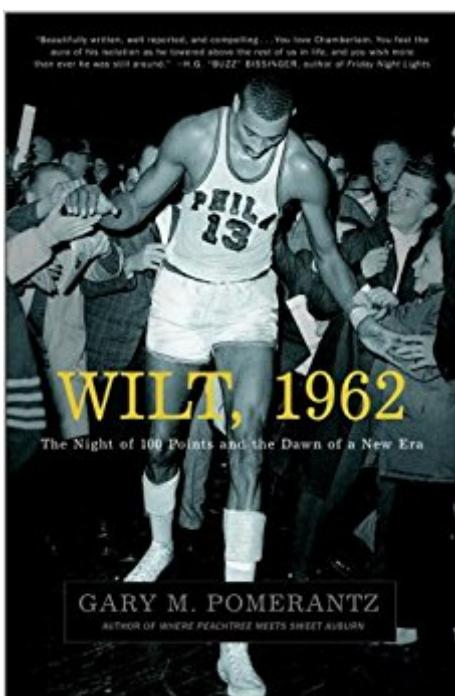


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# Wilt, 1962: The Night Of 100 Points And The Dawn Of A New Era



## Synopsis

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 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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## Customer Reviews

On March 2, 1962, in a drafty, half-full, 8,000-seat arena in Hershey, Pa., Wilt Chamberlain (aka the Big Dipper) scored a stunning 100 points in a single game against the New York Knicks—a watershed moment for the fledgling NBA. Drawing on interviews he conducted with various team members, fans, journalists and referees, Pomerantz (Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn) recreates this historic night in startling detail, bringing everyone from Chamberlain, to the Knicks' defensive player Darrall Imhoff, to the caustic journalist Jack Kiser to vivid life. For Pomerantz, Chamberlain and Imhoff "symbolized pro basketball's accelerating generational shift writ large: the agile black athlete, swift and strong, moving freely against a white opponent who, though young, earnest, and determined, seemed... a handsome blond shrine to a bygone era when all of the players were white." Pomerantz explores the racial tension of the era through Chamberlain's experiences, fluidly transitioning from the action on the court to moments in the player's life and then back again. In one instance, he's finger-rolling a ball into the basket, and in the next, he's at Big Wilt's Smalls Paradise, the Harlem nightclub he part-owned, talking about how many good African-Americans were left out of the league due to its racial quotas. Throughout this surprisingly touching narrative, Pomerantz does a remarkable job of making Chamberlain, the world he inhabited and that mythic night shine all over again. 8-page b&w photo insert. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

The game in which Wilt Chamberlain scored 100 points for the Philadelphia Warriors against the New York Knicks, on March 2, 1962, belongs on the short list of modern sports' defining moments. Robert Allen Cherry discusses the event in his fine biography, *Wilt: Larger than Life* (2004); but Pomerantz looks in more detail at the accomplishment and places it in its rightful context. He notes,

for example, that Chamberlain's 100 points is 51 percent better than David Thompson's 1978 second-place total of 73. And the 100-point game was merely consistent with Chamberlain's unconscious 1961-62 season averages of 50 points, 25.7 rebounds per game. The 100-point game also announced a fundamental change in the style in which basketball would henceforth be played and in the racial makeup of the men who could and would play it. While Pomerantz writes a suspenseful narrative of the game, he also delivers an engaging, full-bodied portrait of one of the great athletes of our time. An excellent companion to Cherry's biography but also a sports book that can stand on its own. Alan MooresCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

The author did a great job in describing the details, background and excitement surrounding this great and unique event. His discussion of the game made me feel as if I was right there in the Hershey arena. But I especially liked his discussion of the Warriors' and Knicks' players both during the game and then looking back many years later. The NBA environment at the time, including the racial environment and apparent quotas was also discussed. I am old enough to remember the NBA at the time and many of the players as well as the event. I remember when Wilt appeared on the Sunday Ed Sullivan show to be congratulated. Various aspects of Wilt's life are presented in a very interesting way. Even the controversy of the game ball is described. A great read and very worthwhile to buy. Dipper Dunk.

