publication about the *korfbal* game, Mr. Godefroy, referred to earlier, pointed in that connection at Clara Baer and Senda Berenson, among others.³³

In the first few volumes, the editors repeatedly mentioned the American roots of *korfbal*, referring to several American publications from the first few years of the twentieth century, such as 'How To Play Basket Ball', 'Character in Basket Ball' and 'Official Basket Ball Guide for Women'. From December 1905 onwards they even printed the official American rules of the game in a series of articles:

"because the editors think it useful to teach to our *korfbal* world the official rules from the country where our game came into being."³⁴

The association journal even went so far as to state that basketball was called *korfbal* in America. An article about the development of *korfbal* referred not only to "our American fellow association" but also to the success of this game in America:

Everybody took up the game of *korfbal*. Without exaggeration, thousands play the game, forming a giant association, of which we may be jealous. In America people play in clothes which the *korfbal* world in the Netherlands knows nothing about (...), for instance separate *korfbal* thumb protectors, sweaters, trousers, shoes, stockings, etc.

About the dispersal of the game the journal went on to say that the Americans promoted *korfbal* in all countries they visit.³⁵

³¹ Jobling & Barham 1991, p. 29.

³² *Korfbal*, official organ of the Dutch *Korfbal* Association, volume 1, number 30, 29 December, 1905.

³³ Godefroy 1919, p. 7,

³⁴ *Korfbal*, official organ of the Dutch *Korfbal* Association, volume 1, number 30, 29 December, 1905.

³⁵ *Korfbal*, official organ of the Dutch *Korfbal* Association, volume 3, number 29, 26 September, 1907

In the course of time the relation with America disappeared into the background. *Korfbal* was represented ever more explicitly as a sport in its own right and later even as a purely Dutch sport, and American basketball as a foreign variant of it. In 1914, articles appeared in the Journal about *korfbal* variants in Germany and Austria, which presumably were also at the roots of the game taught in Sweden. Although the existence of such variants must not be excluded, more probably most of those variants had also evolved from the American game of basketball. *Korbball*, introduced to Germany in 1896 by gymnastics inspector Hermann, was certainly derived from basketball. Of the Austrian variant little is known, but we do know that one rule prevailing there, namely, that the ball was allowed to be held for a maximum of three seconds by one and the same player³⁶, was operated earlier by Senda Berenson.

In the 1920s and 1930s, *korfbal* was regarded ever more explicitly as a Dutch sport. In 1927 Broekhuysen reprinted the first rules of *korfbal* in a booklet about the game, with a double objective:

first, to show that this game as it was played more or less in Sweden, was indeed no more than a gymnastic game, and second, to demonstrate that the present game of *korfbal* deviates so much from the original that one may rightfully say that the present game is a purely Dutch sport.³⁷

Admittedly, as time went on, Broekhuysen was more and more inclined to represent *korfbal* as entirely of his own invention. But his above cited statement was not entirely untrue. “In the Netherlands, the simple game has acquired its final form”, he stated in 1949.³⁸ And that was also true. But he was out of order when, looking back, he called basketball an *indoor sport* (his italics) that around 1905 was entirely unknown here and that only after reading the articles in the Association journal about American basketball it had occurred to him “that one of the American participants (...) had brought *handball* to Nääs”.³⁹ Elsewhere in the same publication he writes that this game was called basketball by the non-Scandinavians at Nääs.

Even further went the *Nederlands Korfbalblad* [Dutch Korfbal Journal] in the 1930s, when in the Netherlands a ‘new’ sport was on the wax, namely, basketball. The AMVJ, an organisation which maintained close relations with the American YMCA, introduced basketball in its American male variant in our country at the end of the 1920s. Because this game appeared to attract *korfbal* players, the editors of the *Nederlands Korfbalblad* wondered in 1938 whether basketball “should be regarded as a competitor of *korfbal* or as a useful training”. The answer of the president of the *Korfbalbond* was the latter:

Basketball is sometimes called *zaalkorfbal* [indoor *korfbal*], but it differs considerably from our game: no mixed teams, solo play permitted, and more use of physical force against the opponent (...). As long as basketball in our country is

³⁶ Renson 1995, p. 28.

³⁷ Broekhuysen 1927, p. 9.

³⁸ Broekhuysen 1949, p. 19.

