

University of Alberta

An Exploration of the Selection Processes of North American
Male Basketball Players into European Professional Leagues

By

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Abstract

Based on Norbert Elias' Figural Theory, the purpose of this study is to explore the processes of import player selection; specifically of North American male basketball players into European professional leagues. Primary data was collected via semi-structured interviews, where open-ended questions were asked to coaches, players, and agents on their experiences within import player selection processes. Consistent with Baur & Ernst's (2011) four stage model for figural studies, supplementary data was used to contextualize the primary data. Following the data collection, a latent content analysis was used to organize the data into meaningful illustrations. This data set was triangulated by supplementary sources including archival documents and the researcher's insider-perspective. Themes of status, legitimacy, and interdependent networks were found to most accurately describe the experiences of selection. Each theme represented distinct procedures within player selection, yet these procedures were found to function as interweaved and normalized processes.

Preface

The idea to embark on a study regarding sport labor migration, and specifically the selection of migrant athletes in basketball began in the summer of 2009. I had recently graduated from University as a former student-athlete, and was looking to translate a relatively successful athletic career into professional basketball employment. Having witnessed the lack of financial incentive that North American Leagues (excluding the NBA) were able to offer, and additionally these leagues' own financial instability, my interest to play in Europe was a natural progression, and was one shared amongst many North American players who while not NBA bound, aimed to make a living playing professionally.

Despite my involvement in basketball circles, I learned quite quickly that talent alone was not going to land me a contract on a European team; I first had to get seen. My coaches seemed unsure about what procedures to take so that teams might consider signing me, and the players who I contacted, both amateur and professional seemed either unable or unwilling to assist. In hindsight, it seemed the majority of these contacts were more unable than unwilling.

Having returned to Canada in the same summer of 2009, I quickly came into contact with players who had also recently completed their amateur playing career. Many of them were elite performers in their given league. They too were finding it challenging to obtain a contract, naming several reasons such as the lack of reputation their amateur league carried, a lack of representation, not knowing who to trust and contact, and difficulty in finding ways to remain a relevant talent following their graduation. These players voiced their discouragement of the selection system in general, admitting that they didn't know how it all worked, and also that there were so many prospective players for European teams to choose from and so few roster spots available for import players.

Frustrated with a lack of leads and an inability to generate any serious offers from teams, I decided to return to Amateur competition, this time within CIS where I would try to perform at a level high enough to be noticed, and eventually attain employment on a professional team. However, this time around, the idea of performance referred not only to on-court success but to the other variables prevalent in import player selection that I had been previously unaware of. Naturally, as a student-athlete, I thought critically about my direction and previous failure. There seemed to be a countless number of player selection variables that I was oblivious to. In order to identify these variables I decided that my athletic and academic efforts would focus on exploring and identifying the processes of selection, and essentially the distinguishing factors behind those who were selected and those who weren't. During this investigation, I would also be experiencing these very processes on a personal level.

Though challenging, the opportunity to experience and study the processes of migrant athlete selection has proven to be quite rewarding. Much of this can be attributed to my incredible supervisor Marvin Washington who valued my ideas

and pushed me to grow academically while also considering my athletic ambitions; I'm not sure there could have been a better match for me to excel in this program as I did under Marvin's tutelage. I would like to thank the participants of this study for their willingness in sharing their expertise, and also the committee, Dr. Jim Denison & Dr. David Deephouse, for their much needed direction which was given during a pivotal stage in the research process. Lastly, I must thank my wife Makeba Lindsay for her patience and unwavering support; she believed in me every step of the way.

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Introduction

With over 12000 male basketball players on more than 750 teams in the NCAA alone (NCAA, 2009), the competitive landscape for athletes attempting to transition from amateur to professional leagues is indeed oversupplied. The NCAA estimates that about one in 75, or approximately 1.2% of NCAA male senior basketball players will get drafted by an NBA team (2009). Based on these estimations, basketball players have the rarest chance of being drafted of all major American sports including football, baseball, and hockey.

While the dream that is the NBA exists as an elusive reality for the majority of North American athletes, and amidst frequent NBA lockouts, lives the realization that professional basketball employment may be most accessible via professional leagues in European countries. However, the player selection processes of the free labor market leagues in Europe differ greatly from the monopsonistic draft of the NBA which essentially assigns players to teams (Daymont, 1975).

Despite the high rate of international player exchange within the global market of sport labor, studies regarding the recruitment and selection of foreign athletes have most commonly focused on the experiences of import players (Ribeiro & Dimeo, 2009; Stead & Maguire, 2000) their contested presence on foreign teams (Falcous & Maguire, 2005; Maguire, 1988; Olin, 1984; Bale, 1991) and their migratory patterns (Chiba, 2004; Maguire & Pearton, 2000a; Arbena, 1994). Elliott & Maguire's (2008) figurational study on the migration of Canadian athletes into British Professional Hockey Leagues is one of few studies that have brought insight to the recruiting trends that exist in migrant athlete selection. Elliott & Maguire's (2008) study found that employment was "facilitated by informal communicative channels maintained by networks of interdependent relationships" (p. 159). Still, no other research, has attempted to further understand the conditions under which professional import players are selected, or as the increasingly competitive global market suggests—are not selected.

Where the NBA arguably attracts and selects the top 60 players in the world each year, selection in European professional leagues face the challenge of evaluating middle-tier players and thus undergoes a selection progression all but uncharted in academic and mainstream literature. This study aims to remedy the gap in the literature which has thus far failed to proportionately represent the high volume of migrant player selection that currently exists in sport markets. To achieve this ambition, this study examines the perspectives of agents, coaches, and migrant players in order to explore the processes of North American basketball talent that has been found to commonly compete in European professional basketball leagues (Olin, 1984; Maguire, 1988).

Although the migrant athlete selection trends that may be found in European professional basketball leagues may or may not appropriately speak to trends found in other overseas leagues, Europe serves as a natural starting point of analysis understanding that it is the most highly centralized location for North

American import talent within basketball. With this study, we may begin to grow from a case-specific understanding of how migrants are selected, to an awareness of the general processes and patterns that underpin selection.

The following body of work is laid out in three main segments. Within the first section I illustrate the study's theoretical perspective, provide a background of general recruitment techniques alongside an empirical review of basketball as it exists in a global sense. A review of relevant sport labor migration literature rounds out the segment. In the second section the employed methods of inquiry are explained, as are the data analysis techniques and results. Finally, the discussion and conclusion sections illustrate the study's limitations, contributions, and provide directions for future research.

Theory

Building on the work of Elliott and Maguire (2008), this study is informed by Elias' Figural Theory, also known as Process Sociology. Considering the international nature of import player selection, a key concern for Figural Theory is to "draw attention to people's interdependencies" (Elias, 1970, p. 132) despite the borders or bodies of water that may separate them. A figuration is simply, as Elias & Dunning (1971) describe, continuous exchange between interdependent individuals. To further explain, Elias & Dunning (1971) use sport rhetoric as an example, illustrating what may be understood as a "game-pattern"—or the flow of a game, is actually "small groups of human beings changing their relations in constant interdependence with each other"(p. 67).

The rules of interdependence however are not limited to sport, but also relate to common, everyday interaction as well. Through a figural lens, these interactions may be understood at both micro and macro levels, or essentially, between individuals and groups. Elias notes that "one of the most serious shortcomings of conventional sociological theories is that, though admittedly they try to present a clear conception of people as societies, they fail to do the same for people as individuals" (Elias, 1970 p. 128). This however does not mean that one's actions may be understood in and of themselves, but rather that the influence of an individual's actions function as an integral part of the *overall* state of a figuration (Elias, 1970). That is, through individual action, one may influence their own position in a figuration, which then may alter the function of the figuration—Figural Theory attests that both aspects must be considered.

The altering of a figuration through individual action has shown to have both intended and unintended consequences. Murphy et al., (2000) explains that unintended or 'blind' social processes are a result of "interweaving". Here, "interweaving" simply refers to the cumulative effect of actions taken by large numbers of people. The great amount of interweaved actions lead to unintended

outcomes, as the sum of many acts prove to result in less certain outcomes than do individual acts.

With consideration to the dynamic movement of interconnected relations, the “objective of Figural Sociology as Elias saw it was to encourage sociologists to ‘think processually’ by always studying social relations as emerging and contingent processes” (Murphy, et al., 2000, p. 93). With process in mind, the aim of figural sociology brings awareness to the ever-changing nature of relationships as they exist, and also how they evolve. Indeed, it is through the interactions between individuals that figurations may be influenced.

Individuals’ actions and the ways in which individuals are able to influence figurations also have implications for the dynamic shift of power within relationships. Figural Theory suggests that power is never absolute, but that it exists as a relational context between groups (Elias, 2001 p. 182). Additionally, while figurations may consist of stronger groups that exhibit greater strength over weaker groups, the relationship of power is by no means a static concept, but a fluctuating, tensile equilibrium [...] moving to and fro” (Elias 1978, p. 131).

Given figural theory’s ability to inform matters of power, interdependence, and evolving group dynamics with respect to individual action, this lens provides an invaluable tool for identifying key characteristics within a relatively unstudied topic. This theoretical lens allows for the unraveling of how interdependent individuals—agents, athletes, and coaches—interact and operate in the pursuit of selection. Elliott and Maguire’s (2008) figural study is an exception in the genre of sport labor migration given its focus on the characteristics of migrant athlete recruitment and selection. Therefore, as this study employs a figural perspective and is of concern to migrant athlete selection, it provides a consistent and coherent framework capable of building on previous literature while also filling the gaps in literature which have yet to adequately address the characteristics and processes of migrant athlete selection.

Recruitment

Barber’s *Recruiting Employees* (1998) states that while “recruitment is aimed at attracting individuals to an organization, selection is aimed at identifying the most qualified from among those individuals, [though] in selection, applicant abilities are matched with the organizational needs, and it is the organization that determines whether a suitable match exists”(p.3). The matching process between organizations and employees however has proven to be quite an inexact science. “Selection is never perfect [as] an employee may fail for an infinite variety of reasons, and no program can evaluate or anticipate all of them” (Mandel, 1964 p. 11). We may also realize that what Mandel describes as failure may not exclusively relate to an employee’s inability to succeed, but also to an organization’s inability to effectively facilitate success.

