

SPORTS

START



By Monte Whaley
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By noon Sunday I realized my love affair with "the greatest game ever invented" had ended.

It was particularly sad since our courtship was so enduring. We met in grade school, became reacquainted in junior high and grew so close in high school.

In college the attraction was still strong but it mellowed a bit, since we didn't spend that much time together.

Later we kept in touch, partly out of affection but mainly because it was my job to do so.

But Sunday, beneath a blazing sun that sapped the enthusiasm from an aging body, I came to terms with our relationship. It was hopelessly one sided.

Basketball had deserted me. Actually to be more honest, I was unfaithful to basketball.

Thinking back, I realize the errors in my ways.

House payment

I'll admit I was unfaithful. Instead of laboring in steamy hot gyms after work, I opted instead for ice cream, pizza and beer.

I realize now I didn't pay enough attention to my trusty love. Instead of improving my hook shot or studying the nuances of the pick-and-roll, I escaped to watch reruns of "Star Trek" in an effort to forget about bills and rent.

Too often, I suppose, I dreamed of how to make next month's house payment rather than the beauty of a Laker fast break.

Funny thing, though. At the time I really didn't care that basketball wasn't the driving force in my life.

I knew I was growing older and softer and that I had a better chance behind a VDT than in the NBA.

But why did my old love have to enact her revenge in full view of so many Sunday?

It was then that Lance and Bruce Dehning hosted their second annual Break Your Ankle Two-on-Two Tournament. The showdown was divided into two classes — A and B — to be played under a 9-foot, 3 inch basket.

The Times Call sports department, being the sporting guys we are, decided to sport a team. My partner, correspondent Mike Jirik, and I were both confident that we couldn't possibly embarrass ourselves. We even pictured ourselves trying on the B division crown.

As it turned out, we discovered that wisdom doesn't always go hand-in-hand with age.

Our first contest featured torrid outside shooting, fearless rebounding and slick moves to the basket. Unfortunately all of those qualities were owned by our opponents — Bruce Dehning and Brett Williams.

We left that first-round game dejected and rejected. We even suggested we should change our team name to the "Munsters" since the main character in that old television series best typified our plodding style of play.

But we took heart. We were still alive and ready to take the B division consolation crown.

Again we learned that stupidity can often be confused for optimism.

Out next opponents — Bill Rise and Jeff Maul — exploited us perfectly.

They showed up to play.

We then retreated to the Dehning's garage, where other players gathered to tell jokes about our team.

With us out of the way, the real competitors rose to the top. Bruce Dehning and Williams eventually lost the "B" championship to Jim Boberschmidt and Todd O'Donnell.

In the A group, Dan Sonnesyn and Matt Sharp beat Lance Dehning and Dave Ericson for the crown.

Not so bad

In hindsight, our experience wasn't so bad. We licked our wounds and justified our poor performance.

"We never played together before," I said. "Right," answered Jirik. "And it was hot," he further suggested.

I then offered: "I hadn't played in six months, it was played on their own court, we were the oldest guys there (with the exception of Longmont baseball coach Wayne Modellmog) and I'm sure our opponents cheated."

But it's fairly apparent, none those excuses will hold water.

The teams that participated in the Break Your Ankle had youth on their side and with that comes a boundless, single minded enthusiasm.

They have time for basketball and basketball won't let them down.

Life should be so easy.