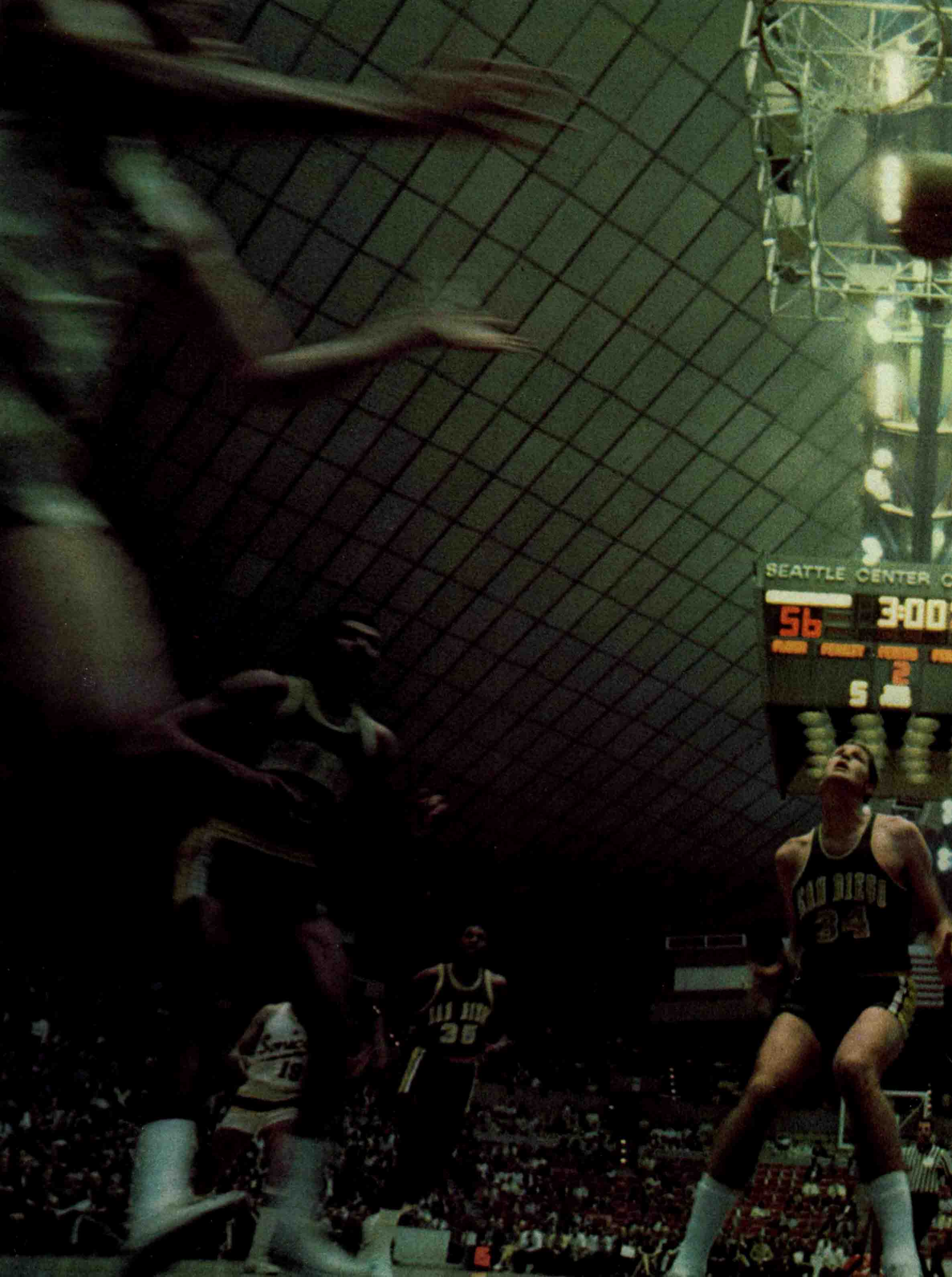


Basketball

The American Game

by Joe Jares





SEATTLE CENTER

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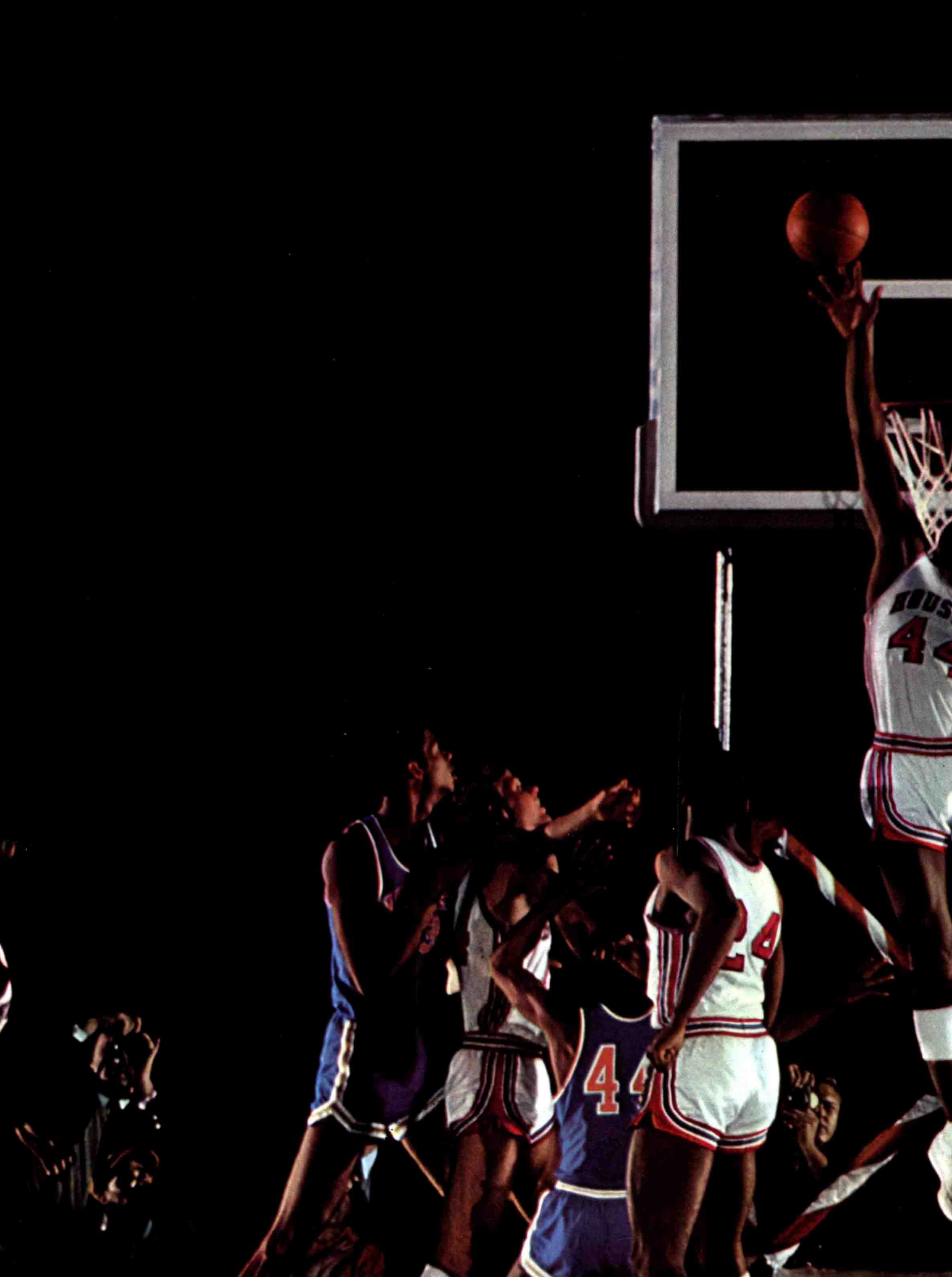
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Page One

Billy Cunningham of the Philadelphia 76ers is right at home in the tangle of bodies and arms in the key. A good outside shooter, Cunningham nevertheless loves to drive into the middle, take whatever shoves and bumps his opponents dish out, then put in the lay-up anyway. An ex-University of North Carolina star, he got his early karate training on the hard playgrounds of Brooklyn.

Pages Two and Three

The shot has missed in a close game as the Seattle and San Diego players look up into the bright lights and hold out their hands as if they were flood victims being dropped a bundle of relief supplies.

Page Four

Jostling, elbowing, sometimes blatantly shoving, the giants of the game battle for position under the basket. That iron hoop is only 18 inches in diameter, and the many shots that carom off it and the backboard are fought for violently. Here, 6 foot-10 inch Willis Reed of the New York Knickerbockers and 6 foot-8 inch Westley Unseld of the Baltimore Bullets, two of the best centers in the NBA, duel violently as Reed tries for a three-point play.