While “valid selection methods merely identify the best candidates from among those available” (p. 15), they do so under the context of *anticipated* utility. Indeed the truest evidence of effective selection cannot be determined until employees have had an opportunity to prove themselves under various conditions on the job (p. 13). Despite the inexact nature of various selection methods which aim to find the best person for the job, Rynes and Barber (1990) claim that a variety of applicant characteristics have become accepted, accurately or not, as signals of actual quality or productivity” (p. 290). These characteristics most commonly include higher education or its equivalent, as well as experience in a given field (Rynes and Barber, 1990; Salt, 1997).

Salt’s (1997) study on the international movements of the highly skilled states that there is no agreed upon definition for the migrant working class; that “the nature of qualifications required, and the location of acquiring them, add further to the heterogeneity” (p. 6) of this group. While groups of working migrants within sport are but a small part of the greater migrant worker demographic, they too have proven to be recruited and selected for a wide range of reasons.

The recruitment of David Beckham to the Los Angeles Galaxy is such an example where the motivation to recruit were influenced by aspects other than talent. Lawson’s et al., (2008) results indicated “that Beckham increased ticket sales as a share of stadium capacity by about 55 percentage points” (p. 189). Falcous & Maguire (2005) further illustrated the great amount of speculation regarding the commercial and marketing initiatives that proved such a move to be economically centered. It is this speculation that may be present as long as Sport continues to commoditize at the expense of its idealized form and function.

Dyson’s (1993) article concerning the cultural impact of Michael Jordan on sport explains the concept of an idealized form— that the culture of American sport views athletic activity “as a means of symbolically embracing and equitably pursuing the just, the good, the true and the beautiful” (p. 65). In this sense, the pursuit of talent in order to win games and to ‘play for the love of it’ has existed as an ideology of sport in its natural, pure, and most celebrated form. These ideals may be most visible during the Olympic Games and other sporting events which utilize athletes as representative entities of a Country through competition.

Consequently, commercially infused player recruitment for purposes of marketability and sport popularity has become as taboo as it has commonplace. The Beckham example, illustrates the powerful influence that athletes possess beyond simply winning and losing games. The same influence can be seen in Yao Ming’s ability to attract a Chinese fan base and single-handedly extend the global reach of the NBA. Certainly for recruiters, the wide ranging abilities of players to influence aspects outside of the actual game are considered at many levels of competition. Basketball is not impervious to players’ wide ranging influences, and as will be seen through the illustration of a basketball specific context, they may actually be more influential than athletes in most other sports: That basketball

players are more visible and thus more influential to the culture of the game on a global scale may be made clear through the following contextual illustration.

Empirical Setting

Considering the function of recruitment within the context of basketball, this section provides practical examples of basketball as it exists within the global arena. Kesenne's (2007) book titled *Economic Theory of Professional Team Sports: An Analytic Treatment*, states that "the players are the most important labor input in the industry of professional team sports" (p. 30). During the 2011-2012 NBA lockout, Economist Kevin Murphy reiterated this point as it concerned basketball specifically:

What separates the NBA from a different basketball league? Well, it's the players. The basketball's the same, the court's the same, it's the players who really are the distinguishing feature [...] the defining characteristic and the scarce resource, if you think about it from an economic point of view, is the talent [...] It's only five guys and you can give the same guy the ball every time you come down if you want to. ... And the players are very visible. It's more of a player-driven sport than [the others]
(Economist and NBPA Rep. Kevin Murphy interviewed by NBA's Steve Aschburner during the 2011 NBA Lockout)

Within the past few decades however, the sport has increasingly been driven by its international stars, whether by German-born Dirk Nowitzki winning an NBA championship over an American star-studded squad in Miami, or Yao Ming anchoring the NBA's marketing outreach to China which saw record breaking numbers of NBA all-star fan voting. While the great impact that international stars have had on basketball's global growth are up for dispute, the increased recruitment of these international players is undeniably evident in the NBA's recent willingness to draft these players at increasing volume. (See Appendix I)

The draft history of the NBA shows clearly the steadily increasing influx of international talent. From 1993-2002 a total of 90 international players had been selected, and from 2003-2011, this total increased to 146. Evident too were the placement of these picks. Where international selection was often associated with high risk/high reward talent, these foreign players quickly legitimized their place among elite American talent based on their on-court success. After Team USA's stunning international losses to Argentina, Yugoslavia, and Spain after a streak of 58 straight wins over ten years, the trend of selecting international prospects increased as the subsequent draft included a record selection of 21 International players.

More recently, the 2011 draft which followed Dirk Nowitzki's MVP performance in the finals was followed up with a draft that selected international players in 5 of the first 10 selections. This was a trend never before seen in what is considered

the most elite of all basketball leagues worldwide. While such events may be partially attributed to international players' proven ability to succeed in a game once dominated by Americans, the NBA's agenda was also intent on entering untouched markets overseas (Miller et al., 2003; Jackson & Andrews, 1999).

While the presence of international talent in the NBA has steadily increased, the presence of American talent in European leagues cannot be understated. Eurobasket.com, a comprehensive basketball database for professional athlete, coach and agent profiles estimates there to be over 6000 American male basketball players (active within a 5 year period) in European leagues. Though a significant figure, this number represents only a modest portion of the total number of players in America's greater talent pool, generated by amateur leagues such as the NCAA, NAIA, and NJCAA.

American player talent pools generated by Clubs, Universities, and (semi) Professional teams continue to exceed the number of available positions in existing European professional leagues. William and Dreher's (1992) study which sought to identify relationships between applicant pool characteristics and compensation attributes for bank tellers claim that "a large applicant pool is thought to be an advantage because, if the number of positions to be filled is held constant, it provides an organization with a large number of applicants to select from, allowing those doing the hiring to be more selective than they could be otherwise" (p. 573). The characteristics which involve large talent pools with limited available positions certainly define the competitive landscape of professional migrant athletes within basketball. In response to this phenomenon, recruiters have not only intensified their expectations of athletes, but as seen in the increasing diffusion of foreign talent, have also broadened their talent identification scope to achieve such demands.

In 2008, Josh Childress, a young and up and coming talent became the most profitable non-NBA beneficiary of this very phenomenon. Childress made an unprecedented move from the NBA to a high level club in Greece named Olympiacos. Olympiacos signed Childress above his projected NBA market value for a reported \$32.5 million (non-taxable dollars) over 3 years, a stark contrast from the \$32 million over 5 years he was offered by the NBA's Atlanta Hawks. Childress' transition from the NBA to a European team was considered unparalleled for two main reasons; in one aspect Childress was a significant contributor in the NBA. Career journeymen and players considered either on the tail end of their career, or on the cusp of 'NBA talent level were the kinds of players who most commonly signed contracts with European teams—not up and coming talents such as Childress. Secondly, Childress' ability to negotiate a contract at a competitive rate *across* leagues challenged the NBA's legitimacy as the single dominant league of the world. While Childress' signing failed to overthrow the ideology of the NBA's dominance, it did illustrate the opportunity of mobility in a newly realized global competitive arena.

Soon after the Childress signing, two high profile high school athletes also

exercised their player mobility options. Though these players, Brandon Jennings and Jeremy Tyler, were considered to be lottery picks in their draft year after the mandatory year in college, they chose instead to forego the NBA-mandated one year of college. This decision allowed these players to earn a living with European professional teams for one year until they became draft eligible. From significant contributors of NBA teams such as Childress, to high school talents like Jennings and Tyler, the pedigree of talent for athletes who compete in Europe is vast and wide ranging. Additionally, as talent mobilizes across continents, the motivations of recruiters to acquire specific players may be just as diverse as the motivations of the athletes that they pursue.

The implications for the recruitment of foreign talent are also wide ranging considering the paradoxical jostling of Basketball's elite levels to claim League supremacy. On one end, NBA recruiters seek foreign players and international legitimacy toward a conquest for basketball superiority. Contrastingly, top tiered Euro Leagues also claim to be legitimate contenders as the highest level of basketball, while commonly employing foreign American talent as their feature players. If there is one constant variable in the exchange of foreign players across leagues and countries, it's that both the demand and supply are expanding.

Lee's (2010) theoretical analysis on sport labor migration attests that the recruitment of foreign talent may be best described as outsourcing. Lee (2010) describes that the use of outsourcing is most commonly utilized for "cost minimization, quality improvement and access to resources" (p.153). This perspective is valid, and while it offers an explanation based on bottom line utility most commonly associated with American capitalist ideals, it also affirms the theory of international diffusion as opposed to a simple Americanization of the sport. Indeed, as most elite international players aspire to play in the NBA, the NBA also relies on these players for providing the best possible product on the floor and an entrance into untouched markets. Through the two-way exchange of sport and culture via the diffusion of international talent, the exchange of traditions may not be as dominant as the NBA and the Americanized game of basketball may seem.

Bale's (1991) study on the recruitment of international talent into American Collegiate teams reaffirms the common dependence displayed in basketball's global growth by stating that "a major feature of sport, like capitalism, is that it is a world system, and movement and interaction are necessary for its survival in its present form" (p. 6). It is within such a world system that sport migrant studies such as Maguire & Pearton's (2000a) observations of migratory patterns understand elite sports migration as a phenomenon underpinned with complexities including, but not limited to economics; interdependencies that also include "political, historical, geographical, social and cultural factors" (p. 175).

Due to the 'outsourcing' for foreign talent, NBA styles of play have evolved toward a more international style of play. This evolution is evident through in-

game rule changes, team play, and finesse play, which have been characteristics most attributed to non-American basketball. The trend of international diffusion within an ‘American game’ demonstrates how over time, subtle changes and events can make such a great impact on the evolution of a sport’s paradigm—at one point Dirk Nowitzki is a ‘soft European’, and at the very next moment, he is the 2011 NBA Finals Champion and MVP.

