An International Crossover: Comparing The Chinese Basketball Association With The National Basketball Association

Allison J. Slusher
University of Mississippi. Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College

Follow this and additional works at: https://egrove.olemiss.edu/hon_thesis

Part of the Political Science Commons

Recommended Citation
https://egrove.olemiss.edu/hon_thesis/47

This Undergraduate Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors College (Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College) at eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of eGrove. For more information, please contact egrove@olemiss.edu.
Abstract

This thesis compares the Chinese Basketball Association with the National Basketball Association in an in-depth comparison of how these organizations approach seven key aspects of sports management including commercialization, regular and post season scheduling, training, player acquisitions, players’ and coaches’ salaries, and players’ and coaches’ unions. This thesis also compares the histories of the CBA and NBA. The histories of these organizations serve to set the background information needed to understand how the CBA and NBA administer these seven aspects of sports management. Comparing these two organizations serves to prove that the CBA is run as a government bureaucracy used to improve China’s image whereas the NBA is run as a non-government corporation.
Acknowledgements

The thesis writing process was challenging as it developed my research and writing skills, but I am thankful for every difficult moment as this process has been enlightening and inspiring to say the least. Thank you to Dr. Gang Guo, my thesis advisor. Thank you for your patience and encouragement as I attempted to translate my ideas into a coherent piece of research. Thank you to my reader Dr. Joshua Howard for asking thought provoking questions and pushing me to take my writing a step further. I would also like to thank my reader Dr. William Schenck for encouraging me to reach the potential in my thesis topic and asking my thoughts on the most recent NBA games each time I passed you on campus.

I extend a heartfelt thank you to the entire faculty of the Croft Institute for International Studies. Dr. Gispen, thank you for always greeting me with a kind word and taking the time to listen to my future plans and aspirations. I decided to enroll at the University of Mississippi after being accepted into the Croft Institute because I believed this program would best prepare me for a career after college while providing me with enriching opportunities during my college career. Four years later, I am glad to say the Croft Institute exceeded my every expectation.

I would like to thank the faculty members of the Sally McDonnel Barksdale Honors College for encouraging your students to live as both citizen and scholar. Thank you for inspiring your students to combine personal interests with academia. Under no other circumstances would I be able to spend a year and a half watching and reading about basketball and be able to translate this knowledge into research.

To my family: thank you for your prayers, support, and advice as I wrote my thesis. I could never say enough words to express my thanks for each and every one of you. To my parents: thank you for your unconditional love and support and for constantly reminding me to do everything as for the Lord, not for myself. Your words of wisdom calmed me when I felt overwhelmed and reminded me to take the thesis writing process one step at a time. After all, we don’t always want to eat the elephant, but we do so by taking one bite at a time.

I would also like to acknowledge my friends. I don’t know what I did to deserve such loving friends, but I am immeasurably grateful for you all. Thank you for listening to me as I enthusiastically inserted basketball facts into our conversations and for going on long walks with me when I needed to take a study break. Each act of service and kind word did not go unnoticed, and I am incredibly honored to call you all my friends.

The idea of writing a thesis seemed daunting my freshman year, but I can honestly say this has been one of my most rewarding experiences while studying at the University of Mississippi. I could not have completed this task without the people who daily walked along side me throughout this project.
List of Abbreviations

AAU: Amateur Athletic Union
BAA: Basketball Association of America
CBA: Chinese Basketball Association
CBA: Collective Bargaining Agreement
CBAL: Chinese Basketball Association League
CBMC: Chinese Basketball Management Centers
CCTV: Chinese Central Television
FIBA: International Basketball Federation
GAS: General Administration of Sport
NBADL: National Basketball Association Development League
NBCA: National Basketball Coaches Association
NBPA: National Basketball Players Association
NSMC: National Sport Management Centers
NSP: North Star Project
# Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.................................................................................................................. 1

CHAPTER I:
The Histories of the Chinese Basketball Association and the National Basketball Association....4

CHAPTER II:
Commercialization........................................................................................................... 9

CHAPTER III:
Regular and Post Season Scheduling............................................................................. 17

CHAPTER IV:
Training............................................................................................................................... 21

CHAPTER V:
Player Acquisitions.......................................................................................................... 2

CHAPTER VI:
Players’ and Coaches’ Salaries.......................................................................................... 40
CHAPTER VII:
Players’ and Coaches’
Unions.................................................................43

CONCLUSION..............................................................46
Introduction

Basketball was first introduced in China in 1895 by missionaries who used the sport as a gateway to introduce their Christian message (Polumbaum 180,184). Since that time, basketball has only become more popular. In the spring of 2015 I traveled to Beijing, China, for a semester abroad. Walking down the crowded streets of the city, I was constantly amused by the number of people wearing either National Basketball Association (NBA) jerseys or Chinese Basketball Association (CBA) jerseys with Western surnames written across the back. I befriended Chinese students who were no exception to the basketball craze. My friends and I would discuss our favorite NBA players and teams. My friends also invited me to watch the CBA finals with them as they cheered their home team to victory. Basketball became our shared language.

I noticed the love for basketball was not limited to a group of college students who were looking for common interests, but the love for basketball was common throughout Chinese culture. I was not surprised to learn that as of 2012 nearly 300 million Chinese people played the sport (Gao). The outdoor basketball courts on my university campus were more than boundary lines limited to the people who were veterans of the game. They were shared spaces for people in the community. Elderly women would bring young children to the courts early in the morning. The women would chat with one another while the children toddled across the courts. In the afternoons, school teams would play league games as a man wearing a Los Angeles Lakers jersey would start a pick-up game on the next court. On a trip to the Forbidden City, I even noticed multiple basketball courts inside the historic structure. I was intrigued by the role basketball played in everyday life in China and became increasingly interested in the
support Chinese people showed for both the NBA and CBA. My curiosity inspired me to learn how the NBA and CBA developed and how they compare to one another.

**The Importance**

One article defines sports management as “a combination of skills related to planning, organizing, directing, controlling, budgeting, leading, and evaluating, within the context of an organization or department whose primary product or service is related to sport and/or physical activity” (DeSensi et al. 33). For the purposes of this thesis, I have divided sports management into six categories: commercialization, regular season and post season scheduling, training, player acquisitions, players’ and coaches’ salaries, and players’ and coaches’ unions.

Previous literature provides a general or partially detailed comparison of the NBA and CBA. After reading both Chinese and English sources, I realized the current literature either over synthesizes a portion of the themes of sports management without combining them into a single, all-encompassing comparison of the NBA and CBA, or literature presents a general comparison of the two organizations without providing in-depth details of how these organizations conduct sports management. This thesis, on the other hand, provides a more holistic comparison of the NBA and CBA by way of an in-depth study of the histories of these organizations and the way these organizations administer the six aspects of sports management listed above. I compare the CBA and NBA by describing, in detail, the similarities and differences for each of the six components of sports management. I then combine each of these descriptions into one overarching comparison of the CBA and NBA. This research also includes examples of specific players and their relations to the NBA and CBA. As part of this comparison, I
focus on the Chinese government’s attempts to follow a capitalist business model, specifically the NBA business model, in order to develop China’s national teams (Houlihan, Tan, and Green 27). Each section in this thesis leads to the conclusion which is: compared to the NBA which is operated as a corporation the CBA is operated as a government bureaucracy. Each chapter supports this argument by examining the role of the government in these sports operations in each respective country, and, if the government is involved, how it uses its role to create a stronger national image.

Not only does the CBA seek to follow a Western business model, but the NBA also works hand in hand with the Chinese government. In 2014, China’s Ministry of Education established its first partnership with any American sports league when it collaborated with the NBA to create basketball programs throughout the country with a goal of training at least three million students in the game of basketball by the year 2017 (Sun). This thesis not only explains professional basketball operations in the United States and China, but the comparison made in this thesis is also vital for individuals seeking to understand Chinese business relationships with Western corporations because it shows the government’s role in such operations. This comparison reveals that the Chinese government is willing to work with these corporations so long as they see a potential benefit from these operations. These benefits are far reaching as scholars have argued the national teams’ performances can not only improve China’s national image, but winning performances can also increase China’s role in globalization (Houlihan, Tan, and Green 3). These benefits act as incentives for the Chinese government to adopt a Western approach to sports management, specifically in the game of basketball.
I arrive at my conclusion by examining how the CBA attempts to balance its state powers with capitalist market forces and how these capitalist forces have affected the CBA’s operations. I have organized my information by first providing the histories of both organizations. I then explain my theories by comparing the NBA’s and CBA’s approaches to managing each of the six categories of sports management.
Chapter One: The Histories of the Chinese Basketball Association and the National Basketball Association

The histories of these organizations work hand in hand with the commercialization of the NBA and CBA (chapter two); however, I find it necessary to explain how these entities began before comparing their approaches to the various aspects of sports management.

