

Basketball and Economics: A Memoir
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I learned to do a layup in the seventh grade. The Hellertown (Pa.) High School gym was an old bandbox, one of those that doubled as an auditorium, with a stage on one side. The high school was both junior and senior, and seventh grade was the year that kids from the two grade-schools in Hellertown and the several schools from Lower Saucon Township (some of which were one-room schools) converged. My township grade school, which had six grades in four rooms (doubling up for all but the first two grades), did not have a basketball hoop, so I arrived in junior high with no experience.

Whoever had organized that junior high basketball session arranged us in the lay-up lines that you see at the warm-ups of every organized basketball game in the world. Boys were given the ball or passed it as we took turns running toward the basket. Most took a few tries to get the hang of it, many of us (I think including myself) going in flat-footed or leaping off the wrong foot. But it eventually came to us, and I still can recall the galumph-galumph rhythm that got me lifting off my left foot and guiding the ball up to the backboard, over the rim, and into the net. The swish of the ball in the net got me hooked.

My dad set up a basket on a wooden backboard in the driveway, and I would while away afternoons working for those tiny psychic rewards that come from a made basket. In ninth grade I tried out for the junior varsity basketball team at Hellertown. I had played seventh- and eighth-grade football in 1958 and 1959. I wasn't bad at it, having reasonable size and strength, but playing guard had little romance, and I lacked enthusiasm for knocking over other kids over or being hit myself.

The JV basketball coach was David Arner, who was also my math teacher: algebra in ninth grade and geometry, my favorite math subject, in tenth. David had played basketball at Moravian College in nearby Bethlehem. He was a little over six feet tall and could leap up and touch the rim, a feat I aspired to and finally achieved after a growth spurt in tenth grade. (Dunking was something only the gods did back then.) I made the team and sat on the bench for most of the season, scoring a total of three points for the entire year, all in garbage time of a game in Bangor, Pa.

The JV team was actually fairly successful. A handful of 10th graders, led by John Kelchner, who later played for a year at Penn, were the core of the team. My class's only quality player was Donny Christian, who was also one of my best friends. After graduation, Donny played at Cornell. He had a deadly two-handed set shot in high school. The set shot was used fairly often back then. Defenses sagged a lot, and for young boys at the time, a basketball was a heavy object. A jump shot from more than 15 feet (beyond the foul line) was something of a heave, so having a smooth set shot was an asset. My guess is that the prevalence of the jump shot nowadays is due to the better strength training that kids now get. The conventional wisdom back then was that weight

training would ruin your touch.

In the summer between ninth and tenth grade I pruned Christmas trees for my dad (50 cents an hour) and worked out with a set of weights three or four times a week. I had pretty much given up any hope of making the JV basketball team again in tenth grade. Ninth-graders without much skill were given the benefit of the doubt if they had some promise, but tenth graders actually had to be able to play. Since a boy of my size had to play a sport in my high school (and almost every other high school) or be relegated to social purgatory, I decided to go out for football. Weight training would make me presentable to the coach and perhaps make him forget that I had unceremoniously quit the junior high team a year earlier.

The football coach was a social studies teacher—seems they all were—and recruited boys who were not in some sport to play football by shaming them in the classroom. He had mostly left me alone on this score because I played basketball and, I suspect in retrospect, because my dad was president of the school board. So I was resigned to playing football, and it would not have been unpleasant. Hellertown's football team was undefeated and untied in my senior year, a record that is unmatched to this day.

But I did not play football. I found that my weight training had made me a better basketball player. I gained the strength to shoot a reliable outside jump shot, and my “touch” was not adversely affected. My coordination and balance were also better, and I had grown to six-feet in height. I made the JV team and started in most games. It was not a good team. We were small—I often started at center—and we won only five games. But it was the high point of my career in organized sports, and I loved it. I scored seventy-two points (yes, I still remember) that season, with a high of ten in one game.