Sport Labor Migration Literature Review

Regardless of the criticisms of foreign players, the dynamic movement of import athletes has remained constant. Joseph Arbena’s (1994) study examining the migratory flows within, out of, and into Latin America has described such movements as “in-migration” and “out-migration”. This “in-migration” phenomenon of import players into the NBA is but one aspect of the labor exchange between North America, and the rest of the world. Indeed the reverse flows of North American players into foreign leagues which may be described as “out-migration” illustrates yet again how necessary player movement is within the sport world system that Bale (1991) described in his analysis of amateur migrant athlete flows.

Influential in the shaping of North American ‘out-migration’ are country-and-league-specific labor laws which dictate quotas for the number of foreign players allowed per team (Maguire, 1994). Falcous & Maguire (2005) explain that “fears concerning the effects of migration have resulted in protectionist labor barriers, including quotas, residency clauses, selection limitations, and eligibility thresholds, to assuage local concerns” (p. 139). Elias & Dunning (1971) have also acknowledged the growing trend to control sport at the state level due to the increasing presence of international relationships. These restrictions have shown to vary across region and league, and are continuously changing across countries in unstandardized fashion. These laws may limit import positions from as low as 1, but more commonly at a rate of 2-3 spots per team. Some countries such as Germany have very loose restrictions for the hiring of import talent, while leagues in China may also restrict playing time for import players. Height restrictions are also prevalent in Philippine leagues.

While labor laws regulate foreign player access, the growing commercialization of basketball, (Dyson, 1993; Maguire, 1988) as well as the overproduction of North American talent, has rendered import players as necessary staples to the majority of professional basketball teams around the world. The employment of North Americans to fill the few import positions available has reached institutionalized proportions, to the degree that “import” is often referred to and understood as “American”. Indeed, the influence of Americanization has been widespread for the recruitment of players, but also for coaches, and specialized positions (Maguire, 1988). Americanization however does not fully explain the complexities of international recruitment within basketball.

Maguire’s (2000) review of an alternative perspective to sport globalization

“rejects the idea that the spread of diffusion of styles of behavior depend solely on the activities of established groups” (p. 363) such as those from western culture. This proposed “two-way process of cultural interaction” (p. 363) is quite visible through basketball’s dominant sport body, the NBA. Although American players have dominated the recruitment efforts of NBA teams for decades, the undeniable growth of international recruitment, most notably over the past decade has shown that Americanization is not solely responsible for basketball growth, but rather that its global popularity is both a result of and a product of international diffusion.

John Bale’s (1991) study on foreign student athletes in American Universities sought to identify the underlying functions and responses of migrant athlete recruitment. Through interviews, the coaches’ opinions of the prevalence of migrant talent were rather dichotomous, as the primary division involved the deskilling of local talent versus the “instant help” model that foreign recruits provided teams. Bale’s ‘instant help’ referred to the foreign recruits that were often older and more physically mature than the usual 18 year old American high school athletes that enter University. These players were believed more likely to allow a team to be successful in the present as opposed to waiting for high school talent to develop in the unforeseeable future. Such findings confirmed that sport’s “corporate athleticism” (p. 100) was experiencing its own version of the Brain Drain phenomenon, referred to by Bale (1991) as the ‘Brawn Drain’. The original “Brain Drain” concept that represents the outsourcing of foreign talent at the expense of local talent is not limited to conventional labor markets, nor is it limited to the amateur playing field that Bale investigated.

Predominant in professional leagues, like their amateur counterparts is the importation of professional foreign talent. While the level of competition is different, the affect and reactions elicited as a result of the “Brawn Drain” effect that Bale (1991) described is quite similar. The asymmetrical nature of foreign recruitment from lesser developed to more developed countries has also been acknowledged (Falcous & Maguire, 2005). This phenomenon has been reported as a contributor to the deskilling of donor countries (Maguire & Bale, 1994) where “the identification and selection of elite players are producing migrant patterns that [not only] impact indigenous player development [but also] the viability and success of national teams” (Maguire & Pearton 2000b, p. 759). Studies concerning the effects of foreign recruitment have considered the many implications of migrant talent entering domestic leagues (Lanfranchi, 1994) noting the advantages and disadvantages of when foreign workers are employed at the expense of locals (Maguire, 1988)

In terms of basketball specifically, studies regarding the recruitment of foreign players have proven more concerned with the on and off court effects of migrant athletes than with the mechanisms that define the functions of their recruitment. The scope of these studies include implications for the contested presence of North American players in professional Finnish (Olin, 1984) and English Leagues (Maguire, 1988; Falcous & Maguire, 2005). Although previous research has identified the increasing demand for foreign talent and also its effects, they have

not addressed how processes of interdependence and the ways in which recruiters respond to such conditions affect athlete selection specifically.

Olin's (1984) study on foreign players in Finnish basketball leagues found that the presence of these players proved to be both positive and negative. His findings reported that "positive increases in the number of spectators, public relations of the club and the success of its team" (p. 273) were expected because of these foreign players, yet they were also shown to "effect negatively the team spirit, the play tactics, the economics of the club, the development of other sport branches in the club and the success of the national team" (p. 273).

Additionally, through this study, Olin makes clear the many dimensions of sport that are influenced by the presence of foreign players. This is evident in the study's inclusion of queries regarding sport popularity, attitudes towards imports, and financial implications to name a few. Confusing however is Olin's allusion to 'success' and the ways in which foreign players were expected to positively impact it. Considering the many negative critiques on the presence of imports, especially on lower tier teams, (p. 277) it is not entirely clear which factors are intended to represent success. This vague assessment of success as it regards sport however may be paramount as long as sport is perceived in its natural idealized form (Dyson, 1993), and as this form coexists with marketing and commercialization initiatives.

Maguire's (1988) study on the commercialization of English Basketball further reiterates the blurring line of success and sport growth. It proposed that the NBL (National Basketball League) underwent three key transformations;

- a. a shift among elite participants from players to workers
- b. a shift towards basketball as a marketable commodity
- c. a shift in the direction of 'spectacularization' (p. 309)

Within this context, success may refer to the efficiency and fairness of basketball players as workers. It may regard whether or not marketing efforts have garnered adequate attention toward growing positively the brand of basketball, or it could potentially indicate whether the fans in the stands were satisfied with the level of 'entertainment' on the floor. These dimensions however are all a dependent function of the stakeholder in question, and hence what may be called success remains dependent upon stakeholder perspective.

Staying with Maguire's case analysis on the NBL, he also stated that "success was increasingly being viewed in terms of the game's marketability and mass appeal" (p. 314). To reach these ends, American imports were recruited with the hope that the "entertainment they would provide would have several benefits: more sponsorship and media coverage, increased attendance figures, greater participation rates and improved playing standards" (p.313). As was the case in Olin's (1984) study, the presence of these import players was creating tension most notably in regards to a lack of local player development. Despite the protest

of local stakeholders, American imports were becoming *more* common in the NBL.

Whereas in the early stages of the NBL concern had been expressed regarding the number of American imports, towards the end of the 1970s and the early 1980's criticism of the number of 'dual nationals' began to rise. That is, while a particular team could have two foreign players, they could also add Americans to their squad if the latter could claim British nationality. Given the rationale underpinning the commercialization of the game, it is not surprising that clubs sought to exploit this loophole. [Not long after the American commercialization of the EBBA the league] was issuing temporary British licenses to Americans who had not yet received British passports! (p. 315).

The NBL was very much committed to attracting foreign talent of the American variety as a goal toward increased sponsorship and sport popularity. This league however became outright dependent on the recruitment of American players to create excitement for the evolving spectacle sport, and the resulting sponsorships that followed. As seen in Falcou and Maguire's (2005) study of American players in British Professional Leagues, increased sponsorship facilitated the recruitment of import players for commercial appeal, where entertaining fans may have been just as, if not more important than winning games. "Players and coaches [had] become more concerned with the outcome and the need to satisfy the audience than with the experience of playing as a pleasurable 'end in itself'" (p. 308). As British Basketball was growing commercially, its "success was increasingly being viewed in terms of the game's marketability and mass appeal" (p. 314).

Although the NBL was dependent on American players, the available talent from America illustrated a fundamental point in that Americans were abundant, and looking for employment. Maguire (1988) stated that "the Americanization of English basketball relates not only to changes in the sport in Britain but also reflects, as noted, the position of college and pro-basketball players in the U.S.A. and their need to come to Europe to pursue a career" (p. 319). The overproduction of sport in America is seen in Miller et al., (2003) which explains that

Having exhausted the domestic supply of good, cheap, obedient athletes and wealthy consumers, the National Basketball Association (NBA) went overseas during the 1990's in search of cheap talent and likely customers, opening offices in Switzerland, Spain, Australia, Hong Kong, and Mexico. Just three international players were drafted into the NBA for the 1993-4 season. The number had increased to 12 four years on (p. 432).

While the overproduction of sport in America's market resulted in the expansion into global markets, Maguire's study shows the back end of this market saturation

in the willingness of American sport talent (players, coaches, and administrators) to enter foreign markets as migrant workers.

Elliott and Maguire's (2008) study showed that "recruitment of migrant workers to EIHL teams need not be facilitated by a formal mediator such as an agent. Instead, informal communicative "friends-of-friends" networks and "bridgehead" contacts more commonly facilitate flows of information to the potential employer and potential migrant employee (p. 158). These findings are in line with extant literature regarding the utility of social networks which have been found to span across nations and attract friends to various locations (Conradson & Latham 2005; Wong & Trumper, 2002).

Despite previous research that has been conducted within the field of Sport Labor Migration, little is known about athlete selection processes for professional teams. While Elliott & Maguire (2008) have shown that social networks of informal varieties may be responsible for the attainment of athletic talent, research is limited which has aimed to further investigate the processes of selection.

We know that while foreign recruitment is constant both in the sense of "in/out-migration" (Arbena 1994), the implications of such recruitment transcend the effects these athletes have on the playing field. Truly, as migrant athletes may be recruited for various reasons, the effects of their presence may be just as diverse.

