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"Shorty" Elgin Baylor towers over bigger men in rebounding.

BASKETBALL'S BIG SHOT— "LITTLE" ELGIN BAYLOR

"Only" six-foot-five, he keeps those pro cage giants up in the air with his all-around finesse

BY ED FITZGERALD

How would you like to be six feet five inches tall and hear the men you work with call you "little man"?

That's how it is with Elgin Baylor, one of pro basketball's greatest players and the "one-man franchise" of the Minneapolis Lakers.

When he walks down the street, Elgin looks like a giant; his wife Ruby had to have an oversize bed custom-made for their apartment in St. Paul to accommodate his height; but when he goes out on the court to play a National Basketball Association game, he's a shrimp.

Well, maybe not exactly a shrimp. Bob Cousy, who is probably the most famous "little man" in the NBA, is only six feet, two inches tall, but almost all the big scorers in the league are three or four inches taller than Baylor, ranging all the way up to Bill Russell's six feet, ten inches and the seven feet, one inch of the astonishing Wilt Chamberlain.

"I guess in just about every game I play, the man I'm matched up with is bigger," Elgin says. "I'm used to it."

It certainly doesn't seem to bother him any. He's been tops ever since he left Seattle University at the end of his junior year and signed a \$20,000 contract with the Lakers, who were frantically searching for a new drawing card to replace the immortal George Mikan. In his professional debut in 1958, he required exactly eight seconds to find the range for his first basket and wound up the evening with 25 points as he led the Lakers to an easy victory over the Cincinnati Royals.

That was only the beginning. In the middle of the season, playing with the West team in the NBA's annual All-Star game, Elgin tied old pro Bob Pettit in the voting for the most-valuable-player award. He was the first rookie to achieve the honor, and Pettit made the occasion even more memorable by insisting that Elgin take the trophy. "I've already got one," Bob said. "Anyway, you earned it."

As good as he was in his rookie season,

Elgin is even better this year. Scoring more than ever, he piled up 52 points in the first game of the season, and on Nov. 8 he buried the champion Boston Celtics under an incredible 64 points. "I never scored that many in college," he said, "and I didn't even in high school."

ELGIN GOT his start as a basketball prodigy at Spingarn High School in Washington, D. C., where he scored some 2,000 points and won himself a spot on the Helms High-School All-America team. A lot of colleges were interested in him, but it usually turned out that only the basketball coach stayed interested—the registrar generally blanched when he got a peek at Baylor's grades.

"I don't remember what they were," Elgin says grimly, "but they weren't very good, I can tell you that." He finally

made it to the College of Idaho, where he played for a year, gave fits to Idaho's opponents, and made the small-college All-America before transferring to Seattle University.

There wasn't much that Elgin could have done at Seattle that he didn't do. Emmett Watson, one of the finest sports writers in the country, wrote this neck-stuck-out line about him in a national magazine: "Elgin Baylor, a junior at Seattle University, is probably the best basketball player today, pro or amateur."

The strangest part about Watson's challenging claim was that knowledgeable basketball men didn't get too upset by it. Some, to be sure, grumbled that Bob Cousy was still around, and others said that it might be smarter to wait until Baylor got out of college and faced the pros. But nobody said it was ridiculous to talk that way about a college kid—not if he was Elgin Baylor.

BAYLOR is much more than just a scorer. He's a complete basketball player. He can handle the ball, set up plays, hit his teammates on the dead run with perfectly timed passes, defend tenaciously, and go after the ball on rebounds with the spring of a leopard and the strength of a bull. In the NBA, they call him a "big six-five" because he has the skill to compete on even terms with the tallest players in the game.

There's no telling how high Elgin will go before he comes to the end of the line. He will probably be drawing top pay in the pro league for another ten years.

And soon he will have even more incentive to play to the peak of his powers: his pretty wife Ruby, a senior at the University of Minnesota, is expecting their first baby in March. Ruby, at five feet, six inches, is almost a foot shorter than her famous husband. If the baby takes after Elgin instead of her, she may have to go shopping for a custom-made cradle to go with that custom-made bed.



To Elgin's wife Ruby, the pro star is a big man around the house in every sense.