

# Fourth quarter radio coverage of Wilt Chamberlin's 100-point game (Philadelphia Warriors vs. New York Knicks)--Bill Campbell, announcer (March 2, 1962)

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Essay by Robert Cherry (guest post)\*



*Wilt Chamberlin*



*Bill Campbell*

“If you know anybody not listening, call them up. A little history you’re sitting in on tonight,” said Bill Campbell, broadcasting a professional basketball game in 1962. Campbell, whose career spanned 70 years, never spoke truer words, for he was describing the game in which Wilt Chamberlain scored 100 points. It remains one of the greatest individual achievements in any sport--not just in basketball.

Wilt Chamberlain (1936–1999) was a larger than life athlete whose magnetic personality and dominating physical presence transcended the sport that made him rich and famous. Wilt was 7’ 1 and 1/16<sup>th</sup>” with broad, muscular shoulders and a narrow waist, a frame that created the optical illusion that he was even taller. He was also graceful and athletic: many people consider him the strongest athlete who ever lived. Even his fellow professionals marveled at his strength: he moved 6’8,” 220-pound men like cups of coffee and his endurance was legendary.

Wilt was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, into a close-knit, large (he had eight siblings), hard-working, lower middle-class family. Eight to ten inches taller than other kids by the fourth grade and gawked at from an early age, Wilt was never like anyone else. From childhood he was eager to make his mark and to supplement his family’s modest income. So in an era when milk was delivered to homes, Wilt, age 5, rose before sunrise to help a milkman on his route--until Wilt’s mother told the milkman that her son looked older than he was because of his height and was too young to help.

As a 6’10” teenager, he ducked or dipped entering or leaving most rooms, the origin of the nickname by which his family, childhood and school friends called him--“Dip” or “Dippy.” That evolved into his adult nickname, the “Big Dipper,” which evoked his intimidating presence and

one of his moves in basketball--his signature “finger roll” where he funneled the ball toward the basket.

Track and field was Wilt’s favorite sport. He could have been a world-class decathlete, as he excelled in high school and college in the shot put and high jump and could run like a deer, seemingly forever. But one couldn’t earn a living in track and field in the 1950s, so Wilt turned to basketball. He led Overbrook High School to three championships, becoming the most famous and sought-after high school prospect in the country. When he decided to attend Kansas University in 1955, “Life Magazine” devoted five pages to the efforts by colleges and universities to recruit this extraordinary athlete from Philadelphia.

In Wilt’s day, the National Basketball Association (the NBA) forbade any young man from entering the league until four years after graduating high school. Wilt graduated in June of 1955; it would have been 1959 before he would have been eligible to play in the NBA. Forgoing his senior year at Kansas University, Wilt signed a contract to play with the Harlem Globetrotters.

African-Americans in the 1940s and early 1950s had few nationally-known sporting heroes of their own color to root for: most prominent among these were the great boxing champions Joe Louis and Sugar Ray Robinson, and--once he broke the color line in baseball--Jackie Robinson. In an unwritten agreement, blacks were barred from the NBA until 1950 and then it was almost a decade before black players made their presence known in a league they have since come to dominate. The best black basketball players--or as they were then called, “Negro” or “colored”—plied their skills with the Harlem Globetrotters, as Wilt first did.

Wilt enjoyed touring the United States and Europe for a year with the Globetrotters before signing to play in the 1959–60 NBA season with his hometown team, the Philadelphia Warriors. (Eventually the Warriors franchise was sold and the team relocated to California, where it is currently known as the Golden State Warriors.)

In his first NBA season, Wilt averaged 37.6 points and 27 rebounds per game, both records. He was named the league’s rookie of the year *and* the most valuable player, one of only two players to ever accomplish that feat. Not since Babe Ruth in baseball in the 1920s had a person so dominated a sport.

His third season, 1961–62, was even more spectacular than his first two: he *averaged* an astonishing 50.4 points a game, a record that has never been approached, save by him. Yet in spite of Wilt’s heroics, the Boston Celtics, then the perennial champions, ran away with the Eastern division and NBA title in the 1961–62 season. In one game, Wilt scored 62 points, Bill Russell, Boston’s great center, even fouled out and still Boston found a way to prevail.

During and even after his basketball career, some sports writers and fans wondered why Wilt’s teams failed, for the most part, to beat Bill Russell’s Boston Celtics in championship matchups.

“Nobody ever wins a team game. Only the team can win,” said Leonard Koppett, who covered the NBA for “The New York Post” and “The New York Times” during Wilt’s era and is the

author of 16 books. “Except for one year in Philadelphia and one in Los Angeles, Wilt was never on a team the rest of which was as good as the Boston Celtics. It’s that simple.”

In the 1950s and 1960s, the NBA was a small-time operation compared to Major League Baseball and the National Football League. One wag described the NBA as “Eight guys with cigars in a telephone booth.” Looking to expand their fan base, the Philadelphia Warriors played a few “home” games in other cities, which is how they ended up playing a “home” game in Hershey, Pennsylvania, 85 miles from Philadelphia and best known for its famous Hershey chocolate.