Basketball offers a unique perspective within sport labor migration due to the two way dependency that exists in the NBA's desire for foreign players (Miller et al., 2003), and European leagues' desire for American talent (Maguire, 1988). With fewer resources than NBA teams, these foreign teams do not simply select from a talent pool of the most elite athletes, but must select from amongst a much broader, and also less proven demographic of talent. Naturally, these 'mid-level' athletes may not be as accessible, as easy to identify or even to evaluate as are the top athletes that make NBA rosters. Indeed, the conditions under which players are selected into European professional leagues are quite different than those of the NBA. Therefore, this study aims to identify the resulting processes of selection as they exist within the relatively uninvestigated context of European professional basketball leagues.

Due to the gap in literature which has thus far failed to adequately research the processes of migrant athlete selection, identifying the various aspects which feed into the phenomenon are necessary in order to understand it as a whole. In an effort to become familiar with these various aspects, the first segment of this essay has reviewed general recruitment, specific empirical examples within basketball, and also extant sport migration literature. While these topics are worthy of inquiry in their own right, they also provide a contextual awareness regarding migrant athlete selection. To coherently synthesize these various fields in order to describe the mechanisms of the phenomenon under study, a figurational lens was adopted which could appropriately speak to each field, and simultaneously the phenomenon as a whole.

In summary, I build upon sport labor migration literature by utilizing figurational approaches to discuss how North American players are recruited into European professional leagues. The following section will describe in detail the undertaken methods used to generate a trustworthy dataset capable of speaking to the abovementioned phenomenon.

Method

Sample

Due to the specific scope of this study, I purposefully selected participants to allow for rich, thick description (Patton, 2002). The sample consisted of three identifiable demographics; North American basketball players (n=5) who had been selected to play professionally in European basketball leagues, player agents (n= 3) who had facilitated the selection of American male professional basketball players, and European coaches (n=4) who had either selected import players to compete on their professional team, or had worked closely with professional coaches. All 12 participants were males.

The participants in this study represented a diverse demographic in terms of the professional levels of competition in which they were employed. The players had an average of 5 years of professional playing experience. The agents averaged 8 years as player representatives, and the coaches though under various roles (e.g. assistant coach, youth developer, etc.) had an average 17 years of experience. Two participants had experience under two different roles at various times in their professional career, both as players and then as agents. One coach was also a National Team Manager and worked in close proximity to the partnered Professional Team Coach.

Interviews

Participants engaged in semi-structured interviews which lasted between 20-40 minutes. I completed the interviews over a span of three weeks. The interviews were done over the phone, via skype and in person. These interviews were audio-recorded, converted into mp3 files, and then transcribed verbatim.

The interviews consisted of open-ended questions so as to remain consistent with the exploratory nature of the study. Following the approval of the University of Alberta's Ethics Board, I used an interview guide to help address the key topics of inquiry. While the interview guide provided a sense of structure to key topics, I remained open to the direction of the participant in order to allow for the surfacing of their expertise. As interviews were undertaken, I altered the guide in order to illuminate the key topics as the participants understood them. The below-listed prompts summarize the key topics of inquiry;

(a) Describe some specific characteristics, emotional, physical, or otherwise that you believe are of great value during the selection of import players. How do you evaluate such characteristics toward a suitable level of certainty?

(b) Describe the process of import player selection/being selected—the key steps you take, and the procedures you follow. Explain how these processes are facilitated.

(c) How would you describe the role of an American import player competing on a European team? Describe the implications of such a role.

(d) What are your thoughts on the prevalence of American players in foreign leagues?

In addition to altering the focus of the interview guide based on the responses of participants, I also adjusted the interview prompts to relate to specific participant perspectives. For example, when an athlete was asked about characteristics necessary for selection, they were asked to speculate given they had not been in a situation to actually select an import player as a coach had. They were however able to respond to the characteristics that they *believed* were necessary for selection since they had at some point been the subject of selection. Essentially, all participants' responses were a subject of their own perspective, as most data was produced from first-hand experience while at some points, participants would speculate on issues within the greater selection process. Speculative information given by participants during interviews was an important part of interview data generation (Morse, 2000). This “shadow data” “provides the investigator with some idea of the range of experiences and the domain of the phenomenon beyond the single participant’s personal experience, and it provides some explanation of the rationale for these differences” (p. 4). Both forms of data were essential in understanding individual experiences within the phenomenon with respect to the greater context of it as well.

Analysis

In order to transform interview transcripts into meaningful data, I used a latent content analysis which Mayan (2009) describes as the “process of identifying, coding, and categorizing the primary patterns in the data” necessary for understanding the generated information within an appropriate context (p. 94). I identified and coded each individual transcript, which then allowed for the categorization of patterns across all transcripts. The patterns most noted in the data results were those which were most commonly illustrated by the participants. I gave the more highly recurring patterns priority to the lesser illustrated patterns. Further descriptions of these methods are explained in the researcher-as-instrument section.

As perspective-unique data was gathered from players, agents, and coaches/managers, I felt that an inductive analysis was necessary to put all the pieces together to form a story-like description of the phenomenon (p. 86). That is, while I understood matters such as player-agent-coach interaction a priori as normalized relationships in player selection, the mechanisms and dynamic processes of these relationships were unknown. Through an inductive approach, and through the use of latent content analysis, I was able to fill in the missing

gaps of the puzzle (Mayan, 2009).

Four-Stage Model

The qualitative data produced by this study was derived from Baur & Ernst's (2011) four-stage model for studies exploring Figurations. The below section illustrates this model in greater detail. Following each stage is an explanation of how the specific stage plays a part in this study.

(1) *"Explicating the researcher's theoretical and personal perspectivity"* (p. 117). This was a key stage given the researcher's own experience within the studied phenomenon. Monitoring my researcher-bias while conducting insider-research was a necessary step so as not to exclude nor overemphasize data (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

(2) *"Exploring the figuration's socio-genesis, using process produced data"* (p. 132) assisted in creating a contextually appropriate illustration of the figuration across various points in time, or as Baur & Ernst (2011) describe, it's *"becoming, changing, and ending."* Essentially, this stage of analysis accepts data sources of *"anything human beings left behind"* (p. 133) in order to identify the evolution of the figuration over time. For the scope of this study, this stage represented a small portion of research efforts, and was analyzed collaboratively with stage (3) which also accessed varied data sources. With the study's scope still in mind, the *"becoming"* stage mentioned above was helpful for understanding present contexts, but was not a key concern for the study. Additionally, the *"ending"* stage was also not identifiable given the fact that the figuration is still ongoing. Therefore, the main concern of this stage and of the study was to identify the present, yet understandably changing phenomenon of import player selection processes.

(3) *"Reconstructing the macro-level: the rules and social structure of the figuration"* (p. 123). This lens was supported from data produced via NBA Draft archives which allowed me to identify quantifiable flows of international players in the NBA over the past 20 years (See Appendix I). Secondly, a CIES-FIBA study which statistically explored the import flows of professional basketball players and the labor regulations of the countries in which they were employed (See Appendix II), as well as the use of *"shadowed data"* as produced by participants in their ability to articulate the common practices and structures of general player selection.

(4) *"Reconstructing the micro-level: the individual's placement within, perception of and ability to change the figuration"* (p. 124). Illuminating participants' expert voice was the primary concern of the study. In line with Baur & Ernst (2011), the use of open-ended questions was necessary in order to *"analyze how individuals perceive the figuration, how they interact with others, how and why they enter or leave the figuration, [and] how and why their position within the figuration changes during their life-course"* (p. 130). Through open-ended questions, the data produced from each participant reflected unique

perspectives while allowing me to identify observable commonalities, and thus form meaningful and appropriate themes.

The utility of each stage was relative to the scope of the study. Therefore each stage was represented disproportionately; stage (1) was necessary for purposes of methodological rigor and (2) & (3) served as supplementary data sources for stage (4). The supplementary data sources however were accessed primarily to confirm speculative statements made by participants. For example, if during an interview, a Western European coach explained that American talent was rarely selected in Eastern European leagues, then quantitative data sources were accessed to confirm validity of such a statement. The supplementary sources of data also provided a point of reference to place participant illustrations in context.

Through supplementary data sources, the study was not only able to ask *what* exactly is going on within the phenomenon—or figuration, but also able to attain a contextually informed understanding into the *why* behind such processes. The prompts of *what* and *why* were considered in relation to the greater landscape of international basketball and how relationships were shown to operate within it; specifically the relationships between athletes, agents, and coaches. True to this focus, participants' voices remained the central mode of data collection, data analysis, and were most represented in the data results as well.

Trustworthiness & Authenticity

Due to the information rich responses of the participants, a sample size of 12 was large enough to provide a “deep, case-oriented analysis”, and also to generate “new and richly textured understanding of experience” (Sandelowski 2005 p. 183). The unique perspectives of the three distinct samples provided credible data whereby common processes of selection were identified through different lenses.

The inclusion of these three distinguishable samples allowed for the enlightenment of multiple perspectives within the same phenomenon. This increased the rigor of pattern identification and subsequently the themes as they were appropriate across all of the participants' experiences. The inclusion of varied data sources also allowed for data triangulation, as well as theoretical cohesiveness.

The object/subject dynamic that is present in qualitative research has been the topic of much debate. Patton (2002) describes this dichotomy—that between objectivity and subjectivity—as politically loaded, and uncharacteristic of the social nature of research. Where

Where objectivity has more readily been viewed as the key source by which ‘credible’ knowledge is gained, subjectivity seems to face obstacles toward legitimizing its place as a reputable research mechanism. Elias understood the “static-subject-object relationship [. . . to be] completely unusable since in the process of gaining knowledge, knowledge changes, [and] the subject itself changes” (Elias, 2009 [1983], p. 104). Indeed, subjectivity inevitably influences

aspects of research which may range from the initial generation of the research question to the final interpretation of data.

In an effort to alleviate the problems of objective/subjective debates, qualitative research may use words such as “*trustworthiness and authenticity*” (Patton 2002, p. 49). Toward the goal of trustworthy and authentic research then, the researcher felt it necessary to illustrate some of the challenges faced during the research process where the researcher’s own expertise played a key role in undertaking the study. This expertise while at times useful had to be identified and monitored.