I'm pleased to see that folks are still buying and reading this book. I was at the game-- I have the game program and am in the cover picture looking up to Wilt. I have told this story so many times that my wife leaves the room when I start it again. But witnessing one of the greatest individual sports performances ever at age 13 is a memory I cherish. This book is a very accurate account of that night and the time in which it occurred. I always felt blessed to grow up in that small town in the 50s and 60s. That game in the Hershey Arena was one for the ages. My classmate, Kerry Ryman, is the kid who stole the ball that night. I visited Kerry shortly after Wilt died and we shared memories of those times and that night. Any basketball fan or student of the 1960s is bound to enjoy Gary Pomerantz's telling of the story.

Gary Pomerantz's story of that storied event is right on the money. The context of basketball in the early 1960's relating to Wilt's story is very entertaining. And when the penultimate moment arrives, it was written so that I felt a real emotional rush from the scoring of the 100th point, almost like having been there.

In 1962, Wilt Chamberlain, the 7-foot-1 superstar, was in his third year in the NBA. It was a time when the game "straddled two NBA eras with isolated images of the game's past and future," according to author Gary Pomerantz. But Chamberlain "did to the NBA game what Elvis did to traditional popular music; he placed it in a new context," writes Pomerantz. Chamberlain moved the game above the rim and quickened the scoring pace. Chamberlain averaged an amazing 50 points a game during the 1961-62 season for the Philadelphia Warriors. The highlight came on March 2, 1962, in Hershey, Pa., when he scored 100 points against the New York Knicks. Pomerantz uses Wilt's 100-point game as the "Dawn of a New Era." He does an excellent job of putting the reader in the game (although there was no television coverage and no New York papers covered the game). Pomerantz interviewed 250 people for the book, including 56 who were among the scant crowd of 4,124 in attendance. A reader will learn a lot about the early days of the NBA and the culture of the 1960s through this book. In 1962, the NBA struggled with attendance, often having doubleheaders (two games for the price of one). Sometimes, the Harlem Globetrotters would be the first game and the NBA teams would match up in the nightcap. On Wilt's 100-point night, the NFL Philadelphia Eagles played the Baltimore Colts in an exhibition prior to the Warriors-Knicks matchup. High-scoring NBA games were frowned upon, and Chamberlain, who was not a gate attraction, was frequently criticized for his scoring and number of shots taken. Unbelievably, there were only 37 blacks in the NBA. Pomerantz offers interesting profiles of the players and coaches involved in Wilt's 100-point game. Wilt's drive to 100 points is vividly and excitedly recreated. He had 69 points entering the fourth quarter, and the Knicks felt like he was embarrassing them. They were determined to keep him from scoring 100. It was 1 vs. 5 down the stretch. There were no easy shots. Chamberlain earned every point. Any basketball fan should find this book fascinating.

Incredible extensive research! Who would have thought you could write 223 pages about a single game - and truly relate it all to that game? It was sad, though, to read how unappreciated Wilt was, and somewhat sad as well. But he truly was THE greatest (sorry MJ).

Excellent history of the event. Great detail and good commentary on the unusual circumstance of playing in Hershey. Wilt was a lousy foul shooter but not that night. Wonderful complement to this book is Malcolm Gladwell's excellent podcast about another interesting facet of this event.

Brought back memories of a great time in the NBA.

This is an interesting take on Chamberlain's impact on professional basketball and, through it, on wider society. It is well written and an interesting read, but I would have welcomed a deeper probe into one or the other of its agendas: Chamberlain the man; Chamberlain the icon; the role of both in civil rights and changing American society. Instead there is a little of each, but all left me wanting a bit more. What's here is good, and I certainly enjoyed it, but more depth would have served the game, the man and the reader better.

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