³⁹ Broekhuysen 1949, 19; see also 12. Actually, in the United States women’s basketball was also practised as an outdoor sport in the first decades.

played in a hall and not out of doors, as at the Olympic Games in 1936, we need not look upon it as a competitor.⁴⁰

One year later the Association's magazine once more reported that basketball was enjoying a growing popularity. The editors added not to believe "that this game will ever succeed in pushing one of the other games to the background. But it is a first-class indoor training."⁴¹ A woman player of DVD held the same opinion, "since in basketball moreover the bucks are separated from the goats" and "the true-blood *korfbal* players of both sexes will in time prefer the mixed game,"⁴²

With a view to the 'new' sport (basketball), the *korfbal* players re-defined their position. Greater stress was put on the Dutch character of *korfbal*. "The interesting thing is", wrote the *Nederlands Korfbalblad* about its own sport in 1939:

that in this case we are not confronted with an imported game, but with a pure product of our own soil. We would say that *korfbal* is a sport which is absolutely of pure national descent, and guaranteed free from any foreign blemish. (...) We also want to reaffirm the real Dutch character of our sport. Most sports had their cradle outside Holland, which means among other things that any amendment of the rules is dictated outside our country.⁴³

That 'Dutchness' was reinforced in several ways. Only in the Netherlands did *korfbal* grow out to a sport for the masses. That was one reason why the *Dutch Korfbalbond* was the most influential among its fellow organisations elsewhere. In international competition, the Dutch *korfbal* team was also the strongest by far. The Dutch *korfbal* association, the Dutch *korfbal* players, the Dutch press: everybody considered this sport a Dutch-grown sport. And as an autonomous game with an international federation, its own rules and its own championships, it had a rightful claim to that feeling.

In conclusion we may put that *korfbal* was derived from American women's basketball. Subsequently, it was not only copied but also adapted, and that to such an extent that a new, national Dutch sport evolved. The first written rules, the first club and the first national association in this new branch of sports were Dutch initiatives. In the course of the first half of the twentieth century *korfbal* was more and more seen and experienced as a purely Dutch game. Initially still regarded as identical to basketball, *korfbal* was more and more viewed as that game's kid brother, and finally wholeheartedly presented as a Dutch sport, with basketball as a new, competitive sport from abroad.

⁴⁰ *Nederlands Korfbalblad* [Dutch *Korfbal* Magazine]. volume 4, number 12, 9 November, 1938, p. 3.

⁴¹ *Nederlands Korfbalblad*, volume 4, number 22, 1 February, 1939, p. 3.

⁴² *Nederlands Korfbalblad*, volume 4, number 13, 16 November, 1938, p. 1.

⁴³ *Nederlands Korfbalblad*, volume 4, number 19, 11 January, 1939, p. 3.

3. Expansion and dispersal

When we observe how women's basketball and *korfball* became popular within their 'home countries', we find no great differences.

3.1 National expansion of basketball and *korfball*

The expansion of both sports was strongly encouraged in their own country by secondary and higher schools. Through the YMCAs, colleges and universities basketball began to spread immediately after its 'hatching' across the United States. That was true of both the men's and the women's variety. The first intermural men's basketball contest was played in 1895, and the first intermural women's basketball contest one year later. Basketball soon grew out to the most popular competitive sport among girls and the most popular after football among boys. Intra- and intermural championships flourished. In view of the increasing popularity of these championships, many schools constructed special basketball stadiums with spacious accommodation for spectators. Increasing attention was given to the recruitment and training of basketball players. And the best players came to be genuine heroes and heroines of the schools.

Outside the schools, baseball was traditionally the most popular men's game, until it was outflanked in the second half of the twentieth century by football. Basketball as well grew to become one of the most popular sports, especially in the great cities.

The female variety of basketball met with fewer competitors and soon was one of the most practised competitive sports among girls and women. As for instance in Chicago, where the Roamer Girls, a team taking part in a competition of Afro-American church and club teams, grew to be the darlings of the black community. And as in Texas, where a huge business contest between women's basketball teams developed, which gave further stimulus to the professionalism and commercialisation of women's basketball.⁴⁴

In the Netherlands, teachers of physical education played a prominent role in the spread of *korfball*. Not only was Broekhuysen himself a teacher, he also gave courses for game leaders in which many teachers enrolled. Through their efforts several *korfball* clubs of teachers and pupils were founded. According to Wiering, these school clubs dominated the early development of *korfball*.⁴⁵

Such impulses helped to make *korfball* grow out, before the Second World War, to the fifth greatest sport in the Netherlands. Among the team sports, only football was practised more in the 1970s. Among girls up to the age of 18, *korfball* was until the early 1980s even the most popular team sport. At the moment, for girls up to 18 it ranks directly after hockey and football, and far before basketball, as the third team sport of the Netherlands.

⁴⁴ Van Bottenburg 2001; Lanning 2000; Guttman 1991; Jarret 1990; Rader 1983.

⁴⁵ Wiering 1974:8-9.

In 2001, the *Koninklijk Nederlands Korfbalverbond* counted 96,528 members, against 46,700 members of the Dutch basketball association. *Korfbal* was that year practised by 28,327 girls and 26,179 women, against 6,723 girls and 6,223 women in basketball.⁴⁶

3.2 International dispersal of basketball and *korfbal*

The popularisation of basketball and *korfbal* may show many similarities in their home countries, in the international spread the differences were great even immediately after their birth.

Even before the First World War basketball spread to many countries outside the United States; notably to countries within the American sphere of influence, such as Japan, Korea, the Philippines and China in East Asia, and Mexico, Cuba, Brazil and Chile in Latin America. American army units, seamen and merchants played some role, but of much greater importance were the American YMCA missionaries. They gave basketball a place in their education programmes (especially in Asiatic countries), which was set up under western impulses.

