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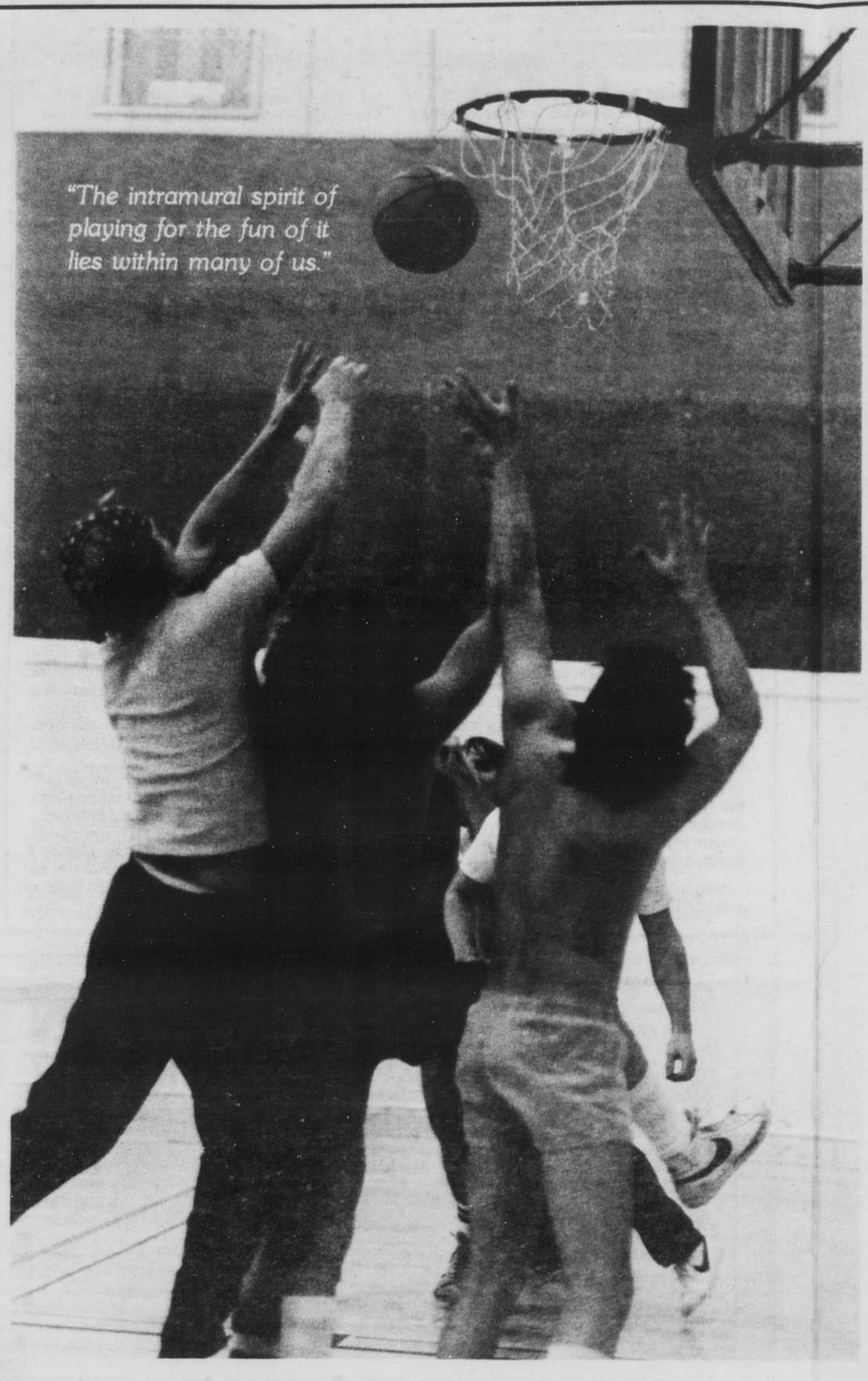
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"The intramural spirit of playing for the fun of it lies within many of us."