Researcher-as-instrument

Elias’ interpretive stance on subjectivity assumed that one must not wonder *whether* subjectivity influences perception, but rather *how* it frames perception (Baur, 2008a). Indeed from an interpretivist perspective there exists an inability to completely separate oneself from their own perceptions. There are however measures by which a researcher may become aware of and monitor their own perspectives in order to allow for trustworthy inquiry.

My experiences within player selection processes influenced the research process and data interpretation and must be explained in detail. In my personal experiences, the processes of selection proved to be a challenging process to understand. This was due in part to the fact that in my initial attempt to obtain professional employment, I failed to receive an offer. Contrastingly, as this research project was being undertaken, I was undergoing (for the second time) the processes of selection (i.e., hiring an agent, actively networking, etc.) and was subsequently able to attain employment. Having then been successful within the player selection process, I understood the process from a slightly different perspective than I did in my first failed attempt. My experiences undergoing the processes of selection and also non-selection provided me with an informed direction of how to undertake a meaningful approach of inquiry into the topic. Still, through these experiences, I had also formed opinions that were not necessarily representative of the participants selected to speak to the same phenomenon. For example, I found that obtaining employment on a professional team was quite challenging for a number of reasons, and at the early stages of the study, assumed that the majority of athletes faced similar challenges. While participants described that they faced challenges, many of their challenges were quite different than the ones I faced.

While conducting this study I engaged in common everyday interaction with some of the participants. Naturally, having competed on local teams I was in a position which allowed me to interact with many players, agents, and coaches in a non-academic manner. However, these connections allowed me first to gain access to participants who might be willing to contribute academically and could be information rich. The connections I had acquired by competing athletically also allowed for references to other contacts outside of my immediate social

network. These peripheral contacts were necessary in order to access diverse perspectives of which my colleagues and I may not have shared.

Because of the exploratory nature of the study, it was extremely important during the interview process that I was not leading participants to speak to the challenging aspects of their selection as I had experienced them, but rather to prompt discussion with unbiased questions (Mack et al., 2005). This allowed participants to speak about the selection process as it related to their own experiences. This neutral and open platform was necessary in order to allow the participants' voice, and not my own to be heard.

I was also aware of the rapport I carried into most of the interviews due to my prior and current experiences in the process of player selection. While this rapport was useful for participants to feel comfortable and speak openly, I actively monitored the responses of participants to ensure that they did not exclude taken-for-granted experiences that they assumed I understood. This was remedied by open-ended questions, and prompts which encouraged elaboration as if I was a researcher with little to no prior knowledge of the topic. This proved to be quite a challenge for some of the participants, most notably the athlete participants.

My bias was also monitored during the analysis stages. To limit the impact of my own prior experiences to the data and to stay true to the perspectives generated by the participants, I stayed as close to the data as possible. For example, during the pattern identification process which was executed upon the second read-through of the transcript, I made judgment-free notes of the participants' ideas. After the general ideas were identified, I went back through the documents to extract key words that participants used to describe their experiences. The surveying of each transcript was also accompanied with reference to the notes I had written while actually interviewing the participant. This allowed me to more confidently validate my analysis. Having to decide between which key words and ideas to express most meaningfully in the results, I allowed the prevalence of an expression to determine its level of inclusion in the thematic findings. For example, a theme heading of 'Status' was not formed by participants' exclusive mention of the word status. Expressions relating to reputation, privilege, and elite standing all served as contributions to the overall theme of status. In this sense, thematic headings were not arbitrarily selected and then matched with handpicked quotes from participants. Rather, the themes spoke to the ideas which the participants most commonly described, thus allowing for the construction of credible themes.

It is important to note that while I have many shared experiences with the athletes that participated in this study, the extent of my knowledge regarding agent and coach perspectives was relatively uninformed prior to the undertaken interviews.

Results

The varied perspectives articulated from the players, agents, and coaches that participated in the study affirmed the essentiality of investigating all key

stakeholders to gain a more meaningful grasp of import player selection processes. That is, while much of the participant-produced data shed light on similar matters regarding the studied figuration, each perspective was uniquely different, yet necessary in order to bring a greater depth of awareness toward the subjective interpretations of the phenomenon.

Based on the participants' responses, three key characteristics were found to operate as integrated processes in the selection of North American import players. The first characteristic identified regarded status. There existed a belief of American basketball talent being superior, and participants either held this belief or were aware of it as the predominant perspective amongst international basketball communities. The theme of legitimacy was identified as a characteristic of selection where players would distinguish themselves from other talent through various means. Amongst other methods such as player marketing, and creating an identifiable and easily translatable body of work, legitimacy was also achieved through the use of interdependent networks. Representing the last thematic characteristic, the use of these interdependent networks enabled stakeholders to reach a comfortable level of certainty. These networks were found to operate formally and informally between individuals and amongst groups. Through these networks, all three stakeholders—player, agent, and coach were able to access opportunities, and consequently reach mutual agreements toward selection.

Status

American talent represents the majority of the selected import players into European professional leagues. The International Basketball Migration Report (2012) undertaken by CIES-FIBA which mapped the movements of import players statistically represented this already well-known trend. The CIES-FIBA study provided evidence that American players were the dominant source of import players in 12 of the top overseas leagues, and that in 10 of 12 leagues, they represented the majority of foreign nationals. 7 of these top 12 leagues were European. In Eastern European countries which were found to be less reliant on American talent and much more likely to develop local talent, American imports still dominated the number of representing foreign players in the given league.

Coach Perspective

One European coach gave some insight into these trends in stating,

“I think in the past there was no doubt that the North American Leagues represents the best place where you find the best talent you know in general, and ummm in the past the US players always represented the best players you could plug in any team, but then, international basketball, European basketball had been improving they have been closing the gap, and 30 years ago people were shaking their heads when Brian Colangelo signed the first European to an NBA team, a Bulgarian player who could hardly

play any minutes in Phoenix. Nobody thought that was the way NBA was gonna go. 30 years later ¼ of the NBA rosters are international players and some of these players are key players in their own teams and some of these players have already won championships have been league mvp's they have impact all around the world, and have helped the NBA become a global game you know in every sense of the word.”

This coach referred to two key state of affairs; the first was the high regard of American talent which is often “plugged in” to European teams; and secondly that the belief of American talent as the single dominant force may be changing. While talent outside of the U.S.A has received increasing attention and acclaim, statistics (CIES-FIBA, 2012), as well as the perspectives of this study’s participants explained how very normalized selecting American talent to fill import spots on a team has become.

Another coach confirmed that the high status of Americans varied from country to country but most commonly as a result of labor laws. He explained that “the rules on the player’s eligibility are very different from one country to another, and [that] they’ve been changing a lot through the years.” Coaches and agents also discussed leagues such as in the U.K. and Germany where American’s essentially make up the majority of the top and middle level players, where in Eastern European leagues, American’s play a much smaller role on a league’s identity. In either instance, the presence of American talent in every European league was noted by the participants.

While the “plugging in” of American imports was shown to be status related as players and agents openly discussed during the interviews, coaches in their acknowledgement of the high status of American talent were more understated in their responses on how it led to their selection. The participants commonly referred to the high status of American talent as having originated from the global popularization of the NBA and its main source of talent—the NCAA.

In this sense, having competed in the NCAA served as a status indicator. This was especially true for one of the Canadian participants who played in the NCAA and was viewed as an American player. This participant stated that he felt that he was better off to project the image of an American player, than to let European Coaches know he was Canadian. Alternately, the other Canadian participant in this study who did not compete in the NCAA spoke strongly of his lack of status due in part to his being a visible Canadian while not competing in the NCAA.

Furthermore, participants also claimed European teams understood that their fan bases desired a style of game which resembled the NBA. For teams, this meant incorporating American talent, for agents it meant marketing American talent, and for players, it meant that their status positioned them as a privileged source of import talent.

A coach from Western Europe described the need for American import talent as a result of a deficiency of domestic talent. That is, in a given country, there existed a great difficulty in selecting 12 local players who could compete against teams with imports from other countries. Considering the abundance of American talent, and the few roster spots available in the NBA, the U.S. provided a talent base of capable and jobless players. Therefore, the status of both parties—European teams recruiting U.S. talent, and U.S. talent seeking employment, were mutually highly regarded. The common needs of both parties were found to result in common exchanges between U.S. players who couldn't make the NBA but wanted to play professionally, and European teams that wanted these players' unique physical and debatably, yet commonly alluded to, commercialized skillset.

Agent Perspective

The agents that participated in this study were also quite aware of the normalized professional league trends that privileged American players over other import players. One agent stated,

“It's like in fashion to sign American players, [...] there's that conception in the world that Americans are better than the other players. There is that sensation, that there is so many so much supply of good American players coming every year out of college, [...] that basically you can get good players for a particular amount because of the supply.”

Here, the practice of selecting American talent was explained not only as a function of their perceived talent level, but also because of teams' ability to employ cheap labor due to the large supply of players in America. Because of the high status of American players, an agent who represented mid to lower level Americans explained that he faced challenges in marketing his players due to such a strong talent pool. This agent noted that for lower level players, making it convenient for coaches to select them increased their status on the prospective selection list. For some players, that meant personally coming out-of-pocket to fly to Europe in order to try-out for a few teams. This method was explained as a way for performance to overcome a coach's initial hesitancy to select (or even consider) a lower level player within a high status talent pool.

Participants noted that the high regard of American imports wasn't based solely on hype. Coaches, agents, and players all confirmed that American talent brought a unique skillset to the game. An agent described this occurrence as “filling the gaps”, where teams would essentially select ‘types’ of players that they were unable to get in Europe. Agents' descriptions of these players were quite specific, as one used an example of the demand for small and quick point guards who could penetrate the lane and create for others, or strong athletic forwards who could bully an opposing defender for rebounds. Coaches however offered a more general observation, stating that American players were “able and expected to give more”.

