

The Development of Japanese Basketball: System and Business Perspectives

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Keywords: Sports Business, Japanese Basketball, Social Study.

Abstract: This article explores the evolution of basketball in Japan, tracing its journey from its introduction in the late 19th century to its current status as a competitive force in international basketball. It begins by examining the early stages of basketball's development in Japan, focusing on the initial challenges and adaptations that helped shape its competing ability. The article then explores the chaotic state of the Japanese basketball league, highlighting the negative impact of this chaos on the sport's growth. It goes on to analyze the establishment of the B League, which brought much-needed structure and professionalism to the sport. The commercialization strategies implemented by the B League, including media partnerships, sponsorship, and audience engagement, are also discussed, showing how these efforts have enhanced Japan's basketball profile globally. Lastly, the article evaluates Japan's youth basketball training system, noting its role in cultivating talent and improving the overall standard of the game. The study concludes that systematic management and commercial strategies have been pivotal in the global rise of Japanese basketball.

1 INTRODUCTION

Basketball in Japan has experienced significant evolution since its introduction in the late 19th century. The game was first introduced to Japan in 1893 (Kawashima, 2018). However, it was not until 1900 that basketball began to gain traction as a formal sport, particularly in schools and universities. The first organized games took place in the early 1900s, with the Tokyo YMCA being one of the first institutions to adopt and promote the sport. By the 1920s, basketball began to flourish in Japan, particularly in educational institutions. The establishment of the Tokyo Metropolitan University basketball team marked a significant step in formalizing the sport within academic circles. The first basketball tournaments and competitions were held during this period, which included both men's and women's teams. After World War II, Japan's basketball scene began to expand, both at the amateur and professional levels. In the 1950s and 1960s, Japan saw the rise of the National Basketball Championship (the Emperor's Cup), which became a key event in the basketball calendar. The introduction of the professional BJ League in 2005 also played a pivotal role in the development of men's basketball in Japan. This league provided a platform for local talent and

also attracted foreign players, enhancing the overall competitiveness of the sport in the country. However, it was not until recent years that Japanese saw a great improvement in their national team's global competitiveness. In this article, the author will deeply research the development of commercial system of Japanese B league, the training system of Japanese youth team and analyze how Japan basketball gains its today's achievements from the perspective of system and business.

2 CHAOS AND UNITY IN BASKETBALL LEAGUES

Unlike baseball and football, basketball has always been an athletic event that is enjoyed by the minority. Although the three ball games entered Japan at relatively the same time in the Meiji era, the achievements reached by football and the popularity of baseball are both out of Basketball's reach.

Despite the lack of popularity, the chaos in the Japanese Basketball League is also a big problem on the road between Japanese Basketball and Success. In the early years, Japanese domestic Basketball matches were presented as an amateur league just like

Japanese Football. League teams are owned by and named after individual firms such as Panasonic and Mitsubishi. This continued until 2014 when Albirex Niigata and Saitama Broncos left the league and established Basketball Japan League(BJL) (Pan, 2021). BJL is the first Japanese Professional Basketball league appearing 11 years later than the formation of the Japanese Professional Football League. 3 years later, the officials of Japan established another professional league—the Japanese Basketball League(JBL)—which was later renamed as National Basketball League(NBL). In this way, two separate professional leagues appeared in Japan at the same time. The situation didn't change until 2014, Fédération Internationale de Basketball(FIBA) announced in the regulation that, "In order to ensure permanent lines of communication, a League should be "represented" at national and or international levels as appropriate". Thus, owning 2 professional leagues, Japan was punished by FIBA utilizing banning the Japanese national team from every FIBA game. At that time, Japan just won the bid to host the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, the punishment meant that the Japanese national basketball team wouldn't be able to compete in the Olympic games hosted (Kietlinski, 2016). In order to solve this problem, Japan cooperated with FIBA and formed a working team—Japan 2024 Task Force—aiming to build a team that would be able to reach the final in the 2024 Olympics. Saburo Kawabuchi, a legendary football player who had led Japan to a breakthrough in 1964 and established the Football J league, became the president of the Japan Basketball Association (Chiba, 2012). After he took office, he quickly combined NBL and BJL into the B League, symbolizing a subversive change for Japanese basketball. On September 22nd, 2016, B League officially kicked-off (Shen, 2016).