As a short center with only moderate leaping ability I developed an offbeat skill in winning the tip-offs with which every quarter began. Referees in JV games were themselves learning the ropes, and throwing up the ball for the tip off required some concentration. So they seldom noticed that I would start my jump as soon as they began lifting the ball. This was against the rules (though rarely called), and I had to be subtle about it, not leaving my feet until the ref's attention was on the ball rather than on the players. But I won my share of tip-offs against behemoths who towered at around six feet two.

My major problem with basketball, one that I never overcame, was that I had stone hands. Not for shooting, a skill more tied to depth perception, which I had a good dose of, but for catching the ball and dribbling it. So during the game I only occasionally got the ball in my center position, as my teammates figured out from experience that a pass to me in a crowd was nearly the same as throwing the ball to the other team. I scored sometimes on pop-out jump shots and off of rebounds and loose balls. I could also sometimes surprise my defender by my ability to use my left as well as my right hand for hook-shots and layups. I am almost ambidextrous with a basketball, but that's not a major an asset if neither hand is especially dexterous.

My major strengths were reliable defense and passing the ball on offense. Since I could not dribble well, I was not in a position to be a playmaker, but when I did manage to get hold of the ball I could use my peripheral vision to detect the slightest movement by a teammate toward the basket. I became a master of the no-look pass long before I heard it described that way. Handing out assists is always appreciated, and my teammates and coach were willing to overlook my otherwise clumsy play. I usually threw the ball in on out-of-bounds plays, and my finest moment of my sophomore year was a perfectly thrown half-court pass on an out-of-bounds play that resulted in an easy lay-up and a last second victory.

I made the varsity team in my junior year but got little playing time. The skillful class ahead of me was good enough to keep Hellertown in contention for the Lehigh-Northampton League title, so the coach seldom cleared the bench. Hellertown lost the league title on a missed foul shot at the end of the final game of the season, and the inconsolable sobbing of the boy who missed made me less enthusiastic about organized basketball.

I did not come out for basketball in my senior year, devoting my spare time instead to founding and leading a YMCA club for fifth and sixth graders. I did this in part to see if a career as a teacher had any appeal for me. (It did, but not for that age group.) I had gotten this idea from my camping mentor, Lee Bowker, who was five years my senior. He had led some YMCA trips I had taken in the summers, and we became fast friends. He took his YMCA charges on camping trips around eastern Pennsylvania and sometimes to New England. I joined him in the summer before my senior year in high school as a backpacking trip leader at Camp Jewell in Hartford, Connecticut. I led hiking trips in Maine, the White Mountains and the Adirondacks through my freshman year in Amherst College. Trip leading was a skill I put to use in my first years as a professor at Dartmouth. I led an annual freshmen trip until about 1985 and met several of our long-standing student friends as a result.

Amherst was not much of a basketball school when I attended. Its best player, Ken Howard, was later more famous for playing a former basketball player on a TV show, the White Shadow. In any case, I had no illusions about trying out for the Amherst team. I studied a lot my freshman year, and once I figured that I could handle college-level work, I looked for a sport in spring semester. The choices that fell into my potential skill set were lacrosse and crew, sports that in the 1960s few freshman had played and which, as a result, I felt I had a chance of learning along with other neophytes. Lacrosse seemed to involve guys swinging at each other with large sticks. The sticks in crew went into the water, which seemed like a better place for them, so I learned to row.

Size and strength are required in rowing, and hand coordination is mostly irrelevant, so I rowed for three years with the Amherst crew and earned a varsity letter in my junior year. I was never in better physical condition from any sport. But except for the spring trips to Florida, rowing was not all that interesting: You sit on your backside and go backwards. My grades by senior year were such that I thought honors were within reach if I spent more time on my senior thesis, so I did not row then or ever again. Nice to see

boats being rowed in the Connecticut River near my home in Hanover, NH, 100 miles north of Amherst, but I have never been tempted to join them.

