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How about a Game of Around the World?

Basketball was invented in 1891 by Dr. James Naismith. Naismith worked as an athletic director in Springfield, Massachusetts, and needed to find a sport that kids could play in a relatively small space indoors during the winter. Naismith wanted a game that not only required strength but also skill. This is how basketball was introduced to the world.

In just over 100 years, basketball has become the world's second most popular sport, behind only soccer. Taking a look around today's NBA and WNBA, you can find players from the United States, Canada, Mexico, Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, and South America. That takes care of every continent but Antarctica, though I hear there's a high school point guard down there who can really shoot the rock, so who knows!

What's more, there are not only a large number of foreign athletes who come to the United States to play, but there are also a number of American athletes who travel overseas to play professionally. In many cases, these athletes find themselves in cultures very different from the places they grew up. This presents them with challenges not only on the court but off the court.

One American hoopster in particular, former Chicago Bull Khalid El-Amin, found himself in the precarious position of being the only Muslim on the Ironi Ramat Gan basketball team in Israel. With tensions high between Jews and Muslims in the Middle East, El-Amin had to be as much a diplomat and ambassador as a ballplayer on the court. As often as he'd have to make a pinpoint pass or "D" up against an opposing player, he'd have to endure frequent jeers and battle rampant prejudice, much as Jackie Robinson had to do decades earlier playing baseball in the U.S. And—just as Dr. Naismith intended—this certainly requires both strength and skill.

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