3 COMMERCIALIZATION AND EXPANSION OF THE B LEAGUE

B league did not put forward long-term goals at first. Instead, it focused on business and finance, solving the problems of the survival of the clubs. In the first season of the B League, teams were divided into 2 divisions: B1 and B2, both had 18 teams competing. The competition was also divided into three regions: East, West and West. The Japanese didn't copy the franchise system of the NBA at first. Instead, the promotion and demotion system was maintained

during this phase of survival of the fittest (Hedani, 2015). At the same time, the system was set up with the goal of self-financing, requiring the club to strive for profit and not to incur losses for three consecutive years. It also stipulated that the company names cannot appear in the name of the team or club, it was not allowed to change the home city at will, and the club's business scope must be established. The above conditions were assessed every year. If the assessment fails, the team will be directly downgraded to B3 level. The B3 level paved the way for a future Japanese amateur league. After this system has been operated for 8 years, Japan now has 3 divisions of the Basketball league: B1, B2 and B3. Currently (2024), the B1 division consists of 24 teams, the B2 division consists of 14 teams, and the B3 division consists of 16 teams. In the 2022-2023 season, a total number of attendances was 3.22 million, including 2.57 million in the B1 league and 630,000 in the B2 league, which is twice the number at the beginning of the league, total revenue reached 49 billion yen. It was also last season that the B League proposed a ten-year plan codenamed B Reform focusing on upgrading all three leagues by 2026. The B1 league will become the B League Premier, the B2 level will become the B League One, and the B3 level will become the B League Next. By 2026, the Premier League will become a fully commercialized league with only three entry criteria: 1. Average attendance of 4,000 people 2. Annual revenue of more than 1.2 billion yen 3. High-level basketball courts that can flexibly adjust the time according to the game. The league will also become more international, and the number of foreign players per team will be expanded to 4. The league is now conducting preliminary reviews for current teams in the league for the future premier league. According to Japanese announcements, the number of teams that meet the Premier League standards has reached 20 (League, 2024).

4 BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT AND FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY OF JAPANESE BASKETBALL

Japan also created a professional sports business environment for firms and clubs. In the early days of its establishment, the Japanese B League had the opportunity to cooperate with the world's sports industry and large industrial entities. The company behind the B League now that provides brand

packaging and commercial services is Dentsu which contributed a lot to Japanese athletic fields. It was also due to Dentsu's help can Japanese sports elites got access to the core of global sports business resources.

Additionally, the Japanese achieved financial transparency. All the commercial data about Japanese leagues can be easily collected from the internet and the official websites of the clubs. The league has been paying attention to the financial health of clubs over the past eight years. The principle of financial transparency was proposed at the beginning of the league.

High business development execution capabilities play an important role in the development of Japanese basketball. In the 2022-2023 season, Ryukyu Golden Kings got 507 sponsors and partners for its games. This list contains a variety of firms including insurance companies, shopping malls, banks, clinics and even personal yoga studios. Some of them provide money supplies, and some of them offer commercial services. As the defending champions, Ryukyu Golden Kings's last season's revenue was 2.375 billion yen including 1.014 billion in ticket income and 0.682 billion in sponsor revenue. After deducting costs, the club had a total net income of 140 million yen and currently, no partner companies are leaving. In the next eight years, Japan will have 10 World Cup standard stadiums put into use. The biggest of which can contain up to 15000 audiences. Japanese also required every stadium that can contain at least 10000 people to have more than 30 private rooms so that there will be a stable ticket income for every match.