The Chinese Basketball Association

The Chinese government manages sports operations under its General Administration of Sport (GAS). A policy reform in 1998 caused the GAS to oversee sixteen national sport management centers (NSMCs), one of these being the Chinese Basketball Management Center (CBMC). Some NSMCs oversee multiple national sports associations; therefore, 25 national sports associations fall under the sixteen NSMCs. The CBA is technically operated under the CBMC as one of these 25 national sport associations (Tan and Bairner 409).

The CBA began consulting an international management group in 1994 that eventually led to the formation of Chinese Basketball Association League (CBAL) (Huang, Wang, and Zhao 106). Policy reforms in 1996 and 1998 also led to the restructuring of the administration of Chinese basketball (Huang Pingbo, Wang Yun, Zhao Ge, 106) (Tan and Bairner 409). The CBA and CBMC are essentially the same entity that manages two different aspects of basketball administration. The CBMC was created in 1998 and acts as the government authority for basketball activities in China while the CBA handles international basketball operations such as Olympic and International Basketball Federation (FIBA) competitions (Tan and Bairner 410) (Huang
and Hong 1035-1036). Although the CBA appears to be a non-government organization, its association with the CBMC allows the organization to be government operated. The CBAL falls under the CBA, thus under the CBMC and ultimately the GAS as well (Huang and Hong 1036). Figure 1 illustrates the organizational structure of sports authorities in China and how the CBMC and the CBA are technically the same organization.

![Organizational structure of basketball administration in China](image)

**Figure 1**: Organizational structure of basketball administration in China (Huang, Hong, 1035)

Li Yuanwei became the director of the CBMC in 2003. Under his leadership, the CBMC created the North Star Project (NSP) in 2004 (Huang, Hong, 1033). The NSP was developed as a solution to a number of problems in China’s national basketball programs. One problem was that the national sport budget in China was consistently low from the
early to mid-1990s. Not only was funding low, but China’s national teams were also performing poorly on the world stage. Both China’s men and women teams did not qualify for a spot in the FIBA World Championship in the 1990s, a spot it had received since 1978, nor did these teams win medals in the 2004 Olympics. This failure pushed the Chinese government to seek policy reform that would enable the CBAL to prepare athletes for wins on international and domestic stages (Houlihan, Tan, and Green 13, 16-17).

The Chinese government attempted to address these problems through five goals listed as part of the NSP. These goals were intended to develop both the CBAL and the players therein (Tan and Bairner 410) (Huang and Hong 1034). These five goals were more of a five step process as each goal depended on a previous step. These steps were to make the CBAL the best performing sports league in Asia as well as into a world renowned professional basketball league, develop the CBAL as a brand, use the CBAL to train and nurture potential and current players for China’s national basketball teams, make CBAL teams more competitive on the global stage, and have the CBAL become a profitable sports league as well as a regularly operated league (Huang and Hong 1034).

When Li announced the creation of the NSP he reminded his listeners “The whole meaning of Chinese Basketball is to enhance the profile of the national teams…Every club has to support and serve the nation’s teams without any conditions,” (qtd. in Tan and Bairner 414). The ultimate goal in growing the CBAL is to train players that have the potential to improve the seven Chinese national basketball teams. These seven teams are the men’s national team, women’s national team, men’s Olympic team, men’s youth team, women’s youth team, men’s early youth team and the women’s early youth team. This
thesis is focused on the men’s Olympic team and the men’s national team, which
competes in national games in China as well as represents the nation as a whole in
international games such as the FIBA Asia Games and the FIBA World Championship
(also known as the FIBA World Cup) (Tan and Bairner 417, 418).

In order to best prepare players for these national teams, the Chinese government
looked to the NBA for a business model. Li even observed NCAA and NBA programs
while in the U.S. before creating the NSP (Houlihan, Tan, and Green 16). One article
states that “the implementation of the NSP amounted essentially to the cloning of the
governance model of the NBA,” (Huang and Hong 1034). The CBA has thus attempted
to use the NBA league structure and business model to develop its own league.

The NSP also moved the basketball systems to a more capitalist business structure
that would be relatively independent from government influence and required all CBAL
teams to have corporate ownership (Huang and Hong 1036). Xin Lancheng served as
Lin’s successor of the CBMC in 2009. He began to lead with a more conservative agenda
than that of Li. Xin planned for the government to have a strong administrative role in
Chinese sports and wanted to capitalize on national support in the market economy;
therefore, his plan led not only to the abandonment of the NSP but also to the
abandonment of the Chinese Basketball Association League Committee (CBALC) as
well as the CBMC Professional League Office, departments that were directly above the
CBAL. This transition then placed the CBAL, the equivalent of NBA clubs, directly
under the CBMC and CBA as they are now (Huang and Hong 1035-1036). Although the
NSP no longer exists, its overarching purpose lives on: Chinese basketball is still seen as
an optimal way to express China’s rising stature in the world by proving to be a powerful
competitor on the basketball court (“Physical culture, sports and the Olympics” 342). The ultimate goal in becoming such a competitor is to strengthen the Chinese government through its sports associations by improving China’s national image.

**The National Basketball Association**

The Basketball Association of America (BAA) was created on June 6, 1946, in New York City. The BAA was a non-government organization created by individuals who owned event arenas and professional hockey teams. These individuals saw the economic potential of creating a professional basketball league. The BAA later took over a competing league, the National League, in 1949, and renamed the organization the National Basketball Association. Since that time, team franchises have continued to develop and change; however, the leadership structure of the NBA remains the same (Koppett). Presently, unlike the CBA, the NBA is still privately operated as team owners comprise the NBA’s Board of Directors. These directors select an individual who is not a team owner to be the NBA Commissioner (Huang and Hong 1035). The CBA’s history is much more complex in comparison to the NBA’s history. This is mostly due to the fact that the NBA is privately owned and operated whereas the CBA falls under the GAS. The structure of the NBA has also remained generally consistent since it overtook the National League in 1949.

These histories only begin to address the differences between the NBA and the CBA. Already, the government intervention in the CBA is clear, a strong indicator that the CBA is operated as a government bureaucracy. On the other hand, the NBA’s private ownership further supports the idea that the NBA is operated as a corporation. These histories provide background information that is useful for understanding how the NBA
and CBA came to be and will serve as the basis for understanding the comparison between the two organizations.
Chapter Two: Commercialization

The first aspect of sports management to consider in comparing the NBA and CBA is commercialization. Professional basketball revolves around the game of basketball; however, as the comparisons in the following chapters will show, both the CBA and NBA focus on much more than the game itself. Although the CBA attempts to follow the business model the NBA has set, the business structures between these two associations are starkly different as the fundamentals of these business structures are different.

Team Ownership

NBA teams can be owned in one of two ways. One form of ownership is investment syndicate equity. This type of ownership means the individuals who have invested in these teams have a set list of responsibilities and rights outlined by particular documents. The other type of team ownership in the NBA is individual equity. This type of ownership means individuals or a group of people can purchase a team. These two options for team ownership allow for transparency as few people are conducting the operations. This also means that there is less government involvement because the owners of the teams handle the teams’ operations (Huang and Hong 1038). These owners are able to make decisions on their own accord about the teams’ best interests so long as they work within the parameters the NBA sets before them.

Since the CBA oversees the CBAL, the CBAL has a more complex process of team ownership. Until 2012 there were six possible types of team owners. These six types of owners were sport administration bodies, public companies, private enterprises, sports colleges, the Chinese army, and state-owned enterprises. These possible team owners are
known as shareholders (Huang and Hong 1038). Among these six possible types of owners it is important to note that sports colleges are often owned by sports administrations (Huang and Hong 1038). CBAL teams can be owned by one shareholder, or multiple shareholders can own one team. The problem with this structure is that many CBAL teams are subject to an unequal balance of power. This is due to the fact that sports administrations or local governments often intervene in team operations even if they do not have ownership in a team.

Sports administrations are able to intervene because they control coaches, sporting venues, resources, and players; therefore, even if a sports administration does not own a team, the sports administrations can still affect team ownership (Huang and Hong 1038). Another reason local governments and sports administrations intervene in CBAL ownership is because many CBAL teams struggle to obtain the funding necessary to pay operating costs. The owners therefore turn to the local governments or sport administrations for financial support. After the NSP was abandoned, teams were required to register with sports administrations. This registration process increased the sports administrations’ influence in CBAL team operations (Huang and Hong 1038).

The NBA can be defined as a cartel: “a group of firms that organize together to control production, sales, and wages within a business” (Sage 196). Since the NBA controls most of the factors on which its operations rely, investors are able to earn the most available profits (Huang and Hong 1038). Not only does the CBA not have this cartel-type business model but it is also subject to the needs of China’s national teams (Huang and Hong 1038-1039). Since the national teams take priority in order to improve China’s national image, the bureaucratic agenda behind CBAL development seems
highly unlikely to address the differences in these organizations. These differences keep the CBA from reaching its highest possible profits (Huang and Hong 1038-1039).

