



The Geezer Game and Dead Men Dribbling

By Richie Zweigenhaft,
61 and 5/6 years old



AIMEE WHITE

I used to think that our mid-day geezer basketball game here at Guilford was unique. Three days a week, a bunch of us, now ranging in age from 40-65, play five-on-five full court basketball. The game began back in 1976, in the old gym (Alumni Gym), known then by all as “the crackerbox.” For many years, we called the game “the committee meeting” so that when actual committees we were on tried to schedule meetings during our sacred basketball time, we would claim that we couldn’t meet then because we already had another meeting scheduled.

Many who have played in our game through the years have retired or moved away, but here we are, 30 years later, still playing, three days a week, full court, most days in Ragan Brown, but some days in Alumni Gym. The game, now known (affectionately, but also officially) as “the geezer game,” consists of faculty, staff and a bunch of guys who used to be YMCA members when the college had an affiliation with the Y, and who now pay dues to rent the court three times a week. (Hung on the rafters are imaginary banners with the imaginary retired numbers of former

participants, such as John “Radar” Stoneburner, Mel “Truck” Keiser, and Ken “Indiana Hook Shot” Schwab).

Our game probably is unique, in the same way that no two snowflakes, no two people, and no two pickup basketball games are exactly the same. But now that a subgroup of our geezer game has competed in a statewide three-on-three half court tournament at East Carolina University that is part of something called “The Senior Games,” I realize that there are geezers throughout North Carolina still putting up jumpers, 1950s-style hook shots, and occasional air balls.

Our team (“Dead Men Dribbling”) was one of 16 teams entered in the 55-59 year-old bracket. I was surprised that there were so many teams at that advanced age (I’m 61, heading toward 62 -- I was “playing down”). For one autumn weekend, the fancy new sports palace at ECU, clearly built to attract virile young college students, was filled with geezers who still play basketball.

So how’d we do? Well, in the first game we played a team from Pinehurst (“Pinehurst Hip and Knee Bobcats”), the first of three games we were to play against opponents who were bigger than we were at each position every minute of every game. Though we were smaller, we were also quicker, and we played well and eked out a win on a shot with three seconds left by 59-year-old Lyn Keller. An hour later, in game two, against a team called “Hoopsters,” from somewhere in North Carolina, but I’m not sure where, we jumped to a lead midway through the first half, which we kept, winning by 14 points. As time began to wind down in the second half, the Hoopsters began to foul us as soon as we passed the ball in, and we spent a lot of time at the foul line. Bob Wineburg, now 56, but who at the age of 14 won the city-wide junior high school foul shooting championship in Utica, N.Y., drilled a series of foul shots; it was the calmest any of us had seen Wineburg in years.

Game three turned out to be another story. We played a team from Charlotte (“Never too Late”) – their pre-game rep was that one of their many good, big, players is the brother of Walter Davis, former UNC and NBA star (Walter, not the brother). They made our “big” men (57-year-old Rob Luisana, 6’1”, our team captain, and 56-year-old Tally Mitchell, also 6’1”), look small. We got clobbered. (We do not blame this loss on our coach, Frank Hatchett, a regular participant in the geezer game but who, at a mere 42 years of age, is much too young to play on Dead Men Dribbling. Neither John Wooden nor Dean Smith could have saved us in game three).

Tired and hungry, we ate dinner, during which we went over every play of each of the three games, and then drove back to Greensboro, talking about next year. **G**

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