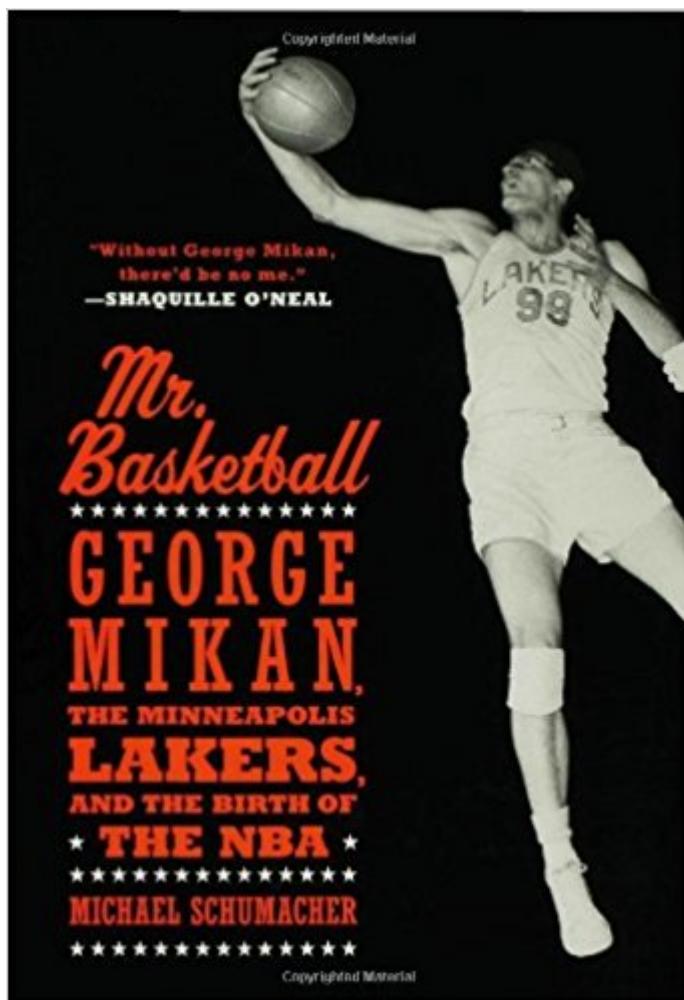


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# Mr. Basketball: George Mikan, The Minneapolis Lakers, And The Birth Of The NBA



## Synopsis

The definitive biography of the first dominant big man in professional basketball, published on the sixtieth anniversary of his debut with the Minneapolis Lakers. Before Shaquille O'Neal and before Bill Russell, there was George Mikan, a six-foot-ten, 240-pound center, whose quiet demeanor and bespectacled face belied his competitive fire. A four-time All-American at DePaul and a six-time professional champion, Mikan was such an unstoppable force—*and a national sensation*—that, when his Minneapolis Lakers played the New York Knickerbockers in 1949, the marquee outside Madison Square Garden read simply, "George Mikan vs. Knicks." Drawing on extensive interviews—with former teammates, opponents, coaches, friends, and rivals—critically acclaimed author Michael Schumacher reveals, for the first time, a wonderfully nuanced portrait of one of the most unheralded athletes of our time, and a fascinating look at the birth of the National Basketball Association.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Schumacher (Family Business) explores the on-court life and legacy of George Mikan, the big man who revolutionized both college and professional basketball as a dominant center in the '40s and '50s and as the American Basketball Association's first commissioner in the 1960s. Several rules in the modern game were enacted to offset 6'10 Mikan's uncommon height advantage at the time: his shot-blocking ability for DePaul University led to the goaltending rule in college basketball in 1943, and his rebounding and scoring for the Minneapolis Lakers prompted the nascent NBA to widen the free-throw lane from six feet to 12 feet in 1951. Wilt Chamberlain described Mikan as the first true

superstar of the league, and Shaquille O'Neal, who paid for Mikan's funeral when he died in 2005 in dire financial straits due to the expenses of his health problems, said, Without George Mikan, there is no me. A native of Joliet, Ill., Mikan was from a Croatian family and remained a true Midwesterner to the end, Schumacher writes. Schumacher's narrative sometimes gets bogged down with tedious, almost box score-like itemizing of the numerous games from Mikan's college and pro careers. Recounting these games in such specifics will be of interest to hardcore fans of the early pro game, but it does little to shed light on the man off the basketball court. (Nov.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Mikan was basketball's first great big man. At nearly seven feet, he came to the nation's attention in the 1940s as an awkward behemoth at Chicago's DePaul University. But through hard work under the tutelage of coach Ray Meyer, he became the dominant collegiate player of his era and subsequently went on to star for the Minneapolis Lakers of the fledgling NBA. Beyond his size and basketball ability, Mikan was a regular guy, a stereotypical midwesterner-family man, married for 58 years. Biographies of regular guys can be a bit bland, so Schumacher wisely blends Mikan's story with a history of the rough-and-tumble infancy of professional basketball. In those early days, the one player capable of filling the stands was Mikan, and it was on his broad back that the league began to establish itself. Research included dozens of interviews with family, teammates, coaches, and friends as well as voluminous secondary sources. Although it's an excellent source of information on an early superstar, the real value of this volume is as a guide to the NBA's nascent years. Lukowsky, Wes

