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IMPROVING BASKETBALL LEVEL IN THE UNITED KINGDOM TO PRODUCE A TEAM FOR EUROLEAGUE COMPETITION

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SUMMARY

Basketball in the United Kingdom has been growing for the past couple decades. Although the growth and improvements are barely visible for the people outside the country, and for the ones that are currently living in this country. This research paper dives deep into the current basketball market in the United Kingdom and explores its weaknesses, strengths, and possible opportunities on how to improve it and have a team from the United Kingdom competing in Turkish Airlines Euroelague.

Considering the lack of research and data on basketball in the United Kingdom, this research paper aims to fill this knowledge gap and provide solutions and suggestions for Basketball England organization. To reach the aim of the paper, the author first analyzes the existing data and academic literature considering the topic of British basketball and its current state. Consequently, qualitative, and quantitative research methods were used to gather information and provide possible solutions.

The results of this paper show how fragile the current basketball market in the United Kingdom is. Suggestions on how to improve the basketball market and the basketball level are offered in this paper, focusing on the long-term growth and sustainability.

Keywords: United Kingdom; basketball; grassroots sport; Euroleague; sustainability; finance; infrastructure

INTRODUCTION

Relevance and topicality. To the person who hasn't been around this sport a lot, basketball might seem like a system of different movements, confusing strategies, and difficult rules. To the person who has been exposed to basketball consistently, however, basketball is nothing less than an art or poetry in motion. From different strategies and plannings, to the executions of these plans, from pre-season workouts to post-season recoveries, basketball exudes beauty with every second of its existence. The game of basketball helped to fuel sport cultures within different countries across the European continent for decades. And to this day, basketball is known to be one of the top sports in "the old world" due to its ability to entertain in the arenas across the world, and in the comfort of your own home.

As the basketball culture continued to grow in Europe, the sport industry continued to adapt to the market, which helped to build a business side of basketball to enhance and profit from the sport itself. Euroleague, the top basketball league in Europe took a great advantage of this opportunity and created a top-quality basketball league in Europe that to this day is the second-best league in the world. However, as revenues and the quality of the game continuous to grow, Euroleague struggles to find new teams in different countries which stops them from entering new markets and exploring new opportunities. With the current market growing steadily, those in charge of the game's expansion must come up with the new ways how to find different revenue channels. While the primary focus for Euroleague basketball is to grow their consumer base in Germany and France, I believe there is undeniable market potential for this league in United Kingdom. In order for this to happen, however, actions must be taken to allow the people of Great Britain to see basketball as art and poetry in motion, rather than just a game that is the most popular in America.

Research problem addressed in this paper is posed by the following question: Why basketball quality is so low in the United Kingdom and what would it take to improve its level and eventually have a team from United Kingdom competing in Euroleague competition?

The paper investigates what are the issues surrounding basketball in the United Kingdom and that they do not have a team that would be capable of competing in the highest competition in Europe.

The object of the paper is current basketball level in the United Kingdom.

The aim of the paper is to identify current issues in British basketball and find out why it hasn't produced a sustainable competitor in the Turkish Airlines Euroleague.

To reach the aim of the paper the following **objectives** were set:

1. Analyse existing data and academic papers on the topic of basketball in the United Kingdom, to point out the fact that today such data is very limited and not addressed enough.
2. To collect data and insights from current basketball players competing in United Kingdom and staff members from London Lions and AS Monaco clubs.
3. Provide comprehensive overview of the current basketball market in the United Kingdom and compare the existing data with the data collected from respondents in the survey and interviews.
4. Develop solutions and ideas on how to improve the overall basketball market in the United Kingdom

The paper is **structured** in 3 main parts.

The first part of the thesis includes existing literature review and data analysis of the basketball market in the United Kingdom and its concerns. This overview provides an understanding of the current basketball market in the United Kingdom and the issues and problems surrounding it. Part one also compares different data, understandings, and infrastructures of basketball around the world.

The second part introduces the field analysis of this research paper, focusing on the past and current basketball market in the United Kingdom. Particular focus is on the infrastructure of basketball and how can it be improved. A comparison to what is done and how it has been managed in different countries is also carried out, so that it is possible to recognize the differences and find the errors in the managerial aspect of the selected sport.

In **the third part** new data, insights and possible solutions are offered to the governing body of basketball in the United Kingdom, Basketball England, in order to improve the basketball quality, ad in order to build a more sustainable basketball organisation.

The **Research methods** utilized in this paper is a two-part mixed methods model. A combination of quantitative (Online Survey) and qualitative (Personalised interviews) to maximize the data gathered and fulfil the objectives of the research paper. The integration of both methods allowed to gather better information and carry out better investigation of the research problem, which helped in providing analytical tools that can be applied to different levels of selected sport.

Information sources. The study will use verified internet sources that will analyze secondary data as well as published journal articles that have relevant information to the topic of study.

I. EUROPE'S INTEREST IN BASKETBALL

1.1 Euroleague Competition

Researches have suggested that a game, similar to basketball was played in the Central America by tribes such as Aztek and/or Inca as early as 800-1500BC, where they attached a basket to a bar and were throwing balls in it. (Oğuz & Oğuz, 2017) However, officially basketball was invented in 1891 in the United States of America, when college professor James Naismith created this game for his students so they would be inside the hall during cold winter days, rather than being outside. Soon enough, after the first official basketball game in December of the same year, basketball started becoming more popular in the US and then eventually across the world. (Carlson, 2011) Basketball is a team sport that includes a lot of different rules and variations. Usually, basketball game is played in a team, where one team is competing against another, and you can help improve your team by crafting your own, individual skills. Basketball is one of the kind sports, that requires individuals to be unselfish and team oriented. With different drills, tactics, mechanics and understandings, basketball has become of the most interesting and exciting sports to watch. (Wissel, 2011)

With basketball being one of the most popular sports in the world, it is important to pay a close attention to the current markets and current interests in Euroleague by the countries that are participating in the competition.

Lithuania has been a basketball country ever since Frank Lubin's last second shot to win the European championship in 1939. Since then, basketball has become a big part of Lithuania's nationalism. (Carlson, 2011) It is only right that Zalgiris Kaunas is the leading basketball team in Euroleague in total attendance since 2016. Within 6 years, almost one million fans (938.301) attended Zalgiris games. (Garuolis, 2022) Statistic, that is absolutely mind blowing, since Lithuania's official population is 2.64 million. (Population, 2022) Second team on this list is Israel's Maccabi Tel Aviv with 769,598 fans supporting their team in their home arena in the past 6 years. (Garuolis, 2022) With basketball being second biggest sport in Israel, the culture and history of it is very important to the development of basketball itself. Israel has been a country that talked widely about the globalization of this sport and adaptation of American basketball culture and still accepting and praising the foreign players that do come to Israel to lift their top basketball teams and help them perform top quality basketball. (Shor & Galily, 2012) Third team and very close to the second place is Cazoo Baskonia Vitoria-Gasteiz from Spain with 767,583 total fan attendance. (Garuolis, 2022) While football is a number one sport in Spain, basketball community and its history are very powerful and rich, that's why Spain will be having four teams in Euroleague this

2022-23 season: Cazoo Baskonia Vitoria-Gasteiz; Real Madrid; FC Barcelona; Valencia Basket. With these teams present Spain will certainly be at the top of the attendance list in comparison to other countries. Since Spain became champions of 2022 Eurobasket Championship, the "home viewership" number should be increasing as well. (Nes, 2022) Next team on the list is Panathinaikos Athens with 724, 585 fans in the last 6 years and not far below is another Greek team, Olympiacos Piraeus (574,476). (Garuolis, 2022) These two teams are known for their fans and their love for this game. Greece was one of the eight countries and founding members (Argentina; Czechoslovakia; Greece; Italy; Latvia; Portugal; Romania; Switzerland) of FIBA in the early 1932 and currently, their national basketball team is ranked among the most dominant teams worldwide. (History, 2020) Next, we have two Turkish giants: Fenerbahce Beko Istanbul (714,975) and Anadolu Efes Istanbul (579,600). (Garuolis, 2022) Basketball takes another number two spot in most popular sports in Turkey. With Turkish basketball history spreading back for almost 100 years, Turkish people are very much into and about basketball. Best example of that is Turkish fans being one of the wildest fans in Europe. (Oğuz & Oğuz, 2017) Crvena Zvezda and Partizan NIS are the top basketball teams in Serbia and names that are well known in the basketball world. Both of these teams attracted around the same number of spectators, more than 500,000 in the last 6 seasons. (Garuolis, 2022) In Serbia, basketball plays an important role and is one of the dominant sports in the country, which according to the Saša Jakovljevoć and Radivoj Mandić, Serbia is the country of basketball with a very bright future that includes a very positive and promising grassroot development. (Jakovljević & Mandić, 2021) Italian team Emporio Armani also attract similar number of attendance, around 500,000 as well even though basketball falls into the third place amongst the most popular sports. Another Italian team, Bologna will be joining the competition this year and is expected to attract around the same number of spectators as their rivals, Emporio Armani. (Garuolis, 2022) Germany and their one of the best basketball teams Munich Bayern attracted around 160,732 fans, what placed them at the bottom of the list, however, Germany's interest in basketball started growing not too long ago which means that basketball in Germany has an enormous potential. (Markovits & Rensmann, 2010) French market is also still developing and growing interest and with another French team (AS Monaco) added to the competition, the level of engagement from the fans and viewers will be growing with each season.

Despite its short history (22 years) Euroleague has made its name and is now well known to be the second strongest league in the world. 5 of the 10 biggest countries in Europe by population (France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Turkey) are participating in the competition with 12 teams which shows that Euroleague is tapping into the biggest markets in Europe in order to increase the interest in European basketball.

1.2 Euroleague Today

Today, in the Euroleague competition there are 18 teams from 9 different countries: Spain, France, Germany, Turkey, Lithuania, Italy, Serbia, Israel, and Greece. As stated by FIBA, all these countries fall into the top 20 of the most powerful basketball countries in Europe. (FIBA EuroBasket 2022 Power Rankings, 2022) While basketball is growing rapidly worldwide, most of the consumers of basketball in European countries choose American basketball league NBA rather than Euroleague or any other European league. However, despite the pandemic and how it affected the whole world, Euroleague's popularity has grown 22 percent overall in the countries which have at least one team participating in the competition. (Nelson, 2021)

Euroleague shares the same data about their rising popularity and goes much deeper into the details showing that the popularity of Euroleague basketball has risen by 60% in France, 47% in Israel, 44% in Germany and 36% in Italy, in the last 3 years. Also, their TV audience has grown as well in the past years and the increase from the 2018-2019 season to the 2022-21 season is a whopping 75% and the country with the biggest TV audience growth (+871%) is Germany. Another vital area in which Euroleague is steady improving as well is their social media accounts where their numbers have been increasing according to the data that was taken from 2020-21 season. Their followers, engagement, views, reach and impressions grew by 15, 70, 46, 29 and 18 percent accordingly. (News, 2021)

According to the World Atlas website, statistics show that most populated countries in Europe in 2020 were Russia, Germany, France, United Kingdom, and Italy. (Shvili, 2021) Which shows perfectly that Euroleague is doing a tremendous job by tapping into these markets and accessing new consumers. Current situation in the world has eliminated all the Russian teams from the competition and opened new opportunities for smaller teams such as A.S Monaco or Virtus Segafredo Bologna. Despite the fact that "smaller" teams were added to the tournament in comparison to Russian clubs, it is still projected that Euroleague will reach 100 million euros in turnover by 2023 according to the 2Playbook and their journalist Alvaro Carretero. (Carretero, 2022) Such revenues help Euroleague to stay the highest-paying league in Europe with average salaries for players varying between 500k and 800k euros per season and highest paid athletes earning up to 4 million euros per season. (Smith, 2021)

In abstract, Euroleague is the second-best basketball league in the world after the National Basketball Association (NBA). However, the opportunities for this league to grow and expand are everywhere and according to Jordi Bertomeu, now ex-CEO the plan for Euroleague is to expand to 20 teams and 16 long-licences in the near future. With the most obvious and logical expansion to

the United Kingdom, with London being the main target of hosting another “Euroleague level” basketball team. (Barkas, 2021)

1.3 Youth Basketball

Basketball is one of the top sports for the youth across European union with growing interest in the countries where basketball is not necessarily very popular. While some parents send their children to basketball practice to become the elite athletes and professionals, it is very important to have a good basketball development program not only for those who have “obvious” talent, but also for all children and adolescents. The talented ones usually stand out very quickly and have a spotlight throughout their careers, however the majority of children that participate in this sport usually pass under the radar of society, as most of the attention and recourses are focused on the exceptional talented ones. An increasing number of parents, coaches, and children themselves believe that participating in just one sport from the early age is more beneficial than attending multiple sports. (Silva, Figueiredo, Elferink-Gemser, & Malina, 2009) Those observations bring us to the point that it is vital to have a good development of youth programs.

While basketball came into Europe from Western culture it didn’t take a very long time for it to get modified for more European based needs. Regarding grassroots and raising talented basketball players, first modification emerged in 1990’s when Europe started focusing on long-term athlete development. With this modification in place, European basketball schools started focusing on children and adolescents, rather than on potential elite athletes. According to Robert M. Malina, early sport specialization is effective, but still has its own risks as the pressure and happiness of the children could vary a lot. However, those who attend just one sport from very early ages do have a higher possibility of success. (Malina, 2010)

The structure and the strategy for youth development programs are crucial for the countries that want to be continuously leaders in the basketball world and for the ones that want to be acknowledge as countries that support and participate in basketball. Very interesting and important research was conducted in the Journal of Sports Science, where the group of researchers were conducting data from multiple countries and their youth programs to find out, if early selection and then re-selection for the national teams influence and motivate younger generation to continue with their chosen sport. In basketball, the constant re-selection of players for their national teams are higher than 74% in the countries where basketball is very popular, and their national senior team is successful in comparison amongst other European countries. (Anton, Erik, Andreas, Ezequiel, & Alexandra, 2021) Researches such as this one provides us with the information that good structure and strategy for the youth development in basketball need to be very well thought through as right now the re-selection of the same players for the national teams might take the motivation and

dedication away from the other players that have never been selected to represent their countries. However, there are multiple countries in Europe where their youth programs for basketball are very well developed. Such countries include Lithuania, Greece, Serbia, Turkey, and Spain. Countries like Italy, France, Germany, and all ex-Yugoslavian countries have basketball on the verge of breakthrough to be extremely popular. Regarding the previous statement, Technavio Researchers conducted a study to find out why basketball is growing so rapidly in those countries and most importantly, if it will affect other countries as well. What they discovered is that basketball is the world's number one sport amongst the people aged 14-18, and that its global market value increased by 1.5 billion dollars ($13.12 billion to $14.62 billion) in just 5 years, from 2015 to 2020. They also discovered that global broadcasting of NBA basketball, celebrities at the arenas, scholarships at the collegian levels, and attractive salaries, are reasons why basketball's popularity is still growing, and it's projected to continue to grow. (Technavio, 2016) Another study conducted in the *Journal of Sport Psychology in Action* tried to discover what are the most important implications towards grassroots level sport to have it succeeding and growing. They found out that curriculum strategies and sustainability of the curriculum programs are vital to grassroots and development of sport. Through multiple partnerships with government organizations, private corporations, international federations, Olympic committees, educational institutions, and non-profit organizations they achieved flexibility, balance, and trust that is very important for grassroots. As mentioned in their research paper, to create a successful youth program that eventually built up to be a sustainable grassroots level program, you need to establish great communication and collaboration strategies, and have a total transparency. The study also provided theoretical information that 50% increase in coaches' positive approach led to overall improvement and more sustainable program. (Blom, et al., 2015)

To sum up, youth basketball development is the foundation on where communities are built. Across the world basketball brings people and communities together, by making individuals, especially younger generations, happier, confident, and healthier. It is crucial to continue harvesting this power of basketball, to make positive changes in the world.