Young people from adoption countries who had studied at American universities, also contributed to the dispersal of basketball. Thus, Japanese students who acquired their university certificates in the United States, propagated basketball in their own countries, where they went to work for the YMCA.⁴⁷ In the Philippines, basketball was promoted, by, among others, students who had received their training at Springfield College, the training centre of the YMCA.⁴⁸ And in Jordan, basketball was introduced by two teachers who had studied at the American University of Beirut.⁴⁹

In the wake of American army units, the YMCA, after the First and Second World Wars, brought basketball to many European countries, and in the setting of peace missions in the second half of the twentieth century to several African countries such as Nigeria, Cameroon, Zaire and Malawi.⁵⁰

As a result of such American interventions, basketball grew out to one of the most globalised sports. At the moment, basketball associations from 211 countries are members of the International Basketball Federation. In all these countries basketball contests are held. How far both men and women take part cannot be ascertained. We know for a certainty, however, that in some countries, such as Japan and the Philippines, women's basketball was introduced earlier (even before 1900) than the men's game.⁵¹ It is also known that basketball is much practised by women in several Asiatic, South-American and African countries.

⁴⁶ NOC'NSF 2002.

⁴⁷ Wildt 1980, part 4, pp. 69-75.

⁴⁸ Bocoo-Olivar 1972:103.

⁴⁹ Ueberhorst 1989:594.

⁵⁰ Clayton 1987; Ueberhorst 1989.

⁵¹ Miller & Horky 1970: 8.

The international influence of the Netherlands does not compare with that of the United States. As a result, *korfball* had far less opportunity than basketball to get a footing in other countries and to develop into a sport with global dispersal. Dutch teachers did not swarm out to all corners of the earth. In view of the modest position of the Netherlands in the international picking order, they had no opportunity to set up a new school system in Asiatic, Latin-American and African countries and give *korfball* a place in it. Nor did Dutch merchants, mariners and soldiers play the role that was awaiting their American colleagues, as a catalyst for the spread of sports enjoying popular status in their own country. And the Dutch schools and universities were far less than the American ones visited by foreign students.

The international spread of *korfball* was thus long confined to the countries that did lie in the Dutch sphere of influence. Before the Second World War, such countries were Flanders and the colonies. In Flanders, the Municipal Teachers' College had promoted *korfball* since 1911. One year later the school was allotted a playing court. In 1920, the first international match between a Flemish and a Dutch team took place⁵², followed six years later by the first official international match.⁵³

The first reports about *korfball* in Curaçao and Surinam date from before 1910. According to Broekhuysen, Paramaribo boasted five *korfball* clubs in 1927.⁵⁴ In what was then the Netherlands East Indies, too, *korfball* found acceptance within ten years of its birth. The first *korfball* club in Java was founded in 1909. That was due to former *korfball* players from the Netherlands working with government departments or with companies or plantations in what is now Indonesia.⁵⁵ Here, the sport profited from what had made basketball great in many other Asiatic countries: it was made an element of physical education in schools. In 1935 *korfball* was exercised by 88 teams in Java. The war of independence and the conflicts with the Netherlands about New Guinea and other questions slowed down those developments, however. To the Indonesians *korfball* was a typically Dutch sport which carried the flavour of colonial dominance. Although the sport was not forbidden, the umbrella organisation, the Indonesian *korfball* association, ceased its activities.⁵⁶

Thanks among other things to the Flemish contacts (and a fund-raising action among Dutch sympathisers which yielded 1,377 guilders), the then president of the Dutch Olympic Committee, Mr. Van Tuyll van Serooskerken succeeded in getting *korfball* accepted as a demonstration sport during the Olympic Games of Antwerp in 1920. Eight years later, *korfball* was once more an Olympic demonstration sport, that time at Amsterdam. The demonstrations did not make much impact. On the other hand, the international activities gave rise to the foundation of an International *Korfball* Office in 1925, which in 1933 was absorbed into the *Fédération Internationale de Korfball* (FIK).

⁵² Renson 1996.

⁵³ Mazure 1949:55.

⁵⁴ Broekhuysen 1927:23-24.

⁵⁵ Bogers & Troost 1984:94.

⁵⁶ Bogers & Troost 1984:95-96.

