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In basketball, lifting weights is just as important as shooting jumpers

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Lift weights if you want to be competitive on the basketball court.

"It's that simple," said Rick Wanamaker, a long and lanky member of the Drake basketball team that reached the NCAA Final Four in 1969. "Everybody was skinny, scrawny and mostly weak back when I was playing, but in comparison, when I watch games today, everybody's muscular and strong.

"It's one of those good evolutions of the game."

Iowa's four major college men's teams enter this week as bigger, stronger and quicker jumpers than most players in their position 40 years ago.

Wanamaker was listed as 6-foot-7 and 185 pounds; Bulldog Jonathan Cox puts his 6-8 by 225 frame up against Evansville Wednesday.

Iowa's Glenn Vidnovic was 6-5 and 165 pounds in 1969; freshman Matt Gatens hits the floor against Michigan State Thursday at 6-5 and 215.

Iowa State's Bill Cain was 6-6 and 195 pounds 40 years ago; the Cyclones' 6-10, 230-pound Craig Brackins faces Colorado tonight.

Northern Iowa's Ken Huelman was big, at 6-8 and 250 pounds 40 years ago, but he still looks up at 7-1 and 290-pound Jordan Eglseder.

"The theory back then was that you didn't want to get too big and bulky as a basketball player," said Bob Hansen, who played for Iowa in the early 1980s, and then nine seasons in NBA. "When I first started out in college, weight-lifting was in its very infant stage.

"There were just so many questions."

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That's why Wanamaker, coached by Maury John, lifted on his own after practice at Drake's Fieldhouse.

"Maury John walked by after practice one day and asked me why I was lifting," said Wanamaker, also a high jumper and later a decathlete. "I told him I wanted to get stronger.

"The typical thought among basketball coaches back then was that you'd get so muscle-bound that you couldn't make a basket."

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That notion, according to Iowa State coach Greg McDermott, was, quite frankly, wrong.

"Strength training improves your quickness," McDermott said. "It can improve your ability to have balance and strength, especially if you're playing on the interior, but I think one thing it does more than anything is it improves your confidence.

"Just having the strength and the confidence to be able to battle with somebody one-on-one and not get knocked off your spot because you're not strong enough, does a lot for the rest of your game."

He has proof.

"I've seen a change in Craig Brackins and Diante Garrett," he said. "They've put on 12 to 15 pounds of muscle, but the

biggest gains may have come in their belief in themselves and their ability to do things they probably couldn't have done a year ago."

Northern Iowa coach Ben Jacobson has examples, too.

"When I look at our team, Adam Koch's improvement can be directly tied to the weight room," Jacobson said. "Grant Stout's improvement from his sophomore to his junior year, can be directly tied to the weight room.

"They look the part a little more."

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Basketball weight training no longer is a question, it's a necessity, according to Iowa coach Todd Lickliter.

He talked about it after a loss against Michigan, and he did it again when talking about Penn State's 6-5, 240-pound Jamelle Cornley after Saturday's 63-59 loss to Penn State.

"He's strong," Lickliter said after Cornley scored from under the basket, and even from 3-point range. "He bench presses 370 pounds, I've heard.

"I'm not sure my whole team, combined, benches 370."

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Weight-training is about keeping up with the competition.

Michigan, for instance, has one person responsible for men's basketball weight-training, while Iowa's Big Four basketball teams share strength coaches with other sports.

"It's really important," Drake coach Mark Phelps said of basketball weight-training. "Guys can get stronger. They can get leaner. They can gain flexibility.

"They can gain explosiveness. They can gain power - and they can still be the graceful athlete, our game calls for."

Ex-Hawkeye Hansen said: "When I got into the NBA, that's when it became a big part of my workouts. Adrian Dantley lifted all the time. We'd watch him lift, and no one could keep up with him.

"Karl Malone was just country strong — he was a big ol' country guy, but he took weight-lifting to a different level."

Player sizes — then and now

DRAKE

40 years ago — Willie McCarter 6-foot-3, 170 pounds; Gary Zeller 6-2, 180; Dolph Pulliam 6-4, 200; Al Williams 6-5, 205; Willie Wise 6-5, 205.

Now — Josh Young 6-1, 170; Craig Stanley 5-11, 190; Adam Templeton 6-5, 225; Jonathan Cox 6-8, 225; Brent Heemskerk 6-8, 225.

IOWA

40 years ago — Chad Calabria 6-1, 175; Chris Phillips 6-3, 187; Glen Vidnovic 6-5, 165; John Johnson 6-7, 190; Dick Jensen 6-8, 215.

Now — Jeff Peterson 6-0, 192; Matt Gatens 6-5, 215; Jake Kelly 6-6, 185; Aaron Fuller 6-6, 210; David Palmer 6-9, 240.

NORTHERN IOWA

40 years ago — Darrell Jesse 5-11, 165; Larry Clausen 5-10, 165; Skip Anderson 6-5, 185; John Martin 6-6, 210; Ken Huelman 6-8, 250.

Now — Johnny Moran 6-1, 185; Ali Farokhmanesh 6-0, 190; Kwadzo Ahelegbe 6-2, 205; Adam Koch 6-8, 245; Jordan Eglseider 7-1, 290.

IOWA STATE

40 years ago — Jim Abrahamson 6-0, 175; Dave Collins 6-2, 185; Jack DeVilder 6-3, 185; Aaron Jenkins 6-3, 190; Bill Cain 6-6, 195.

Now — Bryan Petersen 6-1, 180; Diante Garrett 6-4, 185; Lucca Staiger 6-5, 225; Craig Brackins 6-10, 230; Justin Hamilton 6-11, 255.

Chicago stars lifted 'relentlessly'

The best basketball player on the planet, according to some, didn't get that way by just practicing his shot.

"Michael Jordan lifted weights all the time, relentlessly," said Bob Hansen, a former Iowa star who played with Jordan on the Chicago Bulls. "So did Scottie Pippen."

The Utah Jazz selected Hansen in the third round of the 1983 draft.

Hansen, all 6-6 and 190 pounds of him, did his best to keep up.

"Sometimes I woke up in the morning and it felt like I had 450 pounds on my shoulders," he said, "but it increased my vertical jump, maybe by 8 inches."

How weight-lifting has evolved

THEN: Rick Wanamaker worked out on a universal gym set while playing for Drake in the late 1960s, and the apparatus was tucked in a corner of the on-campus Fieldhouse.

"Whatever I did, I did on my own after practice," Wanamaker said. "Drake had no weight room back then. They had no free weights, just a little universal set that you actually had to look for to find."

NOW: Basketball weight work consists mostly of free weights, said Andrew Moser, who handles strength and conditioning for basketball at Iowa State. "That's what it is throughout the country," he said. "We all use free weights because we're doing multi-joint workouts."

The team lifts for 45 minutes twice a week during the season.