**League Revenues**

League revenues are the core of commercialization. Sponsorships, expanding to foreign markets, and team ownership center around the goal of creating more revenue. The NBA and CBAL are multi-million and billion dollar organizations. The NBA’s revenue is $5.18 billion, and the CBA revenue is nearly $655 million. The NBA’s revenue is significantly higher than the CBAL’s revenue, but individuals have expressed ideas to increase the CBAL’s financial returns. Matt Beyer, first foreign sports agent in China, has seen the CBAL expand over time. Beyer thinks there is potential for the CBAL to experience greater economic growth in the CBAL through merchandizing and marketing (Zwerling). Another strategic move to increase the CBAL’s revenue would be to build bigger arenas. Currently, the largest CBAL arena holds 18,000 people, and the smallest arena holds 3,800 people. This is an incredible difference compared to NBA arenas. The United Center, home to the Chicago Bulls is the largest NBA venue. The United Center holds 23,129 people, and the Smoothie King Center, home to the New Orleans Pelicans, is the smallest NBA arena with a capacity for 16,867 people. The CBAL should build bigger arenas if it hopes to compare to the NBA in terms of income. Not only does the CBAL lack the infrastructure needed to attract more fans, but the CBAL teams must also stop giving away free tickets if they hope to increase their revenue. Government workers and people in higher levels of society often receive tickets
to CBAL games for free. Although giving away free tickets helps to fill seats at the
games, they cause the teams to operate at a loss.

**International Markets**

The CBA and NBA are closely intertwined through commercialism. The NBA became extremely popular in China when Yao Ming started playing for the Houston Rockets in 2002. Although Yao was not the first native Chinese person to play in the NBA his career helped to ignite Chinese fans’ infatuation with the NBA. Chinese Central Television (CCTV) first began airing NBA games in 1987. Since that time, there are an estimated 450 million people in China who watch NBA games through these broadcasts (Gao). In 2003 over 200 million people watched the Houston Rockets play the Los Angeles Lakers, Yao’s first time playing against the Laker’s famous center, Shaquille O’Neal (Gao).

Yao popularized the idea of Chinese nationals playing professional basketball in the United States, and is still admired for his NBA career as he was voted into the NBA Hall of Fame in 2016. This trend is ongoing as two Chinese players are expected to enter the NBA Draft in 2016. Zhou Qi, a seven feet two inches center for the Xinjiang Flying Tigers is not only expected to enter the NBA Draft, but he is expected to go 21st in the Draft if he does enter (Ford). Coincidentally, Zhou is the third highest paid player in the CBA for 2015 (“Highest paid Chinese players in the NBA”). Wang Zhelin, a seven feet tall center for the professional basketball team in Fujian, China, is also anticipated to participate in the NBA Draft this season (Vecenie) (NBADraft.net). The possibility that these two athletes might enter the Draft shows that there is potential for the NBA to remain as popular if not become more popular in China. This possibility also shows that
the market for Chinese athletes also plays a vital role in the U.S. as NBA teams look for athletes that can bring potentially increase their foreign fan bases. This popularity continued when Jeremy Lin, although American born Taiwanese, signed with the Golden State Warriors in 2010 and currently plays for the Charlotte Hornets. In the summer of 2015, Lin promoted Adidas at various store locations in China and visited Beijing University as a guest at a basketball tournament.

This issue of commercialism is magnified when the private sector gets involved. The CBAL and NBA have regulations regarding sponsorships. The CBAL for example, is sponsored by Li Ning, a Chinese athletic wear company. If a player in the CBAL decided to wear clothing or gear produced by another athletic wear company while participating in CBAL affiliated events, the player would have to pay a fine to the CBAL. Nike has agreed to pay the fines for players wearing Nike gear instead of Li Ning gear during such events (“Chinese 18-year-old Zhou Qi signs Nike shoe contract”). This conflict of interest further illustrates differences and similarities between the NBA and CBA. One similarity is the regulations the NBA and CBA have on sponsorships and the repercussions that ensue if a player chooses not to act in accordance with those sponsorships. This example also illustrates how valuable the CBA is to foreign markets. Not only do companies like Adidas seek out players they know will garner interest in foreign countries, but companies like Nike show how valuable a relationship with Chinese athletes is in China because they can act as a stage on which these goods can be displayed to a large market.

This popularity, however, goes both ways. American athletes who had their starts in the NBA have moved to China to play for CBAL teams. One such athlete is Stephe
Marbury, point guard for the Beijing Ducks (Graham). Marbury played at the Georgia Institute of Technology before being drafted by the Milwaukee Bucks in the first round of the 1996 NBA Draft (“Stephon Marbury honored with museum in Beijing”). The first round of the 1996 Draft produced some of the most famous names in the NBA including Steve Nash who clenched an NBA Most Valuable Player award while with the Phoenix Suns, Kobe Bryant who is retiring at the end of the 2015-2016 season after 20 years in the NBA most of which are with the Los Angeles Lakers, and Alan Iverson who played for the Philadelphia 76ers (“1996 NBA Draft, First Round”).

Marbury jumped between teams before finally making a drastic career change. Marbury has played for the Beijing Ducks since 2010 (“Stephon Marbury honored with museum in Beijing”). As a player for the Ducks, Marbury has won three league championships in the last four years. Chinese fans have embraced Marbury and have honored him with the construction of a statue, a musical based on his career, and a museum dedicated to his achievement in the CBA; however, this relationship is mutual. Marbury claims that his time playing in China has been his most meaningful time in his career, and that he is home in Beijing (“Stephon Marbury honored with museum in Beijing”). Marbury’s story is one of the most popular in a number of stories where foreign athletes have traveled to China to take a shot at their chances in the CBA. These players are looking for chances either because they were not chosen as part of the NBA Draft or because their careers were dwindling in the NBA, so they looked for a new market where they could contribute to a team and still remain viable as a player. These considerations show that the NBA and CBA have enough commonality for these American players to consider going to the CBA to be a practical move. The systems are
similar enough that the American players can spend less time adjusting to a new style of operation and more time playing the game. These examples prove that the NBA model has infiltrated China’s borders as Chinese adults and children gather to watch Chinese players in NBA games, but as athletes move to China to seek redemption in their professional careers, the CBA becomes the benefactor. Not only do the teams acquire more experienced players, but they also gain popularity, recognition, and fans. The CBA also benefits by increasing its role in aiding globalization as it strengthens its relationship with the NBA as former CBAL athletes play in the NBA and as the CBAL acquires former NBA players.

**Sponsorships**

Even more, commercialization in these leagues increases as private businesses also gain from these players’ statuses. In many cases, players are sponsored by specific brands, such as Jeremy Lin with Adidas. By sponsoring athletes that are popular in foreign countries, specifically countries with large markets like China, companies can expand their business by appealing to fans through relationships with these particular athletes. Sponsorships in the CBAL are similar to sponsorships in the NBA where businesses can support specific players or an entire team. Almost twenty companies, both Chinese and Western, sponsored the CBAL in the 2013-2014 season (Zheng and Fort 128). Therefore, not only are the sports leagues growing financially and benefitting from one another, but the private sector is also reaping the benefits of these players’ international popularity.

Scholars argue that CBA popularity and the number of sponsorships in the CBA are increasing; however, there is still a lack of information available on the CBAL as
team costs are not made available to the public (Humphreys and Watanabe 16). This lack of information prevents a direct comparison of the NBA’s and CBAL’s expenses as organizations, but the similarities in player and team sponsorships as well as player and coach salaries (chapter six) emphasize organizational differences that can be attributed to government and market influences. If the CBAL continues to cater to its market demand and allow businesses to provide funds for team operations then the CBAL has potential for financial growth, much like the NBA. Financial growth would allow China to increase its role in globalization if individuals from foreign markets begin to follow CBAL teams and, in turn, purchase team merchandise, watch televised CBAL events, or even purchase tickets to watch their favorite teams play. The most significant difference between the NBA’s and CBAL’s commercial operations is that the CBAL obtains funding from local and municipal governments whereas the NBA is funded solely on market influences. If the Chinese government began to relinquish its role in CBAL operations and allow the organization to operate with a solely free-market approach, the Chinese government would see the CBAL increase in popularity as well as grow financially. Until this happens, however, the Chinese government’s interference with the CBA’s market affairs further promote the notion that the CBA operates as a government bureaucracy whereas the NBA operates as a corporation.
Chapter Three: Regular and Post Season Scheduling

The second aspect of sports management I will compare is regular season and post season scheduling. This aspect is important, not only because it shapes what fans see of these basketball organizations, but it also automatically highlights a distinction between the CBA and NBA. The NBA is its own entity. It does not fall under another basketball organization, broader sports federation, or government bureaucracy; therefore, the NBA trains players for NBA games only. The main purpose of the CBAL, on the other hand, is to prepare athletes to play for the Chinese national teams with the hopes of improving these national teams, and, consequently, improving China’s national image (Tan and Bairner 417). This difference in purpose explains the difference in schedules between the NBA and CBA.