1.4 Comparison with NBA

Most will agree that NBA and Euroleague are the best competitions of basketball in the world. While NBA is seeded strongly in the first place, Euroleague basketball is not far behind with every year growing competition level. Basketball in Europe has been adopting similar rules and structures to make it the game more interesting and viewable, therefore the European basketball looks a lot more like American basketball. 21st century has brough many changes in European game. The game has been changed to 4 periods that last 10 minutes, 24 second shot clock has been

added, 8 second rule to advance the ball pass half court been applied as well. These are the major similarities to the NBA, not including the globalization and commercialization of European basketball as well.

To many, NBA basketball is a lot more attractive due to its speed and entertainment level, however, by changing the shot clock from 30 seconds to 24 seconds, resulted in a greater number of possessions in European basketball, which drastically changed the speed of the game and entertainment level of it. (Mandić, Jakovijević, Erčulj, & Štrumbelj, 2019) Interestingly, another study done in University of Dubrovnik in Croatia found out that ever since new rules were implemented in the European basketball, Euroleague and NBA basketball games and mainly offense has become very similar to one another. For example, their research suggests that the time for controlling the ball, equal duration for the offensive plays and high usage of "set plays", man to man defence, and internal distribution for transition offenses are very similar in both leagues. However, these few similarities are not enough to bring Euroleague to the same "level" as NBA. American basketball is still being viewed as basketball that is more entertaining due to characteristics such as: more transition offenses; higher frequencies in possession changes; higher frequency of scoring and finishes; more "man to man" basketball; higher representation of "pick-and-pop" basketball. Meanwhile, in European basketball there is more set offenses, more zone defences, higher representation of textbook "pick-and-role" situations, and "man to man" back to the basket finishes. (Aleksandar Selmanović & Milanović, 2015)

Similarities between two strongest basketball leagues in the world are very substantial, however, the main differences are the pace of the game, NBA offense possessions are shorter than Euroleague's, and the difference in salaries and fan reachability, for example average attendance for the home games in Euroleague is between 8000 and 9000 fans, while NBA generates around 17 000 fans on average. (Mandić, Jakovijević, Erčulj, & Štrumbelj, 2019) Another similarity between Euroleague and NBA is their need and plans to expand into different countries, and one of these countries that is on the top of both of their lists, is United Kingdom.

United Kingdom has been on NBA's plans since 1993 when first official pre-season NBA game was played in London, where Orlando Magic faced Atlanta Hawks. Since the first game, it took NBA 14 years, to play another game in London. It happened in 2007 as a part of Europe Live Tour. Today, since 2012 NBA hosts New Year fixtures every year, with the exception during 2019-2021 due to global pandemic. NBA stated that since the first friendly game in London, their effort is to drive awareness of their brand in Europe and United Kingdom. More than 60% international players coming to the NBA are from Europe, which allows brand to tap into more local areas and countries, such as Lithuania, Slovenia, or Serbia. Currently, UK has only one British basketball player in the NBA, OG Anunoby. Which pushes NBA to make different strategic decisions on how

to raise awareness of their brand in the UK. NBA decided to first build relevance for their brand by providing brand experience, products, and content for the UK market. Their biggest success' have been their broadcasting deals, Half Court Challenge for social media influencers, and their Jr NBA programs. (Millington, 2015)

In the case of Euroleague, UK has been on their radar ever since London Towers basketball team was participating in the competition back in 2001. Main goal for Euroleague and their ex-chief executive Jordi Bertomeu were and are to grow beyond their core fan base and not just focus on Euroleague, but rather focus on the whole British Basketball League and help it develop and thrive. Initially they launched grassroots partnership with schools and local communities to target families and younger generation. (Joseph, 2012) By being in the UK market, Euroleague would be able to attract new commercial partners and sponsors. Euroleague successfully hosted 2013 Final Four in London, right after London Summer Olympics that took place in 2012, which was a very big eye opener for a lot of basketball fans, as there was an increase in members joining basketball clubs across the UK and all the members were 16 years old or under. (Southwark, 2013)

1.5 Basketball in The United Kingdom

FIBA (Fédération internationale de basketball) is the governing body of basketball that currently has 213 national federations as members. In the United Kingdom, national federation of basketball is called BE (Basketball England) and it was established in 1936. (England, 2022) By contrast to basketball's global interest, the sport has relatively low profile in the United Kingdom. The coverage and interest in basketball in the United Kingdom is very minimal and within academic literature about Great Britain's sport, basketball received nothing more than a few comments. Although, despite lack of interest from public and its low profile in England, basketball is still widely played. (Skinner, 2018)

According to Basketball England annual report 2020-2021 season, despite global pandemic, there were 1 million active participants of which 35% of them are females. There are nearly 15000 registered Basketball England members and more than 5000 National Basketball League players. (England, 2022) Compared to the 2018-2019 season, Basketball England improved in social media followers, it increased from 73,744 to 103,462, although total website page views decreased from 2,141,084 to 1,976,276. Growing interest in basketball across the country has been the reason for the BE to improve and get better, as one of their main goals for their upcoming seasons is to retain and grow participation. To accomplish this goal, they have set key objectives, such as supporting and sustaining basketball clubs and deliverers of the sport, identifying, and supporting the most vulnerable groups of society, and supporting people with disabilities or long-term health conditions. (England, 2022)

As it was mentioned previously, there is very limited data provided on basketball in the United Kingdom. A considerable volume of information was chosen from annual reports that are provided by Basketball England. From such reports it is well known that key public entities that are involved in UK's basketball are UK Sport and Sport England, while National Lottery is the main source of funding for basketball. Since 2006, Sport England as a governing body of BE has been running regular surveys on participation in basketball, as their main focus is to raise the awareness of this sport and grow participation. While these surveys are relatively small, local and doesn't always provide best accuracy, they are still widely used in the sporting industry by both sports bodies (BE; Sport England) and the media. Skinner's research on basketball in UK came across few major problems on why basketball is nowhere as popular as football, cricket, or rugby in England. Lack of public and commercial funding, media coverage, organisational structure, governance, and sometimes just bad luck are the main problems that English basketball faces today. (Skinner, 2018)

Another minor reason why basketball is not as popular as other sports in England is the lack of local players playing in the top British leagues, in the Euroleague, and NBA. While this might not be such a big problem today, it is important to recognise that for the past 40 years, the game of basketball has been globalized in Europe and in the United Kingdom, which means bringing foreign players to your teams and attracting audiences is very important to most basketball teams. To some, foreign players, usually American, are the reason why they are watching basketball, and to others, they are ruining possibilities to improve and become successful for the local players. However, it is worth to mention a rather funny fact, that in 4 seasons between 1982 and 1986, when basketball was nowhere close in England compared to where it is now, American players lead the league in all major categories (Points; Rebounds; Floor shots; Assists). All while there were only 120 American basketball players playing in the UK, compared to 408 English players. (Bale & Maguire, 1994)

One of the most important objectives in the annual report provided by Basketball England is to create a world class talent system which starts at the grassroots level. For the grassroots to develop and become successful in later years, Basketball England has joined and created camps and programs such as: Slam Jam program for children aged 7-11 years old; school aged programs Jr. NBA and Satellite Clubs, as well as 3x3 tournaments. To continue, for children and young adults, as well as adults, Basketball England has 3x3 tournaments, commonwealth games, disability basketball and walking basketball. Commonwealth games were mentioned in the annual report from 2020-2021 season and the focus for these games were to begin laying the foundation for the international profile of English basketball. Commonwealth games turned out to be a big success for Great Britain as their men's national 3x3 team won the gold medals, and their 3x3 women's national team won silver medals. According to the annual report, Great Britain in the FIBA standings went up from 68th place to 33rd in the world and their men's team moved up to 26th in

Europe and 41st in the world, while their women's team are seeded in the 19th in Europe and 29th in the world. (England, 2022) Great example on how to increase participation in basketball and eventually raise more talent was set by the International Basketball foundation Project in Rwanda. In the case study provided by Shema-Maboko Didier and Alexis Lyras, they evaluated the importance of this project. They found out that by creating a strategic action plan that covers three main areas – sport, social, and administrative, they managed to achieve great results. Their focus on society, and their health led them to creating a basketball programme that helps participants with their medical needs and problems. Families, and children with poor backgrounds were enrolled in the programme with financial subsidy from the government and gave them the opportunity to access medical treatments. With such programme, they are building a sustainable environment for everyone participating in basketball and their families, as well as raising more talent and increasing overall participation in the sport. (Didier & Lyras, 2018) Knowing that most people that participate in basketball are ethnic minorities and come from inner city communities, such programme as the one created by International Basketball Foundation in Rwanda, would be very beneficial and helpful for the sport itself and for the people in the United Kingdom.

Another key objective for the development of English basketball as reported is to enhance their infrastructure. Main aspect of that is coaching. The plan is to recruit and develop more and better basketball coaches so they can raise young players to be their best selves for the future. To develop skilful and eager coaches, basketball England is planning on hybrid program for the coaches where they would have to participate in online courses and face-to-face learning. Until now, basketball England is utilising their existing partnership with NBA to deliver online clinics and classes for coach wannabes. (Skinner, 2018) To add more on non-player and non-coaching development, basketball England is trying to put a lot of focus on officiating. They created online webinars and conferences to improve officials' work and enhance their performances. BE's strategy is to improve the whole infrastructure surrounding officiating, which includes online learning, face-to-face learning, and officiating games. (England, 2022) *Sport, Education, and Society* published a research paper in 2016 about the importance of mentors for the elite coaches. In their research paper they found out that it is crucial for the basketball coaches to have a mentor with proven experience and knowledge. They also discovered that formalised coaching schemes are not always working, and sometimes are just simply a tool to fulfil the political agendas. Also, such schemes, even though they provide coaches with basic knowledge, do get influenced by stakeholders who become contradictory agendas due to their formality and institutional goals, rather than personal player development. This study shows us that coach development programs are necessary, however, they should be based more on educational information that they value, and not the information or goals

that would bring more funding to specific institutions or stakeholders. (Sawiuk, Taylor, & Groom, 2018)

Project swish is a project that was invented by basketball England to spread the word of basketball around the Great Britain. #projectswish is a basketball campaign that provides free basketball nets for the outdoor basketball courts. Within last two years basketball England distributed close to 6000 basketball nets and aims to send out even more in the upcoming seasons. While the project has been around for only 4 years, the influence of it for the basketball community is huge. In addition, BE collaborated with artist Gareth Roberts to start improving outdoor basketball courts in the UK and continue to upgrade and create better communities throughout basketball. Such simple and rather small campaigns and programs are the reason that English basketball gets more recognition, and for the people that are involved in it, basketball England created volunteer awards, to celebrate and acknowledge them and what they do for the sport. BE also provides support for the clubs across the nation in areas such as governance, volunteer recruitment, funding opportunities, problem solving and so on. To show their appreciation and support for all the basketball clubs, BE delivers Club Matters support workshops with around 45 different basketball clubs in attendance. Their plan is to continue increase club support around development, including templates and information. (England, 2022)

1.6 Organisation, Finance, Media

Throughout the years, many sports in England received heavy attention from scholars, however basketball, almost none. *Sport and the British: A Modern History* was a seminal book published in 1989 by Richard Holt, which did not mention basketball as a sport at all. In 2018, almost 30 years later, basketball in the United Kingdom was being played by almost as many people as cricket and rugby, however, it still received little to no media coverage. Luckily, Joseph Maguire stands out as one of very few who researched English basketball throughout the years. He noticed that major “errors” were made in the 1970’s and 1980’s in British basketball, when most of the money received from the commercial sponsorship went to acquiring foreign players to improve strengths of their teams, rather than to structuring and improving the organization. In the end, such mistakes left most of the clubs financially exposed. Furthermore, following these decisions and actions, Joseph Maguire demonstrated that such events reduced opportunities for local players to develop, which has negative implications to the overall image and future of English basketball. Later, Maguire noticed that growing expansion of the NBA had a positive impact on British basketball. With NBA London games taking place, UK’s interest in basketball and general exposure of basketball started growing across the nation and helped British professional league BBL attract additional public interest. (Maguire, 1994)

Tony Collins, in his book called *Sport in Capitalist Society* suggested that basketball in England is very similar to soccer in the USA. His reasoning is very simple and obvious, before basketball in England, and soccer in USA could get seriously established, other sports like football, cricket, and rugby in England, or basketball, baseball, and American football in USA won mass interest from society, as well as media. For these reasons, basketball in UK and soccer in USA is still in the early stages of development compared to other major sports. (Collins, 2013)

Regardless of the fact, that some evidence show that first basketball game played in England was in 1892, British weren't interested in the game, because it was introduced to them as "girls' game" back in 1972, meanwhile soccer in US was generally played by middle class groups that most significantly consisted of women. Because of this fact, similar problem emerges to both countries, soccer in US and basketball in England both struggle to attract interest from entrepreneurs or major corporations willing to invest. Both sports struggle to reflect a strong belief that despite both markets being very crowded, basketball in England and soccer in US are very good and promising investments. (Markovits & Hellerman, Offside: Soccer and American Exceptionalism , 2001)

English basketball has been facing a lot of difficulties in making their top basketball leagues financially and economically sustainable. Such difficulties include franchises collapsing or relocating, owners having to face a difficult reality of years of loses before seeing returns, media coverage, and public interest. Arthur Marwick, a British historian discovered that 1979 was a pivotal year for British sport when it started shifting from public ownership to private ownership. This changed the economic climate of sport in England, commercialism became top priority for the clubs, which impacted the government's approach and grassroots participation. (Marwick, 2003) Cleo Schyvinck and Annick Willem conducted a research paper that covered the main marketing approaches of sports organisations in Europe. They concluded that the approach in Europe is far less developed than in the United States, which leaves United Kingdom's basketball market way underdeveloped. They conclude that bigger focus on customer related marketing is essential to start building a sustainable organisation. Interestingly, they discovered that European social engagement with basketball community is more altruistic than American one, which leaves European basketball clubs focusing less on their marketing outcomes. (Schyvinck & Willem, 2017)

Media plays a major part in basketball's development and globalisation. Basketball and media have a huge impact on each other, both positive and negative, however, the relationship between media and basketball has slightly changed, it gets harder to "earn" television money since the 2008 economic crisis and the growing power of social media and OTT (Over-the-top media). Increasing number of different OTT services as streaming channels, and the growing importance of social media services are impacting media's ability to generate numbers like it used to before. With such situations, TV broadcasters fail to generate revenues that would let them bid for the rights to

be broadcasters of the sport. (Rowe, 2004) NBA, however, made right decisions at the right time, since 1984 when David Stern was appointed as a commissioner of the league, their strategy changed and they marketed basketball as a commodity to the young audience with its values outside basketball, such as music (Rap; Hip-Hop) and fashion style (baggy clothes; jewellery; caps). With these values and influence, basketball has become a component of entertainment business in America. And since basketball in England is still in the early development stages and doesn't really have traditional roots, it doesn't have the same affects as it does in US. Since basketball in England doesn't have traditional roots, club owners had to make questionable decisions between investing money into professional foreign players and making the game more entertaining or building the roots and investing into the youth. With most owners focusing on the entertainment and profits, grassroots have become dependent on public funding and public facilities. (Cashmore, 2010) Unfortunately, lack of investments and interest in grassroots led to discontinuity and confusion for basketball providers in the UK, which later led to minimal or no coverage of the sport across British media.

