Penning an exciting book about the invention of the apparatus which allows players to slam dunk with abandon should be a – well, a slam dunk. Thirteen pages into "Two Guys From Barnum, Iowa and How They Helped Save Basketball, a History of U.S. Patent 4,345,556," I realized the title was a clue to the excitement level of the content. Written in 2008 by a patent attorney, this recitation of events surrounding the patenting of the break-away rim has it place among definitive accounts of basketball.

Francis B. Francois, childhood friend, patent attorney and eventually partner of the Two Guys From Barnum (Ken and Paul Estlund) meticulously details every step, from the concept to the patent, including their interaction with fellow inventors, Art Ehrat, Coach Chuck Randall, Toby Dittrich, Frederick Tiner and Ken Mahoney. All racing for the prize and the multiple, sometimes opposing, patent rejections and appeals, marketing, licensing and royalty contracts, this unlikely group all believed they had the answer to the questions, damages and injuries personified by Darryl Dawkins' high-flying antics.

Arthur Ehrat's patent covered his "Deformation-preventing swingable mount for basketball goals," affectionately called "The Rebounder." Tinkering with an old rim, a magnet and a hinge, Art had an "aha" moment looking at his farm's field cultivator. John Deere is so proud of their contribution, they issued a press release , including the little known fact that the early prototype

is now in the Smithsonian:

Farmers are known for fashioning makeshift parts and even inventions when they see a problem to solve. Arthur Ehrat, an Illinois farm boy and retired grain elevator manager from Virden, Ill., used a John Deere cultivator spring to solve a basketball coach's problem in the 1970s and changed forever how basketball is played.

Ehrat took an old metal basketball hoop and added a magnet and a John Deere cultivator spring to create what is known today as the breakaway basketball hoop.

Dan Raley, Seattle P-I , researched the contributions of Western Washington's Coach John Randall, saying:

The CBS Evening News interviewed him, as did The New York Times and Washington Post. Paul Harvey mentioned him by name in one of his radio commentaries.

Dan, determined to restore the memory of Coach Randall's role, goes on to say:

Randall was widely considered the inventor of the collapsible rim. In the eyes of these national news outlets, this Bellingham icon had provided basketball with a clever innovation, one urgently needed to prevent backboards from shattering under the stress of overenthusiastic players throwing down dunks.

... However, Randall, 81, has precious little to show for it. Other individuals, through sheer hustle or maybe disingenuous means, have been credited with this sporting discovery and reaped financial rewards.

Enter Toby Dittrich:

Toby Dittrich, 62, a Portland physics professor, likewise has his name on patent documents stating he is one of the breakaway rim pioneers.

Randall is left with yellowing old newspaper clippings and a $12 check he receives every few months.

"Chuck Randall got the publicity," Dittrich said matter of factly. "Arthur Ehrat and I got the patent and the money."

Thanks to the intervention of Rose Brittain, a sympathetic supporter of the coach, and the kindness of her writer friend, Barbara (I am not kidding) Kindness, Coach Randall's story is now in print, titled "My Impossible Dream," with a corresponding Web site, www.myimpossibledreamchuckrandall.com .

Which brings us all the way back to Francis B. Francois and the Estlund brothers' "Break-Away Basketball Goal." The Estlund brother's invention was eventually adopted by the NBA and used in colleges and universities but only after a fight for a patent application described by the author as:

... [one which] holds the record for twists and turns and the amount of time it took the obtain the patent.

The brothers donated their original protoype to the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame. And, according to S.I.'s Luke Winn , Art Ehrat's invention also resides in the HOF archives. Much like basketball, the story of the break-away rim is full of twists and turns and people jumping through hoops.

Chris Broussard, writing for the NY Times in 2004 , gives a perspective from another era:

"Awesome Kansas Giants Reverse Basketball Lay-Up Shot Process" read a headline in a 1936

edition of The New York Times. The writer, Arthur J. Daley, chronicled the fabulous feats of the McPherson, Kan., Oilers, a refinery-sponsored team that awed fans and opponents by dunking during practices and warm-ups.

After a McPherson workout at New York's West Side Y.M.C.A. for the 1936 Olympic Trials, which the Oilers won en route to claiming the Olympic gold medal, Daley wrote: "The McPherson version of a lay-up shot left observers simply flabbergasted. Joe Fortenberry, 6-foot-8-inch center, and Willard Schmidt, 6-foot-9-inch forward, did not use an ordinary curling toss. Not those giants. They left the floor, reached up and pitched the ball downward into the hoop, much like a cafeteria customer dunking a roll in coffee."

Regardless of the controversy, hard feelings, money issues and heartaches, Chris reminds us we can be grateful for one thing:

Had Daley used the term "dipping a roll" perhaps Saturday night's slam-dunk event would have been called the Slam-Dip contest.