The NBA works on a round robin schedule during the regular season in which teams play 41 games at their home arenas and 41 games on the road. The CBAL also operates with a round robin system, usually with 34 games in total; however, the number of games fluctuates based on the demand from the national teams (Zheng and Fort 128). The Chinese national teams¹ can alter the length of the CBAL season if they need more time for training and preparation (Huang and Hong 1037). This alteration hinders the CBA from matching the NBA’s model. In this case, the outside force that is hindering this growth is the government influence in the CBAL’s operations.

The schedules for the playoff seasons in the NBA and CBAL do not differ as much as the regular season schedules differ. This is because the CBAL very nearly follows the NBA’s model. One of the main differences is, again, a product of the CBAL’s

¹ There are seven Chinese national teams; however, the teams mentioned here are the men’s national team and the men’s Olympic team.
submission to the Chinese national teams. If the Chinese national teams decide to cut the CBAL season short, the CBAL Finals could be moved up to February or March instead of April, the month in which the Finals are usually held. In contrast, the NBA consistently holds its Finals in April (Huang and Hong 1037).

The NBA playoff schedule consists of four rounds. The NBA is divided in halves - the Western Conference and the Eastern Conference. Both of these conferences are divided in halves as well. The Western Conference is divided into Southwest and Pacific, and the Eastern Conference is divided into Atlantic and Central. The first round of playoffs is the Conference Semifinals. Sixteen total teams are included in this round (eight from each conference). The eight best teams in the Western Conference participate in the semifinals for the Western Conference, and the eight best teams in the Eastern Conference participate in the semifinals for the Eastern Conference. The Conference Quarterfinals consist of four games for each conference. The teams are assigned to play each other by the way they are seeded, or ranked. Teams are seeded by their regular season records with the team with the best record receiving the lowest seed number and the team with the worst record (out of the best eight teams) receiving the highest seed number. The winners from the four games then play each other in the Conference Semifinals. The two teams in each conference that win these games then play each other in the Conference Finals. The team that wins the Conference Finals for the Western Conference Finals plays the winner of the Eastern Conference Finals in the NBA playoffs. All four of these rounds consist of seven games per match.

The teams that win four out of seven games move on to the next round of playoffs until the NBA Finals where the team that wins four out of seven games wins the National
Championship (nba.com). These games are played in a round robin system where the
team with the best regular season record has the home court advantage for the first two
games then the opponent gets home court advantage for the second two games. The fifth
game of the series (if necessary) is played at the lower seeded team’s court and rotates
between courts after each game until the series is won.

Although the CBAL playoffs are not guaranteed to take place at a certain time
every year, they are similar to playoffs in the NBA. The CBAL also has two conferences,
and the top eight teams for each conference compete in the finals (Huang and Hong
1037). CBAL playoffs are also similar to NBA playoffs in that the rounds are the same.
One variation, however, between the NBA and CBAL playoffs is that all series of games,
except the final series, consist of only five games where the teams winning three out of
five games move on to the next round of playoffs. The final round of the series is the only
round that consists of seven games. The NBA and CBAL also use similar award systems
during the playoffs. Championship winning players, coaches, and general managers
receive the same form of awards including rings, trophies, MVP awards, and other items
(Huang and Hong 1037).

The scheduling systems for the NBA and CBAL are closely related and show
there is potential for the CBAL business model to align with that of the NBA; however,
unless the CBAL can become independent from the demands of the Chinese national
teams, the CBAL is unlikely to match the routine scheduling of the NBA. This
information can be significant when analyzing relationships between other Chinese
businesses and businesses from the United States. If Chinese businesses hope to take a
Western approach, they may face the same problem the CBA encountered which was not
being able to fully adapt a Western business model so long as government intervention
persisted. This intervention took place with the goal of making the Chinese national
teams more competitive on the world stage and, in turn, improving China’s national
image. The purpose of this intervention further reiterates the theory that the CBA
operates as a government bureaucracy whereas the NBA, without this intervention, works
as a company guided solely by the restrictions it sets for itself.
Chapter Four: Training

The second aspect of sports management worth comparing is player training. Chinese basketball players undergo physical training as well as ideological training. The Chinese government believed that the commercialization of basketball in China had a negative impact on some of the more popular Chinese players. The government then developed “ideological education” for professional basketball players that reinforced the idea of “national pride first and personal interest second.” Vice Sport Minister Xiao Tian further supported the goal of ideological education when he said, “It was their responsibility to raise the national flag and to play the national anthem in the international sports arenas,” (qtd. in Tan and Bairner 417).

The Chinese government thought ideological education was necessary after players like Wang Zhizhi, the first Chinese athlete to play on an NBA team, grew in popularity and risked betraying national interests. Wang was the son of two former professional basketball players in China, and his inevitable career as a professional basketball player led to his stardom (Larmer). In 1999, Wang, a professional basketball player in China at the time, was recruited by the Dallas Mavericks. Wang did not come to the U.S., however, until the Chinese army allowed him to do so in 2001 (Polumbaum 208). Some people speculate that this agreement was made as a strategic move to help China receive the bid for the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing (Beith). Whatever the reason, Wang made history by becoming the first Chinese player to sign with an NBA team. Not only was he a popular athlete at the time, but he was also in the spotlight in China and the U.S. for his refusal to return to China to practice with the Chinese national team out of fear that his career in the NBA would soon be drawing to a close. Wang
moved to California to avoid returning home until he ultimately found himself estranged from the national team for which he once played. Not only was his refusal to return home a shock to the Chinese people simply because he was ignoring his legal duties in China, but he was also setting both himself and his country in a poor light because, as a soldier, Wang’s action was a public display of defiance against the Chinese government (Larmer). The government retaliated by requiring Wang to make a public apology in 2006 before being allowed to participate again on a Chinese national team.

Ideological education for athletes took shape in many forms. Players received lessons on revolutionary heroism, patriotism, and collectivism. Ideological education also involved training with the People’s Liberation Army in China in order to remind these athletes that they, like the soldiers, were serving a greater purpose for their nation by fighting to uphold their nation’s image (Tan and Bairner 417). This second type of education was geared around the 2008 Olympic Games because playing in these games was seen as an equivalent of fighting for one’s country. Although these methods of reform served as a preventative measure to keep Chinese star players from dwelling on individualism, these reforms stopped after the 2008 Olympic Games (Tan and Bairner 417). This type of training and education does not take place in the United States. A player’s achievement in the NBA is not reflective of the nation’s ability or status as a whole but is instead merely representative of the NBA.

Aside from ideological training, it is important to note the way players train to become professional basketball players. In the U.S., players must prove themselves worthy of team selection as a member of the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU), meaning the player is not a collegiate or professional athlete, or while an NCAA athlete (Huang
and Hong 1039). The NBA can evaluate players while they are amateurs to determine whether or not those players have a future in professional basketball.

Players in China have three options when preparing for professional basketball careers, unlike the two options available in the U.S. The CBAL scouts players who have trained in a public system, a school system, and an educational system. Players in the public system have already been drafted by a CBAL team, but they participate in this system to continue their training. Players in the educational system train while in primary or secondary school to be selected by sports colleges or secondary professional teams. The third form of training for Chinese professional basketball is a school system in which students attend sports schools from a young age and work their way through different levels of training with the ultimate goal of being selected to play for the national teams (Huang and Hong 1039).

The NBA and CBAL then have methods of training their players once they have been selected to participate in these professional associations (the process for this selection is discussed in chapter four). These methods take shape in different forms. The NBA has a training camp every September in which teams that will be playing in NBA Global Games, a series of pre-season exhibition games in foreign countries, are allowed to begin practices a few days before teams that will not be participating in NBA Global Games. The Global Games then take place before the roster is set for the NBA regular season (Huang and Hong 1036) (National Basketball Association Important Dates).

The CBAL closely copied the NBA training system beginning in the 2004-2005 season by holding pre-season games; however, the CBAL does not hold training camps like the NBA does because CBAL teams find potential players on their own whereas
NBA teams use training camps as a way to scout players (Zheng and Fort 128). The NBA uses these camps not only as a method for training but also as a way to analyze players for transfer purposes. The CBAL differs from the NBA in regards to player transfers, so the training camp is not vital for the business operation of the CBAL (Huang and Hong 1036-1037). A comparison between the transfer aspect of the CBAL and the NBA will be explained in greater detail in chapter three.

Aside from training camps and preseason games, the NBA also has a developmental league, NBA Development League, which is the official minor league of the NBA. In this program, players, coaches, officials, front-office staff members, and trainers can prepare for the NBA. In the 2015-2016 basketball season, there are 19 development teams that are owned by NBA teams. Three more teams have purchased NBA Development League teams that will participate in the 2016-2017 basketball season. This league has a 50 game season and allows players who have signed with the NBA league instead of a particular team, to train with the hopes of signing with an NBA team (“Frequently asked questions”).

One interesting feature of Chinese training is that beginning in 2005, the Chinese government has sent about 40 Chinese junior players to the U.S. to be trained by American coaches. Not only have young Chinese athletes trained in the U.S., but Chinese professional athletes also train yearly in the United States (Houlihan, Tan, and Green 24). This exchange in training techniques, however, was not limited to players.