Only after the Second World War did *korfball* manage to get a footing in countries outside the Dutch linguistic sphere. As for the introduction of many other sports – basketball among them – the beginning was almost always a bilateral contact between a person or group from the adoption country and the country of origin. Thus, Albert Milhado, past member of school *korfball* club DED, introduced the game of *korfball* to England, where he had fled during the war.⁵⁷ A Dutchman resident in Spanish Marbella started *korfball* there. An exchange between the fellow cities Delft and Castrop-Rausel brought German teachers in contact with the game. And in the United States, two professors of Dutch descent in the 1970s requested the FIK for a *korfball* demonstration. The reason for this was a new Act (Title IX, about which more later-on in this Chapter), which prohibited all forms of sex discrimination in higher education. As a consequence, sports were looked for in which women and men played together on an equal and integrated footing. Naturally, *korfball* was eminently (and one of few sports in the world) suitable to meet that need.⁵⁸ France got to know *korfball* through Belgium. And an Englishman introduced and organised the game in Papua, New Guinea and Australia.⁵⁹

However, that international dispersal was far from sufficient to give *korfball* the same global status as basketball. Nor could the six-month world voyage offered to association coach Adri Zwaanswijk by the *Korfbalbond* on the occasion of his farewell, change the situation. Although he visited over thirty countries and made *korfball* known for instance in India and Taiwan, the number of national *korfball* organisations associated with the International *Korfball* Federation (IKF, the successor of the FIK), was in the year 2002 no more than 35. Among them are 17 European countries, 7 former Dutch emigrant colonies, and 7 other countries (all in Asia). *Korfball* thus hangs at the tail end of the long list of internationally organised sports recognised by the IOC.

4. Rules, professionalism and commercialism

The Netherlands stayed behind the United States not only in terms of size, variety and reach of international contacts; but also in terms of promotion and status of its products. Supported by globally operating companies and media networks, many products of American popular culture obtained a world-wide following in the second half of the twentieth century. Think of the eating culture (barbecue, fast-food), viewing behaviour (soaps, Hollywood films), youth fashion (jeans, baseball cap, sport shoes), pop music (rap, dance), and language (okay, see you, wow, shit, fuck). There are hardly any Dutch products and customs that have enjoyed such global fame.

Sports are no exception. Notably basketball and baseball have acquired outside the United States not only many active players, but also a great media audience. Moreover, new American sports, such as surfing, fitness, mountain biking and skating, have obtained, with the support of private enterprise and the media, followers all over the world. As an element of the American culture all these sports count as ‘fashionable’.

⁵⁷ Wiering 1975:80.

⁵⁸ Because full integration in all sports proved too complicated, with too many negative side-effects, most female sports leaders preferred aiming for separate but equal sports worlds (Rader 1983:341).

⁵⁹ Bogers & Troost 1984:98-101.

Even such an old game as basketball emanates a flavour of fashion. More than a hundred years after the first basketball match, the NBA still counts as ‘hot’. That is not (yet) true of women’s basketball, but that variant has for a long time failed to develop along with the men’s game.

4.1 The adaptability of basketball

Basketball owes its fashionable image among other things to the commercialisation and professionalisation it has undergone since the beginning. Just as would later happen with *korfball*, the men of the first hour warned against the consequences of such developments. But the warnings could not slow down the American lust for change. Beside the YMCA, other organisations – especially the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) – took up basketball. They developed this sport each in their own way. In the words of the American sports historian Allen Guttman:

“Once it had sprung full-blown from the high-minded Mr. Naismith’s brow, basketball was continuously reshaped by the YMCA, the AAU, the NCAA, and various other national and international bureaucratic organizations anxious to perfect the game.”⁶⁰

A succession of amendments to the first published rules in 1892 resulted, aimed at reducing injuries, enhancing the excitement for players and spectators, and preserving a contemporary character. A selection from the adaptations in (men’s) basketball will illustrate that.

- In 1893 the ‘backboards’ behind the baskets were introduced, and the ‘pivot’ (the attacker who positions himself as ‘post’ below the basket of the opposing party) were accepted.
- In 1894 a larger ball was accepted and the free shot introduced.
- In 1896 the dribble was permitted, the first five-against-five match was played, and a field goal came to count as two points.
- In 1897 the change from nine to five players per team became definite.
- In 1906 the basketball net was introduced.
- In 1909 glass backboards were permitted and the disqualification rule on a fifth personal fault became applicable.
- In 1923 a number of offences (such as ‘double dribbling’ and running with the ball) became punishable no longer with a free shot but with loss of possession of the ball.

In sum, as Guttman concludes:

“Everyone realizes that basketball, like the internal combustion engine and the computer, is an invention that has been and will be modified.”⁶¹

⁶⁰ Guttman 1988:72.

⁶¹ Guttman 1988:72.

In view of that propensity to change it is not surprising that the resistance to professionalism and commercialism was almost at once overcome. As early as 1896 a basketball match was reported for which the players got paid. Two years later the first professional 'basketball league' was founded. Around 1920, professional players performed in several professional basketball leagues simultaneously. College basketball continued to draw most attention until into the 1940s. For the American colleges it was, notably in comparison with football, a cheap sport, by which they could gain status.