Page Five

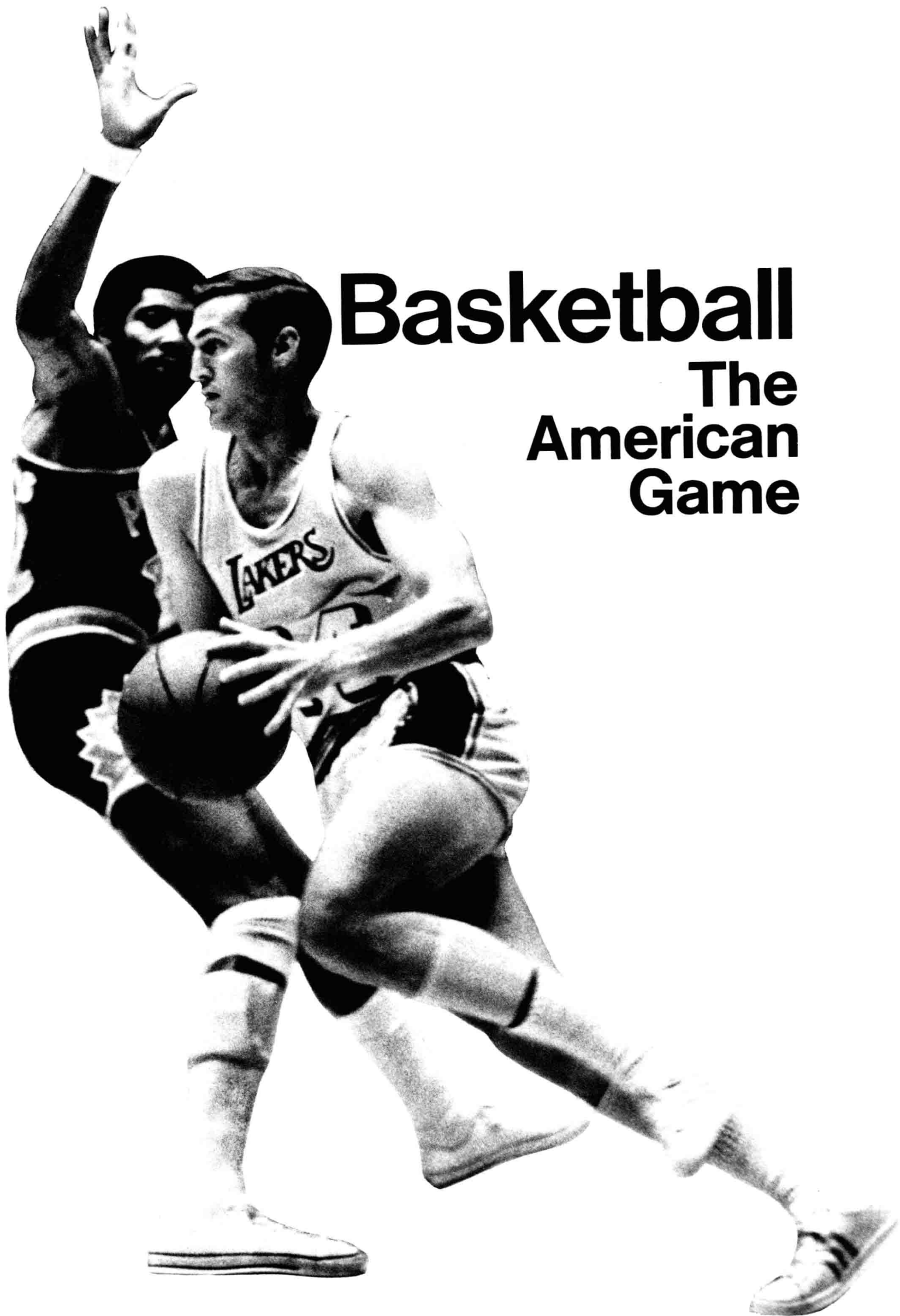
As purple-clad Los Angeles center Wilt Chamberlain is caught by surprise, Milwaukee's meal ticket, Lew Alcindor, fires a jump shot over him. The Lakers' Jerry West, a mere 6 feet 3 inches, watches helplessly. Lew is amazingly agile and quick for a 7-footer. Overnight he made the Bucks a championship contender—and, perhaps as important, he made the franchise a lucrative one.

Pages Six and Seven

Soaring high above the basket in a way that the sport's inventor, James Naismith, never envisioned, the University of Houston's 6 foot-9½ inch Elvin Hayes blocks a shot in the famous 1967 Astrodome game against UCLA. As a record crowd of 52,693 watched in the domed stadium, the Cougars upset the Bruins and Hayes completely outplayed UCLA's Lew Alcindor. (Left, being blocked out by one of Hayes' teammates). But Lew got his revenge later in the NCAA semifinals in Los Angeles. UCLA massacred Houston and went on to beat North Carolina for the national championship. Shot-blocking intimidators like Hayes and Alcindor were common in the late 1960s and early 1970s, leading some coaches and officials to call for a 12-foot-high basket (the present height is 10 feet). Even when a giant center fails to block a shot, the threat of his presence often throws off the opponents' shooting, and the big man's mates can play more daring defense because they know he is behind them, ready to swat shots into the third balcony or force a sloppy pass.