The Chinese government has developed two programs since 2000 to train coaches for its national programs. The CBMC developed the first program in 2000 in which 10 potential Chinese coaches were sent to either the United States Basketball Association’s
facilities or NCAA universities for training. The CBMC created the second program in 2005 in which coaches for the national reserve would be sent to NCAA universities for five months to receive training from NCAA coaches and team managers. This program also required these national reserve coaches to learn English, basketball, and computer knowledge for 18 months (Houlihan, Tan, and Green 25). The Chinese government took this exchange a step further when it invited 32 American players and eight American coaches to China to become part of the eight Chinese National Basketball Association teams. While this particular transfer is not directly related to the CBAL, the Chinese government had been encouraging foreign involvement in the CBAL since its creation in 1995 (Houlihan, Tan, and Green 25-26). It can be inferred that with this direct interaction, these Chinese athletes will be able to learn more about professional basketball systems in the U.S., making them more likely to adapt to an NBA style system in China. The same can be assumed of Chinese coaches, that with this direct interaction and education, they will be fully prepared to recreate the NBA’s business and competitive models.

Not only does the Chinese government send players to the United States for athletic training, but Chinese players have also chosen to attend universities and colleges in the U.S. in order to train as athletes in the NCAA (Houlihan, Tan, and Green 24). This willingness to come to the U.S. for education and training shows an implied respect for the training operation in the U.S. The NBA’s D-League as well as its search for players trained as part of the AAU or the NCAA further proves the NBA is a company operating itself. On the other hand, the Chinese government’s method of training children in an education system for a future career in basketball as well as the government’s initiatives to send players, coaches, and trainers to the U.S. for training further reiterates the theory
that the CBA is a bureaucratic system, operating mainly with the intentions of improving China’s national image.
Chapter Five: Player Acquisitions

The CBAL’s and NBA’s methods of player acquisitions and league training are closely related aspects of sports management. This chapter will compare the player recruitment of both organizations in order to determine how similar or dissimilar the NBA and CBAL are in terms of their business models. This comparison is based on the groundwork referenced in the previous chapter.

The NBA has three ways of obtaining new athletes. These methods include the NBA Draft, signing “free agents,” and player trades and purchases. The CBAL, likewise, has three methods of obtaining athletes. These three methods include recruiting athletes from the public system, the educational system, and the sports school system (Huang and Hong 1039). (These three methods were referenced in chapter two.)

The NBA Draft first began in 1947 allowing NBA teams to select their new members from a pool of high school, NCAA, and free agent players. This Draft is supplemented by the NBA Draft Lottery. The NBA Draft Lottery did not begin until 1985. It determines which teams out of the teams that did not make it to the playoffs will take the first three picks in the first round of the Draft. The Draft Lottery system has been updated multiple times. The current style of the Draft Lottery was implemented in 1994. This system assigns the teams with the worst records from the regular season a four digit number. During the lottery, 14 ping pong balls are placed in a drum. Each ping pong ball is labeled with a number 1 to 14. Four ping pong balls are then pulled out of the drum at once, creating a four digit number beginning with the number on the ping pong ball that was drawn first, then second, and so on. An update in 2004 raised the number of teams participating in the lottery to 14 (“NBA Draft Lottery History”)

29
The team whose number is drawn first is then assigned the first pick in the first round of the NBA Draft out of the teams that did not play in the NBA playoffs. Each team has a chance of having their number drawn for one of the three picking assignments; however, the worst team is given a 25% chance of receiving one of the three slots, the team with the second worst regular season record has a slightly lower percentage, and the teams with the best regular season records aside from the teams that competed in the playoffs have the lowest chance of receiving one of the top three picks in the first round of the draft. The remaining slots are still determined by the lottery after the first three spots have been taken. The assignments are then based off the teams’ regular season records. The assignments are given in order of worst record to best record. This assignment ensures that the teams with the worst records can still have a higher pick in the draft and, consequently, a better chance of selecting highly coveted players (“NBA Draft Lottery History”).

The NBA Draft takes place after the lottery assignments. The teams that participated in the playoffs make their selections following the first 14 assignments. These teams pick in the order of lowest regular season wins to highest regular season wins. The second round of the Draft does not include the lottery as the teams make their selections with the team with the worst regular season record picking first to the team with the most regular season wins making the final selection (“NBA Draft Lottery History”). This selection system is based solely on the teams, not the players. The players are simply hoping to be selected for participation in the NBA.

The CBA created a similar draft system to that of the NBA in 2002 that allowed the CBAL teams with the worst records to have the first picks of available players. The
difference between this CBA model and the NBA model is that the CBAL teams were not picking from players hoping to join the CBA. They were picking instead from transfer-listed players (Houlihan, Tan, and Green 30). Each CBAL team was required to release “surplus players” to be transferred to other teams for one year. This transfer system did not live up to the purpose of the NBA Draft because these teams were not necessarily choosing from the best available players. CBAL teams were ultimately able to retain their players with the most talent defeating the purpose of giving the least winning teams priority (Houlihan, Tan, and Green 30-31). This system, like the NBA Draft was focused solely on the teams’ selections with no input from the players (Houlihan, Tan and Green 30). Although the systems were not identical, the CBAL’s attempts to incorporate a draft system show the CBAL’s willingness to adapt NBA practices.

This draft system was deemed unsuccessful in China due to policies focusing on the elite sport system. These policies include the requirement for clubs to have “reserve teams” and the fact that at least one-third of CBAL clubs are connected to the sports bureaus in their particular province. Hao Guohua, director of the National Team Department, explained this conflict of interest when he said, “The NBA transfer system is a perfect commercial model…We can’t achieve it at this moment due to our ‘policy of whole country support for the elite sport system’…This is a structural conflict which exists within the Chinese Basketball system itself,” (qtd. in Houlihan, Tan, and Green 31). This statement shows that as long as the Chinese purpose for the CBAL remains to train players for potential participation on national basketball teams, the CBAL cannot fully
develop into the model the NBA has set forth. Ultimately, these policies constrained the CBAL from having an identical draft system to that of the NBA.

Another form of player acquisition in the CBA and NBA is player transfers. One important stipulation to note about player transfers and purchases is that all NBA players must have been eligible for selection in no less than one and no more than two NBA drafts. This means that no player may be signed with a team if that player has not first been made available for selection to all teams through the Draft. All players, excluding international players, must also turn nineteen within the calendar year of the NBA Draft or must be older than nineteen years of age (NBA Collective Bargaining Agreement 258). This is part of a policy created in 2005 that prohibits NBA teams from recruiting players directly out of high school as they were previously able to do (Hilton). One of the major ways NBA teams can scout potential talent is through the NBADL (described in chapter two). While NBA teams have affiliate teams in the NBADL, players in the NBADL are not signed with those specific teams. Instead they are signed as players with the NBADL and are available to be “called-up” or chosen to play for any of the 30 NBA teams. This means these players are technically free-agents (“Frequently Asked Questions”).

There are only two types of players who are signed by the individual teams instead of by the league itself. These players include “assignees,” individuals who have been signed by an NBA team but have been assigned to play for that team’s NBA D-League team, and “Draft Rights Players,” individuals who are chosen by NBA teams during the draft but are not yet signed with those teams. The NBADL team affiliated with that NBA team then has first pick of that player over other NBADL teams (“Frequently
Asked Questions”). Since most NBADL players are not signed with a specific team, any
NBA team can sign one of these players (“NBA D-League 101”).

NBA teams also use NBA summer training camps to recruit new talent (as was
mentioned in chapter two). These camps allow teams to re-evaluate their talent as they
prepare for the upcoming year as well as to scout any potential players from other teams
who would be worth trading.

As for the trade itself, there are at least nine steps that must be followed before a
trade can take place. These steps can work in a chronological order but often work
concurrently. Some trades might be conducted more quickly than others depending on
when those trades begin and how much time remains before reaching this deadline. One
of the first steps in conducting a trade between teams is determining if a trade of one
player for another player will fit within a team’s salary cap. If a player one team hopes to
acquire must be paid a certain amount due to a requirement in that player’s contract then
the team must make sure they can legally afford to pay the player. Another step in the
trade process is that the teams involved in a trade process receive the medical records of
the players being considered for trade. The teams involved in the trade process consider
this information to make sure the players under consideration have no medical problems
that would hinder their abilities to play basketball. Team doctors are also allowed to look
at the players’ past medical test results as part of this consideration (Zarren).

A third step in this trade process is the teams considering a trade must provide the
opposite team in the trade deal with insurance policies the current team might have with a
player’s salary. This information concerns a team’s financial department because if a
team chooses to trade for a particular player, even after seeing an insurance policy on a
player’s salary, that team must be prepared to potentially pay extra costs in order to cover that individual’s expenses outlined in the insurance policy (Zarren). This information is closely linked to the information addressed in chapter four concerning a player’s salary.

Trades affect an NBA player’s job, but those trades do not completely compromise that player’s financial security, further proving that the player as an individual is valued within the realm of professional basketball in the United States.