5 JAPAN'S BASKETBALL YOUTH TRAINING SYSTEM

The Japanese system is also of the reference value. The Japanese national team was based on player speed and shooting accuracy (Kuzuhara et al., 2018). However, as the world of basketball evolves, more and more teams are becoming quick and accurate. Therefore, the Japanese men's basketball team's advantage no longer exists. Planning players has become the key to victory for the Japanese men's basketball team (Chiba and Falcous, 2024). Nevertheless, Japan regards player planning as a means to improve competitiveness rather than an end. When there is a lack of excellent players in the country, planning becomes a necessary measure.

When the quality of local players gradually improves, planning players will no longer be necessary.

In elementary school, many schools in Japan have basketball clubs where students are introduced to the sport. The emphasis is on mastering basic basketball techniques, such as dribbling, passing, shooting, etc which is fundamental to the player's future development. In addition to school basketball clubs, there are many regional basketball clubs in Japan. These clubs offer more training opportunities for young players. Many regional clubs collaborate with schools to form specialized training programs. These clubs often hire experienced coaches to help players improve their skills. High school basketball is very influential in Japan, especially the national high school basketball championship (DEMACHI and SUZUKI, 2020). The tournament is an important part of Japan's youth basketball training system and attracts a lot of attention from spectators and the media each year. Through these tournaments, talented high school players can demonstrate their skills and be explored by professional and college teams. Japanese college basketball offers players the opportunity to further improve their tactical and technical skills after entering college. The b division is a bridge for young players to professional basketball. Many college graduates joined the b division to become professional players. As the highest-level basketball league in Japan, the B league not only prepares professional players but also provides a platform for young talents to demonstrate their skills. In recent years, Japan's youth basketball system has placed more emphasis on training and playing abroad. Many young players are sent to countries such as the United States and Europe for training camps and competitions. This international training not only helps players improve their personal skills, but also exposes them to different playing styles and helps them understand the competitive global basketball environment. In addition to training players, the JBA also places great emphasis on training coaches. Japan has a well-established system of training trainers. Trainers must be certified at different levels to perform different levels of trainer training. This ensures that coaches in Japan's youth basketball system are of high quality and that players receive professional instruction.

6 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the rise of Japanese basketball from modest beginnings to a competitive global force underscores the impact of systematic reform and

strategic development. This paper charts the historical evolution of the sport in Japan, highlighting the challenges encountered and the pivotal milestones that have steered its growth. Through perseverance and strategic planning, Japanese basketball has transformed into a formidable presence on the world stage.

The unification of Japanese basketball leagues into the B League marked a significant turning point, resolving the prior disorganization that hindered the sport's progress. By prioritizing financial stability and fostering business development, the B League has ensured the sustainability of its clubs while also facilitating growth and expansion. The introduction of the B Reform plan and the accompanying restructuring initiatives reflect a proactive and visionary approach. These measures are designed to elevate the sport, fostering a more competitive and organized environment that propels Japanese basketball to new levels of excellence.

Financial transparency and robust business development execution have been pivotal in drawing sponsorships and partnerships, enhancing both revenue and the sport's visibility. Clubs like the Ryukyu Golden Kings, with their numerous sponsors and substantial earnings, exemplify the effectiveness of these strategies. Their success underscores the impact of these approaches on the financial health and profile of basketball in Japan.

The Japanese basketball system focuses on nurturing talent from a young age, creating a seamless pipeline through school and regional clubs, high school championships, and the B League. This comprehensive approach is complemented by an emphasis on international training and exposure, which has honed the skills and competitiveness of Japanese players globally. Investment in coaching and training infrastructure ensures that this pipeline remains resilient and effective, producing a steady stream of elite talent for the sport.

Looking ahead, the B League aims to fully commercialize its Premier League by 2026, with stringent entry criteria. This ambition promises to bolster the sport's professionalism and draw in more talent and investment.

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