I resumed regular basketball playing in graduate school at Princeton, whose economics PhD program I started in the fall of 1969. I tried recreational tennis and squash for a while, but my limited small-motor coordination was even more evident in those sports. I managed to lose a tennis match to a retired professor, Lester Chandler, though I admit to being sardonically pleased (in distant retrospect) by his quiet satisfaction at beating an athletic-looking guy 40 years his junior. I eventually ended up getting almost all of my daily exercise at pickup basketball games in the old Dillon Gymnasium.

Here I learned the basic and nearly universal rules of pickup basketball. First ten on the court formed teams by foul shooting or by choosing up. The winners of the first game play the next five to arrive. Winning score was usually 11 baskets (there were no 3-point baskets back then to complicate score-keeping), and the reward for winning was the entitlement to keep playing. Losers had to defer to those who had not played yet, and if fewer than five newcomers were waiting, those who had already played but lost took foul shots to determine who would fill out the next team. In half-court games, the rule was “make and take,” meaning the team that scored got to keep the ball. Sounds unfair, but it kept the game moving faster than having to change places all the time.

You called fouls committed against yourself, and the general rule was not to call incidental contact, which normally meant you called fouls only in the act of shooting. The penalty for fouling someone was to allow the other team to keep possession of the ball, assuming it had not scored despite the foul. Only a clueless rube would call charging. You did not usually complain about unreasonable fouling or foul calls. The unexpressed but acceptable rule was measured retaliation in kind, which usually kept the game from deteriorating into arguments or excessive roughness. It was generally acceptable to foul your opponent, though not too flagrantly, to prevent him from laying in the winning basket. For this reason, a close game was often decided by a long jump shot.

The interesting thing about these rules and norms is how widespread they are. They are pretty much the same at Dartmouth and at the pick-up games that I played in at the University of California during leaves and at various points in between. Rules are almost never written down or enforced by an authority higher than the older gym rats who form the core of many established pick-up games. I would guess that the rules spread with the peripatetic players who took them to new locations, but I think they persist because of their economic efficiency.

The goal of the game is to maximize the physical exercise and pleasure from playing. Assembling teams from the first ten on the court — ready to play, shoes laced up — encourages promptness and avoids wasting court time. “Make and take” keeps the game moving in half-court games, but it is never used in full-court games, thus minimizing the transition time after a made basket. Forbearance of trivial fouls and never stopping to shoot foul shots likewise keeps the game moving. Motivation for skillful, team-oriented

play is provided by the guarantee that winners play the next game. I found that these rules and norms made playing in informal pickup games more enjoyable than the occasional refereed games I played in for intramural teams at Amherst, Princeton, and Dartmouth.

Witnessing the spread and efficacy of these norms probably has something to do with my professional writings, which are mostly about the economic behavior of local government in the United States. I have over the years become more skeptical of the need for a central authority to coordinate many of the actions of local governments. School districts, for instance, independently developed curricular norms that make it easy to move from one school to another. That's why American literature is almost always taught in the junior year of high school and also why almost all schools start in August or September, allowing newcomers a long summer break to arrive from their previous schools and start the next grade along with everyone else. (If you think the school year had to do with farmers, do a web search for "Will I See You in September?" and my name.) "Spontaneous order" has long been associated with private markets; I just extended it to the supposedly unruly or anarchic behavior of local government. But my confidence in these propositions has been reinforced by my pick-up basketball experience, where efficient norms seemed to have spread without central direction.

Another economic principle that my basketball experience illustrated was that of comparative advantage. This is my favorite economic topic to present to beginning students because it offers the comforting message that no one is redundant. If you specialize in something you are relatively good at and exchange with others for the stuff you want, you and most everyone else are better off than trying to do it all yourself. The more difficult problem is how to discover your comparative advantage. Basketball is a team sport, but, at least in the pick-up version, there are seldom any prearranged roles. No one is told to be center or forward or point guard. So players usually learn by experience what roles will contribute most to the success of their (usually) randomly assigned team.