The fourth step of completing a trade deal also considers a player’s existing contract. This step deals with end-of-the-year bonuses and determining which team will pay which portion of the bonus. Some players have contracts that ensure they will receive a bonus at the end of the basketball season. The two teams involved in the trade of a particular player must decide how they want to pay a player’s bonus. This is especially necessary when a player is traded in the middle of the season or closer to the trade deadline because the team that acquired the player might not want to pay the majority of the bonus since the player was only on that particular team for less time during the regular season than he was on the other team.

The fifth step, like the two previously mentioned steps deal with regulations in a player’s contract. This step can be divided into two parts. The first part deals with whether or not a player has a contractual right to decline a trade. If this is the case, no team involved in the trade can offer the player a reward for accepting the trade. The choice to be traded lies in the player’s hands. The second part of this step concerns the salary cap and how it relates to a player’s trade bonus. When a team is acquiring a new player in the NBA, they most often give that player a trade bonus. If the trade bonus offered to the player would cause that player’s salary to exceed the acquiring team’s
salary cap, a player must agree to change the amount of the trade bonus (Zarren). These negotiations further prove that the NBA, unlike the CBA, places value on the player and the player’s rights when making team decisions.

The sixth step does not necessarily have to do with the particular players being traded, but, instead, deals with the benefits the teams involved in the trade will receive from one another. This step is closely related to the NBA Draft as teams can choose to offer their selection slot in the draft to another team in a trade deal in order to add an extra incentive to a trade. The previously mentioned steps involve only the two teams working on a trade, but this step could involve a third team if one of the teams involved has a pending draft slot trade with another team. Once the negotiations between that team and the third team are completed, the two teams involved in the trade can finalize their time slot trade (Zarren). The use of draft picks as an incentive for trade can make a deal mutually beneficial if one team feels as though the player they are acquiring from the other team is not as talented or does not meet the team’s needs as does the player who will be traded to the other team.

The seventh step of a trade deal is either an extend-and-trade deal or a sign-and-trade deal. Sign-and-trade deals are more common than the former. Sign-and-trade deals initiate the trade process for one team while the second team continues to negotiate with a potential player to be traded. These trade deals usually take place when the first team has the money within their salary cap restrictions to trade a player, but the second team might not have the money available to pay a player a particular amount. The second team will be given 48 hours to make this deal before the contract is void. Extend-and-trade deals are created when a team extends a player’s contract with another team before he is traded.
This trade is not as common as a sign-and-trade deal; however, there are guidelines for this type of trade written in the NBA’s Collective Bargaining Agreement (Zarren).

The eighth step in a trade is the phone call each team makes to the player they will be receiving from the trade to formally announce the deal to the player. The ninth step in the trade finalizes the deal as the players report to their new teams. This step also states that, in order for a trade to be finalized, players must receive physicals after reporting to their new teams. Sometimes, teams might agree to not require these newly acquired players to have a physical. Whatever the case, teams must finalize their decisions of whether or not they will complete the trade if their new player does not pass a physical (Zarren). This decision can vary with each trade, but is a thought to consider before finishing a trade deal.

Trading players amongst teams in the NBA is a lengthy ordeal and relies on many participants. Legal counsel is often sought as teams and players negotiate a myriad of factors involved in a trade deal. Although this process can require a great deal of negotiation and paper work from both teams involved, this process allows players to have a say in their roles in the NBA as well as provide teams with another means of acquiring players besides the NBA Draft.

While the information listed above explains how the trade process is conducted in the NBA between two teams, players can also join a team as a free agent. Free agents have more flexibility, but also have less job security as they are not bound by a contract (CBA 273). A free agent’s amount of flexibility depends on whether or not that player is considered an unrestricted or restricted free agent (nba.com). Free agents’ salaries must fit within a team’s salary cap like players’ salaries must do who are not free agents. Once
a player becomes a free agent he is encouraged to remain with one team for an extended period of time and is given financial incentives for doing so (“Free Agency FAQ’s”).

Unlike the NBA, the CBAL discourages player transfers (Huang and Hong 1039). The Chinese government first allowed player transfers in 1993. Players could transfer for a fee to be paid by the player’s new team to the player’s former team. There was no amount for the fee, so the amount was to be determined by the teams involved based on the player’s skill level and the amount of training the player had within that particular period of time. These rules were set forth in the NSC’s official document, “The Suggestions of the NSC about Deepening the Reform of Sport” (Tan and Bairner 410).

The transformation in the Chinese government’s attitude toward player trades can be seen through a timeline. In 1996, the year the Western club system was introduced in China, the Chinese government encouraged player transfers by setting recommended prices for player transfers. The price was later raised in 2003, and in 2005, minimum and maximum limits were placed on player transfers. These amounts were in place until the 2007-2008 season, but the amounts steadily increased (Tan and Bairner 410). Player transfers in the CBAL are closely related to issues relating to commercialism (chapter seven). The relation comes from the fact that Chinese players who are transferred to foreign teams participate in commercial opportunities abroad.

The CBAL limits the number of trades that take place through various restrictions. In theory, players in the CBAL have mobility to move amongst teams if they follow the outlined manner. Players in the CBAL are signed to a specific team. Once the player’s contract lapses, his team can sign him to another team for a specific amount of time. When that time ends the player qualifies to be a free agent. In reality, players are rarely
traded between teams because players fall under the authority of a specific team and the
authority of a local sport administration. This means that if a player were to become a
free agent he would have to be released by both his specific team and local sports
administration before signing a contract with a new team (Huang and Hong 1039-1040).
This regulation further solidifies the notion that the CBA cannot completely follow the
NBA for a business model so long as the government has a hand in the CBAL.

As was mentioned earlier, the CBAL does have a form of transfers that takes
place through its draft system. Teams were required to release a specific number of
“surplus players” who could be traded to other teams temporarily. The CBAL’s draft
system consisted of giving teams with the worst record the first picks at these players
(Tan and Bairner 414). The goal of releasing these players for transfer was to allow poor
performing teams the opportunity to win more games by acquiring skilled athletes. The
CBAL’s policy for this type of temporary transfer included a quota for the number of
“key” athletes, predominant athletes on a particular team, these clubs were required to
include in these transfers. A new CBAL policy attempted to increase the number of “key”
players included in these trades, but essentially increased the number of players included
overall; therefore, this draft system was not as successful as the NBA system as it simply
rearranged players, not assisted under-performing teams by giving them the opportunity
to receive skilled athletes (Houlihan, Tan, and Green 30-31); however, it should not go
unnoticed that despite the policy’s failure, the CBAL attempted to adapt an NBA style
draft system.

The CBA also imposed a transfer tax for trades that took place between CBAL
teams and were imposed on players transferring to foreign leagues. The tax was first
established when the Western club system was introduced to the CBA in 1996. These regulations also give the teams and local sports administrations more power than that given to the players. In the NBA a player can make a choice to become a free agent if he is not selected in the draft, or, once a free agent, he can negotiate a contract with another team. As was mentioned earlier, if the player is an unrestricted free agent he can make the decision to leave his current team without that team having an opportunity to match his offer from the new team. Chinese professional basketball players are not granted this freedom as they are bound to the decisions of their current teams and local administrations to release them before signing with a new team and local administration.

Although both the NBA and CBAL have similar forms of player acquisitions by name including a draft, free agents, and trades, in reality the NBA and CBAL are vastly different in the manner in which they execute these forms of acquisition. These differences are due to the fact that the NBA is acting as its own entity while the CBAL must act in accordance with the government administration involved in the CBA’s operation.

**Player Transitions between the CBA and NBA**

NBA players have found the CBAL to be a comparable league to the NBA in terms of pay. The CBAL pays the closest to the amount players might receive in the NBA. There is currently no salary cap in the CBAL, a major difference from the NBA which, as will be explained in the following chapter, does have a salary cap for athletes. Players also find the CBAL to be an appealing option compared to other national leagues (besides the NBA) if they hope to return to the NBA because the CBAL’s regular season schedule consists of an average of three games a week. This is more closely related to the NBA’s
schedule than any other foreign basketball organization’s schedule. Playing in a league closely structured to the NBA in this regard would allow players to train for the demands of the NBA. Not only does the CBAL have a similar number of games each week, but the season is usually shorter than the NBA season, allowing players to return to America in time to join, or rejoin, the NBA for the upcoming season (Zwerling).

Many players hoping to play professional basketball look to the CBA after looking to the NBA for many reasons. Often these reasons is financial as players want to have a greater salary than the amount they are earning in the NBA, or they hope to start earning a higher salary in order to provide for their families in the U.S. Emmanuel Mudiay is a perfect example of this decision making. After NBA regulations had changed regarding players’ Draft eligibility immediately after high school, Mudiay left the U.S. after graduating high school to play in the CBAL after receiving a $1.2 million contract with the Guangdong Southern Tigers. Playing in the CBAL allowed him to make more money to send home to his family while also curtailing the NBA’s restrictions. Mudiay returned to the U.S. and participated in the Draft after one season in the CBAL. He now plays for the Denver nuggets (Wolfe).

