

# Gears in Sneakers

*Gear Technology's* bimonthly aberration — gear trivia, humor, weirdness and oddments for the edification and amusement of our readers. Contributions are welcome.

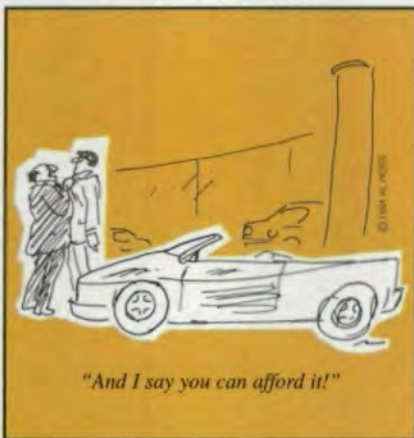
**M**ove over, Michael Jordan. While the Addendum staff is as proud as any other Chicagoans of our unbeatable Bulls, we confess to a soft spot in our hearts for the hometown's *other* championship basketball team: The Chicago American Gears.

That's right, the Gears.

The Chicago American Gears played in the National Basketball League during the late 1940s. They were led by star center George Mikan and player-coach Bobby McDermott to their only championship in 1947. The story of the Gears is told in *The Dynasty That Never Was*, a book by Richard F. Triptow, who played for the Gears for three seasons.

## How Does a Team Get Named The Gears?

The team was founded, owned and, for a while, coached by Maurice A. White, owner of the American Gear and Manufacturing Company in Chicago. This was in the early days when the National Basketball League, one of the precursors of the modern NBA, was struggling to make its transition from an industrial league to a professional one with teams like the Oshkosh All-Stars, the Indianapolis Kautskys and the Rochester Royals. When you think about it, wouldn't you rather cheer for the Gears than the Kautskys?



"And I say you can afford it!"

The Gears existed as a team from 1944, when White obtained the franchise, until 1947. Their short three-year tenure was filled with controversy, drama and even a little bit of success.

White was a bit of a basketball rebel right from the start. He was used to being in charge and applied his own particular style of management to his team. For example, in order to keep the fans interested and the game fast-paced, he reportedly offered his players an incentive program that included bonuses of \$5 for each field goal and \$2 for each free throw.

But the team didn't really take off until 1946, when White decided to spend what was then a small fortune to sign college basketball's greatest star, DePaul University's George Mikan, to a five-year, \$60,000 deal.

Then as now, professional athletics was about big money and big egos. When White abruptly cut four of the Gears players, including Joe Mikan, the star center's brother, George quit the Gears, filed a lawsuit against the team and sat out for six weeks of the season.

Without Mikan, things looked dismal for the Gears. But during Mikan's hold-out, White acquired player-coach Bobby McDermott, who was in his own right one of the game's biggest stars. After Mikan's and the team's lawyers worked things out, Mikan returned to finish out the season. With the added help of McDermott, the Gears went on to win 17 of their last 23 games to make the playoffs.

The Gears charged through the playoffs, defeating Indianapolis in the first round, Oshkosh in the second round and Rochester in the final round to gain the NBL title.

But White wasn't content with a championship. Based on the success of his team and the status of his two stars,

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he tried to leverage his way into a position as league president. When this attempt failed, he set out to form his own professional basketball league, with the Gears as the centerpiece team and himself as league president.

Unfortunately for White and the Chicago American Gears, the new Professional Basketball League of America folded just one month into the 1947-48 season. Miffed at White's audacity, the NBL refused to accept the Gears back as a team. A special draft was held and each player went to another team.

Today, the Gears are a scarcely remembered footnote in basketball history. But the Addendum staff can't help wondering if it isn't time for a revival. Somewhere out there, there must be another Maurice White, the owner of a successful gear manufacturing company who's willing to buy an NBA franchise. We can almost see the brightly colored Gears logo. Sign us up for season tickets. We'll be in the front row.

**The Addendometer:** If you've read this far on the page and enjoyed it, please circle 225.