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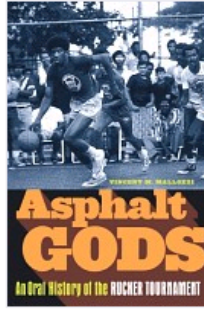
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Asphalt Gods: An Oral History of the Rucker Tournament
by Vincent M. Mallozzi

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The real basketball deal—the inside story of Harlem's legendary tournament and the pros and playground legends who have made it world famous. Earl "The Goat" Manigault. Herman "Helicopter" Knowings. Joe "The Destroyer" Hammond. Richard "Pee Wee" Kirkland. These and dozens of other colorfully nicknamed men are the "Asphalt Gods," whose astounding exploits in the Rucker Tournament, often against multimillionaire NBA superstars, have made them playground divinity. First established in the 1950s by Holcombe Rucker, a New York City Parks Department employee, the tournament has grown to become a Harlem institution, an annual summer event of major proportions. On that fabled patch of concrete, unknown players have been lighting it up for decades as they express basketball as a freestyle art among their peers and against such pro immortals as Julius Erving and Wilt Chamberlain. X's and O's are exchanged for oohs and aahs in one of the great examples of street theater to be found in urban America.

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