

One Shot at a Time

By Jessica Larsen
(Based on a true story)

Melbourne, Australia, 1956

“Are you part of that basketball team made of Mormon missionaries?” asked a reporter holding a camera.

“We sure are!” Elder Condie said. “We’re the Mormon Yankees.” He smiled for the camera as the reporter took a photo.

What a team the mission president had assembled! Before their missions, a lot of the team members had played basketball in college. The Mormon Yankees had helped train the Australian Olympic basketball team. And now other national teams wanted to have practice games with the Mormon Yankees.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY CLAYTON THOMPSON

And the missionaries were grateful for chances to share their testimonies. One day when they were running drills with the Russian team, an interpreter asked, “What training methods do you use?”

Elder Condie hesitated. The mission president had said the elders could practice only on Saturday mornings and play games only on Wednesday nights. They were missionaries first, so they didn’t train more than that. He wasn’t sure what to tell the interpreter about why their team did so well. Then an idea came.

“The Word of Wisdom,” Elder Condie said. The interpreter looked confused. “We don’t drink coffee, tea, or alcohol, or smoke tobacco,” Elder Condie explained. At that time lots of people drank and smoked, even athletes.

When the interpreter told the Russian team what Elder Condie said, they just stared. They were amazed at how long the missionaries could play before getting tired. Because the Mormon Yankees followed the Word of Wisdom, their bodies were healthy and strong.

“Just remember who you are,” the mission president told them. “Live missionary standards. Keep mission rules. No exceptions. Remember, people are watching your example.”

Because basketball was pretty new in some countries, they helped the other teams



understand the game better. The teams were grateful for their help.

Tonight was their third practice game. Elder Condie looked at the bleachers. The stands were already filling up! He could see lots of Church members and people the missionaries were teaching. He spotted one girl who brought pom-poms and cheered at every game. She always shared her testimony with anyone who would listen. After each game, Elder Condie and his teammates did the same. They shared pamphlets and read scriptures with people who wanted to know more about the Church.

One of the other missionaries tapped Elder Condie on the shoulder. “Tonight we’re playing the French Olympic team,” he said. “They’re really good.”

Elder Condie shrugged. “But we’re not so bad.”

It was true. As they ran plays and drills with national teams, the Mormon Yankees had gotten better and better.

That night, thousands of people came to see the French team play against the Mormons. Throughout the game, the score was close. Near the end, it was tied, 59 to 59. Cheers erupted: “Blue, white, blue white. Mormon Yankees, fight, fight!” With seconds to go, Elder Condie caught a pass from his teammate Elder Hull. Elder Condie shot the ball. It dropped into the net just as the buzzer sounded. The missionaries had won, 61 to 59!

The cheers were still ringing in Elder Condie’s ears when he wrote to his family. “We won some games and lost others,” he said. “But it’s not about basketball. I think people are wanting to learn more about the Church because we’ve shown them that we’re people, just like they are. We’re helping the Church to grow, one shot at a time.” ●

The author lives in Texas, USA.