I'm giving this book two stars because I'm tired of giving sports bios one star. And really this book deserves one star. It tells you very little about Mikan the basketball player. There's nice anecdotes about Mikan's desire and strength. But like virtually every sports bio I've ever read, this tells you next to nothing about Mikan's skills and athletic ability. A typical review of a great game by Mikan by the author was simply to recite Mikan's stats for the game. Such as "it was a big game for the Lakers, and Mikan scored 38 points. The next big game George scored 30 pts. The next game George scored..." you get the idea. And that's it. Leaving the reader to wonder how did George score his points. What else did he do during the game. How did he rebound? Did he block a lot of shots? When I read a bio of a great player in a big game, I want to know more details about the game than just a few stats or a play at the end of a game. Schumacher does a very poor job in this respect. As with every other sports biographer, I usually wonder about the knowledge of the game

when I read an entire book, and know barely more about the player (other than his off-court life) than I did before I started reading the book. At one point in writing about the Lakers-Globetrotter games, Schumacher quotes Goose Tatum as saying Mikan was a lot quicker than he was led to believe. But obviously Schumacher thinks George was merely a huge brute who knocked players over to get his points. I've seen videos of Mikan. George is not the oaf many modern people think he is. He could get off the floor and he had a very quick move to get his hook shot off. I'm now of the opinion very few sportswriters know how to write a good sports bio. Schumacher is not one of them. I've read about ten sports bios in the last two years, and every one is disappointing.

I often heard my great-grandfather mention Mr. Mikan and his contributions. I was pleasantly surprised to learn so much of his origin, how he helped the game of basketball evolve, and also how he was a man of principle as displayed by his fight to get the pensions of retired players increased. Even though he passed.

Truly taken with the awesome history of this first giant of the NBA. Not only a wonderful basketball player but a real decent individual. Schumacher really hit all of the major points needed to better understand this man.

GEORGE MIKAN WAS THE DOMINATING BIG MAN OF HIS TIME. HE HELPED REWRITE MANY OF TODAY'S RULES BY HIS SIZE AND ABILITY TO DOMINATE MOST PLAYERS OF HIS TIME. I AGREE WITH THE OTHER REVIEWERS THAT MUCH OF GEORGE'S LIFE OFF THE COURT IS NOT DISCUSSED TOO MUCH. I ALSO AGREE THAT WE REALLY DON'T GET TO KNOW HIM VERY WELL. MOST OF THE BOOK IS MOSTLY STATS AND YEAR TO YEAR COVERAGE OF HIS CAREER AND OF THE LAKERS. STILL I DID NOT KNOW MUCH ABOUT GEORGE BUT I THINK THE AUTHOR DID A NICE JOB DESCRIBING HOW THE GAME WAS PLAYED THEN AND I LEARNED ALOT ABOUT HOW THE NBA WAS FORMED AND ABOUT IT'S EARLY YEARS. IF YOU ARE CURIOUS ABOUT GEORGE'S CAREER AND LIKE BASKETBALL THEN I RECOMMEND IT. NOTHIN GREAT BUT BETTER THAN I EXPECTED.

By "typical book," I mean that it covers Mikan's career in great detail, give you some early biographical info, and then zips thru this post career life in mere seconds, until coverage of his death - maybe there isn't much happening after an athlete retires but it should would be nice to see some real research every once in a while. Wait for this to come out in paperback - in fact, wait for it to

come out in mass market paperback - either that or in your library's discard pile.

George Mikan had a big part in the initial growth of the NBA. Pun intended. Mikan was an early superstar of the league, and he showed everyone how it should be done in a lot of areas. That makes Michael Schumacher's book on Mikan's career, "Mr. Basketball," relevant to hoop fans. Way back in the 1940's, big people who played the game of basketball were generally considered freaks and uncoordinated. If anything they were the subject of scorn. Mikan changed the mold. He was about 6-foot-10 and 240 pounds, and he was almost graceful. The center also could knock opponents out of the way with a forearm or elbow; he wasn't someone to upset. Mikan first turned up at DePaul University, where he caught the eye of then assistant coach Ray Meyer. The eventually legendary coach worked closely with Mikan, developing his skills. When Mikan was ready to carry the Blue Demons into the national spotlight, Meyer went along for the ride as the head coach. College basketball wasn't particularly structured back then, and the NIT and NCAA tournaments were competing for fame at that point. Still, Mikan was good against all comers, averaging more than 20 points per game twice. From there it was on to the pros with the Minneapolis Lakers, where Mikan quickly became the leader of the first dynasty in the pro game. Some of Schumacher's best work centers on how primitive the pro game was back then, loaded with fights and rules that seem archaic in hindsight. In fact, the league widened the lane on the court by six feet to keep players like Mikan away from the basket. It didn't help. George was good no matter what the rules were. He only played seven years in the BAA/NBA but won five championships. Schumacher gives the impression that Mikan was upset about the two that got away. He won two other titles with a predecessor to the NBA, the NBL. In other words, there weren't many players who won with more regularity. Bill Russell heads the short list. Mikan eventually retired for good in 1956, stuck to law work and spent some time as Commissioner of the American Basketball Association. He did some work to try to improve the pensions of the game's pioneers. Mikan died in 2005. So that's his story in a page. How's the book? It's mostly a recital of Mikan's accomplishments as a player. That has its place, although his personality doesn't really shine through here. Once we get past the fact that he was a genuine person who was smart and slow to anger, it's not a particularly full portrait. Still, Mikan's two autobiographies are out of print at this point. Those seeking information on the superstar will find this to be a pretty good source of basic information. "Mr. Basketball" serves as a good introductory course on the sport of pro basketball rather than a probing look at the subject.

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