As it was mentioned before, national governing body for basketball is Basketball England, which directly interfaces and reports to UK Sport and Sport England. The previous two provides finance and in return requires certain behaviours and goals to be met. Since 1940's, when government became directly involved in the nation's health choices, the key themes for the policies provided by the government were physical health of the nation, addressing and solving social problems of every community, and increasing national interest in sports. MaryJo Archambault and Yan Dominic Searcy also discovered that United Kingdom struggles with the overall overview of the sports in local universities. In their research paper, they stated, that better understanding of sports is very necessary in the universities as there are a lot of students who have lack of understanding of different types of sports, because there aren't enough events that would give them better knowledge of it. (Archambault & Searcy, 2018)

According to these three key factors mentioned above, biggest focus of the public must go to the grassroots and increasing its activity and participation. However, even though basketball could be a great financial investment in most countries, in UK it lacks government attention and public interest due to poor performances internationally. With the concern of UK's international image, Sports Council was established in 1972. And the priority of the council was to address the issue of a lack of decent and available facilities across the nation. Later, Sports Council's goal was to improve the international performances, which formed a new understanding that the provision of grants to the national governing bodies would be a huge help itself. First grant provided to Basketball England in 1972 was only £7,475, however, in 2020 according to Basketball England annual report, the grant provided was £1,740,000. (England, 2021) Even after the global pandemic

that started in 2019 and made a huge negative impact financially to the sprots world, Basketball England managed to secure two £150,000 grants from Sport England to help 110 basketball clubs in the nation to improve their physical, mental, and social wellbeing. (England, 2022) With such support and goals, Basketball England, as of May 18th, 2020, decided to grant each new club £2,000, and raised there ambition to invest £10m per year into community sport with major focus on grassroots. (England, 2020) Despite the fact that government grants were a big help, in the 2010 annual report provided by Basketball England, independent survey was conducted which provided crucial statistic that 40% basketball clubs in England still have a major problem with availability of facilities. The combination of lack of funding and facility availability has been a great problem for English basketball starting with grassroots and ending with elite players across all levels. Brad R. Humphreys in his research paper talks about subsidizing sport venues and facilities. In USA 65% of the budget for all facility and venue buildings are supported by the government or governmental agencies. Which is shown clearly in numbers of facilities and venues being built and renovated annually. In his research paper, he discovers that the real estate prices go up in the housing market around such facilities which is beneficial to overall town's or city's economy. (Humphreys, 2019)

Basketball in England has been surrounded with a lot of ups and downs throughout the years, however the participation in this sport is still growing. Even though the sport has suffered from high costs of facilities, underfunding of grassroots and international level, poor financial and managerial decisions it still manages to gather as many people participating in basketball as cricket. Increasing the level of finance still stands as the major goal for basketball in England. There is also a very strong data to support the fact that basketball is a good investment, as every 1 pound invested in communities that play basketball and where its most popular, the returns are somewhere between 4 to 8.60 pounds. These figures suggest that further attention should be paid to basketball and its development in local communities. (Skinner, 2018)

A case study from Tibetan communities in China, provides great examples and valuable information on how to improve basketball and utilize all the possible tools to do so. For example, Zhou Zidong and Zhou Yuhua, in their research paper tried to implement mass basketball games as a new approach to grassroots basketball. Their study focused on people's growing interest in basketball and fitness in general. Their main goal was to host as many mass basketball games as possible throughout the year, as they knew that in summer more than 100 mass basketball games happen in the small providence of China, Diqing. They raised money and increased financial input and support just by drawing attention how many people participate in basketball during summer. Diqing community also working towards building basketball facilities and overall improvement of infrastructure of basketball. They continue making overall plans to promote the construction of basketball facilities including stadiums and school gymnasiums. With that in mind, they created a

service system that is responsible for constructions of basketball facilities. Diqing formed a network of basketball infrastructure that contains 4 levels: state, county or city, township, and village. All these levels work together to build facilities and improve communities. Achievements of this 4-level structure are amazing as their average court coverage reach around 70%. Besides those improvements and achievements, they continuously try to develop more basketball games and activities for all ages across rural areas of China as well as strengthening the guidance of basketball as a sport by meeting the needs of the sport that is always changing and improving. With these developments and initiatives from Diqing city, now there are 21 various sports associations and sports clubs operating in that area with constant improving training systems which eventually leads to improving basketball quality and infrastructure. (Zidong & Yuhua, 2022)

1.7 British Sports Fans

United Kingdom is a home for variety different sports like football, cricket, tennis, rugby, golf, boxing, basketball, etc. According to multiple surveys carried out on the internet, United Kingdom usually falls into top 10 of the countries that "love" sports the most. (Top 10 Greatest Sports Countries , n.d.) To some, Great Britain is a home of football, to others, it's a home of rugby, but a lot of people will agree that Great Britain is a birthplace of modern sport. Great Britain has a major influence by the way sport is shaped today with all the rules, developments, philosophies, and strategies. The presents of variety different sports in England is the reason why sports participation in this country is very high. (Carmichael, Grix, & Marqués, 2013) In a survey carried out by Keith D. Parry about sports influence, he found out that 80 percent of people that participated in the survey (95 university students) responded that their "role model" or a "hero" is an athlete. However, according to his data, only 2 of these students said that their chosen person is a basketball figure. In comparison to the same survey carried out in Canada, when 888 Canadians were asked who's their favorite hero, they received 56 different responses, and top 3 answers were: Michael Jordan, Wayne Gretzky, and then father/mother. (Parry, 2009) Despite lack of particularly basketball heroes in England, sport in general is still very popular and important amongst the people. A very interesting fact was discovered in the same survey as well, that all the British people that participated chose another British person as their hero regardless of their profession. Also, most female participants chose a male hero, as most of the men did as well. (Parry, 2009)

Sport environment in UK is very generous for fans, which is why UK fans dominate in high attendance of sport and high coverage of it as well. Most of it is based on English Premier League. According to the ESPN, in 2018 combined attendance figures for a season in English Premier League were over 13 million. (Sport, 2018) Despite football being a top sport in England, crowds in other sports such as tennis, cricket and rugby appears to be increasing as well. In the research study

carried out by Keith D. Parry, Ian Jones, and Daniel L. Wann the main objective was to find out how often participants engage into sporting events as fans rather than participants. In their result, it is clear that out of 252 students, males participated in sporting events more often than females. However, females were more likely to attend such events in person compared to males. 33% of females attended sporting event in person twice a week or more, compared to 22% of males. 51% of men, however, watched some sort of sporting event on television or internet at least once a day, when only 8% of women have done the same. Furthermore, 84% of men noted that they discuss sport daily, compared to 33% of women.

To sum up this study provided by Keith D. Parry, Ian Jones, and Daniel L. Wann, British fans are more likely to watch sporting events at least twice per week in comparison to other European countries. 39% of British fans of which 51% are males watch sports on television, social media, or internet on a daily basis. 71% of British males that participated in the survey reported discussing sports daily, which is higher in comparison to other cultures such Australia and Norway according to the study. Socialization into the sport fan role in England is mainly influenced by a father figure, when in other countries the main agents for such cases are friends and communities. Which shows us how strong sport culture is in the United Kingdom. Lastly, very important fact was discovered in this research, that UK fan behavior is closer to that of North American, rather than fans in most European countries, as their fans are more likely to watch sport live and discuss about it more frequently as well. (Parry, Jones, & Wann, 2014)

Another interesting research was conducted by Stacey Pope, where she tried to find the meaning and importance of female sports fans. Her work is mainly based around Richard Giulianotti's work, where he discovered two types of fans: "hot" and "cool". According to him, "hot" fans are the ones that have loyalty to their favorite teams, buy their merchandise, and show support throughout years, "cool" fans are the ones that follow a team or two on social media accounts, through local news, or newspapers. "Hot" fans tend to have only one team that they support dearly, and "cool" fans could switch up their favorite teams every year. (Giulianotti, 2002) What Stacey Pope discovered in her research is that majority of her interviewees that labeled their favorite sport as football, are indeed "hot" fans.

Furthermore, she discovered that there are two types of fans beyond primary "hot" and "cool". Those types are "masculine" femininities and "feminine" femininities. More "masculine" femininities often were involved in contact sports themselves and exhibited "hot" styles of support and were strongly identified with male fans, while "feminine" femininities showed completely opposite propensities. She continued to explain that mainly all the research done in the past on UK's sport fandom highly focus on male fans and exclude female fans. (Pope, 2012)

To pay closer attention to women in sports and women as sport fans, Frances S. Sutton and Chris Knoester have conducted research on women's sport consumption in the United States of America. From a large sample data, they found out that women in US are common consumers of sport. Depending on their life circumstances such as number of children, social lives, sport experiences and involvement in sport, and their significant others they identify themselves as "somewhat" a sport fan. Interestingly, they found out that women with higher socioeconomic status, such as higher income and education watch, follow, and attend sporting events more frequently. They also spend more money on sport participation than women with lower incomes and lower levels of education. However, it was discovered that women with higher income and education, are not necessarily more passionate and engaged with a chosen sport than the ones with lesser income and education. Furthermore, it's clear that women's social relationship that involves sports, and the number of children highly impact women's participation in sport as fans. These findings indicate that women are common consumers of sport as well as there are plenty of room for growth. (Sutton & Knoester, 2021)

II. METHODOLOGY FOR THE RESEARCH ON THE CURRENT BASKETBALL MARKET IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

2.1 Object of Research

It has been more than 130 years since the first basketball game was played in the United States. Since that day, basketball has become one of the most popular sports in the world due to its excitement, entertainment part and overall beauty. To some people it might be just a game, but for others it's a lifestyle, regardless of if you are a professional basketball player, or a fan who enjoys watching it from the comfort of your couch. Since 1891, when basketball was invented, the game itself has changed in pretty much every aspect, and since then, basketball is being played in most of the countries worldwide. More interestingly, over 100 countries have their own basketball leagues and according to the Federation of International Basketball Association (FIBA) minimum of 450 million people worldwide play basketball either recreationally or in a structured competition.

However, today, there are still countries existing where basketball is still in the developing stages. One of the biggest countries with a rather small interest in basketball is the United Kingdom. With other sports such as football, cricket, rugby, and swimming taking the attention away from basketball, people in the United Kingdom struggle to find interest in the game itself, which leads to lower funding and crippling infrastructure. The obstacles that British basketball players must overcome are well forgotten in other countries: low fan attendance, not enough funding, small and less improved facilities, etc.

Luckily, there is always room for growth and UK's basketball is in a perfect place to grow and improve. With recent surges in social media usage and attention to basketball from biggest media platforms as well as recognition by the top basketball leagues in the world, British basketball is starting to get a bigger and certainly more important spotlight. This data shows that possibilities to improve basketball in the United Kingdom are very optimistic, but the work and progress to achieve that is still far undergo.

2.2 Research Methodology

Aim of the research is to identify the state of current basketball market in the United Kingdom, also find and provide solutions for Euroleague and Basketball England on how to improve it so there would be a team competing in the Euroleague's competition. All the data used for this research paper was gathered from public surveys and personal interviews with basketball club's general managers and professional players.

Objectives of the research:

1. To analyze the current state of UK's basketball.
2. To compare UK's basketball market with countries where basketball is a lot more popular.
3. To find out if there are opportunities and possibilities for basketball to improve and become more popular.
4. Find out the reasons behind poor basketball infrastructure.
5. Provide logical solutions how to improve basketball level.

Logic of the research

Two different methods were selected in order to get more accurate data. Interviews provided rather more qualitative and personal information regarding basketball in the United Kingdom. The survey provided quantitative data that helped gather a broader understanding of UK's basketball level and current state of it.

2.3 Methods of Research

Interview. Using this qualitative measure, the attempt was made to examine people that share a deeper knowledge of basketball in the United Kingdom, as well as across Europe. The study was conducted in the form of an interview and was selected to produce and help gather qualitative inside information to the researcher. Participants of the interview indicated their involvement in basketball and were asked specific questions that required them to specify (a) their name, nationality, involvement in basketball, etc., (b) their involvement in supporting different teams and following different leagues across the globe; (c) their opinions on the current state of British basketball and the community surrounding it, (d) their opinions on the organization structure of basketball in England as well as financial part of it and media coverage, (e) their insights about grassroots level basketball in the United Kingdom, and if there is room for growth for basketball in the UK, (f) and finally if they see a possibility for UK to have a team in the Euroleague competition. In addition, few extra and different type of questions were provided for the General Manager of the London Lions basketball club and the assistant of General Manager of AS Monaco Basketball club. Questions were designed to elicit participants' perceptions regarding their playing experience and their involvement in basketball, as well as their perception and views of basketball in the United Kingdom.