I had developed a reliable outside jump shot. Had the three-point shot been available when I was in high school (it did not arrive until the mid 1980s), I would have gotten more playing time. But with slow reflexes, I needed time to set up my shot. I often would take early shots in the pick-up games, when my defender was not so attentive. If I scored a couple of baskets, my defender would step up his efforts to guard me. Occasionally I was accorded the honor of having a better athlete replace my initial defender. Then I would go into running mode, moving without the ball from side to side in order to help teammates get open. If my defender got tired of chasing me, I would get a few pop-out jump shots, but usually my scoring was a lot less later in the game.

My other comparative advantage was on fast breaks. Defending them, not participating in them. I could not reliably catch the ball while running hard, and I kind of look like I have mittens on when I dribble in the open court, but I long ago figured out that the balance of many games was determined by how many fast-break points the opposing team would score. Rather than following my shot (except on those rare occasions when I shot somewhere near the basket), I would immediately start back-

pedaling toward the other end of the court. I would also usually do this when someone else shot. My reflex meant that the other team would seldom get an uncontested lay-up if they got the rebound.

Of course turning tail on most shots meant that I got few offensive rebounds and fewer second shots for any reason. But I was not much good at rebounding, which requires good hands to a degree that most people do not appreciate. (Think of how Larry Bird and Bill Bradley, contributors to the “white men can't jump” legend, got so many rebounds because of their sure hands.) And my quick retreat definitely did stop easy buckets by the other side. My habit was vindicated by Princeton's varsity basketball tactics, coached by the incomparable Pete Carrill, in which most players (and often the whole team) retreated after the first shot so as not to give up easy fast-break points.

Finding the appropriate niche also tracks what I have done in my economics career. I was never especially good at the mathematics of economic theory. I got good grades in calculus—you doggedly do all the homework, you get good grades—but I was never creative with it. Finite math was more difficult. More than three symbols and I was constantly checking back to see which was which and losing the logical thread. So my statistical skills were never strong. What I could do better than most other economics students, though, was look at a problem from a slightly different angle or see an analogy that others had overlooked and tell a story about it. Many of my better ideas came from general reading and personal experience rather than perusal of economics journals. My service on the Hanover zoning board led me to appreciate why homeowners are so touchy about neighborhood change, and this in turn became the core idea for my most successful book, *The Homevoter Hypothesis*.

Jon Sonstelie, a close friend in Santa Barbara, once introduced me at an economics seminar I was giving at the Public Policy Institute of California in 1998. “Bill is an unusual economist,” Jon began. Pause. “Bill has no skills.” Audible gasp from the audience of young economists. I am not sure whether they were shocked at my disability or at Jon's having revealed it—all scholars have some insecurity about their skills—but I have never before or since heard an audible gasp at an economics seminar. Jon went on: “What Bill does is tell stories...” As he later told me, perhaps thinking he might have insulted me, he wanted to explain to the younger PhDs in the audience that having a story for your research is critical to its development and acceptance by a wider audience.

Basketball was the one sport I transmitted to my son. We were on sabbatical in Santa Barbara in 1985-86, when Josh was in the second grade. His school was a short walk from our rented house—that's why we selected that modest cottage—and it had a kid-sized basketball court on its playground. The basket was set low, perhaps eight feet rather than ten, so younger kids could manage to score. Older kids loved it, too, because they could dunk the ball on it.

I do not recall giving Josh any specific instruction or drills. We shot the ball and would play one-on-one games, which he invariably won. Of course I let him win. I had an acquaintance in college who was a New York State tennis champion in high school

but had never beaten his father at the game. He struggled with a lifelong stutter. Not saying it was causal, but I was not going to take any chances. When Josh got to be a teenager, we could play games more evenly, and I did not have to hold back. A few years later we were playing at a playground and I managed to take a couple of games from him. Looking back, I now entertain the suspicion that he was letting me win.