At the same time, the sport became tougher and livelier, with the result that basketball increasingly shed its image of a 'sissy game' notably among the football lovers. 'Shoving, elbowing, holding and clawing' soon stopped being an exception, so that there remained little to recall the original non-contact sport.⁶² Besides, commercialism and professionalism had several unintended side-effects. From the 1920s onward and especially in the 1950s, various scandals in college basketball came to light about bribes, sexual abuse and drugs dealing.⁶³

These scandals stimulated the shift from college basketball to professional basketball. In 1949 the National Basketball Association was founded, which focused exclusively on professional basketball, recruited the best players and paid high salaries. The rise of television accelerated that development. Basketball proved telegenic and became more so as new rules were introduced. Thus, under pressure from media and viewers, the 24-seconds rule was introduced, by which the attacking party must shoot at the basket within 24 seconds, on penalty of loss of ball. In the 1970s and 1980s, basketball was able to hold its own in the competition with baseball and football on television.⁶⁴

Owing to the tempestuous development of their sport in their own country, the American basketball players had little time for international federation building. The international Basketball Federation was founded as late as 1932 under European impulses. Four years later, in 1936, basketball made its debut as an Olympic sport. The men's game, that is, for women's basketball had to wait until 1976 to be admitted as an Olympic sport, after it had been entirely adjusted to the men's game in most American states.

While men's basketball had soon shed the dominance of teachers, women's physical education went on much longer to put its stamp on the development of women's basketball through the Women's Basket Ball Rules Committee. The rules committee was not averse to amendments, but they were far less inspired by the wish to make matches more exciting than was the case with the men's game. A selection from the amendments in the first decades shows that the limitation of intensity and roughness – to avoid too much maleness – was the prime directive.

- In 1903 the length of the match was shortened from 40 to 30 minutes.
- In 1905 the size of teams was established at from six to nine persons.
- In 1908 placing one's hand on the ball in possession of the opponent was made an offence.

⁶² Guttman 1988:75; Rader 1983:275

⁶³ Guttman 1988:75-77.

⁶⁴ Rader 1983: 279-296.

- In 1908 double covering of an opponent was forbidden.
- In 1910 dribbling was forbidden.
- In 1913 a single dribble was once again permitted, provided the ball bounced up to knee level.
- In 1918 the substitution of players was permitted, on condition that replaced players were not allowed to be put in again.

The official rules were not followed everywhere. In various states and cities, especially on the west coast, home-developed variants were retained, or most of the men's rules copied. Moreover, outside the schools new contests were staged, which tended to keep to rules of their own. As women's basketball became more popular, the interest of private enterprise also increased. In the early 1920s, company contests had sprung up across the country. Banks, insurance companies and other business organisations recruited girls from schools to work for them and play in their company teams. The competitions drew ever more spectators, and were from the early 1920s on financed by the Amateur Athletic Union.⁶⁵

As the popularity of basketball among girls (both within and outside the schools) increased, the criticism of its development became hotter. This criticism was notably directed against the competitive character. Presumably competitiveness would be achieved at the cost of the dignity and femininity which, in the opinion of the criticsers, girls should learn and observe. The criticism came from science, politics and the church. And the sport organisations also contributed their part.

Under the influence of first lady Lou Henry Hoover in 1923 the Women's Division of the National Amateur Athletic Foundation (WDNAAF) was founded, which forthwith passed a resolution against competitive sports. The resolution called for prohibition of sports matches between schools, the levy of entrance fees at sports matches, removal of teams to other places, and publicity about women's sports. With that message the WDNAAF developed a powerful lobby which addressed schools, business companies and city governors.

The results were divided. On the one hand, various schools and companies responded to the pressure to stop intermural and company contests or to shift the accent to less rough sports such as tennis, golf and volley ball.⁶⁶ On the other hand a movement was started which undermined the dominance of school basketball and enhanced the influence of men outside education on the further evolution of women's basketball. In some states companies for commercial reasons mounted new non-school competitions. On the national level some businessmen revived the AAU-tournaments. In 1930, 28 teams took part in this tournament, which was preceded by a beauty contest.⁶⁷

Thus the trend was set which was to determine the further evolution of women's basketball into the 1960s. While on the level of schools the game disappeared into the background in most states except for Iowa, the AAU-tournament and the company

⁶⁵ Lannin 2000, pp. 37-39.

⁶⁶ Cahn 1994:89.

⁶⁷ Lannin 2000, pp. 42-43.

competitions flourished. As a consequence, women's basketball changed its character, becoming more commercial and looking more like men's basketball. In 1927 players carried numbers. The three-court system was dispensed with in 1938 and replaced with a two-court system with six players per team: three attackers and three defenders. In 1953 the sudden-death rule was introduced. Three years later, permission was given to take the ball from the hands of the opponent.

In the 1960s the climate for women's sports in high schools changed. As a result of the increasing rivalry with the Soviet Union, more stress was put on the physical development of students and the winning of international tournaments. As a result, the varsity sports for women expanded. By the end of the 1960s, eighty per cent of the colleges took part in extramural sports competitions. The female version of basketball was moreover made to conform even more to the men's rules.