Respondents of the interview. The interviews were done with 9 men that are actively involved in men's basketball. 7 out of 9 participants are currently playing professional basketball in the United Kingdom, while 3 of them were participating in the top tier league in the United Kingdom in the early stages of their professional careers. 6 out of 7 interviewed players have played professionally overseas for at least one season. All 7 participants that are currently competing professionally hold British passport and have been involved in British basketball from very young age. They are also involved heavily in coaching and mentoring younger generations across the country. One participant has represented his country in the Commonwealth games that took place in the United Kingdom and won a gold medal in the 3x3 competition. Two out of 9 participants that aren't basketball players are currently employed as a General Manager for the London Lions basketball team and as an assistant to General Manager for the AS Monaco basketball team. Overall, all the interviewees have a very high basketball IQ and deep knowledge of the sport. The approximate time to get all the interviews completed was **3 weeks.** This method was selected to produce and help gather qualitative inside information to the researcher.

Data collection and analysis. Because of the current occupations of the participants, all the interviews were conducted digitally, via email, private internet conferences, and private phone calls. Interviews were digitally recorded and conducted with the aid of a 10-item interview guide for the current basketball players. For the interviewees that are not playing professional basketball the interview guide was provided with 9 and 7 questions accordingly. All interview guides listed the essential questions needed for the research. Interviews lasted between 30 and 50 minutes. The approximate time to get the interviews completed was **6 weeks**. Participants were given personalized questions to get deeper knowledge on the level and quality of British basketball and what it would take for a British team to compete successfully in the Euroleague competition. All 9 participants were compared with one another to find out if there are any similarities or identical issues that they would recognize and point out that they have seen in the different parts of the world and particularly in United Kingdom.

Questionnaire is an established research method in general studies that helps gather information from the respondents and helps understand and gauge issues and opportunities surrounding British basketball, find ways to improve it or change it, and overall get a deeper understanding of the basketball community in the United Kingdom and how the rest of the world views it. The survey was created and based on the information gathered from the first part of the research paper. This method was selected, because of its ability to reach bigger audience and produce bigger amount of information in a short period of time with no costs to the researcher. The survey consisted of 11 multiple choice questions and 1 short answer question. Questionnaire was designed based on the current information, research papers provided, and feedback given by the

interviewees to get a broader understanding of the current state of basketball in the United Kingdom.

Data collection and analysis. All the primary data was collected via survey that was published on multiple social media platforms and sent out individually. Approximate time to share the survey and get the information was **3 weeks**. The web page used to create and share the survey was Google Surveys. Sampling method was random, due to the need to have diversity of the people to get accurate results. 177 people participated in the survey in the period of **2 weeks**. Confidence level is 95%, while margin of error is 7%.

Respondents: 177 people participated in the survey of which 84.2% were male, 14.7% were female, and 1.1% chose not to disclose their gender. The age range of all the participants were as follows: 38.7% were aged between 25-34 years old; 27.7% were aged between 18-24 years old; 20.2% were aged between 35-44 years old; 8.7% were aged between 0-18 years old; 4% were aged between 45-54 years old, and 0.6% were aged 55-64 years old. No participants were older than 65 years old. Geographical location of all participants was as follows: 26% were currently based in Lithuania; 20.8% were based in the United Kingdom; 9.2% were based in Germany; 3.5% were based in France; 2.9% of the participants were based in Italy and Spain; 1.7% were based in Netherlands; 1.2% were based in Belgium; 0.6% were based in both Poland and Latvia; 30.6% were based in “Other” countries that weren’t mentioned in the survey.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Consumption of Basketball

With basketball being one of the top sports in the world, United Kingdom as a nation does not consume basketball as much as other countries. With this survey and all the participants that filled out the questionnaire the goal was to find out how many people choose to watch basketball over other sports, such as football, cricket, netball, American football, or other sports. Out of 177 that participated in the survey, most of them 150 (84.7%) stated that their preferred sport to watch is basketball, followed by football, which was selected by 20 (11.3%) people. 5 people, or 2.8% of them selected that their preferred sport is the one that was not mentioned on the list, while 2 people or 1.2% chose American football and netball as their preferred sports as shown in Figure 1.

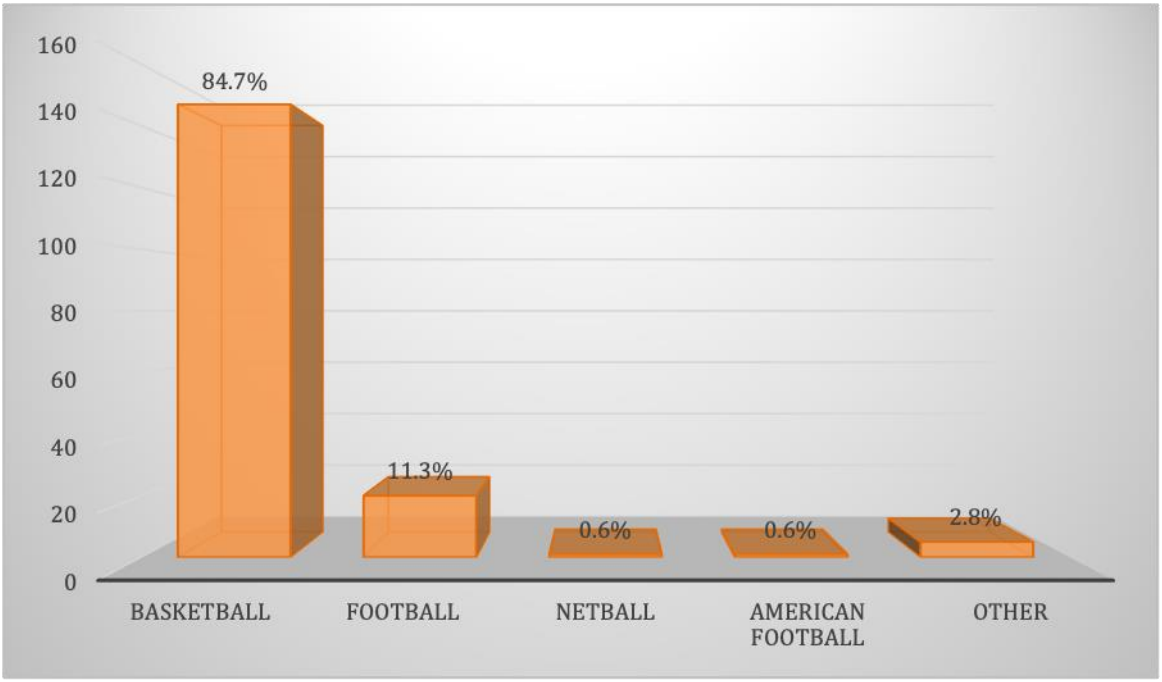


Figure 1 Preferable sport chosen by participants

Despite the fact that for some participant basketball was not a number one sport that they choose to watch the following question in the survey was to select the league or leagues that they would prefer watching or are watching currently. As Figure 2 shows, there is a clear trend of two basketball leagues that are favorable by the participants, those are the top two basketball leagues in the world: NBA and Euroleague. Euroleague was selected by 90.8% of people while NBA was selected by 52% of people. With the possibility of selecting multiple leagues, participants have shown that they are more than likely follow few basketball leagues at the same time. Lithuania's top tier league LKL is being consumed by 26.3% of people, while Spain's Liga ACB and Germany's Bundesliga BBL was chosen by 16% and 10.9% of people accordingly. Last three leagues

mentioned in the survey were UK's BBL/NBL1, France's LNB Pro A, and Italy's LBA. Those leagues were selected by the participants as follows: 8.6% for BBL/NBL1, 5.7% for France's LNB, and 5.1% for Italy's LBA. 22.3% of participants chose "other" league as their chosen basketball league to follow. Figure 2 proves that by a big margin top basketball leagues NBA and Euroleague attract the most attention from the viewers. It also shows that one of the highest populated countries in Europe -United Kingdom, struggles to produce high quality basketball which reflects on their viewership numbers of their domestic leagues.

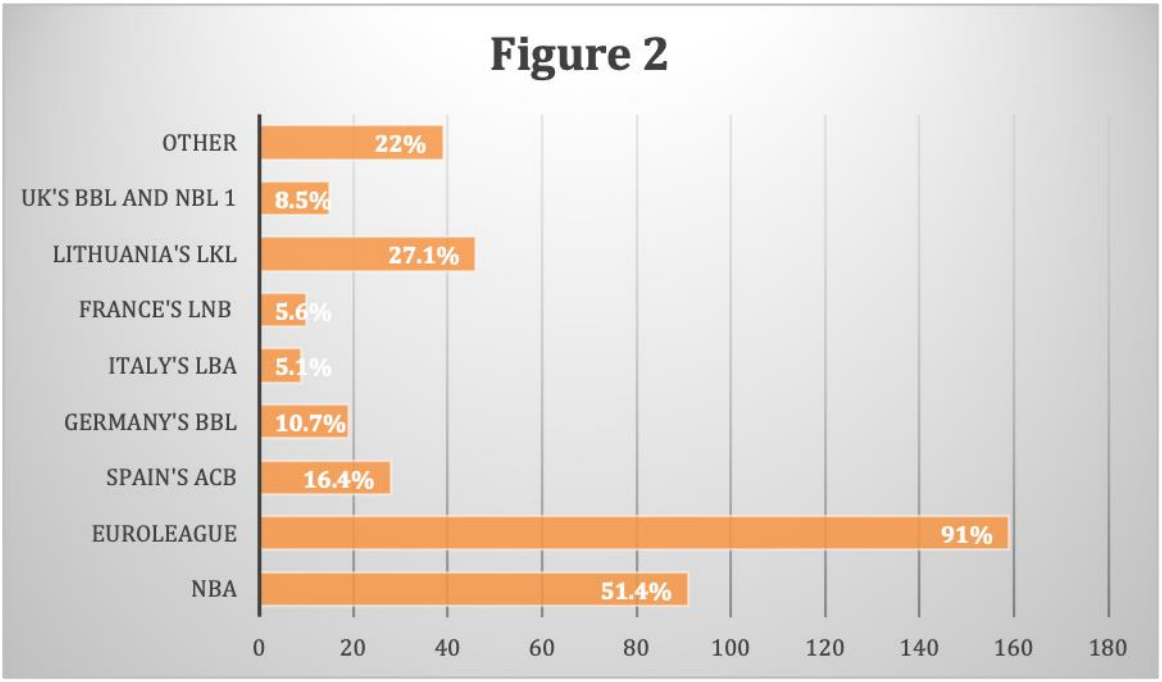


Figure 2 Data showing viewers interest in different basketball leagues worldwide

3.1.1 Euroleague in The United Kingdom

With Euroelague being a top basketball league in the old world, survey participants were asked if Euroleague should expand into different countries and specifically into United Kingdom. The idea behind this question is to see if European fans and British basketball fans themselves see a team from United Kingdom competing in Euroleague today or in a near future. From the data in the Figure 3 it can be seen that the participants were rather skeptical than optimistic. 44.9% of the people that filled out this survey suggests that there should be a team from UK competing in Euroleague, however, they were doubtful that the team would be strong enough for such competition. Furthermore, 27.3% of the respondents believe that UK basketball does not have a team that would be suitable and strong enough to compete in Euroleague, while 7.4% of the respondents were unsure about this answer. On a brighter side, 20.5% of the participants in the survey believe that UK should have a team in Euroleague and the wait has been long overdue.

From gathering different data from previous years and the history of British basketball, it is clear, that British basketball is still in its development state. To account to the possibility for the British team competing in Euroleague, the following question was asked to find out what it would take for UK to have a team in Euroleague. To start off, only 4.6% of people thought that UK's basketball already has everything what it takes to be a competitor in Euroleague. However, according to the rest of the respondents, a lot of improvements need to be done. 69.9% of the respondents believe that British basketball needs to focus more on the grassroots and youth developments. They believe that only with a good grassroot structure it is possible to develop high quality basketball players that would lift the level of British basketball. 58.4% of the respondents believe that bigger and better media exposure would help British basketball, which correlates very well with the fact that 57.8% of the respondents suggest that bigger investments and sponsorship engagement would be a key to more sustainable basketball in the United Kingdom. High level international basketball players would be very helpful for increasing the level and quality of British basketball according to 52.6% of the respondents, while 38.2% of them believe and strongly suggest that British basketball should get more support from the local government and Euroleague itself.

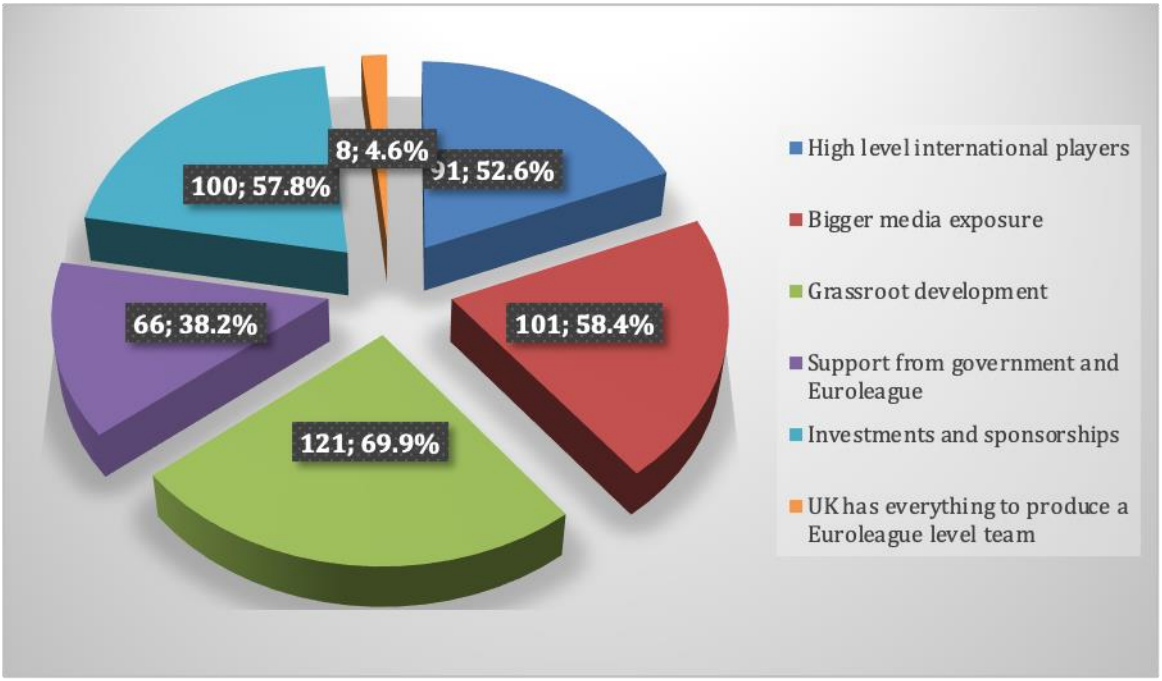


Figure 3 Data showing the possible improvements for British basketball

As British nationals and people that are currently living in the United Kingdom participated in this survey, it was very interesting and vital to find their opinions about the local players competing in the Euroleague and if that would be a factor in attracting bigger audiences and bigger viewership numbers. However, the data (Figure 4) is rather surprising as 33.1% of respondents

suggest that local players competing in Euroleague will not bring more fans and higher viewership ratings to Euroleague, while 28% thinks that the numbers will increase. Surprisingly, 38.9% of the respondents weren't sure about their answer and they saw it as a possibility, however, a rather tiny one since there aren't many exciting and high-level British basketball players.

