

The First Great Basketball Coach

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By Bob Hogue

I'm a huge basketball fan and an even bigger fan of basketball history. But until "Chic" Hess, the former BYU-Hawaii head basketball coach and current Kailua Intermediate School P.E. teacher, tapped me on the shoulder the other day, I had never heard of the man who is credited with one of the most incredible winning streaks in the annals of the game.

"I'll have to send you a copy of my book," Hess told me. And so a couple of days later, there it was on my doorstep, *Prof Blood and the Wonder Teams, The True Story of Basketball's First Great Coach*.

Prof (short for Professor) Blood was a physical education teacher in New Jersey, who doubled as the basketball coach at Passaic High School. In the early 1920s, Blood coached Passaic to 159 victories in a row, a feat that created nationwide awe and eventually had his games attended by thousands of wildly cheering fans.

In a day and age when competing teams held a center jump after each made basket, and when backboards were still often attached to the wall in tiny basement gymnasiums, Blood's teams ran up victory margins of more than 100 points. His teams featured a precision passing game on offense, while on defense Blood may have been the first coach to use a full court press.

"I used to read his name as a footnote on the bottom of the sports pages," says Hess, who grew up in Philadelphia, and was a successful high school coach in Pennsylvania. "My research started as a hobby around 1985. Pretty soon, it was an obsession."

Hess says that he would tell Blood's story to anyone who would listen, until people frequently told him to write it down. But Hess didn't have time to write for more than a decade. From 1987 until 1990, he was the head coach at BYU-Hawaii, winning NAIA District 29 Coach of the Year honors. In 1991, when he coached former UH Rainbow guard Trevor Ruffin at Arizona Western, he was named NABC Junior College Coach of the Year.

By the late '90s, Hess was coaching Kahuku High School, when he abruptly resigned. He saw similarities between his own issues and Prof Blood's off-court battles almost three-quarters of a century earlier.

"I could really relate to him," Hess says. "Many successful coaches can relate to what he went through.

He had a boss who didn't appreciate him, and irate parent with political connections, (and a Board of Education) that seemed determined to see him fail."

For three years, Hess worked non-stop on Blood's story. "I practically lived in the library, going over old microfilms," he recalls. "I had to tell his story and I wouldn't quit until I finished writing and got it published.

"I love basketball and I feel that this story is what I can give as my last contribution to the game," the 60-year-old Hess says.

The book, released just two months ago, tells the saga of an obsessively disciplined former YMCA instructor who, ironically, was inspired by a man born in Hawaii. Prof Blood was only 19 years old when Dr. James Naismith invented the game in Springfield Mass. (in 1891), at the behest of YMCA director Luther Halsey Gulick.

Gulick Avenue in Honolulu is named after the uncle in the family. And Gulick's Clean Sports Roll, kind of like the nine commandments of athletic fair play, became Blood's rules to live his life by.

"Blood is in the (Naismith Basketball) Hall of Fame, but I wanted to set the record straight," Hess says. "The people at the hall of Fame were even surprised by what I found."

Now a copy of Hess's new book, with a foreword written by legendary college and NBA coach P.J. Carlesimo, is on display at the Hall in Springfield. "P.J.'s dad had Prof Blood as his physical education teacher in (high school)," Hess says.

The book is a fast read and a truly amazing story. But what I found the most fascinating wasn't the basketball, but Blood's high profile battle against the administration, the media and jealous community members. Once I picked it up, I couldn't set it down.

"I didn't try to make Prof Blood out as an angel," Hess says. "(But) this was a guy who was short-changed by history. I want people to know the story."

Prof Blood and the Wonder Teams is available at Bookends in Kailua or by calling 1-800-247-6553.