In 1966, (unlimited) dribbling was permitted. In 1971 the two-court system was abolished in all states (except Iowa and Oklahoma) in favour of a full-court game with five players per team.⁶⁸ That opened the way to participation in international tournaments. In 1976, women's basketball featured for the first time on the programme of the Olympic Games and an American basketball team made its debut. It ended with a painful 112-77 defeat against the Soviet Union, which from 1958 on had not lost one single international basketball women's tournament. On the international level, the game was played more physically and sharper than the American college players were used to.⁶⁹

The copying of the men's rules in 1971 coincided with the passing of a new Act that much favoured the evolution of women's sport in the United States. In 1972 the so-called Title IX of the Education Amendments came into force. This Act forbade discrimination on the basis of sex in educational programmes for which educational institutions received federal subsidies. Although the interpretation of this legislature was a source of persistent dispute, Title IX resulted within ten years in the budget for women's sports being multiplied by ten.⁷⁰ The new act also led in many sports to attempts at removing the differences between men and women. It was no different in basketball. Being equalised with the men's game stimulated the practice of women's basketball, strengthened the chances of professionalism and enhanced media attention.⁷¹

The number of girls in highschools taking part in basketball competitions increased from 300,000 in 1970 to two million in 1980. In 1975 the finals of the intermural tournament were for the first time staged in the Valhalla of indoor sports, Madison Square Gardens. In the same year a women's basketball match was broadcast for the first time by a prominent national television network. Six years later the sports cable network ESPN broadcast several competition matches, and the finals were to be seen on TV. By that

⁶⁸ With thanks to Shelley Lucas, who informed me of her unpublished investigation into girls' high-school basketball (in particular in Iowa).

⁶⁹ Lannin 2000, pp. 76-89.

⁷⁰ Rader 1983:341.

⁷¹ Lannin 2001; Hult & Trekell 1991.

time there was also a professional women's basketball competition sponsored by Adidas, Kodak, New Balance and others.

Results on the international level did not fail to appear. In 1984 the American team for the first time conquered a gold Olympic medal. Four years later followed the second one, that time with the Soviets present. The third medal was won at Atlanta in 1996 and the fourth in Sydney in 2000. Only during the Games of Barcelona in 1992, when all attention was focused on the Dream Team of Michael Jordan and other stars, did the Unified Team of the former Soviet Union manage to defeat once more the American women.

4.2 The conservatism in *korfball*

The rules of *korfball* were also with some regularity amended and sharpened in the early period. In 1906 the poles were lengthened from 3 to 3.5 m. One year later the *Korfballbond* decided to expand the dimensions of the court. In 1909 the right to score from every free shot was dispensed with and the rule about touching one's opponent or the ball in obstructing, relaxed. The subsequent introduction of the penalty shot in 1912 (at first from 7 m, in 1921 shortened to 5 m and in 1937 to 4 m) and the setting of new maximum court dimensions in 1916 were the last amendments to have an obvious influence on the game in the pre-war period. According to Jan Mazure, all other amendments were confined "to the sharper interpretation or a more logical and clearer formulation of the existing rules."

Looking back (in 1949) Mazure therefore rightly stated that "1915 can be considered the year in which the development of *korfball* to a sport in its own right can be looked upon as finished."⁷² That opinion was shared in 1963 by the well-known journalist Jan Cottaar, at the time president of the Dutch Sports Press, who on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the *Korfballbond* called *korfball* a game "to which the modern luxury of sports has not yet penetrated."⁷³

In the second half of the twentieth century that picture changed slowly but steadily. Two revolutionary changes contributed. The first revolution in the world of *korfball* was not so much an adaptation of the game as an extension of it, namely, the development and acceptance of indoor *korfball*. The increasing competition which *korfball* experienced from basketball, was a prominent reason to develop indoor *korfball*. Several *korfball* clubs founded basketball divisions and provided players of both sexes for representative basketball teams of eleven. According to Wiering the situation with two *korfball* clubs in the Netherlands, Blauw-Wit and Westerkwartier, even evolved to the point where "ladies and gentlemen abandoned their *korfball* clubs at important matches to make a foreign trip with a basketball team."⁷⁴ When the Foundation for Physical Education in 1952 celebrated its 25th anniversary and on that occasion some 'new' sports were demonstrated (volleyball, basketball and indoor handball), professor Mazure saw to it that *korfball* was

⁷² Mazure 1949:28.

⁷³ Van Driel 1963:80.

⁷⁴ Wiering 1975:84.

added to the programme. To that end he drew up new indoor *korfbal* rules on the basis of a two-court division of the field.

The indoor version, which initially was given the not-too-appealing name of *micro-korfbal*,⁷⁵ was received with mixed feelings. The game of *korfbal* was a ‘responsible’ sport, beset with rules based on principles that had been developed by teachers from a moralist educational vision. In line with the principles underlying women’s basket ball, the rules of *korfbal* were intended to stimulate self-control, increase the notion of responsibility, oppose specialisation and individualism, prevent the hunt for performance and records, enforce co-operation and encourage versatility.⁷⁶

Against that background, every fundamental renovation was approached with caution. Were not the principles of the game devaluated when in the hall the centre court was left out? Was it permissible to play *korfbal* indoors? For had it not been devised as an outdoor game? Initially, the *Korfbalbond* refused to accept indoor *korfbal* and did not change tack until indoor *korfbal* had proved its right to exist on the local and regional level.⁷⁷ With that decision, the game became faster and more attractive on television. The media attention shifted largely from field to indoor *korfbal*.