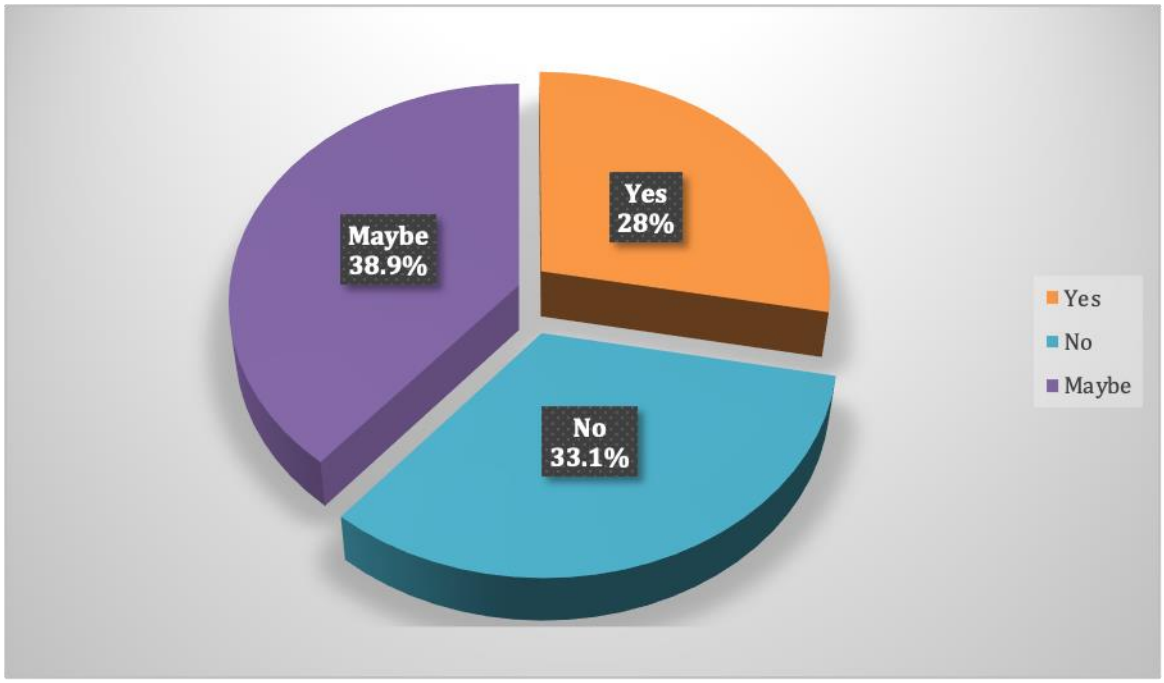


Figure 4 Local British players bringing more fans and higher viewership ratings to Euroelague

However, to look at this data from a broader view, 85.7% of the respondents stated they do follow local players that are playing internationally and only 14.3% of them stated that they don't. The results of this question suggest that British basketball players would bring bigger audience and viewership numbers to Euroelague.

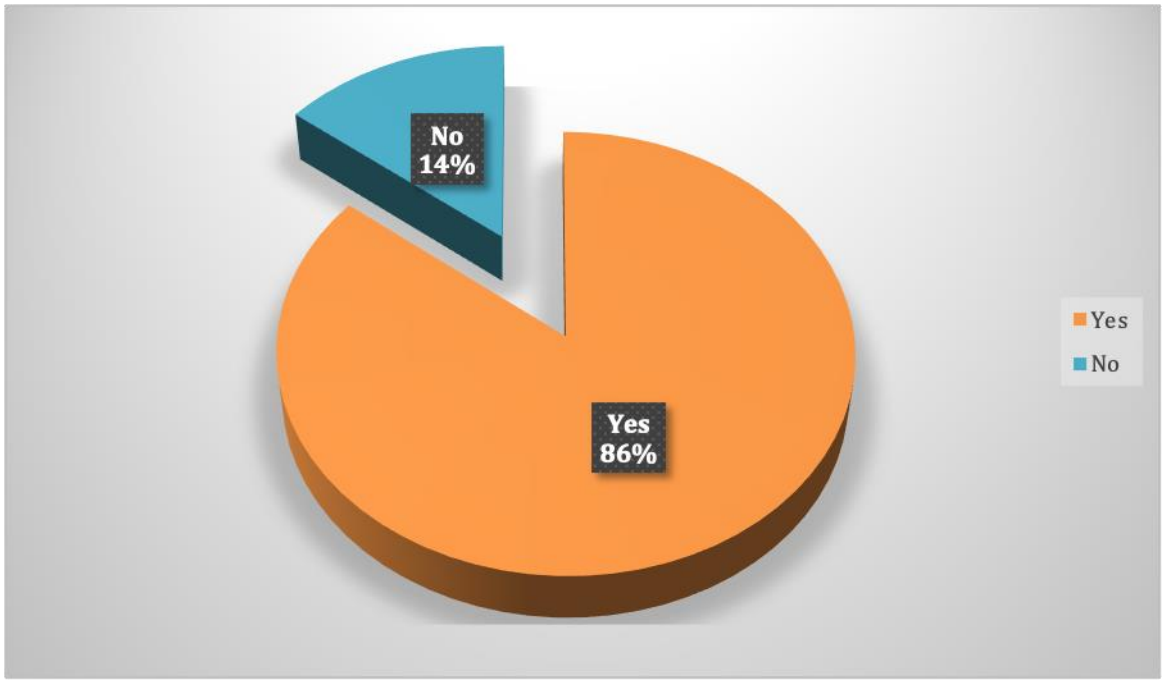


Figure 5 Participants responses if they follow local players playing overseas

Big part of all the respondents (52%) believe that basketball could become a top sport in the United Kingdom, although they believe that it could never compete with the popularity of football. Meanwhile, 9.1% weren't sure if basketball would be capable of becoming a top sport and only 4.6% believed that it has a good chance of being one of the top sports in Great Britain. On the other hand, 34.3% of the respondents stated that basketball will never become as popular as football or rugby in the United Kingdom due to its football culture and everything surrounding this sport. However, with this survey, the goal was to figure where main changes should be made in order to help basketball develop and increase its level. Respondents were rather critical with their answers as they believe that the whole basketball system needs to be restructured. 71.8% of the respondents stated that organizational structure needs to be changed or improved; 50% and 48.8% of the respondents believe that grassroot level should be a place where changes begin and that facilitates and venues need major improvements; 45.3% responded that financial part of basketball needs major improvements as well, while 37.6% believe that economical sustainability has to be improved also. Overall, more resources and bigger basketball knowledge needs to be implemented in the whole basketball system in the UK to get different and improved results regarding their basketball level and organizational structure.

Last part of the survey was intended to gather rather broader spectrum of information from the casual basketball fans and see their views on what British basketball and British society needs to improve the overall state of basketball. Participants were asked to kindly share their thoughts and ideas. Although the question was not mandatory and rather optional, it still gathered 50 responses from all the participants.

Most of the personal responses from participants cover main problems that British basketball is currently facing, such problems include investments, sponsorships, interest from the society and so on. Few respondents mentioned and talked about how everything what British basketball is doing currently needs to be done from the grassroot level following into elite level later. Meaning, grassroots is the level where sports foundations are built, and basketball in England is not an exception. Changing the structure and the organization of the grassroots will be a major step forward in creating better and bigger basketball culture in the United Kingdom. It should start with investing into local basketball programs and then into local basketball players, which later should convert into higher quality basketball overall.

Another problem that participants pointed out was media coverage and overall interest in basketball. Respondents believe that there is little to no coverage of basketball in the United Kingdom on the main media platforms. For example, despite UK's participation in Eurobasket 2022 there was zero coverage of this event. Even on BBC news website they provided very little attention to the team's performance and overall information about games and basketball related statistics.

Opinions provided by the respondents at the end of the survey surely show their frustration and their love for the game of basketball. Most of them believe that it wouldn't take too much to make basketball very popular in the United Kingdom. Few international players that are well known across the basketball world, few international coaches that would help British basketball to improve from the grassroots level, even few more investors and sponsors that would see UK's basketball as a good investment and as a sport with a good future. Also, bringing more basketball games (NBA and Euroleague) to the UK would be a big step towards rising overall awareness of the game itself, as well as having exhibition games between NBA and Euroleague teams would be extremely beneficial to all parties.

To finish it up, one of the participants compared UK and UK's basketball to Ireland and its basketball. A comparison that wasn't covered here before nor was acknowledged on any documentation previously. Therefore, the comparison itself is very insightful and useful for the future of basketball in countries where it's not the top sport, such as United Kingdom:

"I think the problem is general interest, I'm based in Ireland which has quite a similar level of basketball interest to UK. There are very few people who have an interest in basketball as a whole and those that are interested in basketball, follow the NBA. The popular football teams in Ireland are those that had Irish players in the past like Liverpool and Man U. so I think it would be important to develop an interest in watching and playing basketball first and foremost. I can say for a fact that Dublin, a city of 1.2M people would not have a viewer base to support a Euroleague team. Most Irish people have never even heard of the Euroleague. Maybe giving free to view broadcast to RTÉ (similar to BBC in the UK) for the Final Four could help generate interest but

there would also need to be major investment in advertisement for the competition. Ireland doesn't have a lack of courts to play on but there is so little interest that they lie empty and in disrepair most of the time. I recall my time in school only a few years ago, in a year group of 100 people there was one other person with an interest in basketball. It must start from the bottom, basketball leagues must find ways to generate interest, with the emergence of Connor McGregor UFC became very popular to watch and compete in, I believe that Ireland is one high level player away from being a country who loves basketball, but there must be investment and vision for that to happen."

3.1.2 Insights from British Basketball Players

Personal interviews were conducted with the local British players who have been around basketball for a long time to get a broader understanding from someone who has been playing basketball in UK from early age. Interestingly enough, even though expectations were low, there are a lot of positives that have been shared from all the participants, which gives hope to all the people that want to see basketball rise into new heights in the United Kingdom.

Participants of the interviews were asked to identify themselves and share their involvement with British basketball, which all of them stated they have been playing basketball from early age and only one of them haven't played professionally in other countries, they also have mentioned that all of them are following different teams and different leagues across the world, with Euroleague and NBA being the top 2 of everyone's list. Due to their nationalities and involvement with basketball it is safe to state that the information and opinions provided by the participants are very credible.

Questions 4 and 5 in the interview asked participants to describe the state of basketball in the United Kingdom as well as the community surrounding it. Surprisingly, all the participants think that basketball in England has improves a lot withing the last couple years as bigger interest in the sport has been shown from the public. Which corelates very well with the growing basketball community. Few players have mentioned that the top teams in BBL (British Basketball League) have a usual amount of 2-3 thousand fans during their home games, while some teams barely attract couple hundred. Most of them pointed out that the problems lie within organization itself and that it's hard to attract bigger audiences when they don't see quality and motivation from the governing body to make basketball great as a sport and not just a business. Organization has been improving according to all participants, however, knowing that the organization was in a very bad state couple years ago put people in doubt if they can maintain positive changes. Finance is another major problem that was mentioned by all participants, as one of them stated that *"selfish people within industry take more than they give, which leaves players open for exploitation".*

Money is the major driving force for most industries and organizations, British basketball however cannot relate to this statement as there isn't a lot of money within the industry, which technically creates a great opportunity for the investors and entrepreneurs. Participants of the interviews believe that few bigger investments would change the picture of basketball in the United Kingdom drastically. While two of them believe that UK is not strong enough to have a team in Euroleague just right now, all of them admit that London Lions are on a right path to make it to the top league of Europe sooner than later, because all of them have mentioned that basketball in the United Kingdom has a lot of room for growth but it needs to start at the grassroots level. Bigger investments, bigger and broader media coverage, and better coaches will be a great start. Commonwealth games 2022 was a great platform for UK's basketball to get bigger attention and spread the awareness of the game itself. Orlan Jackman, represented his country in the 3x3 tournament where Great Britain were number one and received gold medals. He stated that such victories raise great awareness nationwide, as they have inspired new and local generations to play basketball, while on the international level they have showed the basketball world that they are not a small nation, and they can compete with the best of them. Success and the gold medal in the Commonwealth games 2022 made Orlan even popular in basketball community as he is now a regular guest in different schools, basketball academies, award shows, and local news. Orlan Jackman is a great example of what basketball can do to the local communities and young generations if it's being managed properly and organized well.

3.1.3 From London to Monaco

With the second part of the interviews the goal was to interview the general manager of London Lions and the assistant of general manager of AS Monaco and get their point of view of the current basketball market in the United Kingdom, as well as their insights on the game itself and how to focus on becoming better and achieving higher goals while representing a country where basketball is not a number one sport.

AS Monaco is a basketball team that has been competing in the Euroleague since 2021-2022 season. As its only their second season in this league, it was very insightful to interview their management and tried to figure their goals for the future. As you might know, Monaco is the second smallest country in the world, which makes it very difficult for them to have a big basketball culture, yet alone raise and produce local talent. However, with high expectations and great management, AS Monaco team managed to win Eurocup in 2020-2021 season and get an opportunity to compete in the Euroleague. Rokas Mickevicius is currently working as an assistant to the general manager, and he was happy to share his views of the club and future goals for it.

What does it mean for AS Monaco to compete in Euroelague and how their goals differ from competing in the French league, and how the success of the first season impacted their club, were the first questions that were asked Rokas to get a better understanding of their goals and plans. As a lot of people would have expected, their main focus for the last season was to have a great season and try and stay in Euroleague for the upcoming 2022-2023 season, so to make it to the playoffs was the minimum achievement. AS Monaco ended up a step away from going to Belgrade and competing in the Final 4 as they had to bow down against the basketball machine from Greece - Olympiacos Piraeus. However, the success of that season did raise their stakes higher as their social media accounts grew, the attendance increased, and basketball became more attractive in Monaco. Although Rokas thinks that last season's success is based on the last five years and their accomplishments in Champions league, Eurocup and French league. Within last five years, AS Monaco learned how to compete with the best and have a win-all attitude in every league that they play in. This perfectly reflects their current team and current management, as they are one of the top teams in Euroelague now. On the other hand, Rokas did mention that the big attention and focus on Euroleague had some negative effects on their performance in the French league, as the players weren't motivated enough to compete in this "lower level" competition. Which eventually did affect their performance in the negative way as they ended up losing the final to their French rivals, LDLC Asvel.