I was not much of a basketball viewer as a youth. No one else in my family was interested in the sport. My older brother Jonesy loved baseball. He organized our backyard softball games with neighborhood boys in the summer. Although we lived in Pennsylvania only fifty miles north of Philadelphia, our house was situated on a hill such that we could get New York TV but not Philadelphia stations. Jonesy took a liking to the Brooklyn Dodgers, whose games were broadcast in grainy black and white. "Liking" is too mild; obsession would be closer. He listened late at night on the radio to games he could not watch and kept a running total of the earned run averages of the entire pitching staff. Our family would go to Philadelphia to see them play the Phillies. So I knew a lot about the 1950s Brooklyn Dodgers, an interest that faded when they moved to Los Angeles and Jonesy went to college at Bucknell. My only enduring baseball loyalty is negative: I still hate the Yankees.

My one lasting interest in the Dodgers was Sandy Koufax. My younger sister Peggy continued to follow the Dodgers after they moved to LA, and Koufax was her favorite player. I once knocked down a Koufax pitch that was fouled into the stands in a Dodgers–Phillies' game, and Peggy came up with the treasure. By wild coincidence, an acquaintance told me a few years ago that Koufax now lived near where I grew up in Pennsylvania. Janice and I drove by his place when we were visiting our parents, and I caught a glimpse of the greatest strike-out pitcher of his generation. He wasn't mowing down batters. He was mowing his own lawn, just like I do. No, I didn't stop to get his autograph or talk. My acquaintance said Koufax really valued his privacy, and I have too much respect for the guy who declined to pitch a World Series game on Yom Kippur to violate the code.

My viewing interest in basketball was born at Princeton. I was playing pickup games in Dillon Gym, where Bill Bradley a few years earlier had put the game on the map in the Ivy League. A new and much larger arena, Jadwin Gymnasium, was where the varsity athletes now performed, and I soon became a regular fan of Pete Carrill's teams. (Only later did I learn that Carrill had grown up nearby in Bethlehem and had been a star player at Liberty High School and Lafayette College.) Princeton's teams were quite successful during my four years there and for years afterwards. Carrill's teams played what many others derided as a slow style (this was before the shot clock had been installed), but they continued to be successful even after the shot clock was adopted. One of the high points I saw was Princeton defeating North Carolina when UNC was ranked number 2 in the nation.

I had never understood Carrill's coaching technique until one of his assistant coaches, Gary Walters, became head coach at Dartmouth in the late 1970s. Walters took a Dartmouth men's team that had won six games in the season before he arrived and won

sixteen games with the same players, minus one of its best, Jim Beattie, who had signed as a pitcher for the Yankees and thus lost his basketball eligibility, too. Walters gave a coaching clinic for Dartmouth fans, and he explained how he (and, I assume, Carrill) taught basketball. The key to the Princeton offense is that it has no plays in which a designated player is supposed to take a shot. There are instead a variety of opening scenarios from which players move in ways mainly dictated by how the defense responds.

The reason for the absence of set plays, Walters explained, was that the defenders quickly figure out the repertoire and can adjust their defense to it. He described, perhaps tongue in cheek, his playing experience at Princeton in which he sometimes told opposing players where they were supposed to be for a particular play. (I guess that counts as trash talk in the Ivy League.) Teams with gifted players can overwhelm most defenses, but Ivy League teams, which usually lack superstars, require the element of surprise. Thus Walters schooled his players in the basic motions of offense and made them familiar enough with one another that they could anticipate the moves the others would make, even though they were not rehearsed. The best-known of these moves is the “backdoor cut,” in which a player without the ball sees his defender momentarily takes his eyes off him and races to the basket, knowing that his teammate with the ball will pass it to him.