That success was one reason for discussions of the usefulness of the middle court in outdoor *korfbal* to flare up. Notably the association coach Ben Crum repeatedly advocated abolishment of the middle court. With correct play, top players never needed to lose the ball in that court. It only served to slow down the game. For children up to 14 it was even better to play across the entire court. It would also give the game more status.⁷⁸ Bob de Die, vice-president of the *Korfbalverbond*, pleaded updating *korfbal*:

If Broekhuysen had invented *korfbal* today, there would have been no middle court. It is no longer fitting: the objective of the game is to score. What is then the use of such a middle court?⁷⁹

In 1991 the time had come for the *Korfbalverbond* finally to switch to the two-court field. Remember: in women’s basketball the division into courts had been entirely done away with, after the first switch in 1938 from a three-court to a two-court system.

The abolishment of the middle court did not mean the end of the discussion on renovation of the game, although the full-court game never came off. New questions regularly came up, leading to endless debates between traditionalists and modernists. Thus, the rule of defensive scoring has been under fire for years. Especially Americans plead a simplification or amendment of that rule, but traditionalists fear that basketball should

⁷⁵ Wiering (1975:83) remarks hereto: “Why it has been baptised *micro korfbal*, I don’t know, unless it is again from the desire to keep ourselves ‘little’ and by no means to pretend contributing something equal in value to indoor handball and basketball”.

⁷⁶ Van Bottenburg 1991:12-13.

⁷⁷ See Bogers & Troost 1984::43.

⁷⁸ NRC Handelsblad, 23 October, 1989.

⁷⁹ Cited in Bogers & Troost 1984:110.

thus force an entrance. And in truth, the *korfbal* world is mortally afraid that their sport should come to be too much like basketball.”⁸⁰

That fear is not shared by the present association coach, Mr. Jan Sjouke van den Bos:

Korfbal should become more attractive. The rules must be amended, for as they are now one can play for time to one’s heart’s content. (...) And defensive shooting must be abolished. When you are defending someone with a stretched-out hand and looking him deep into the eyes, he is not allowed to try and score a point. That is of course silly. It is a remnant of what used to be educationally justified. You are big, I am small, and that is not fair. That’s the frame of mind in which this rule was invented.”⁸¹

The amateurism of the sport is also under fire. The ‘old’ Adri Zwaanwijk, who in the 1970s travelled round the world to promote *korfbal*, is among those in favour of professionalism.

We are wrong to remain wallowing in amateurism. We are refusing to pay a top *korfbal* player if the canteen lady does not receive anything. We are the last of the Mohicans. (...) We should no longer think that small. We, like everyone else, must create a Super League to promote *korfbal* as a top sport. For indeed, the way the game is now developing is a threat to the small associations.⁸²

Another fight between traditionalists and modernists developed about the outward characteristics of the game, with the rush basket as symbol of the fight. Ben Crum remarked on that aspect in 1988 that even the Dutch *korfbal* association could not accept that *korfbal* is a modern game:

which you have to perform in a modern way to keep abreast of the time. (...) Take that crappy basket. It is the symbol of conservation. It is something that dates from 1900. Whereas we are quite capable of making a basket out of plastic, which like a pinball machine reacts with lights when a ball passes through. A system directly linked to the score board. For basketball they have already invented a fibre construction for the ring, when it transpired that with each dunk the board fell to smithereens. Thus the spectacular movements could be kept in.⁸³

The irritation about the basket was for Zwaanswijk reason to present a new design. But that, too, met with heavy resistance in the *korfbal* world.

⁸⁰ Bogers & Troost 1984: 111.

⁸¹ De Gelderlander, 11 August, 2001.

⁸² BRC Handelsblad, 17 October, 1998.

⁸³ De Volkskrant, 22 October, 1988.

The clubs are wary of experiments. I already got the reproach that we would have to change the name of our game, because my basket looked no longer like a real basket. (...) Touch their material, and you touch their souls.”⁸⁴

Nevertheless, the modernists seem to be winning the fight. Slowly but steadily they gained the upper hand in the 1990s. More than ever the present board of the association shows willingness to change to a future-oriented management. The support to the societies has been taken in hand professionally. The contact with the media has been intensified. And the rules of the game and traditional customs are no longer sacred. One success of the new policy has already been achieved: the dropping trend in the membership observed since the early 1980s, was in 1993 converted to a surprising growth.

5. The ‘what if ... question

Now what would have happened if *korfball* had not been devised by a Dutchman but by an American man or woman? If not Nico Broekhuysen but Nick or Nicky Brookhouse had been the founder of the sport? The reply to such a ‘what if’ question cannot, of course, be other than speculative. But in the light of the comparison made between *korfball* and basketball it *is* possible to find some *ratio* for such speculative reasoning.