There, on March 2, 1962, Wilt Chamberlain accomplished the unimaginable. His amazing performance wasn’t televised and there is no videotape of the game. Only a Philadelphia radio station broadcast it. Fortunately, Jim Trelease, a college student in Amherst, Massachusetts, jerry-rigged an antenna and recorded the fourth quarter, one of the audiotapes that is now in the Library of Congress Registry.

The Philadelphia team burst out to a 19 to 3 lead, but the New York Knicks, their opponent, climbed back into the game. Commenting some time later on his 22 first-quarter points, Wilt said, “I wasn’t thinking about getting a lot of points, but after I made nine straight free throws, I was thinking about a foul shooting record.” A notoriously poor free-throw shooter, Wilt made 10 in a row before missing and, proving God has a sense a humor, would set a record that night for foul shots made in a game, 28.

At the half, the Warriors led 79–68 and Wilt had 41 points. But no one was taking notice, for there had been many games, particularly that season, when the Big Fella had nearly that many at the half. Wilt had scored 67, 65 and 61 points, respectively, in his three previous games--without, it ought to be noted, the benefit of the 3-point shot, introduced to the NBA in 1979.

With 10 minutes and 25 seconds left in the game, Wilt tied his personal, and the league, mark of 73 points in regulation time. It was after Wilt scored his 84<sup>th</sup> point that Bill Campbell said to his radio audience, “If you know anybody not listening, call them up....”

Six minutes to play and Campbell told the audience that the Knicks were fouling the Warriors in the backcourt to try to prevent the Philadelphians from getting the ball to Wilt. The Knicks were determined to avoid the embarrassment of giving up 100 points and also began to hold the ball, passing up good shots until the 24-second clock wound down to almost zero. With 2:28 remaining, Wilt scored his 93<sup>rd</sup> and 94<sup>th</sup> points on a pass from Guy Rogers; his 95<sup>th</sup> and 96<sup>th</sup> points on one of his signature fade-away jump shots, usually taken 10 to 15 feet from the basket and banked off the backboard. He dunked the ball for his 97<sup>th</sup> and 98<sup>th</sup> points; likewise for his last and that night’s most famous basket.

Campbell exclaimed:

“He made it! He made it!.... A Dipper Dunk!” Campbell shouted. “He made it! The fans are all over the floor. They stopped the game. People are running out on the court. One hundred points for Wilt Chamberlain. They stopped the game. People are crowding

around him.... The Warrior players are all over him. Fans are coming out of the stands. Forty-six seconds are left. The most amazing scoring performance of all time. One hundred points by the Big Dipper!”

For years afterwards many people believed the game never resumed after Wilt scored his 100<sup>th</sup> point, given the commotion on the floor. The Knicks scored a few more points before the game ended, with the Warriors winning 169 to 147. Those 316 combined points were an NBA record, (since broken).

After the famous basket and the hullabaloo therefrom, Wilt stood at center court for the remainder of the game. Reminiscing years later, Wilt said he was pleased that no film exists of the game and that it wasn't televised, adding aura and mystique to his special night. And 100, he'd say, has a nice ring, much better than 97 or 101.

Without question, The Game is historic. Six decades later, no two players on the same team have ever *combined* for 100 points in an NBA game, much less one player surpassing that total. Kobe Bryant has come the closest, scoring 81 point in a game in 2006---but in the era of the 3-point shot.

In the locker room after the 100-point game, Harvey Pollock, who was the Warriors' publicity man at the time, snatched a piece of paper and scribbled the number 100 on it. The photo of Wilt holding up the paper became the iconic photo memory from the game, since reproduced thousands of times. It was taken by Paul Vathis of the Associated Press, who ironically was not on assignment but just happened to be there as a spectator with his son.

Wilt retired from basketball in 1973 and died of heart failure at age 63 in 1999. He still holds 68 NBA records (72 if you count those he co-owns), far and away more records than anyone else. He also led one of the greatest teams in history, the 1966–67 Philadelphia 76ers, to the NBA title, winning the MVP award that year--one of four he earned in his 14-year career. And after demanding to be traded, Wilt led the 1972–73 Los Angeles Lakers to the NBA title, earning MVP honors in the championship series. That Lakers team, not incidentally, won 33 straight games during the season, the record for consecutive victories by *any* North American professional team in a major sport. So much for the occasional carping by the uninformed or the biased that Wilt was not a winner.

The Hershey Arena holds 7,200 people. A total of 4,124 attended The Game, even though many thousands more claimed they were present that eventful night, some of them even telling Wilt over the years they saw him do it at New York's Madison Square Garden.

“When people tell me they were at the game,” Wilt liked to recall, “I never correct them. I always let them feel like they saw it. I just say, ‘So you saw it? Hey, well good for you. I was there, too.’”

Indeed he was--Earth's Big Dipper making basketball history.

*Robert Cherry is the author of “Wilt: Larger Than Life,” an acclaimed biography of Wilt Chamberlain. He is also author of “Cherry Delight” and “Living Liberia: Laughter, Love and Folly.” He was a starting guard in 1960-61 at Wilt Chamberlin’s alma mater, Overbrook High School.*

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