CBAL games are also broadcasted on CCTV-5 which airs basketball games to 900 million viewers. This wide audience is attractive to Western basketball players as it provides them with a great deal of exposure to international sports agents. This audience might allow players to be picked up by international agents, but it also gives them the opportunity to promote their personal businesses such as Stephon Marbury who sees the Chinese market as an opportunity for him to promote his brand, Starbury (Zwerling).
While some players find the CBAL an attractive alternative, they find the CBAL to fall short of the NBA when it comes to challenging players. Former NBA All-star Gilbert Arenas explained in an article that he wanted to be challenged while playing the game, but competing in China would not provide him with the competition he wanted (Wolfe). Although Arenas’s reasoning for leaving the CBAL is not reflective of the CBAL as a league, it does help to shed light on the reality that players, while they might find the CBAL to be a respectable alternative to the NBA, does not compare to the caliber prestige and competition the NBA provides; however, despite players like Arenas who found the CBAL unable to meet his demands as a player, the CBAL remains one of the most alluring choices when making major career decisions for professional basketball players. This is due to the fact that the salaries (for Westerners) are comparable to those they might receive in the NBA, the season demands are similar to those in the NBA, and the CBAL’s season is shorter than the seasons in other professional basketball leagues. The CBAL acts as a beacon of hope for players who have been cut from their teams or are looking for a new market to which they can be exposed.

Conversely, Chinese nationals see the NBA as an opportunity to increase their basketball fame. Yi Jianlian came to the U.S. in 2007 after playing in the CBAL. He was drafted by the Milwaukee Bucks and played for a handful of teams in the U.S. before returning to China after a considerably unsuccessful career in the NBA, especially when compared to Yao Ming who had already made a name for himself in the NBA (“Player Profile”). Yi returned to China to play in the CBAL where he has won numerous MVP awards, made appearances in eight All-Star games, and has helped lead his team to the CBA Finals (Conway). Yao, on the other hand, had a highly successful career in the NBA.
He retired from the NBA and professional basketball altogether after recovering from a series of injuries. He now resides in Shanghai and owns the Shanghai Sharks, a CBAL team (Lee). His decision to return to China says little about his opinion of the NBA as an organization but says more about a sequence of events in his personal life.

This exchange of NBA players into the CBAL and vice versa is interesting as it highlights similarities and differences between the organizations; however, the personal accounts of players’ reasoning to play in either the NBA or CBAL reflect little of their opinions of the organizations themselves but instead show how both the CBA and NBA offer different advantages for players’ personal needs. Although, it seems to stand that while these athletes have little to say about whether or not they like one of these leagues more than the other, the system of player acquisitions reflects government influence in China that is not present in NBA operations. The NBA trades and drafts players based on the outline set forth in the Collective Bargaining Agreement, a legal document created without government influence. The CBAL, on the other hand, must adhere to the Chinese government’s demands and regulations regarding business and its specific interest in the CBA. This vital difference between the two associations further asserts the idea that the CBA is a government bureaucracy, used as a tool for government influence, whereas the NBA is a corporation.
Chapter Six: Players’ and Coaches’ Salaries

A vital aspect of sports management is salaries. Players and coaches conduct the core of professional basketball which is the games themselves. The NBA and the CBA take different approaches to player and coaches’ salaries. As was mentioned earlier, many aspects of sports management are interconnected. Salaries are affected by the presence of unions as well as player transfer systems. (Unions will be addressed in chapter seven, and player transfer systems are addressed as a part of player acquisitions in chapter five.) Although salaries are connected with these other aspects, they play a vital role in sports management and will, therefore, be discussed in detail in this chapter.

Before looking at the differences in the way salaries are determined in the NBA and the CBA, it is important to see the amount players receive in order to understand how these regulations are put into place. The range in annual salaries for every listed NBA player for the 2015-2016 season ranges from $30,888 to $25 million (“ESPN Player Salaries- 2015-2016”); however, the NBA’s Collective Bargaining Agreement guarantees that each NBA player cannot receive a salary lower than a particular amount (CBA 25-26). This amount is determined through an equation that considers the number of days in the regular season as well as the number of days players are covered in the “Rest of Season Contract” (CBA 29). The list of NBA salaries included all 421 players registered with the NBA including NBA D-League players. CBAL player salaries are not highly publicized, but an article written in January 2015 by sports.sina.com in China and cited in an article also published in January 2015 by BasketballBuddha.com gives the salary for the top ten CBAL players in China in that year. The player with the highest salary earns $1,607,717 a year and the player with the tenth highest salary earns $369,774 a year.
(Humphreys and Watanabe 16) (“Highest paid Chinese players in the CBA”). These salaries in and of themselves offer a stark contrast to one another, and the following outlines for determining a player’s salary offer insight into the gap in players’ salaries.

Players in the NBA have a two-part salary. This split is a result of the Collective Bargaining Agreement which gives players a fixed minimum rate of income based on the NBA league’s income. The second part of a player’s salary comes from the agreement a player reaches with his club’s management team. While this second part of a player’s salary is determined by the player and the player’s club, the NBA has a maximum salary limit in place in order to create equality between cost control and teams (Huang and Hong 1039). This salary limit does not make the salaries equal amongst all players in the NBA; however, this salary limit is applied in general to a team, requiring the team not to exceed a certain amount that can be divided however the club sees fit amongst its players. This limit is also used to ensure teams do not continually sign free-agents. A team can only sign a free-agent if the team can afford to pay the player without exceeding its salary limit (Huang and Hong 1043). This flexibility in the NBA gives players a certain amount of bargaining power.

The way the CBAL pays its players differs from the manner in which the NBA pays its players. The most dramatic difference is that there are no labor contracts between clubs and the players. The amount players are paid also differs for each club (Huang and Hong 1040). In one regard, the CBAL seems more free and flexible in that is does not have a set procedure for salary determination nor does it have a collective salary for players (Huang and Hong 1040). The problem with this flexibility and freedom is that it mostly benefits the association, not the players therein. There are no players’ unions for
the CBAL; therefore, players have no legal protection to argue for certain salary amounts (discussed further in chapter seven). This lack of legal protection further reiterates the idea that players have little leverage in Chinese basketball, unlike the NBA where players have a certain amount of power to negotiate their earnings (Huang and Hong 1040).

Coaches’ salaries are another major contention in professional basketball salary earnings. NBA teams have a number of coaches including assistant coaches and a head coach. For this research I am focused primarily on the amount head coaches earn each year. As was mentioned earlier, the highest paid NBA player receives an astronomical amount each year. Coaches, on the other hand, do not receive such high salaries. Coaches sign contracts with teams like players do. Their contracts usually list a specific amount of income to be divided by a certain number of years. In an unverified collection of sources, one website lists Gregg Popovich, the San Antonio Spurs head coach, as the highest paid coach in the NBA (although a few coaches’ salaries were undisclosed) with an annual salary of $11 million (“NBA Head Coach Contracts”). This amount is significantly smaller than the annual salary received by the highest paid player in the NBA, but this process proves that each actor in professional basketball plays an integral role.

Unlike NBA coaches, CBAL coaches do not have legal representation in the form of a union through which to negotiate their salaries (as will be discussed in chapter seven). It can be assumed that this lack of representation makes it difficult for CBAL players and coaches to negotiate a salary amount. This is due largely to the fact that the CBAL is a bureaucracy, operated under government control, whereas the NBA operates as a company independent from government control.
Players’ and coaches’ unions are a unique component to sports management that account for more differences between the NBA and CBA. These unions serve a number of purposes. The main goal of these unions is to give players legal protection in regards to their salaries. (This was briefly mentioned in chapter six.) The National Basketball Players Association (NBPA) serves as the legal representative for NBA players. The NBPA was created in 1954 and represents players in more aspects than salary determination. This union also protects all aspects of the players’ employment by negotiating the terms of the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA); negotiates and monitors players’ insurance policies; educates, certifies, and regulates players’ agents; promotes positive images of NBA players; and handles matters relating to players’ ownership under their particular organization. The NBPA also helps players extend their impact beyond the court by helping with community and charity organizations (National Basketball Players Association).

Some specific ways the NBPA carries out its duties is by assisting players in appealing suspensions and fines, filing grievances, protecting medical benefits, assisting contract negotiations, receiving salaries, and settling disputes between players and their agents, providing legal advice for disputes, and providing legal representation for disputes (National Basketball Players Association). This association proves that there is much emphasis on players in regards to the NBA’s operation. The NBPA states that it is committed to helping players whenever the association sees fit when they say, “Available to address player concerns seven days a week, 365 days a year, the NBPA is accessible to aggressively protect players’ rights and interests,” (National Basketball Players Association).
Association). The NBPA is not affiliated with the NBA; however, the NBPA deals directly with the NBA when settling some of these players’ issues (Xinhua).