Player Perspective

As American's represented the majority of import spots on teams outside of North America, these American players understood that it came at a cost. They noted that as the European market was weakening around 2006, their salaries were decreasing, and consequently the power dynamic between teams and players was changing as well. To explain, one player noted that as the market was declining, teams were taking more risks and became more likely to employ a younger inexperienced player for less money as opposed to a more experienced player who would essentially demand a larger contract. As the younger player was willing to take less money—a participant explained in his eagerness for an opportunity—the older player was unhappy with the contract offer and would part ways. Another participant claimed this to be the deciding factor behind why he discontinued his professional career in Europe, as the salary simply was not worth the effort considering the level of which he valued his services.

Systematically, this cycle created a highly volatile environment of employment, where turnover was high and could afford to be because of the great supply of players looking for opportunities. This trend is further reflected in the CIES-FIBA (2012) migration study which illustrates the short length of contracts for import players. In most cases, import players stayed no longer than two years on any given team and for the interviewed players in this study, only one had stayed with a team for more than a full season.

Still, the *overall* status of American players was believed to be considerably high and these players provided a staple commodity for agents and the teams who desired their skill set. Yet, the unstable nature of the oversupplied market proved to be incredibly competitive. This was reflected in the players' awareness of a lack of job security. A professional player of 7 years explained that “a contract means nothing; it's just a piece of paper.” He went on to explain that if he were to get injured, or was not performing up to the teams expectations, he would be cut and sent home prematurely.

Another player expressed the high turnover rate in different terms. He explained,

“The way pro basketball works is that both sides want to get the most out of their situation. For teams, that means signing the best possible talent for the least amount of money, and for players that means performing well, and looking for a bigger contract the next year.”

Indeed, the high velocity of turnover was a common function in a system where the status of players and teams alike, were in flux. As the relegation system of European Sport enabled the movement of teams, from bottom, to middle, and to top tiered leagues, for players, this movement was similar, though achieved differently. That is, while players moved within various league levels, and across continents, their non/-selection onto teams was not a result of winning and losing games as it was for teams. One European coach explained that the movement of players to various levels was “a function of a number of different factors”. He maintained that there was no one thing he looked for in a player, and that the

circumstances changed as the season changed. He added that when determining who to select, he looked at whether or not the player may be an “asset”, that “the pluses of the player [were] greater than the minuses.” For American players looking to be selected, this meant differentiating their skill set in order to sustain their status in higher leagues.

Whether an American rookie player entering a professional league or an experienced American looking to be selected to a higher league, the degree to which an American player was able to attain legitimacy among the many highly regarded Americans was found to occur by differentiating oneself from the crowd, and thus allowing for selection to take place. This differentiation as shown under the following thematic heading refers to the ability of one to legitimize their talent in a competitive group of high status athletes. The next theme will explain the process by which American status was found to transition into an individual’s legitimacy—where legitimacy may refer to one being worthy of selection.

Legitimacy

This theme marks a clear transition from the macro perspective of American player status, into the more micro analysis of individual legitimacy. As most participants attested, the attainment of legitimacy was achieved through many sources, but was narrowed down to two main headings. The first was a player’s resume, or as one coach explained, their “body of work”—what have they done, and what are they doing now? The second source regarded the matching of player and team. That is, can the given player’s skill set fit in with a coach’s wants, and the team need. The player/team match also considered whether or not the player felt that the contract offer was worth their services. Tying these two headings together was the use of interdependent networks which operated as the most essential legitimizing resource for players, agents, and coaches alike. Interdependent networks will be further discussed under a separate segment.

Rookie Players (those transitioning from amateur to professional competition)

Within the processes of player legitimization were two distinct settings. In one setting there existed the selection of import players transitioning from amateur leagues—most commonly from an intercollegiate league such as the NCAA, and into a professional league. The alternate setting regarded players with past professional experience looking to attain a contract. While both settings were found to have some similarities, they differed in terms of how coaches evaluated the player. For coaches looking to recruit a rookie import player to their team, they stated that they faced evaluative challenges. The challenges of making evaluative judgments on players across many different levels of competition were a result of the many intercollegiate leagues in North America. A professional coach in Germany explained this dilemma,

“The statistics are not so important for me because I don’t know the level of a Division I [University] and a level of a Division III [University] so it depends, so I have to see the person [...] I know

a little bit the level but uhhh, it could also happen that the team in the division III is also very good.”

This coach valued the ability to see a player in person in order to evaluate them and to feel certain about a given player’s ability. The unfamiliarity with North American leagues was one of the reasons why American rookie players were shown to be at a disadvantage as compared with experienced professional players. An agent described this trend by explaining how a player in a given country’s market had a competitive advantage over the foreigners that had yet to enter that particular market. He explained that this process existed because coaches and employers in general wanted to select something that is *known* to be legitimate, and thus something the coach would feel comfortable selecting. The degree of coaches’ comfort in selection described how certain they felt that a given player could perform to the level of their expected performance expectations.

Interestingly, in terms of talent and the evaluative tools used toward selecting an American player, a coach explained that the level of competition across North American intercollegiate leagues may favor one player over the other depending on the circumstance, but that it may not necessarily favor the player in the more prestigious league.

“It’s certain in [...] the lower end [professional] leagues, you may be looking at a player saying well hey, they’re too good, like I’m only going to have him for four months, they’re going to want a buyout contract where they can leave at Christmas time or whatever it may be. So you may pick the division III kid because the division III kid is clearly somebody who [...] isn’t as hot on the radar.”

As the coach further described, this process indicated a coach’s desire for team stability through a season, but was also said to represent external pressure in the form of a fan base that desired players who they could become familiar and identify with over a longer period of time.

For American rookies entering the European market, the participants understood that starting out in lower professional leagues was a common practice. This was due to their uncertain status, rooted in an inability to market their “body of work” as precisely as players from other professional leagues. This, as the above quotes allude to was not because of talent level necessarily but because of coaches’ uncertainty with how players would perform at higher professional levels considering the difficulty of evaluating talent across unfamiliar contexts. Consequently, the participants explained that players would have to prove themselves in lower leagues before making their way up to higher leagues. Coaches noted that the translation of performance from one professional league to another allowed for an easier evaluation of how player talent would translate in their own league, while the amateur to professional transition proved a more difficult task.

Coaches were not the only cautious selectors of rookie players. A high profile agent who commonly represented top players in Europe and in the NBA also explained his sentiment toward American rookie players,

“I try to avoid signing them personally, any agency has their own selection process okay, we have a lot of players so we try to put a limit on the selection because you are getting 5 or 6 players asking for representation every day and umm, it comes to a point where we need to have like some quality in the list, we don’t want to go below some certain level. So I want to be able to any player that we’ve signed we feel like we can place them. We honestly feel like we can place them.”

Here, the issue of player legitimacy as agents saw it was a function of how likely they were able to place the player on a team. For lower profile agencies, this also proved to be the case. A lower profile agent who claimed to represent mid-level players explained how it was difficult convincing teams to select rookie imports who competed in leagues other than the NCAA.

The legitimization of a player as these agents referred to was found most commonly to relate to a players ability to score. While coaches were less likely to describe scoring alone as a way for players to legitimize themselves for selection into higher leagues, they noted higher statistics did in fact help players’ chances, but that the higher the level of basketball, the lower the scoring, and the greater the role of other skills.

Although players understood that starting out in lower leagues was a common procedure used as a stepping stone to work their way up to better leagues, a few players also recognized that there were ways in which this process could be accelerated. One way players legitimized themselves as rookie imports capable of competing at higher levels was by building up their player resume with attractive, and more importantly, identifiable accomplishments that would appeal to European coaches. While scoring and solid statistics in general played a role in a player’s ability to legitimize themselves to teams, two players found that they became distinguished talent by virtue of their invitation and participation in NBA workouts. This legitimization of sorts generated from NBA attention allowed these players to enter European professional leagues at higher levels than most rookie imports from America.

Experienced Players (those who have competed professionally)

Coaches noted that they felt more certain of the talent level of Americans with past professional experience than they did in selecting American rookies from intercollegiate leagues. This was a result of European coaches being more familiar with the professional leagues of Europe than they were with the amateur competition in America. As noted, this also resulted in a greater willingness for agents to represent players with professional experience.

Players also recognized the importance of getting their first opportunity in order to have professional experience on their resume. These participants understood that once they were able to get an initial opportunity and would begin to build up their 'body of work', it became easier to get selected the subsequent year on another professional team than it was during the initial selection stage from amateur competition.

However, the degree to which a player was able to perform at a high level during their first opportunity determined their success of selection moving forward. That is, it was understood especially by the agents and the players that American players had to make an impact in their first year or two to remain a legitimate professional player worthy of reselection in the following season. The characteristics which described a high performing American import differed greatly from what it meant for the domestic players.

For American import players, the responses strongly indicated that the performance expectations were much greater on these players than they were on the domestic players. Thus, Americans were expected to score more, and perform at a higher level than domestic players. One player noted that as a point guard, his team never told him that he had to score, but internally, he felt that he had to in order to legitimize his place on the team, and also in order to market himself for the following year. Another player explained;

“You’ll never get cut if you score 20, it doesn’t matter how shitty you played, it doesn’t matter if your guy scored 30, I get my 20 to 25, do something that makes the coach happy so that I wouldn’t get cut.”

With four years of professional experience, this player seemed confident in his strategy to remain successful and continue to be selected over a span of a few seasons. He however was aware that his skill set limited him. He described that the shooting guard position in which he played was usually used on a domestic or Bosman player, not commonly an import player. Here, a Bosman refers to a player who faces less EU labor restrictions than import players. He also realized that while his scoring prowess allowed for his continuous selection amongst low and mid-level teams, his skillset which was limited to scoring negatively affected his capacity to play in higher leagues. To further illustrate this point he referred to a fellow teammate of his who couldn’t score quite as well as him, but who was known to play a better all-around game. This teammate of his was often selected on higher level teams, though was notably cut mid-season under a few teams for failing to perform up to par. The scorer who played in the lower leagues however had never been cut from a team mid-season.

