

Rudometkin Recalls His Knick Days

By SAM GOLDAPER
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—Rudo, the Reckless Russian, can remember the first field goal he scored in the National Basketball Association. It was one of about 300 he made during a career cut short by cancer.

It was on Oct. 15 1962, the Knicks' second game of the season against the Los Angeles Lakers at Madison Square Garden.

"Those fans in New York were the most boisterous in the world," said John Rudometkin at Kutsher's Country Club today, where some of the top talent gathered for tomorrow night's Maurice Stokes Memorial Basketball Game. "It was a 20-foot jumper and the place just seemed to go wild. I guess the fans were overanxious for me to make good."

Those were the days the Knicks were the regular last-place tenants in the Eastern Division of the N.B.A. and the New York fans always lived in hope that a draft choice would make things better. Rudo, the Reckless Russian, second draft choice that season and the greatest scorer in Southern California history, became that new hope.

Rudometkin, 31 years old, speaks much slower now and stops often for a gasp of breath. He walks with a limp and there is a lot of weight missing from his 6-foot-6-inch frame. Since Thanksgiving Day of 1965, Rudometkin has changed his religion from Russian Molokan to Seventh Day

Adventist Christian and has passed up those juicy steaks he used to devour at the Knick training camp and become a vegetarian. It's all part of what he calls his, "winning fight against the rare and incurable disease of cancer of the chest area and lymph glands."

Financial nightmares troubled Rudometkin and his wife, Carolyn. Antibiotic injections, cobalt treatments, continued hospital and doctor costs drained their meager savings.

As word of his fight against cancer spread, basketball people went to his help. Alex Hannum, then the San Francisco Warrior coach, talked the Los Angeles Lakers into helping.

During a playoff with the then St. Louis Hawks in Los Angeles, a half-time collection was made for him. Just before Christmas of 1966, during a game with the Philadelphia 76ers, funds were collected to help meet Rudometkin's bills. Forrest Ewogood, his Southern California coach, organized efforts that also contributed to the fund.

Shares in Memorial Game

The latest in basketball's helping hand are some of the funds from Stokes memorial game.

"They have a John Rudometkin 110 per cent effort award now at U.S.C.," said Rudometkin. "When it first started a couple of years ago and I was flat on my back in the hospital I'm sure it was meant to be a memorial award. I really fooled them one day when I showed up to present the award."

Red Auerbach, the Boston

Celtic general manager, who with Al Attles, the San Francisco Warrior coach, will be coaching the All-Star teams in tomorrow night's game, remembers Rudometkin well.

"He was an excellent quarter man," said Auerbach. "I watched him in college and he was a great shooter with quick cat-like moves. He never lived up to those expectations in the pros. Now that I look back at it, it was probably the disease in its infancy that hampered him."

Rudometkin believes that too. "During the last weeks of the 1963-64 season I found myself unable to come up with that old drive and zest," he says. "Everything seemed so much of a labor, that I kept telling myself that I was getting a little older and since I was not playing as much maybe I was out of shape. Now I can ask myself, how long was that tumor growing in my chest anyway?"

Rudometkin's 1,484 points, more than 400 over what Bill Sharman—the new Los Angeles Laker coach—scored when he starred at U.S.C., still is the school record.

"I get onto the basketball court every so often and I can still shoot," said Rudometkin, "But I just can't move. I haven't been to a pro game since I went into the hospital in 1965, but I still watch them on television every Sunday. The game sure has changed and the players have a greater voice in the game. Oh, those bonuses [the minimums in the N.B.A. are \$15,000] are more than my salary was when I signed to play with the Knicks."