Playing just to play

Continued from Page 1B

Some would call it stupidity; I prefer to believe that this intramural spirit of playing just for the pure fun of it lies within many of us. One sport in particular where I find this play-for-the-sake-of-playing spirit to exist is intramural basketball.

Basketball is a funny game. If you are a young boy — and now sex has little to do with anything — who frequents the playground or schoolyards, you play basketball. It's as simple as that. And if you can dribble well, shoot well, and read the sports pages, it is easy to have visions of the NBA dancing in your head.

I know I did. As a little kid on the New York playgrounds, I was one of those little guys who could dribble around everyone and score.

I saw myself being the next Walt Frazier — hitting the clutch shot, dishing the ball off to an open teammate for an easy two, or making the big steal against Wilt Chamberlain. Every time I watched my long jumper swing in the net, I was secure in the knowledge that my Knicks had won another last-second heart-stopper against the Celtics.

As I grew older, but not much taller, the dream eroded.

Let's face it. These guys on the major college level are awesome. If you're 6-foot 8-inches, can hit most of your shots within eyesight, can challenge a cheetah in a 40-yard dash, and can get within an arm's length of the clouds with a single bound, you're normal.

So, for most of us, intramurals is the closest thing to the NBA. And at Oregon, intramural basketball does not amount to much. Check the facts:

Each team plays only three regular-season games. Part of the reason for this is the over-abundance of teams — there are approximately 80 teams split into division I, division II and an unaffiliated division this year.

Another problem is the scheduling. All the games are played on weekday afternoons, which is okay, but there are always going to be a few guys who have afternoon classes and have to miss the games.

A final problem is the facilities for intramural basketball. The games are played at Esslinger, where the floor creaks and the backboards are rusting. Then there are the rims. In the middle gym, there is one rim that is so loose it clangs like the liberty bell when the ball strikes, then sends the sphere caroming off in incredible ways. Sure putting books on the library shelves is more important, but couldn't the University scrape up a few dollars to change that damn rim?

Despite the less-than-perfect conditions of intramural basketball, it seems most players get that little-boy excitement and those little-boy dreams

come game time.

Why do these guys play? Most will tell you it's just for enjoyment; others like the competition; and some play just to stay in shape.

For me, quite honestly, it is ego. Maybe I won't play in the NBA, or put the jumper in front of a packed Pit. But if I can make a steal, get an assist, or nail a jumper from the top of the key, the visions can flicker once again.

I play for my house, Phi Delta Theta, in division I. In division II, I would likely see more playing time and score more. But in division I, I accept the label of "role player". My job is to play good defense, pass the ball, and score some points if I have the open shots.

Today, we are playing Sigma Alpha Epsilon, our biggest rivals. This is our Biazers-Sonics game. While we warm up, I get the familiar knot in my stomach. I'm our third guard, and I feel ready to play.

Looking around, I notice only a few people will watch the game — a smattering of fraternity brothers and girlfriends. There will be no thunderous applause, no chants of "dee-fense", no hollering at the officials.

The players are set for the tap. Our team is bigger and, I hope, more talented. The SAE's jump out to an early lead, but we're controlling the boards and taking better shots.

We finally take the lead and remain ahead until halftime, 16-11. That's about the average halftime score in this league — you've got to worry about just getting the ball up the floor before you can worry about putting it in the hole.

In the second half, the SAE's have the advantage. We have the damn loose rim; and while our shooting isn't too great to begin with, the

grating metal hoop acts like a pinball bumper on all but the most perfect swishers.

A defender strips the ball from me and starts a fast break; luckily they miss the lay-up. Later, I give up an easy foul-line jumper, and we lead by just one point.

Whereas Jim Haney's Oregon club would have held the ball to run out the clock and seal the win, intramural ball is a different kind of game. One of our forwards breaks clear and without thinking launches a shot towards the unforgiving hoop. As the SAE's gathered in the key to gobble up the inevitable rebound — SWISH — the ball goes through without even grazing the rim.