To begin with, we may assume that *korfball* would have been developed by a physical director, either at an American college or in an YMCA-related agency. Should that have happened before 1892, then presumably Naismith would not have received the order to develop a new sport as an indoor alternative for football, which was in a strong upswing just then.

On that assumption, the sport developed by Nick(y) would probably have spread across the United States just as fast as basketball has in reality. De YMCA Training School at Springfield would have taught the new sport to its many students, who subsequently would have swarmed out across the country. They would initially have used the many gymnasiums (halls for gymnastics) which the YMCAs had built for physical education in the nineteenth century, and later the sports halls of the colleges and the great boxing arenas in the big cities.

The game of *korfball* (probably called basketball, but to go on speculating along those lines is too confusing) would have been subject to change faster and stronger in the United States. The conservatism that has characterised Dutch sports in general and *korfball* in particular, would have succumbed to the spirit of that vast country, which in American basketball promoted the formation of several associations and competitions, with their own administrative apparatus and rules committees. Moreover these committees, *if* the game would have spread across the country at all, would have experienced tremendous pressure from colleges, highschools, sponsors, media as well as players towards continuous innovation.

⁸⁴ NRC Handelsblad, 17 October, 1998.

Perhaps there would have been hard-liners who could have withstood the pressure. But on the other hand, in certain states or regions of the United States, new associations would have been erected which would have promoted professionalism and commercialism and adapted the game to conform.

Furthermore, it would have been well-nigh unthinkable for 'the inventor' Brookhouse to go on for thirty years guarding the development of the game in his capacity of Association President, as happened in the Netherlands. Nor would he probably, as in the Netherlands, have been succeeded by another teacher who had already been on the association board for twenty years. Most certainly, the association would not so long have tolerated a board which based itself primarily on the preservation of the original philosophy behind the sport. The great men of the past would in the United States soon have been delegated to the 'Hall of Fame', 'and that's it'. The educational ideology would soon have been eroded, in particular in the men's version.

It is doubtful that Brookhouse would have been a man. And that separate men's and women's variants would have evolved in the first place. Should the sport have been developed as a co-educational, mixed sport, then the inventor could just as soon have been a woman as a man. The question remains, of course, whether that mixed game would have been accepted in the American society of the final quarter of the nineteenth century. Had it been, then the sport would undoubtedly have suffered badly from a dubious image. Even men's basketball counted in the United States initially as a sissy game. Would the sports leaders have succumbed and have adjusted the game? I can imagine how, dispersed across the United States and linked to ideological movements within the sport, three versions would have evolved: a men's version, a women's version, and a mixed version. These three variants would very fast have gone their separate ways owing to wide differences in the propensity to innovate.

In the men's variant the development from a three-court first to a two-court and next a full-court game would have progressed speedily. Professionalism and commercialism would soon have made their entry, with all manner of adjustments in the exterior characteristics of the game as a consequence, as well as the problems of hardening of the game and bribing scandals. National and later international *korfball* stars would have risen, bearing themselves like Michael Jordan. And who knows, in a small and far European country, a Rik Smits – in reality a Dutch basketball player who made it to the 2000 NBA Finals – might have come to the fore, who would see his boy's dream realised by signing a contract with one of those professional clubs from the Valhalla of *korfball*.

The female variant and the mixed variant would perhaps have developed more or less similarly and simultaneously, the female game being led by women and the mixed game by men. The women leaders would have been divided into two camps, with fervent discussions between those wishing to maintain the women's rules and those in favour of copying the men's.

At the first stage, perhaps those in favour of the women's rules would have played first fiddle. But ultimately the men's version would have gained followers. The final choice might have been made on the achievement of the 'Title IX of the Education Amendments'. It would have been a well-considered answer to the question whether the female variant had to be abolished in favour of the co-educational version, or adapt to the rules of the men's game, so that it could develop alongside but separately as a commercial and professional sport. I believe the latter option would probably have been chosen. The interest of the top players, of the association and of the colleges would have tipped the scales, particularly in view of the junction of time in which Title IX was introduced. It was the time of increasing numbers of spectators, an expanding role of television sports and a corresponding rise in players' salaries.

The mixed variant would, in that frame of thought, and lacking commercialism and professionalism, play a somewhat marginal role, both nationally and internationally, and in the end perhaps even have disappeared.

Internationally, Brookhouse's *korfball* might have been an unprecedented success. On the wings of the YMCA this new game would in the beginning of the twentieth century have become a hype in countries in the American sphere of influence, first in Asia, across which the physical directors of the YMCA swarmed out. *Korfball* would have become part of the Japanese, Chinese and Philippine school systems. Furthermore it would have been spread among city youngsters in Brazil, Chile, Cuba and Mexico, as a means for the YMCA's muscular Christians to proclaim their religious ideas outside the United States. And soon, it would also have been introduced to Europe, where it would have been given a position in physical education. As a sport with world-wide appeal, *korfball* would have become an Olympic game, which in the second half of the twentieth century would have had unprecedented media opportunities.

But all that would concern the men's game, which would soon have lost almost all likeness with Brookhouse's original design.

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