



Wilt, 1962: The Night of 100 Points and the Dawn of a New Era

Gary M. Pomerantz

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On the night of March 2, 1962, in Hershey, Pennsylvania, right up the street from the chocolate factory, Wilt Chamberlain, a young and striking athlete celebrated as the Big Dipper, scored one hundred points in a game against the New York Knickerbockers.

As historic and revolutionary as the achievement was, it remains shrouded in myth. The game was not televised; no New York sportswriters showed up; and a fourteen-year-old local boy ran onto the court when Chamberlain scored his hundredth point, shook his hand, and then ran off with the basketball. In telling the story of this remarkable night, author Gary M. Pomerantz brings to life a lost world of American sports.

In 1962, the National Basketball Association, stepchild to the college game, was searching for its identity. Its teams were mostly white, the number of black players limited by an unspoken quota. Games were played in drafty, half-filled arenas, and the players traveled on buses and trains, telling tall tales, playing cards, and sometimes reading Joyce. Into this scene stepped the unprecedented Wilt Chamberlain: strong and quick-witted, voluble and enigmatic, a seven-footer who played with a colossal will and a dancer's grace. That strength, will, grace, and mystery were never more in focus than on March 2, 1962. Pomerantz tracked down Knicks and Philadelphia Warriors, fans, journalists, team officials, other NBA stars of the era, and basketball historians, conducting more than 250 interviews in all, to recreate in painstaking detail the game that announced the Dipper's greatness. He brings us to Hershey, Pennsylvania, a sweet-seeming model of the gentle, homogeneous small-town America that was fast becoming anachronistic. We see the fans and players, alternately fascinated and confused by Wilt, drawn anxiously into the spectacle. Pomerantz portrays the other legendary figures in this story: the Warriors' elegant coach Frank McGuire; the beloved, if rumpled, team owner Eddie Gottlieb; and the irreverent p.a. announcer Dave "the Zink" Zinkoff, who handed out free salamis courtside.

At the heart of the book is the self-made Chamberlain, a romantic cosmopolitan who owned a nightclub in Harlem and shrugged off segregation with a bebop cool but harbored every slight deep in his psyche. March 2, 1962, presented the awesome sight of Wilt Chamberlain imposing himself on a world that would diminish him. *Wilt, 1962* is not only the dramatic story of a singular basketball game but a meditation on small towns, midcentury America, and one of the most intriguing figures in the pantheon of sports heroes.

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