Here, the participants illustrate how various league levels required quite different skill sets. Aside from scoring, which in the case of the abovementioned player also proved to be problematic for selection success, no identifiable player characteristics were commonly explained to exist

across league levels. While online player databases show that height is a privileged feature of players in professional leagues (see appendix III), shorter players have also found their niche in various leagues, though more rarely, including one such player who participated in this study. Consistent amongst all the participants however was the understanding that talent alone did not legitimize a player toward being selected.

The common process for players looking to market their talent to teams was the hiring of an agent. The use of agents as an intermediary connection to teams was noted as a normalized practice identified by all participants. For players, the use of agents provided them with a legitimized form of representation. Players noted that they would rather not represent themselves, stating they neither had the skills nor the desire to be involved in the business aspect of selection. They also noted the differences between European agents, and North American agents. Players acknowledged that North American agents were able to provide opportunities and were certainly more accessible especially for those entering European leagues for the first time. On the other hand European agents were closely tied to various clubs and leagues and also provided a valuable service given their close ties with European teams.

While agents realized that it was ultimately a player's past professional performances that made them likely for future selection, they noted that their services were especially important for negotiation. For less proven players such as incoming rookies, the use of play characteristic "comparables", or other relatable devices were used to allow coaches to better understand the type of player they were recruiting. The degree to which these devices led to serious considerations of selection were partly influenced by the level of trust between agent and coach. Additionally, the degree of legitimization that a player could achieve was directly related to the number of, or strength of reliable and trusted sources (not simply the agent who represented the player) that could speak to the player's virtues. This circulation of trusted information as we will see was not only common amongst coaches in their search for legitimate talent. The pursuit of legitimacy in order to achieve a level of certainty during selection processes was found to operate systematically between all three stakeholders. Most commonly, this pursuit was achieved through informative interdependent networks.

Interdependent Networks

The data prior to this section shows that legitimacy is not simply a label placed on a player by a coach, but is a matter regarding relations between parties with various power, each capable of affecting the process of selection in its own unique way. For legitimacy to be achieved within these relationships, trusted sources of information regarding player talent, agent capability, and coach/team reputation were commonly considered. Although each stakeholder employed formal methods to assist their function within the selection process (e.g., the hiring of an

agent), informal methods were found to operate just as commonly, and in most cases, in addition to formal processes. To empirically illustrate how these formal and informal interdependent networks operated toward the selection process of American talent, each stakeholder perspective was identified through personal experiences as they were illustrated by the participants.

Coach and Agent Exchange

Coaches explained that the amount of money spent on recruiting and scouting services used to identify talent was based on the financial budget as well as the competitive level of a given professional team. Independent of financial resources and league level, coaches employed a network of trusted agents that would “operate as their eyes internationally”.

The value of an agent’s word largely depended on their ability to deliver high quality, high performing players. Agents who were former players also carried a strong voice, especially when speaking to coaches of leagues in which they had previously played.

One coach explained how he always contacted the player’s agent, never the player directly unless given permission by the agent. However, he also felt that the more contacts he had, the better. That the greater number of contacts he could access, the more certain he felt about his decisions. He noted that for European coaches, himself included, this meant visiting the U.S. during summers to get in touch with a network that would lead to reliable sources of information regarding American talent.

Commonly, coaches would contact agents or agencies asking for a specific skill set and position. As coaches would describe the kind of player they were looking to employ on their team (e.g. a tall point guard that can play shooting guard), it was up to the agent to find suitable matches of players within their agency.

Agents were also likely to contact other agents in order to place players in leagues which their own reputation could not have achieved alone. In the event of an additional agent being used to facilitate player selection, the agents would split the commission. By employing an additional agent, and one who was trusted in a given league, player selection was able to take place.

Agents were well aware of the function of their own reputation. One agent stated;

“As an agent when you’re just starting off fresh you really don’t have a reputation yet, it’s really difficult, so that video that you send has to wow them [...] that player has to wow them, and if it’s a big time guy that they know about, you as an agent won’t have to do a lot of work, if it’s someone they haven’t heard about, you have to make a lot of calls, send a lot of emails, keep your client in their ear and just keep plugging away. Once you start building that reputation of producing solid guys and your guys are over there

putting in work and they're averaging good points, they're top in the league in certain stats, then teams will start believing in your agency.

Although agents understood the importance of having a strong reputation in order to effectively market their players, the reputations of the teams in which they were marketing their players to were also important. Agents had a stated awareness of the reputations specific leagues carried. They understood what level of player would succeed in a given league, and also the correct paths that players needed to take in order to move up through league levels. For example, an agent would not send a high-potential player to a league with a poor reputation. In this case, reputation would refer to the level of competition. Sending such a player to a poor league would stunt the progress of a player moving up to a higher league the subsequent year. Essentially, the player would become susceptible to circulating in similar lower league levels, and additionally at the expense of the agent's reputation depending on how many lower level players the agent ended up representing.

Coach and Player Exchange

The coach and player exchange, as noted above was most mediated by agents, and other reliable sources who could speak to the virtues of the players. The voice of the player when speaking to their own abilities was not seen to be a trustworthy source of information. Coaches did however note that in some cases, players could overcome the lack of a strong network or of a lack of trusted sources, through social media. That is, players could post their in game videos online, and could rouse the interests of recruiters. This was seen as an advantage to coaches and players alike.

Direct coach to player exchange was found to be quite limited in the player selection process. An exception to this was noted as a late stage to player selection where coaches desired access to speak directly to players to get an understanding of their character and personality. Again, networks of reliable sources who could speak to a player's ability were used to form opinions of players. These sources included past players of the league who might know the recruited player, or the league in which they previously played, agents not directly associated with the player, as well as the past coaches of the player.

Understanding the limited interaction between player and coach, players too utilized their own networks in order to get a better understanding of the teams they hoped to work for. One player stated that once a few teams showed interest in him, he would contact players who had previously played on those teams in order to get an idea of the things such as living conditions, and the financial situation.

Agent and Player Exchange

One agent discussed the ways in which he decided which players to represent;

“Because I’ve played for the National team, I have lots of contacts in [given country], so I can contact a pretty trustworthy source and get a good synopsis of a player and a lot of it comes down to me seeing the player, I like to see the player [...] video is okay, but word of mouth is always good.”

The value placed on word of mouth was common amongst other agents as well. The word of other trusted individuals in addition to an agent’s own expertise on talent identification allowed these agents to make informed decisions on signing players who they believed they could place on professional teams. For agents, expertise was a function of how well they understood talent levels across different league levels, and the degree to which they could predict how a player’s talent would translate from one league to another.

Players were also transferred from agent to agent depending on player-agent match. An agent was found to inherit a player of another agency if that agency felt that they weren’t able to give the player the attention needed for job placement. In the case of such an event, such players were often referred to fellow agent associates who may have been employed by another agency.

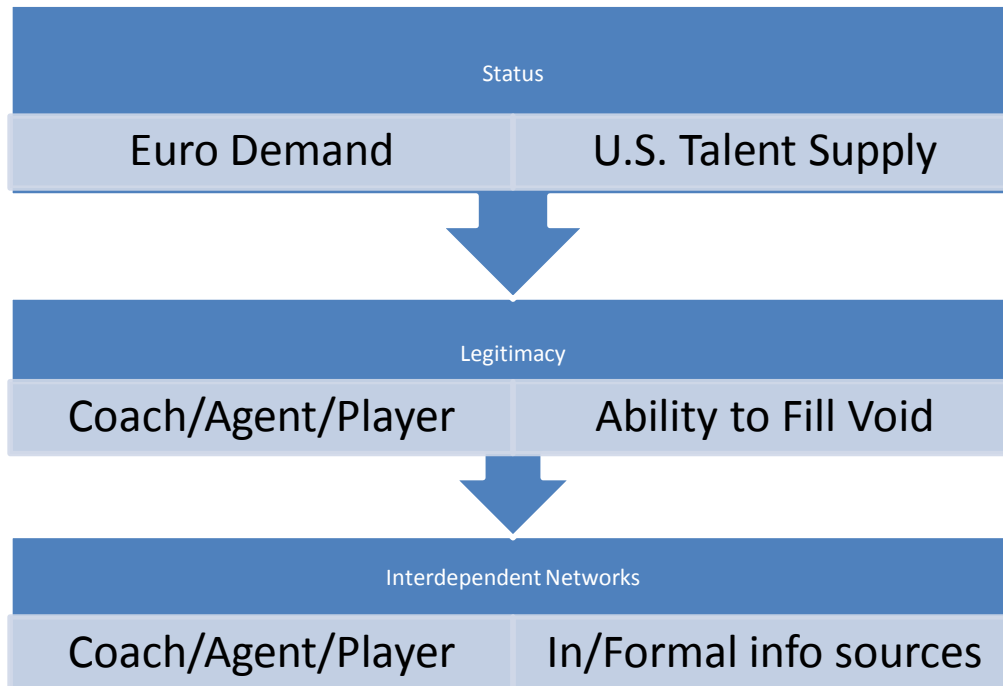
Although some players hired agents through formal avenues such as those agencies connected with their University’s basketball program, other players explained how they chose agents based on less formal avenues. In some cases, players mentioned how they would hire an agent based on what the agent did for a friend, former teammate, or for a player of whom they knew the talent level in comparison to their own. Players thought, “if this agent can place this given player, they should be able to place me.” This was a case for a few of the players. In one case a player used this kind of comparative rationale instead of trusting the recommendations of his college coach who referred a different agent altogether.

Players also explained that they used multiple agents to market their talents despite having signed with one specific agent. This proved to be the case with rookie players looking to enter the professional market, or players that were somewhat unsure if their agent would secure a contract. Most players however claimed to have contact with other agents in the understanding that the more people they knew and kept contact with, the better their chances of opportunity.

Likewise, as multiple agents were utilized to maximize players’ exposure to opportunity, they also noted using references of friends who had played on previous teams. Through this, players were able to become aware of opportunities, and additionally were able to gain an insider’s perspective on an opportunity. These friends or associates were also valuable references in that they were noted in some cases as having a strong influence on a coach’s consideration of a prospective player.