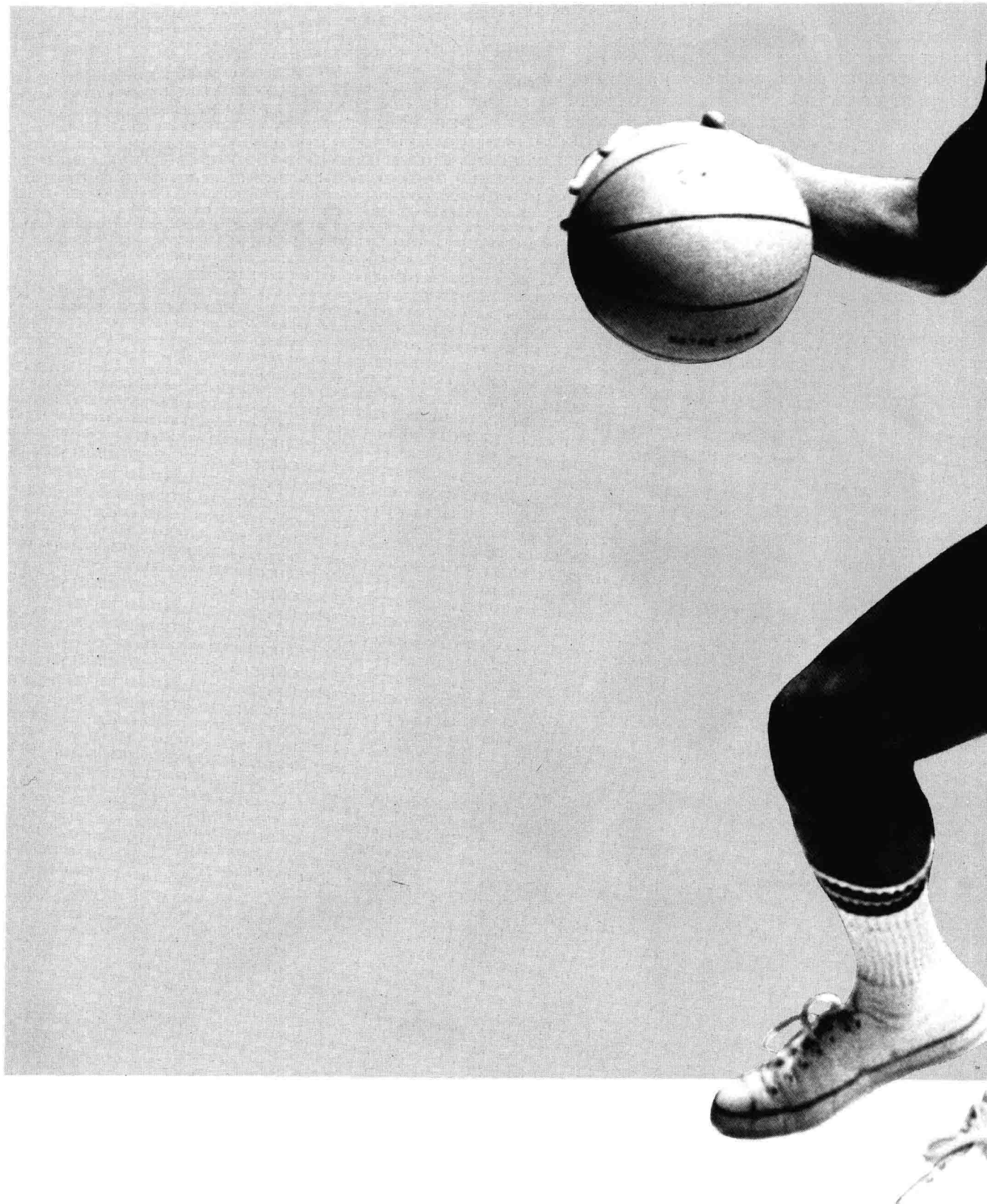
Page Eight

Basketball is supposed to be a noncontact sport, but when you put 10 large, fast men on a court, the resulting swirl of action—leaping for rebounds, fighting through picks, dribbling up the middle—has to result not only in contact, but in collision. One of the problems is that the big men want to be in the same area—under the basket—and there just isn't room. Referees are faced with the problem of keeping some semblance of order while not letting the game degenerate into a free-throw-shooting contest.



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For Suzy