Coaches are also a key component to sports management in the NBA and are reflected as such with representation under the National Basketball Coaches Association (NBCA). This association was created by former NBA player and coach Tommy Heinsohn in 1976. The NBCA is comprised of NBA assistant coaches, NBA head coaches, and former NBA coaches. This association represents NBA coaches by creating opportunities for coaches in international basketball and international coaching clinics; creating opportunities in publishing, radio, television, and the internet; keeping contact with and supporting coaches as they move between coaching jobs; taking advantage of technologies that are used for basketball; and helping to acquire maximum salary opportunities, various marketing opportunities, and insurance and disability benefits. The NBCA also assists coaches by serving as a go-between for association members and the NBA, promoting the job of being an NBA coach, serving as an outlet to improve the coaching profession in the NBA, and by holding meetings to help coaches share their ideas about basketball as well as exchange ideas about coaching. The NBCA, like the NBPA, is not affiliated with the NBA but works closely with the NBA in particular matters pertaining to the coaches (“About the NBA Coaches Union”).

The CBA is much different from the NBA in this regard. There is currently no players’ union in China. Huang and Hong explain why players in the CBA have little legal protection when they write, “Since the players are the lowest actors in the power hierarchy of Chinese basketball, their authority is weak and with little legal protection,” (Huang and Hong 1040). Li Yuanwei, the former director of the CBMC, proposed a form
of support for CBAL players as part of the NSP (Huang and Hong 1036, 1040); however, this support was not the same as the legal protection offered by the NBPA nor was this proposal ever implemented. The proposal included creating a Chinese Basketball Development League as part of the CBAL, creating a free agency training camp, creating a salary determination system, initiating player mobility and draft systems, and drafting normative player contracts for clubs (Huang and Hong 1040).

Although there is currently no union for CBAL players, Chinese news reports have indicated that the CBAL is planning on creating a union that is part of the CBAL to provide legal protection for its players. This is different from the NBPA which is not affiliated with the NBA. The CBA’s player union will be comprised of a player representative from twenty CBAL teams, and each player representative will hire an attorney for legal advice. This news article also questions whether this union will effectively be able to represent and protect its players (Xinhua). There is currently no date set for the union to be established; however, an attempt to represent the CBAL players shows a transition for the CBAL to move from a stance of giving its players a limited voice in their transactions with the league to giving them a greater stance from which they can be heard. There is currently no coaches union in the CBAL or any plan to develop a coaches union. This further reiterates the idea that the coaches are not the main focus of the CBAL, and therefore are not given special representation under the umbrella of a union.

Seeing as these unions are not part of the NBA, players and coaches have a more powerful voice in these negotiations because if the NBA refuses to consider the salary demands, the NBA runs the risk of these unions taking legal action against the NBA.
Since the CBA is not run as its own company but is instead closely monitored and in particular cases is closely operated by the government, its players and coaches have less flexibility and freedom to seek a third party for legal counsel. This situation as a whole exemplifies how the CBA is run like a bureaucracy.
Conclusion

Professional basketball in China is shaped by a complex history as well as by cultural and economic influences. This influence comes in part from the NBA. As the Chinese government sought to develop Chinese basketball players as well as Chinese basketball leagues, the CBAL began to morph into an entity similar to the NBA. This transition was intentional as Chinese leaders spoke of the potential the NBA business model held for developing basketball programs.

The NBA’s influence on the CBA can be seen by examining the history of the CBA and six specific elements of sports management. There are many similarities between these two organizations in commercialization, scheduling, training, player acquisitions, salaries, and union representation; however, upon closer examination, there are a number of differences in these organizations that are attributable to the role of the government in operating these programs.

Although the CBA began following a business model the NBA set forth, the CBA has not developed into a program identical to the NBA. Government administrations oversee the CBA, preventing it from operating as a corporation like the NBA. The organizational structure of both the CBA and NBA serve as the backbone to their administration therefore altering the way these programs manage their leagues. This government influence in China provides CBAL teams with funding, affects regular and post season scheduling, limits the legal representation players and coaches receive, alters the CBAL training system from the NBA system, and reduces the amount of flexibility players and teams have in player acquisitions.

The question remains, however, if the CBA’s bureaucratic system has benefitted Chinese basketball. The purpose of reforming China’s basketball programs was to make
China’s national teams more competitive on the world stage. These teams became less competitive at national competitions, and China’s men’s national team failed to qualify for the FIBA World Championship in the 1990’s meetings. Not only did the national team not qualify for the FIBA World Championship, but the Olympic team also failed to receive a medal in the 2004 Olympics. Since the reforms to the Chinese basketball programs, China’s national teams qualified for the FIBA World Championship in three consecutive meetings (2002, 2006, and 2010) but failed to qualify for the 2014 World Championship, and the Olympic team failed to win a medal in the 2008 and 2012 Olympic Games. Tables A and B list China’s rankings in the FIBA Asia Games before and after the creation of the NSP in 2004. Table A begins with China’s first appearance in the FIBA Asia Games in 1975.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>FIBA Asia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>FIBA Asia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table B

Tables C and D list China’s rankings in the FIBA World Championship before and after 2004. I have inserted a dash for the years the Chinese national team did not qualify for the games. Table C begins with 1974, China’s first year to participate in the FIBA World Championship.
Lastly, Tables E and F list China’s rankings in the Olympic basketball competitions. Table E begins with 1984, the first year the Chinese basketball team competed in the Olympics as the People’s Republic of China.

As these tables show, policy reforms beginning in 2004 did little to improve the Chinese national teams’ performances. To most observers, these games do not reflect China as a nation; however, after studying the changes made in the Chinese basketball administration to improve the national teams, these efforts seem unsuccessful as they have not dramatically increased the presence of China’s national teams on the world stage. Taking this argument a step further, if the Chinese government has not increased
the success of China’s national basketball teams, it has failed to improve the image of the Chinese government through this sport.

China’s failure to improve its national teams by reforming its basketball administration leaves another looming question: what caused these teams to be unsuccessful in such competitions? This discrepancy in sports management and national team performance can be attributed to a number of factors; however, one of the most likely reasons is the CBA system’s inconsistency. In an ideal situation, China’s national teams would reflect the CBA’s reforms to the country’s basketball leagues. Throughout this thesis, I have outlined six aspects of sports management and the Chinese government’s attempts to match the NBA’s business model in order to improve China’s national image through sport. The changes in China’s sports management system, however, have been inconsistent. The CBA has benefitted from these changes, albeit through international exposure and thus increased revenues as well as an increased role in globalization, but the national teams’ performances show little change. The Chinese government created the NSP only to abandon the program five years later. CBAL players and coaches never had unions, but there are now talks of establishing a players’ union. Team ownership has also been granted to individuals; however, this ownership shifts hands far more often than NBA team ownership. Although there is a need for reform in Chinese basketball administration if the government wants to see China’s national teams improve, it can be argued that these changes must be made in a consistent fashion. The CBAL is constantly changing, but making changes in an inconsistent fashion can lead to confusion and a lack of time to adapt to any one of these reforms. If the government hopes to see the Chinese national teams win and, in turn, improve China’s national image,
the Chinese government should give its players, coaches, and owners time to adjust to China’s new approaches to sports management. Consistency will give athletes the opportunity to play basketball and improve their game without struggling to stay adept on the CBA’s operations.

Aside from competition results, professional athletes who have played in the CBAL and NBA have offered valuable insight on the CBA’s operations compared to the NBA’s operations. As was mentioned in chapter six, Western athletes have moved to China to play in the CBAL as an alternative choice to a completed or underwhelming career in the NBA. Whether or not these players find the CBAL to be a more favorable league or a league that will simply accept them remains uncertain, but as long as the CBAL is receiving high profile and experienced players, their opinions of the CBAL seem unnecessary. The same can be said of Chinese players leaving the CBAL to play in the NBA. These players offer little to no reflection of the organizations themselves, but their opinions on the NBA may not be questioned so long as the NBA continues to acquire talented players.

Ultimately, the information provided in this thesis reveals a more in-depth study of the two organizations. The similarities and differences prevalent in the histories of these organizations as well as the aspects of sports management through commercialization, regular and post-season scheduling, training, player acquisitions, player and coach salaries, and player and coach unions suggest that the Chinese government is heavily involved in the operation of the CBA. This organization is structured to fall under government authority, but the desire to improve the Chinese government’s image by improving its national teams has increased the amount of
government interaction with the CBA. The NBA on the other hand operates independently from the U.S. government. This stark contrast argues that while the NBA is managed as a corporation, the CBA is managed as a government bureaucracy, serving the demands of the CBMC and GAS and being used for the purposes of strengthening the Chinese government.
Bibliography

Bedard, Nick. “Chinese 18-year-old Zhou Qi signs Nike shoe contract.”


Wagg, Stephen and David L. Andrews. _East Plays West: Sport and the Cold War._


Wolfe, J. Francis. "Top 15 Elite NBAers Who Have Taken Their Talents to China."


Xinhua News Agency. “China’s basketball league to set up players’ association.”


Zwerling, Jared. "How China Became Hot Spot for NBAers." _Bleacherreport.com._