When asked if French players and local players attract bigger audiences and bigger viewership numbers, Rokas wasn't too sure. He mentioned that overall attraction might have increased, but it is hard to put everything in numbers just after one season in Euroleague. This season, as they have more French players on the team, will bring more data and understanding of importance of having local players competing for AS Monaco. However, big name players such as Mike James, who is currently their star player, do attract bigger audiences and bigger viewership numbers. He stated that such players help people to find attractiveness and excitement in the game, and it doesn't matter if you are a basketball fan, or this is your first time watching.

When asked about the grassroots and its level, Rokas was disappointed in the development of young players and the management of it. He mentioned that it is mandatory for teams that compete in the French first league, to have a youth development program, however, with Monaco being such a small country, local talent is almost not existing, and most youth players are brought from surrounding French cities. The organization for youth development still needs a lot of improvements and bigger investments to create a place where basketball players can actually develop and become their best selves, and Monaco as of right now cannot provide such circumstances for young players. Even though AS Monaco as a club is a private organization, it also faces difficulties and needs improvements and changes. AS Monaco itself sees those problems

and issues that they are facing managerially, however they still aren't addressing those problems. In order for them to stay and be top competitors in both Euroelague and French league, they need to address those issues and solve them. That is the main goal for the AS Monaco as of right now and their near future.

AS Monaco and London Lions have few similarities that can be pointed out by most basketball fans. Both are countries where basketball was not the most popular sport, both have opportunities for big investors to come along any time, both can have a very bright future in the sport of basketball. London Lions general manager Brett Burrman understands that very well and says that the goal for London Lions right now is to learn the new landscape of Eurocup and become sustainable competitor. Even though the dynamics of British Basketball League are already known for them, never less, it is still their goal to be the best team in BBL every season as well.

When asked if competing in Eurocup has increased their viewership numbers and attracted more fans to the games, Brett stated that it helped their viewership numbers tremendously. Because of them competing in Eurocup, they managed to attract more sponsors to the team and struck their by far biggest sponsorship agreement with BT Sport, which also helped increasing their fast growing fan base. The fact that London Lions is focused on grassroots and developing local players helps their image as their goal is build British basketball talent that the country could rally behind. This is where AS Monaco and London Lions team and organization differs the most as AS Monaco vision is to bring and sign great international players rather than developing their own talent. With such different vision and the current basketball market in the United Kingdom, the progress and big achievements for London Lions might take time, however, their overall goal is still to compete in the Euroleague eventually. But it's important to know that it is necessary to take one step at a time and firstly conquer the Eurocup and create an organization that will be ready to compete in Euroleague from both aspects of the game. Brett also believes that even if or when London Lions compete in Euroleague, they will still play in their domestic league and will not enter different league such as French league to face "better" and "tougher" competition, as he believes that the BBL competition is already way better than it used to be, and it is improving within every season.

Such insights from both interviewees provide us information that correlates very well with both teams and both countries in general. It seems that both teams are just a step away from having a sustainable and very well managed organization. Big investors or sponsors would be a major turning point for London Lions organization, while management and organizational changes would be a huge improvement to AS Monaco.

3.2 Improving Basketball Level in The United Kingdom

Basketball is certainly a sport that is currently growing and has a bright future in the United Kingdom. With basketball culture growing across the world, countries where basketball hasn't been that popular has a great opportunity of improving by following some great examples. Lithuania, Spain, and USA in that matter set great examples for the rest of the world.

United Kingdom has never been known as a basketball country, simply because football takes everyone's attention away from basketball. However, according to the survey conducted and interviews taken from different people in United Kingdom, basketball is growing quite fast. As **Figure 1** shows, most of the participants in the survey are basketball fans with different cultural backgrounds. Even though 20.3% of the respondents were from United Kingdom, survey gathered useful and promising data for the basketball culture in the United Kingdom. One of the most important and rather rewarding part of basketball is the competition itself and how important it is to compete against good teams, as only then you become better yourself. That is why most of the respondents have selected NBA and Euroleague as their top basketball leagues to follow. Of course, there are great basketball teams and high level of competition in other leagues as well, but those two take the crown of two of the best basketball leagues in the world.

As United Kingdom's level of basketball is nowhere close to those countries where basketball is a top sport, it's still developing and improving every year. The survey conducted by the author received data that aligns very well with the one conducted by Jeff Skinner. He pointed out the issues and problems surrounding basketball in his research paper about the development of basketball in the United Kingdom, those include lack of public and commercial funding, media coverage, organisational structure, governance, and sometimes just bad luck. (Skinner, 2018) Based on Skinner's research paper, the question *"Where should the changes be made to improve overall basketball organisation in the United Kingdom"* was asked. As mentioned above, the main issues selected by the respondents were overall organisational structure, finances, grassroots, sustainable development, and facilities.

3.2.1 Organisational Structure

Currently, Basketball England has 10 board members who are labelled as sporting experts and most of them have been involved in basketball since early age. Basketball England Board is at the top of the table responsible for all the major decisions and changes. According to Basketball England official website, goals of the board members and the Basketball England itself is to:

1. *Increase the participation in the sport nationwide.*

2. *Help young people and others that participate in the sport to fulfil their potential by providing them with the pathway to do so.*
3. *Sustain growth and success of the sport.* (England, Basketball Development Model, 2018)

Findings of the survey and interviews suggest that overall organisation structure needs to be changed or at least improved. Better and overvalued structure, starting with grassroots needs to be implemented in order to start seeing improvements within few years. Unfortunately, changes won't happen quick, and it needs to be looked at as a business plan. Awareness of basketball as a sport, and general interest need to grow in the United Kingdom before any visible improvements will manifest. Also, to create a team that would and could compete in Euroelague, Basketball England must understand what audience they want to target the most. Would it be local people in England, or would it be immigrants as UK is known for its multiculturality, or maybe it could be focused more on targeting female basketball fans as well. For the Basketball England as an organisation solidity is where the changes begin, and improvements start. Well established organisation needs to have people that are experts in their own fields and work extremely well in the group, it should have a well-established plan for the future, and should build an organisational structure that would last a lifetime. Most importantly, Basketball England should analyse their past and make sure that the same mistakes won't be made again.

3.2.2 Finances

Joseph Maguire, one of the few authors who researched basketball in England throughout the years concluded that major mistakes in British basketball finances were made in 70s and 80s, when most of the money received from commercialization went into acquiring international basketball players for a short-term success, rather than investing in the local players for the long term and sustainable basketball future. (Maguire, 1994) As **Figure 3** shows, 57.8% of the respondents believe that in order to make British basketball better, financial part of the game needs to improve. Most of the interviewees also suggest that financial part of the basketball in the United Kingdom is in a rough state and bigger investors and sponsors would help tremendously. However, most believe that it is nearly impossible to attract such investors or sponsors since most of them would choose football as their investment target, rather than basketball. One of the best solutions for such situation that has come across is merging with top football club in the United Kingdom. Arsenal, Manchester United, Manchester City, just to name a few, would be ideal for all parties. Investors would have more interest in investing money in the world known organization that has a proven record of success, while basketball would have a chance of reaching out to more consumers and fans nationwide. For example, Arsenal football club is owned by the Stan Kroenke's firm Kroenke

Sports and Entertainment (KSE). Stan Kroenke also owns NBA basketball club Denver Nuggets, and NFL football club Los Angeles Rams. Clearly, such person and his firm have a strong interest in different sports across the world. The knowledge and experience that comes from such person and his firm would be huge to basketball market in United Kingdom. He already knows basketball structure as an owner of Denver Nuggets, Arsenal knows everything about fans, attendance, and how to manage a sustainable club, therefore they would be a perfect place to birth a very successful Euroleague club. There is a possibility that Stan Kroenke and his firm would be interested in having another team competing in one of the best basketball leagues in the world by proposing a business plan, goals, and visions of having a team in Euroleague that would come from United Kingdom. Another great example of an opportunity like that would be football club Chelsea F.C. owner Todd Boehly. Todd Boehly is also a part owner of NBA club Los Angeles Lakers and WNBA club Los Angeles Sparks. He was also a part owner of NBL team Los Angeles Dodgers according to Molly Knight and her book *"The Best Team Money Can Buy: The Los Angeles Dodgers' Wild Struggle to Build a Baseball Powerhouse"* (Knight, 2015) Todd Boehly obviously shares his interest in different sports and acquiring teams that are the best in the world. It could be a huge challenge that he would love to take upon by creating a Euroleague worthy team in the United Kingdom that would make history as a first club from the United Kingdom to win Euroelague competition.

Overall bigger investments into basketball and better sponsors are needed regardless. Basketball in the UK is a niche that still hasn't been explored and discovered fully. As many other sports in the United Kingdom, basketball has a great potential and is a great investment for the right people.

3.2.3 Grassroots

All of the respondents and the participants of the interviews agreed on one thing at some point during the survey or interviews – grassroots. Developing clear youth structure that would start from the grassroots level all the way to the elite level is the most important aspect on improving basketball in the United Kingdom. Currently, the grassroots level is suffering due its overall structure. For example, there is no pathway for players to progress into BBL (British Basketball League), as the current business model is built on basing their domestic league around imports which is not the most stable option, however, in terms of performance it offers a quick fix. Which again, leaves UK basketball suffering in the long term. Aaron Williams, a British basketball player believes that children in UK start playing basketball way later than in other countries, he suggests that children start playing basketball around 13-14 years old due to weak grassroots approach to how important is young generations involvement in basketball. Chuck Duru, another British basketball players who has been playing basketball since he was 12 years old believes that grassroots level has improved over the years, but however, believes that player development in the

United Kingdom is still not good. He believes that competition for junior basketball is far weaker than other European countries which stops UK from producing players who are top tier professionals unless they leave the country and develop elsewhere at 16.

To fix such problem UK basketball needs to focus on grassroots and helping players with their path to become professional basketball players in their own country rather than elsewhere. Bigger exposure of basketball is needed to spread awareness of this sport, later, better and more qualified coaches need to be employed to develop players to be professionals, by teaching advance skills earlier. Vince Macaulay, ex-chief executive for the British Basketball League's London Lions once said that children in the United Kingdom want to play basketball and it's not a problem to get them on the court, the problem is keeping them in their home country. He says that British players need to start believing that they can achieve anything they want, even if they are growing up and developing their basketball knowledge in the United Kingdom. (Whittle, 2018) Even though children in the United Kingdom have various sports to choose from, early exposure is essential to not just growing a sport but enhancing the product itself. Vince Macaulay also has mentioned in one of his interviews, that he believes, that UK basketball lose around 89% of their best players to other countries simple because they don't believe in basketball development programs in the United Kingdom. London Lions general manager Brett Burman, when asked, how important grassroots it is to their club said:

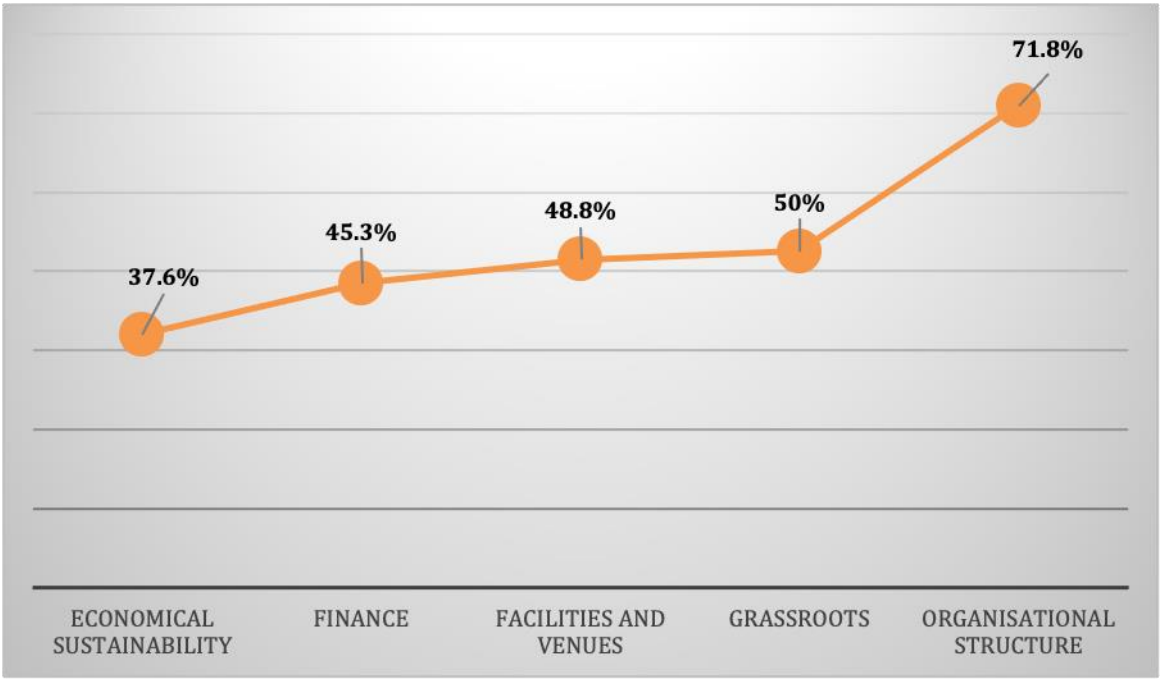
"It's enormous. That is why we are building an economy and putting so much of our resources into the community program. We need to get the kids aged as low as 7 to start playing basketball instead of football and that will help the sport as a whole."

Lastly, grassroots level needs to become a priority to the investors and sponsors as well, as only by building from the ground up you can have a successful and sustainable basketball culture.

3.2.4 Economical Sustainability

Sport can positively affect areas in the community such as health, education, gender equality, good governance, and building strong institutions. As it was mentioned above, to reach the state where sport is developed sustainable, changes and implications need to happen at the grassroots level. Simon Ličen and Scott R. Jedlicka in their research paper *"Sustainable development principles in U.S. sport management programs"* discovered that the current problems lay in the old, twentieth century understanding of how sport should operate. The twentieth-century sport model is based on revenue generation liability mitigation. (Ličen & Jedlicka, 2020) There is a significant correlation between those findings and the ones conducted in this research paper. Graph below

provides survey data and respondents feedback on where changes should start to improve basketball quality in the United Kingdom.



Graph 1. Areas where improvement is needed in British basketball

Once Basketball England acknowledges and addresses these issues, the basketball quality in this country will improve immensely. Brett Burman, general manager of London Lions surely agrees that those would be the major problems to address, as he stated that they must take one step at a time to build sustainable basketball culture, which later would lead to having a team in Euroleague.