The most famous example of this was Princeton's last minute upset of defending-champion UCLA in the 1996 NCAA playoffs. Princeton player feints toward the basket from the wing. UCLA player, clearly the better athlete, easily covers him. Princeton player goes back to original position and seems to relax. UCLA player looks towards the ball, thinking, I infer, okay, what's the next play? There is no next play. Princeton player (Gabe Lewullis, native of Allentown) sees his defender look away and is headed for the basket. His teammate passes him the ball and he lays it in for the win.

Princeton's strategy started to be emulated in various forms throughout the Ivy League, and Carrill's protégés took it elsewhere, too. It even affected how we played in pickup games at Dartmouth. (Or did Carrill get the idea from pickup games?) Although we had no set teams, regulars got to know each other's habits and could anticipate what they would do. A rangy player named Ed (no one used last names) figured out that I was always willing to pass the ball to an open teammate. Two varsity players are on the other team. I catch a long defensive rebound. Ed breaks for the basket at the other end of the court but is well covered by the two varsity guys. I look downcourt as if intending to pass, then look away. The two defenders, who did not regularly play in this pickup game, see me seem to give up, and they relax their coverage. Ed knows what I am doing and accelerates toward the basket. I throw the ball the length of the court and Ed catches it and without a dribble lays it in.

I hurt my lower back by falling during a basketball game in the mid nineteen-eighties, and this greatly reduced my participation in pick-up games. Most of my basketball life became vicarious with the Dartmouth men's team, and Janice and I got season tickets when Dartmouth built its new arena. Dartmouth men's basketball has usually been on the

lower ranks of the Ivy League (last title was in 1959), while its women's team has had a winning tradition from its inception in the 1980s. But we attend no more than one or two women's games per season. College communities have cultural as well as athletic diversions, and the adrenaline rush that I get from watching a close men's game just does not kick in during the women's contests.

I became acquainted with some of the women players, though. The noon pickup games occasionally were joined by one or two women players. They weren't deferential to the guys. The games are shirts vs. skins (shirtless), so, naturally, we assumed that the varsity star who'd joined us would be a shirt. "No way," she said, "I'm not playing with some sweaty, shirtless guy pressing up against me on defense. So you guys just remember that I'm on the skins side even though I'm keeping my shirt on." We did.

Professional basketball has interested me only occasionally. In grad school I followed the New York Knicks, who were enjoying considerable success in the early 1970s. The Knicks were especially favored in Princeton at that time because Bill Bradley was on the team. After we moved to Hanover, I changed my allegiance to the Celtics, but I watched with only tepid interest until the Larry Bird years of the mid 1980s. Bird was great fun to watch even though he did not seem to have that much fun playing the game.

The other great pro player at the time was Magic Johnson, who, in contrast to Bird, clearly enjoyed every minute of his playing time. Josh and I followed the Lakers when I was on leave at the University of California in Santa Barbara in 1985-86. Josh was in second grade and learning to play on the aforementioned playground, and he regularly read about the Lakers and Magic Johnson in the Los Angeles Times. He did not calculate stats in the manner of my older brother's obsession with the Brooklyn Dodgers, but Josh could easily go through the Lakers' roster and comment on their strengths and weaknesses.

Unlike me, whose sports allegiances are temporary and portable, Josh has remained a Lakers fan to the present, even though he now lives in the Boston area. This occasionally created some family tension in later years when the Lakers played the Celtics (and, I imagine, with his fellow teachers in Massachusetts), but I was only a sunshine fan of pro teams. Steadfast allegiance to professional sports teams has somewhat bemused me. High school and college players are at least people you might know on campus, but pro players are pretty remote and have mainly a financial relationship with the locale in which they display their talents. I enjoy watching both college and pro teams on TV without having strong preferences for which side will prevail, though I am usually more pleased if the underdog wins, assuming its coaches, players or fans do not egregiously misbehave during the game.

Sports allegiances may actually have little to do with relating to the players. It is probably more about relating to other fans. It is easier to chat with strangers at a business meeting or a social gathering if you have an interest in the same team (or even opposing teams), and so knowing something about the local team's lore can be a useful ice breaker and a seed for the "weak ties" that are supposed to lead to successful business and

professional contacts. Sounds trivial, but if you add up the value of all those ties, maybe it explains why so many pro teams can get voters to subsidize their stadiums and why even academically respectable schools nonetheless field competitive sports teams.

