

The Bullets, The Wizards and Washington, DC, Basketball

Brett L. Abrams

Raphael Mazzone

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The professional basketball teams in Washington, DC, have been the butt of jokes more often than they've been legitimate title contenders, but even they deserve a comprehensive compilation of their history. That's what Brett L. Abrams and Raphael Mazzone have provided with *The Bullets, The Wizards, and Washington, DC, Basketball*.

Archivists by profession, Abrams and Mazzone culled through more than one hundred years' worth of newspaper and magazine articles, supplementing those details in interviews with former players and coaches to pull together a basketball history lesson for the nation's capital. It begins with amateur league and YMCA games of the 1900s, continues through the territorial battle between the Washington Capitals and the Baltimore Bullets, recaps the NBA franchise's one championship season in 1978, and ends with today's Washington Wizards counting on potential superstar John Wall to end a streak of ineptitude that includes just five playoff appearances since 1988.

The result of the coauthors' research produced a sixteen-page bibliography of sources used to generate the book and its twenty-six-page index of referenced players, coaches, executives, owners, and teams.

While Washington may not be the flashiest franchise in NBA history—Elvin Hayes and Wes Unseld are among the most notable former players to suit up there in their prime—the city has ties to two of the biggest names in basketball history. Before becoming a legendary coach and general manager with the Boston Celtics, Arnold “Red” Auerbach led the Washington Capitals of the Basketball Association of America (a predecessor of the NBA). And one of the game's greatest players, Michael Jordan, played out his saga of minority owner turned unretired player with the Wizards in the early 2000s. Abrams and Mazzone cover both of those short-term blips on the Washington basketball scene as they do the rest of its history, with exhaustive detail and little or no original commentary.

While the text can be excessively dry at times, the book more than adequately fills its niche as historical reference material. What casual sports fans may deem mind-numbing minutiae—like the Wizards selecting God Shammgod and Predrag Drobnjak in the second round of the 1997 NBA Draft—is also chronicled fact, the prior example providing insight to the Wizards' struggles (especially after the co-authors point out that Shammgod played just twenty games with the team, and Drobnjak elected to instead play in Turkey).

The full-page, black-and-white photographs and reproductions of documents—including a 1950 player's contract—sprinkled throughout the book's 379 pages are interesting supplements.

This is not a light read for the average sports fan, but that's not what Abrams and Mazzone intended it to be. Readers with an interest in sports history, particularly in the Washington, DC, area, and die-hard Wizards fans—yes, one must assume they're out there—will find *The Bullets, The Wizards, and Washington, DC, Basketball* to be a valuable resource and a meticulously researched historical reference.

RICH REZLER (June 5, 2013)

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