3.2.5 Facilities And Venues

Facilities and venues play a major part in sports development in every country. Few community programs that Basketball England contribute to making basketball more popular in the United Kingdom aren't enough, as most of the clubs until today struggle to find a good and not expensive basketball gym to practice in and play matches in. The whole basketball infrastructure needs to improve to provide overall better results. Again, all these improvements could be achieved with more sponsorship, bigger investments, and greater support from the local government. According to Basketball England official website, strategic plan called *"Growing Basketball Together"* was created which addresses the issue of the current basketball infrastructure. Technical guidance for facility development was drafter and it has an aim to be achieved by 2024. (England, Strategic Plan, 2018) Currently, outside basketball courts are being renovated across the nation, and that is a big step into the right direction, however, as basketball is mainly a winter sport, facilities and venues

need built, or renovated as well, as basketball venue itself can be another source of revenue to the specific club, league, and the whole organization.

3.2.6 Having A Team from UK Competing in Turkish Airlines Euroleague

Today, London Lions are the only team from the United Kingdom competing in European league, Eurocup. In comparison to other leagues in Europe, according to *league-ranking.eu* British Basketball League is ranked 39 in European basketball leagues. (League Ranking Europe , 2022) Such placement for the United Kingdom is very low, considered that BBL is their top tier league. However, it does portray British basketball quite reasonably as British talent is hardly seen in the top basketball leagues across the world. When talking with London Lions general manager Brett Burman however, he mentioned that even if London Lions would end up competing in Euroleague, they would still be competing in BBL as well, as he believes that the competition is getting tougher, and basketball quality is improving. Although he also pointed out that their main goal right now is to learn the new landscape of Eurocup and become a sustainable competitor there. As of Euroleague competition, it is in their plans to compete there, but as of right now, their main goal is to win BBL and earn their respect in Eurocup.

AS Monaco assistant to the general manager Rokas Mickevicius believes that the success of their team is based on their wins domestically first. For the past 6 years, their accomplishments grew with every season, and that evidently was their steppingstones into entering Euroleague competition and becoming top competitors within an extremely short time. He also elaborated the difficulties that they had to face after the first season in order to stay in the league. First one of course was their home arena and its capacity. They had to do some major improvements to raise its seating capacity, even though the Euroleague standards are still higher, they allowed AS Monaco to continue participating in the competition as they proposed a plan to build a new arena with capacity of 10 000 seats. The same scenario could be applied to London Lions as well, as their current arena doesn’t meet the criteria set by Euroleague, although in London, other options are available before building a new arena, for example O2 arena where they hold NBA Europe games and where Euroleague Final 4 was held.

London Lions and AS Monaco has a lot of similarities as basketball clubs and organizations. Both teams are well known in their domestic leagues, both have a history, and both are entering European basketball market as new teams with big goals. In general, both teams are rather small, and both of them have a budget to create a competitive team in Euroleague and Eurocup. With more focus being targeted towards grassroots development, London Lions are one step ahead of AS Monaco as they are already thinking and creating sustainable club from grassroots level to elite

level. Although bigger investors and more sponsorship is crucial for London Lions, as they are in the competition with other sports that a more popular in the United Kingdom.

Basketball in England is mostly influenced by NBA and its culture. With the NBA basketball you get more than just a game, the marketing of NBA puts a lot of focus on strong cultural elements as well, such as clothing, music, and drama surrounding some players and/or staff members. Such elements appeal to those groups in England who come from inner city communities, and usually are young and ethnic minorities. With such people interested and participating in basketball, high cost of facilities in the United Kingdom is a major problem, as most of young people cannot afford it. This is the problem that England has been facing for decades now. *In The Mallin Basketball Review* of 2007, 87% of respondents stated that high cost of facilities is the biggest problem that basketball community and basketball as a sport face in the United Kingdom. (Mallin, 2007) Getting more support from government to maintain these facilities would mean lesser costs for the people who want to play basketball, which eventually would lead to higher attendance numbers and more talent being developed within this country.

For London Lions, or any other high-level team, to compete in Eurolegue, a lot of changes need to be made and a lot of improvements within the organization achieved. For the organization itself, a new Chairperson, CEO, and management team needs to be hired which would create a new structure and the new plan. As mentioned before, a clear path and clear direction needs to be agreed on by the organization to deliver needed improvements. Overall, the governing body of basketball in the United Kingdom, Basketball England, needs to be reformed as well to create a sustainable future for the athletes that would be managed by the individuals who are qualified and dedicated to their job. Professional staff including coaches need to attract and employ the best people to run the sport and raise overall quality of the players. Finally, create a business plan that would attract bigger investors and sponsors, agree on the recommended funding from the government, and Sport England, as well as apply for any other possible grants available. For the players, raise the participation target every year to grow the basketball community and have a goal of building a world-wide known local basketball team with ideally just local talent, and increase the quality level of domestic leagues. Finally, build a strong partnership with professional leagues in Europe such as Euroleague and Eurocup and have teams participating in those competitions annually. Only by achieving these targets and continuously improving, basketball in the United Kingdom has a chance of growing, entering Euroleague, and proposing a high-quality basketball.

CONCLUSIONS

This research paper has been set in the context where basketball, whilst being one of the most popular sports in the world, has a very low public profile in the United Kingdom. British basketball leagues have a low standard in comparison to European basketball leagues, while English and British national teams have minimal success in the world of basketball. However, despite the low results and lack of success, basketball is still played by many in the United Kingdom. It is safe to state that basketball in the United Kingdom has a significant potential and that the failure to attract big investments and sponsors, as well as its weak organizational structure, contributed to limiting its development. This concluding chapter covers the key findings that highlights the issues and problems that have been surrounding basketball in England, as well as solutions on how to improve it.

While sport in England has been growing and becoming more popular exponentially, it has been through many different changes since the start of the National Basketball League. As mentioned above, most of these changes happened due to commercialization and television. Worldwide, sport coverage has been increasing annually, including United Kingdom with all the major sports surrounding this country. However, in comparison, basketball is still nowhere close to football in the United Kingdom with media coverage, finance, and infrastructure. In most of the countries, local sports have a financial advantage and bigger audiences to support the sports, that's why England's top sports are rugby, football, and cricket, rather than basketball. This has made it exceptionally difficult for sports with lower spectator interest like basketball to gain exposure, attract sponsorship, and grow. Nevertheless, since the creation of National Basketball League, basketball has been growing rapidly and the participation in the sport is increasing as well. Although its development is still far beyond in comparison to the basketball development in other countries.

This research paper combined different methods and technique to achieve the objectives defined above. It represents interview data obtained from British national basketball players, general manager of London Lions basketball club, and assistant to general manager of AS Monaco basketball team to draw on their experiences and insights on how to improve British basketball. It also represents the data obtained from the online survey to get broader understanding on how British basketball is viewed worldwide and what measures could be adapted to make it better.

1. Even though basketball has been growing in the United Kingdom for the past couple decades, it is safe to say that in comparison to other countries, it still has a long way to go. First suggestion of this paper is to reform the governing body of Basketball England and restructure the whole organization, also appoint new, more experienced people to start

making changes for building a sustainable basketball market. Despite the growth of basketball in the United Kingdom, findings of this paper suggest that many, and same problems continue to exist in relation to the structure and governance of this sport. Current governing body does not realize the full potential that this sport can provide for the society and the country itself. It should be the goal of the governing body of basketball to ensure the basketball growth in the United Kingdom by increasing its presence in schools and universities; by providing access to affordable facilities; by helping managing quality clubs; by managing and developing quality coaches; by providing commercial sources of funding and raising the overall awareness of basketball.

2. Without sufficient funding, basketball in the United Kingdom will continue to struggle to achieve success locally and internationally. Basketball England should have a clear, reasonable, achievable, and sustainable structure on how to generate income in all possible matters. Such matters would include investors, sponsorship deals, ticket sales, TV deals, broadcasting deals, etc. If executed correctly, commercial sources of funding would be a tremendous help for the basketball in the United Kingdom. Sufficient funding, and higher overall budget would lead to hiring more staff and having more funds allocated towards the development of basketball which would attract greater levels of expertise and skills.
3. Increasing the quality of grassroots level and the participation of it is one of the most important tasks that Basketball England should focus on. As mentioned above, to succeed in raising the quality level in grassroots starts with the available and affordable facilities access. The base of basketball clubs needs to be expanded geographically and offered to many more different communities across the nation. To raise the overall quality level of the players participating in the grassroots level, or any levels above, a program for coaches and their development should be designed. Basketball England should pay closer attention to the performance requirements that are necessary for the development of high-quality coaches, as well as learn how to identify and later develop the talent. Increased staff numbers nationwide will eventually lead to forming a clear pathway for the players to develop from grassroots level to the elite level.
4. It is safe to say, that right this moment, United Kingdom is not suitable to have a team competing in Turkish Airlines Euroleague competition. They are making a positive progress with teams like London Lions entering and participating in Eurocup competition, however, they first need to become a sustainable competitor there before raising their goals any higher. It seems that European basketball landscape for the team from the United Kingdom is still a very difficult task to solve, however the progress has started, and the possibilities and opportunities are there for them to grab.

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ANNEXES

Annex 1.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS:

Athlete Development – Systematic and progressive development of an athlete imposing different approaches, tactics, and systems how to develop the best athlete possible.

Curriculum – Lessons, or academic content that is being taught in schools. Such content can be provided by schools, or professional individuals. (Blom, et al., 2015)

Elite – Select group or individual that is superior in terms of abilities and skills to anyone else. (Sawiuk, Taylor, & Groom, 2018)

Eurocup Basketball – Professional basketball league organized by the Turkish Airlines Euroleague. Europe's second highest basketball league.

Euroleague Basketball – Top tier basketball competition in Europe.

Globalization – Process when businesses or other organizations start operating on the international level or start developing international influence. (Shor & Galily, 2012)

Grassroots – The level where certain sport is being participated in on the most basic level, such as leisure. Grassroots sports can be organized and un-organized activity. (Whittle, 2018)

Media Coverage – When any digital content such as blogs, pictures, and videos, being used to show or discuss specific brands, organizations, services, or products.

OTT – Other the top media services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, Euroleague TV.

Sponsorship – A position when a company, or an individual is a sponsor.

Sport infrastructure – The foundation of every sport needed to facilitate sport participation. Sport infrastructure enables members to participate in sport, it includes facilities, goods, systems, and services. (Sutton & Knoester, 2021)

Sustainability – Ability to maintain the position, rate, or level without the consequences of compromising needs of the future generations. (Wissel, 2011)

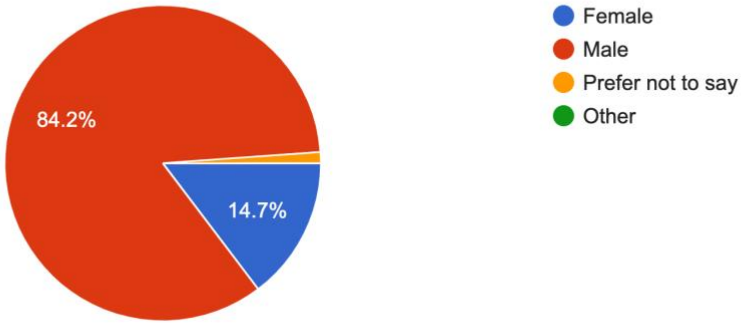
Transparency – All the organization's actions can be and are provided for the public. (Blom, et al., 2015)

Annex 2.

Online Survey Questions and Answers

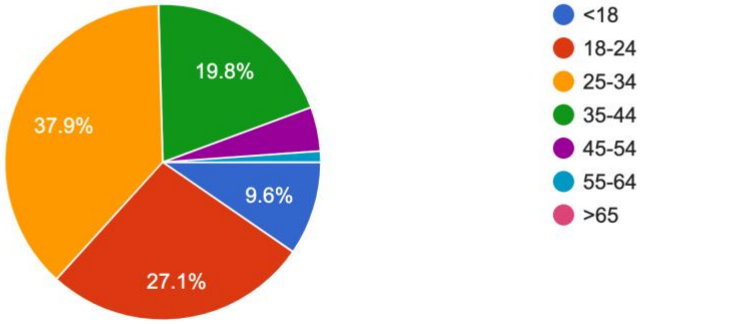
What is you gender?

177 responses



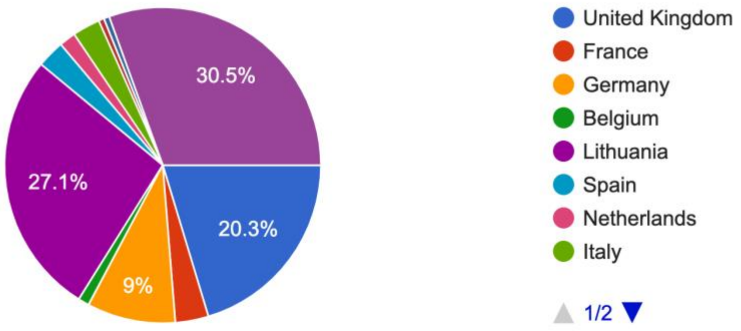
What is you age range?

177 responses



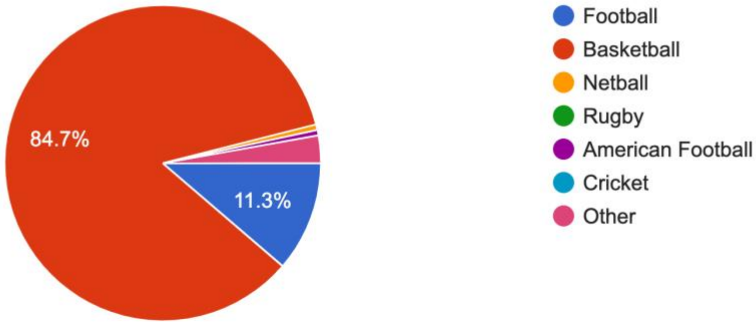
Where are you currently based?

177 responses



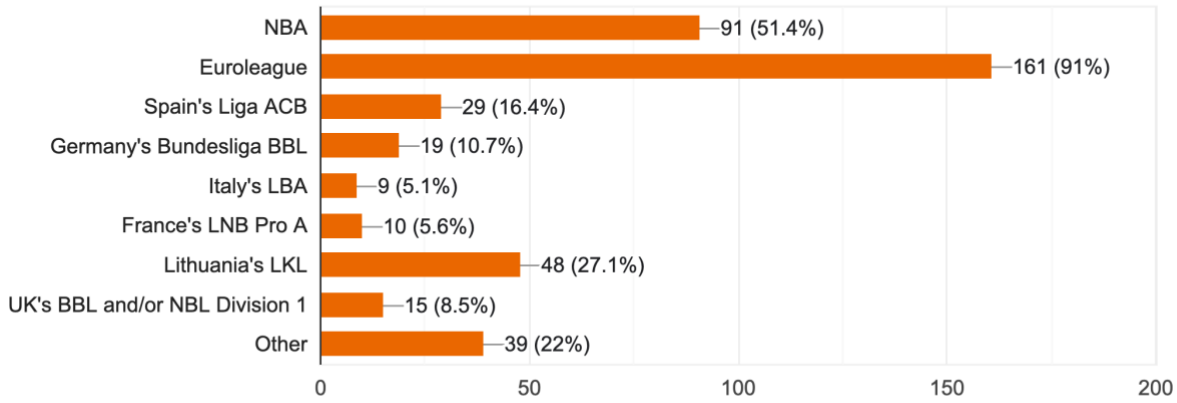
What sport do you prefer watching?

