

Every Monday Night

48 years of basketball and brotherhood in a middle school gym

By [Elizabeth Fishel](#) | June 7, 2024 | [Fitness and Exercise](#)

My husband's Monday night basketball game in Berkeley, California, is older than our marriage — it's been going on for 48 years, and we just celebrated our 45th anniversary. The players, who call themselves "The Monday Night Warriors," are all in their late 60s and 70s; one just hit 84.

They are slower at covering the court than when they started the games — fast and furious — in their 20s and 30s. But the chance to stay active, blow off steam, test their mettle, feel young again and hang out with friends keeps them coming back even when their knees complain afterwards.



"They've hooped through marriages and divorces, bringing up children who delight and occasionally confound. Along the way the players have had long careers, become grandfathers, celebrated 50th anniversaries and adjusted to retirement." | Credit: Getty

For almost five decades, 14 or 15 guys have showed up every Monday night. Some players have dropped out over the years, and others have been recruited, but the regulars are picky about who they let in: "There is an attitude of ageism," says one player. "We resist adding younger players!"

Each Monday is the same: They divide into two groups of five, play each other till one team reaches 15 points, and then add and subtract players for the next round. They're teachers and poets, lawyers and therapists, a filmmaker and a retired prison guard. One player, who makes his living as a truck driver, commutes more than an hour to play.

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My husband Bob is nicknamed Big Bob; over the years there's also been Butcher Bob, Bobby, Body and Dobey.

They've hooped through marriages and divorces, bringing up children who delight and occasionally confound. Along the way the players have had long careers, become

grandfathers, celebrated 50th anniversaries and [adjusted to retirement](#).

Their athletic bodies used to be able to do things that are now distant but pleasant memories. Today, after knee surgeries, heart procedures and cancer treatments, they may not chase down every loose ball. But when they do sink a shot — or block someone else's — those precious seconds please them for days.

After they take off their jerseys, they meet up at a local bar and kibbitz about the game ("Thanks for stuffing my shot!"), politics, the Golden State Warriors, and, so I've heard, their wives. They tell bad jokes and trade titles

of books and movies and streaming series they've enjoyed. Unlike women, who seem to bond naturally — in book groups, knitting circles and the consciousness-raising groups of yesteryear — with men it helps if there's an activity to provide the glue.

Still Playing After All These Years

Basketball is epoxy for these guys, and the older they get, the more they appreciate the easy intimacy that's evolved with the game. "The value of friendship supersedes the value of competition," says one player. Exults another after every game, "We're so lucky! We played another Monday night!"

No one will confuse them with Steph Curry or Nikola Jokic, but their love of the game is no less intense.

When our sons were young — or as another basketball wife put it, "as soon as they could walk" — they went to the gym with Bob and ran with the other offspring while a slighter older daughter kept an eye on them. The wives and mothers at home, usually on call 24/7, drank up the couple hours of peace and quiet. For years I met with my [writers' group](#) on Monday nights, blessedly childfree.

A Film Captures the Camaraderie

Meanwhile the kids played together and watched the dads' great shots and the ones that missed by a mile, heard an occasional sharp word erupt, and took note of the camaraderie. Now a lot of those kids are in their 30s and 40s, and they're friends, too, sharing basketball and history.

Recently our son, Nate Houghteling, a documentary filmmaker and co-founder of the digital content company [Portal A](#), made a short doc about the

game called "[Every Monday Night](#)." It's just 11 minutes but it's long enough to capture the importance and meaning of the Monday night ritual.

There's also some gentle ribbing that only a son can do to a father he loves and admires. The opening sequence of the gym warm-up shows at least 10 shots bouncing off the rim before one drops in, and it always gets a laugh. OK, so no one will confuse them with Steph Curry or Nikola Jokic, but their love of the game is no less intense.

No Jokic, but No Joke Either

The video has been posted on YouTube, where it's been seen 11,000 times, and it will be screened at the Chesapeake Film Festival in Baltimore in September 2024.

It has drawn raves from viewers who relate from their own perspective, whether they have been in a longtime basketball group, like this one; an over-50 soccer league; or even in a longstanding book group. "Fantastic," commented one viewer. "Hope we all feel inspired by this. Whether it's hoops or any other activity that keeps you active and with friends is great. But gotta love these guys."

Another viewer commented: "I cried. That was such a wonderful video. It made me want to meet all those spirited old guys."

After almost 50 years, the Monday Night Game is not just a game, it's a community, and the need for community only gets stronger as we get older.

Elizabeth Fishel is the author of five nonfiction books including *Sisters* and *Getting To 30: A Parent's Guide to the 20-Something Years* (with Jeffrey Arnett). She has contributed to numerous magazines including *Vogue*, *Ms.*, *New York*, *The Writer*, and *Oprah's O*. She has written for *Next Avenue* since 2014. [Read More](#)



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