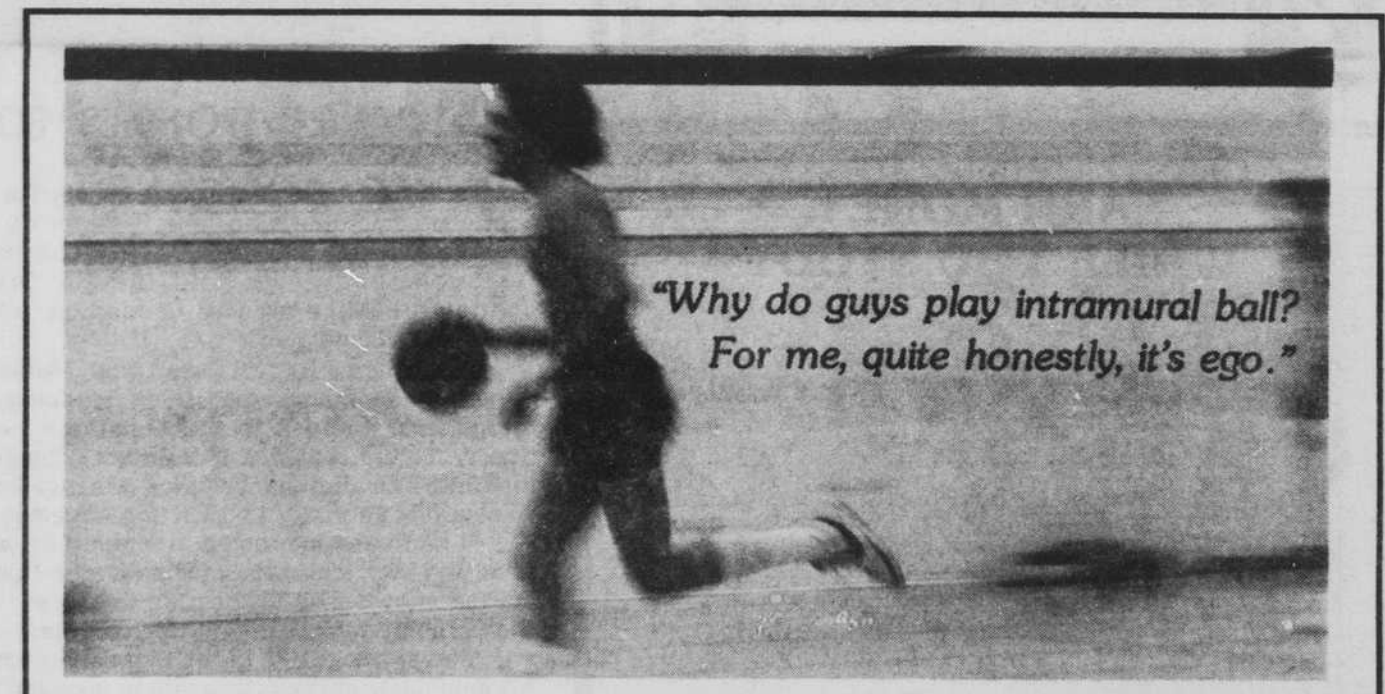
The sight of that ball swinging in the net sent the same message to us that it would have to the Ducks and the Knicks. The adrenalin flowing, we scrambled back on defense, owning a three point lead and the game.

We run out the clock after they score to take a 26-25 win. The game was sloppy, but a win is a win.

After the game, there is the usual joking and laughter that surrounds the winning team. I have an empty feeling inside of me. It seems I always perform better in pick-up games than in the real thing. I tell myself I will do better next time.

I guess I must resign myself to the fact that I won't be a Julius Erving. But who knows, maybe next game I'll score 30 points, and Jim Haney will just happen to be watching and... well, there is nothing wrong with dreaming.

Story by Doug Levy
Photos by Bob Baker



"Why do guys play intramural ball?
For me, quite honestly, it's ego."

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