177 responses



Let's pretend your favourite sport to watch is basketball (if selected sport above was different), what basketball league/s you choose to watch?

177 responses



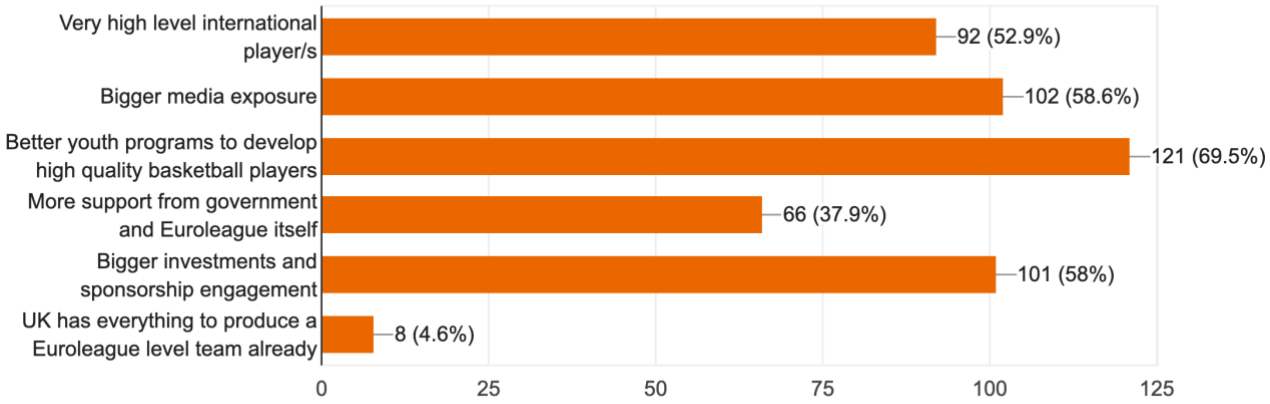
With Euroleague being top basketball league in Europe, do you think it should be expanding into other countries that currently don't have a team in the competition, such as United Kingdom?

177 responses



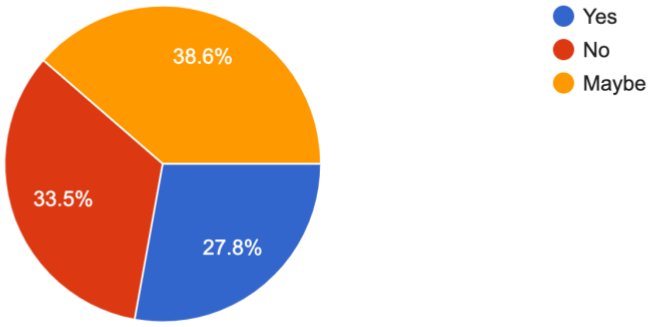
What would it take for UK to have a team in Euroleague?

174 responses



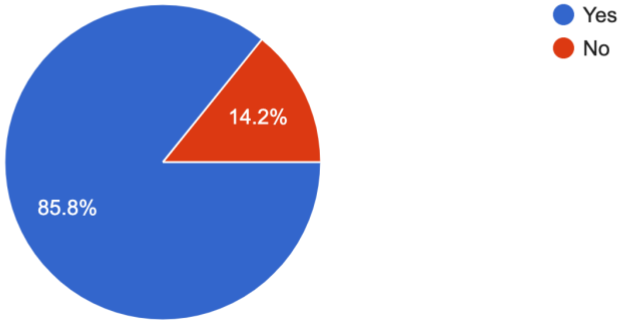
In your opinion, would local British players bring more fans and higher viewership ratings to Euroleague?

176 responses



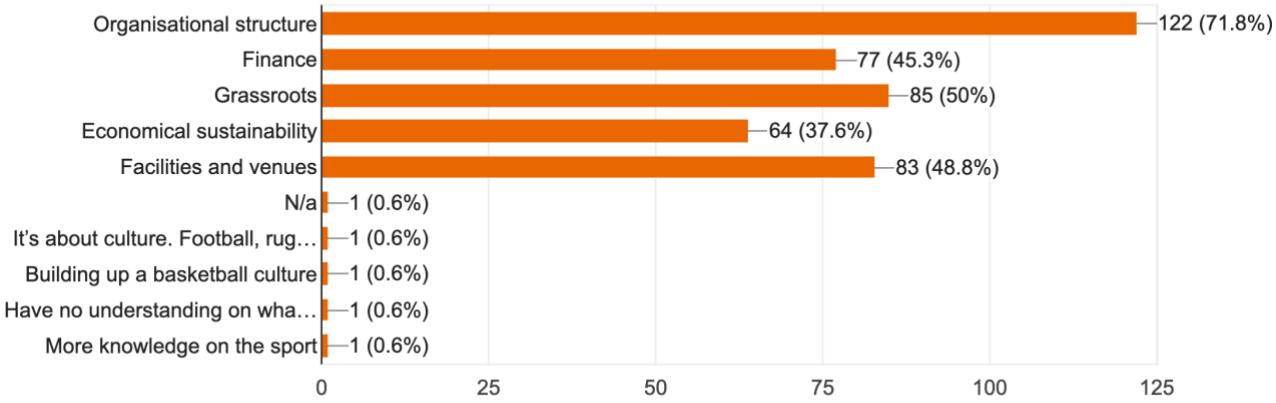
Do you follow and support local players that are playing overseas?

176 responses



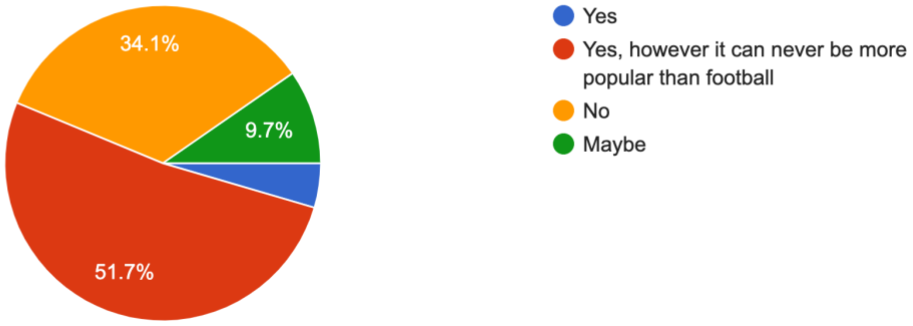
Overall, where should UK make changes in order to improve its basketball level?

170 responses



Can basketball become a top sport in England?

176 responses



Annex 3.

Personalized interview questions to the British basketball players:

1. Please tell us about yourself. (Name, nationality, basketball career, etc)
2. Please briefly describe your involvement in English basketball.
3. As a basketball player what basketball leagues and/or teams you follow and/or support?
4. In your opinion, what is the state of English basketball? How would you compare it to basketball in other countries, if you have such experience to do so?
5. How's the basketball community in UK? Do you have a lot of fans attending games and/or watching it online or on television?
6. What is your opinion on the organization, finance, and media coverage of UK's basketball?
7. Grassroot level basketball in UK, based on your experience, what is the state of it and how could it be improved, if improvements are needed?
8. Overall, is there room for basketball growth in UK? (If possible, explain your answer)
9. Euroleague is the top basketball league in Europe, do you think there should be a team in UK that participates in Euroleague competition?
    - If yes, which team in your opinion would be the best pick to compete in Euroleague?
10. In your opinion, is there a chance for basketball to become a top sport in England?

Personalized interview questions to the London Lion's Basketball Club General Manager:

1. What does it mean for London Lions to be competing in Eurocup in comparison to competing in the BBL. Are the expectations the same, to win the league, or do you have a different approach?
2. How does playing in the Eurocup affect your viewership numbers, home game attendance, social media accounts etc.?
3. Most of the current London Lions roster is British players, is that your strategy to "make it" with British players rather than getting "big name" players?
4. Grassroots level basketball and the youth in general, how important that is for London Lions? Is the organization focused more on achieving results now or building for the future?
5. In your opinion, what will the future look like for London Lions? Is the goal to eventually compete in Euroleague?

6. Let's say London Lions win Eurocup and can compete in Euroleague. What would need to be done for you to have a competitive team ready? (Not just players, perhaps structure of the club would need to change, would you need bigger investors and/or sponsorships, like what issues or problems you would tackle first?)
7. If London Lions are competing in the Euroleague, would you still participate in the BBL or would you better enter a more competitive league, for example French top league?

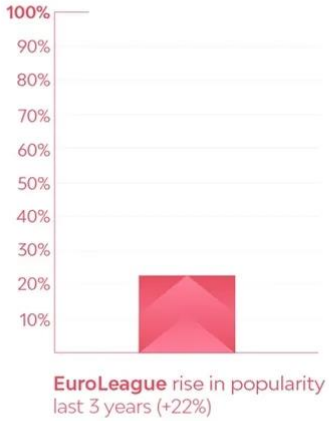
Personalized interview questions to the assistant of the General Manager of the AS Monaco basketball club:

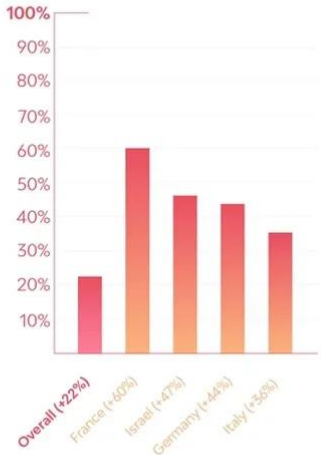
1. What does it mean for Monaco to be competing in Euroleague in comparison to competing in the French league. Are the expectations the same, to win the league, or do you have a different approach?
2. How did the success of the last season impact AS Monaco's viewership numbers, home game attendance, social media accounts etc.?
3. According to Euroleague's official website, Monaco currently has registered 6 French players for the competition. Do you see difference in attendance and viewership in general based on how many French players you have on the team?
4. Does having big name players on the team help with attendance and/or viewership?
5. Grassroots level basketball and the youth in general, how important it is for AS Monaco? Do you have special programs and/or schools where players have a chance to gradually make it to the men's team?
6. If you entitled to disclose such information, what is the main source of finance for AS Monaco: governmental grants, sponsorships, private investors, or ticketing?
7. What is AS Monaco's organizational structure? (Goals, future, investments/longtime/shortime)
8. What are the key factors for a new team like AS Monaco to compete and stay competing in Euroleague.

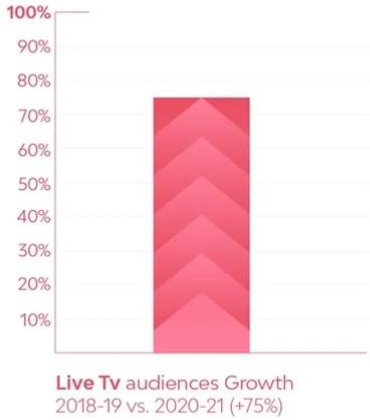
9. As a general manager of a team that competes in Euroleague's competition, what would be your insights and/or suggestions to the team that wants to enter this competition that is not necessarily from so called "basketball loving" country like United Kingdom?

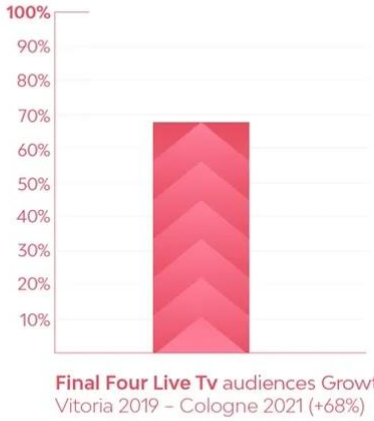
Annex 4.

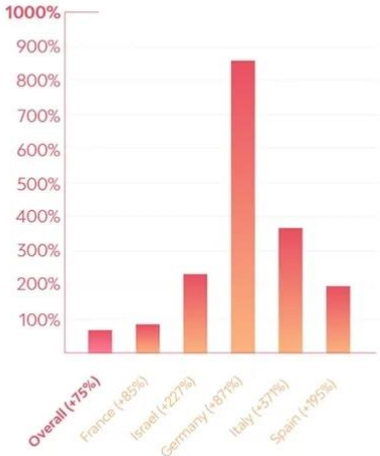
Overall statistical data regarding Euroleague's growth.



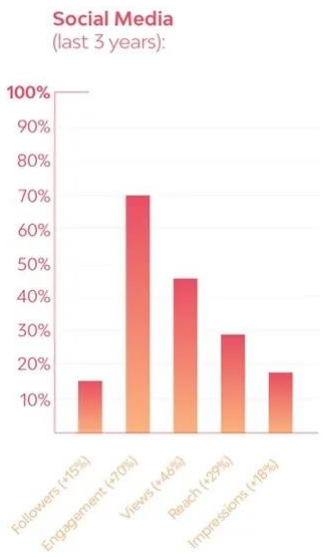


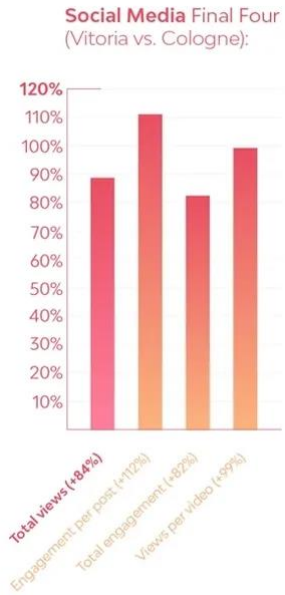


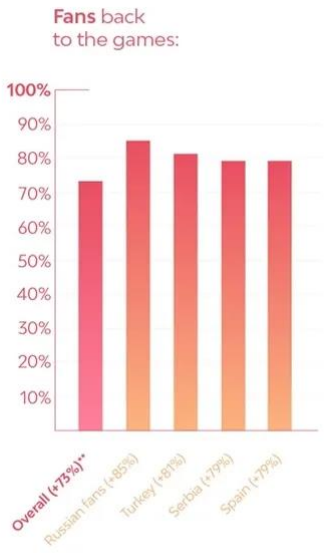




Annex 4. Continued







** Research conducted by Nielsen Sports

** 73.2% of fans want to come back to the games as soon as possible