I played basketball only lightly between 1985 and 1998, the year we spent a sabbatical at the University of Washington. I had resumed bicycling for recreation and exercise in the 1980s. I was always comfortable riding a bike—I rode to kindergarten—and it did not bother my touchy lower back as much as basketball or jogging. During our leave in Seattle, I would ride in my rain suit four miles to the university in the morning, work out at the gym, and then go to my office. I tried some new exercises at the “U Dub” gym and discovered one that strengthened my lower back so well that I started shooting baskets at the gym again.

One of my inspirations was an informal game I saw at a local recreation center when I was looking for places to work out in Seattle. The players were all disabled young men in wheelchairs, obviously fitted out for sports mobility. They played well, dribbling and shooting in the regular way, but I was actually most impressed by their strength. In the heat of play, two of them tipped out of their chairs and sprawled on the floor. As the only guy with operative legs in the gym, I pondered the ethics and etiquette of going out on the floor to help them up. Before I could make up my mind, both of them righted themselves by doing handstands and then flipping themselves onto their chairs.

With a stronger back and the confidence that I could run again, I resumed playing in the noontime pickup game when we got back to Hanover in the fall of 1999. Much had changed in my decade-plus basketball hiatus. I was kind of the Rip Van Winkle of the noon crowd. They had all gotten faster and younger, except for my longtime basketball buddy, Bruce Duncan, who taught German at Dartmouth in order to support his basketball habit. I took up jogging to get back in shape. During games I sometimes strained my hamstrings and other muscles, which I dealt with by doing more regular weight training at home.

A more persistent deficiency was the loss of my outside shot. I had had a fairly reliable jump shot in the 1980s, but it turns out that shooting a basketball is not like swimming or riding a bike. Your body forgets how to do it right without constant practice. With lame shooting ability, I struggled to get respect on the court. I once saw Bruce Duncan on the court after he had been away for a year in Berlin. Asked if he'd played any games in Germany, Bruce replied, “I haven't touched the ball in a year.” “Same with me,” I said with only some exaggeration.

So when we went back to Santa Barbara for a sabbatical in 2005, I decided to see if I could get my shot back. Several days a week I would go to the gym and shoot 50 or 60 three pointers as part of my workout. The gain in accuracy was almost imperceptible. There was no moment at which I felt, “Aha, now I remember how it's done.” I didn't actually play in any games, so I could not reliably measure my progress. When we got back to Hanover, I resumed noontime play. A friend from the math department, a pretty good player, was guarding me and giving me plenty of space to shoot. I sank a three-

pointer to win the game. He congratulated me on the shot afterwards, and I told him about my sabbatical practice schedule. He asked politely if that was one of the sabbatical accomplishments I would list on my report to the dean of faculty.

I gradually got some respect on the court. Other players were willing to pass the ball to me, and one of the best regular players (a Vermont all-stater in his youth) paid me the indirect compliment of chiding a teammate for not guarding me closely enough after I made a three. "You have to get out there," he said. "That's his shot."

But success was short lived. By 2007 (age 62) I was rationing my noontime play to two games so as to avoid aggravating the knee pain that plagues older players. I was leaving after the second game when a new game was forming. There were only nine players available, and I gave in to their requests to make a minyan. Not too long into the game, the guy I was guarding, one of the few regulars I disliked, got away from me and went up for a shot. I made a mighty leap from out of position to block his shot. We got tangled and fell to the floor. The very bad bruise on my left arm swelled painfully, and a week later, after a business trip, I went to the emergency room and had an x-ray. "You broke it last week?" the ER doc asked incredulously. After the arm healed, I cleaned out my locker, turned in the lock, and have not picked up a ball since.