Below is a figure which illustrates the thematic outline of the above-discussed selection processes:

Figure 1: Thematic layout of results



Participant Distinction

Though the perspectives of agents, players, and coaches allowed for a triangulated data set where parts of the greater selection processes could be pieced together in an almost linear story-like fashion, these three distinct participant samples also represented slightly different perspectives based on their unique function within the selection system. Below is a description of the perspectives as they differed amongst the three distinct samples. These perspectives regard the chief concerns of the participants in their pursuit of selection.

Players

The athletes who participated in the study all described the necessity to score points as an import player. They explained this to be a normalized function as to why they were selected onto teams. They stated the importance of scoring as being a visible performance indicator which they believed was a valued asset toward being retained, and reselected. Scoring points was thought to be the main way to remain under contract, and also to achieve reselection the following year. Remaining a visible commodity was especially important for import players understanding that in most cases, employment contracts were usually limited to one year at a time.

Agents

The focus of agents during the processes of import player selection concerned the marketing of players. In order to effectively market, they understood that they first had to have a strong rapport in the market they operated in, and they also had to sell the individual skillsets of players as they were needed in regards to specific team needs. That is, their focus was to find suitable matches for teams with needs. By effectively matching teams' needs with highly performing players, they were able to build a strong reputation which fed into more quality players coming their way, and also, having earned credibility with teams, allowed for repeat business.

Coaches

Coaches generally explained the selection of North American players as just another necessary characteristic to complete a team. They described import talent as a way to compete against other teams, in that most other teams also hired such talent to gain a competitive advantage. In this sense, coaches focused on the function of this talent as a way to improve the team's success. Contrastingly, they spoke little in the way of import talent individually, with exception to the few allusions to these players being expected to "give more".

Each sample group seemed in some way to accommodate to the system in which they operated in order to reach a certain level of success. For players, they understood that their success was directly related to 'visibly' performing or excelling in tangible indicators of on-court effectiveness so that they would be reselected the next year. Agents understood that building rapport by effectively matching teams with suitable players and vice versa allowed their business to grow. And lastly, coaches understood that the competitive landscape of their league required them to select import players if they were to reach a high level of success in their league.

Discussion

As the data illustrated, the selection of North American talent into European leagues was very much process oriented. Though interrelated, three distinct processes best represented the processes of selection. These included the highly regarded status of U.S. talent, the legitimacy that this talent was able to achieve initiated by the demand for an individual's skillset, and the interdependent networks which operated to create a level of certainty for selection amongst each stakeholder.

Irrespective of participant experiences were the common use of agents as intermediaries which allowed for the facilitation of selection between coaches and players. Though the use of informal networks first identified by Elliott & Maguire (2008) was confirmed in this study, these informal networks were not found to be the primary nor the singular method through which selection took place. Instead

informal networks served as a by-product of a stakeholder's pursuit of certainty, while the formal exchanges of player-to-agent and the subsequent agent-to-coach agreements of selection were found to commence. Consistent with these findings, informal networks proved to be a valuable asset for opportunity and eventual selection as they operated complementarily to more formal and normalized methods of selection.

It was essentially the inclusion of each stakeholder's perspective—player, agent, and coach that allowed for the illumination of how the above mentioned processes operated. The normalized practices of player to agent, agent to coach, and each of them to their informative formal and informal network of associates illustrated the common exchanges between each stakeholder. Within these processes, each stakeholder was seen to pursue the common goal of selection through similar avenues, yet through sources with varied levels of power. That is, while selection and opportunity commonly operated via networks developed through one's own established social support system, the power of the sources a coach would consult in order to reach a comfortable level of certainty differed from those a player may have consulted while looking for a suitable team. In most cases, the greater power was found to be in favor of the coach. The relational existence of power however, was also found to shift depending on the level of which the player was sought. In most cases the scales were tipped to the coaches' advantage as there were more available players for them to choose amongst, than there were teams available for a player to be legitimately considered for. Additionally, the coaches were also the ones who decided who to select or not select, and could therefore leverage this power.

These processes as they were illustrated were all markedly influenced by the interconnectedness of the globalized sport that basketball had become. Theoretically speaking, such interconnectedness suggested that the global professional basketball community was very much in tune with the status quo, and consequently vastly influenced by the movements, actions, and events caused by groups of greater power within the figuration. This environment was both a result of the popularized movements of the NBA and also the interconnectedness of the relegation system of European Sport which essentially ties countries, leagues, and people into a centralized entity of competition.

Due to America's role as one of basketball's most influential players, one must consider that as the popularity of the NBA grew so too did the global perception of the NCAA talent which represented the majority of its players. Additionally, the dominant performances of the Dream Team left a legacy of the force of U.S. talent, and a global fan base that craved domestic leagues which resembled the star power of the NBA. The infusion of American talent was a result of this very craze as Maguire's (1988) study of the BBL illustrated. Also, due to the abundant talent produced by American intercollegiate leagues, the great demand was able to be supplied.

The benefits of understanding the selection of this U.S. talent in a figurational sense is significant considering its ability to comprehensively explain the genesis

of specific selection patterns and the trends in which they presently function. We may effectively through this lens connect the actions of groups and historical events to the most fundamental source of influence: individual action. Indeed the recruiters of European teams that systematically recruit American talent are simply the sum of individual coaches who have decided to select an American player for their specific team's need. This is certainly true for foreign talent entering the NBA as well. In understanding the micro/macro connection with regard to player selection processes and trends, we may also begin to identify more than simply past and present figurational patterns, but also more accurately forecast them.

Although the scope of this study did not allow for an in-depth historically grounded analysis, it did however use historical data as a supplementary and contextually necessary data source alongside the perspectives of the participants. Due to the contextually loaded implications of import player selection which were identified during this study's investigation, the study was limited in that not all aspects influencing player selection were covered. While participant interviews provided the most prevalent data source, much more information is necessary to gain a better understanding of the influencing aspects of player selection processes. This is due in great amount to the lack of extant literature regarding migrant player selection processes, but also to the rapid global evolution of basketball which academic inquiry has failed to keep up with.

This study also faced limitations accessing sample groups; first at the proposed Likert scale which aimed to statistically analyze the characteristics of import players that coaches most desire, and secondly during the interview data collection stages. While players and agents were quite accessible, professional team coaches were a difficult sample to access. Understanding that in most cases, selection is ultimately determined by these coaches, a greater response rate by this sample would prove fruitful for future inquiries of both the quantitative and qualitative variety.

This study is also bounded by gender and region. In the case of gender, only male subjects were interviewed. The trends that have been found to exist in male professional basketball may or may not translate into female professional leagues. The targeted region of Europe, while providing useful insight of selection processes into the most centralized body of North American talent may or may not accurately apply to leagues within China, Africa, South America or of those in the Middle East.

The need to involve a 'peripheral' demographic sample consisting of non-sport actors such as fans may prove an opportunity for increased academic and applied knowledge within selection processes. The benefits of investigating 'peripheral' actors may also prove affective for athlete samples as well, as the inclusion of migrant athletes who may have failed to be selected, or are prospective athletes of selection must be considered legitimate data sources for future research.

This study's findings may add a wealth of knowledge to recruiters concerned with understanding the perspectives of the various stakeholders in which they deal with commonly during selection processes. As the coaches themselves ultimately decide who to select, realizing the perspective of agents and players alike may prove fruitful for future transactions. Certainly, the data gathered from this investigation may provide necessary information for recruiters across different league levels to more effectively construct their own recruitment and selection strategies. This information may be equally important for agent and player transactions.

The contributions of this study are as significant to academic inquiry as with those that concern practical implications. The infrequency of research within the sport labor migration genre which has concerned the processes of migrant athlete employment are startling considering the vast number of migrant athletes, and doubly, their influence on the sport employment market. This study contributes by exploring a relatively untouched topic within Sport Labor Migration literature. Through a figurational lens, this study serves as an early stage of understanding how the micro processes of selection are influenced by greater events of a globalized game, and alternately how these very micro processes may shape sport-specific global trends.

Future studies regarding player selection in basketball may find it useful to collect data from sources such as non-academic sport literature which have covered stories on international competition, the NBA's rapid global growth, and the rise of international talent. Such data would contribute to a historically grounded analysis of the trends of basketball's international evolution, and thus provide useful insights to player selection trends as they relate to notable historical events. Reliable statistical data such as the CIES-FIBA (2012) study are also much needed and would strongly contribute to an awareness of the global reach of basketball and its impact on international labor migration.

Until now sport migrant research has investigated topics mainly concerning the circumstances of *successful* migrant athletes (Olin, 1984; Maguire, 1988; Stead & Maguire, 2000)—those who have attained contracts. In doing so, these studies have managed to reach only a portion of the greater migrant talent pool. Through identifying the patterns of player selection as they exist across different league levels, and through the investigation of a varied sample, this research may speak to a greater demographic still including successful migrant athletes who have attained contracts but also those aspiring migrant athletes.

As this study represents an introductory exploration of player selection processes, we may see that these processes represent more than simply coaches' selection of athletes. Elias' principles of power as a relational entity illustrate that the perspectives of less privileged stakeholders are equally significant. Within the topic of import player selection, these less privileged stakeholders may include agents, fans, and as mentioned earlier, those prospective migrant athletes that have previously failed to enter the market of migrant employment. Because of sport's unique existence which essentially makes visible the managing of teams,

or small businesses to critical spectators, we must at the same time realize the interconnectedness of each stakeholder, and additionally their ability to influence aspects of the market demand. This study showed first-hand the power of such interconnectedness. Figuratively speaking, topics concerning each of these stakeholders can be addressed, and done so with theoretical cohesiveness for future sport migrant studies concerning selection.

Conclusion

This study began with the intention of exploring the processes of import player selection with specific regard to North American talent into European professional basketball leagues. Perhaps the greatest assertion to be made about these selection processes is that the micro/macro dynamics are virtually indistinguishable. The micro processes which underpin selection can be seen to influence global trends. This trend proves true in the reverse sense in that as long as the NBA continues to be considered the elite league of the world, and America, the most highly regarded and abundant basketball talent generator, the trends of player selection in European leagues will continue to manifest in a responsive nature relative to the Western landscape. Such is the case for highly regarded American talent, but equally so for the rising status of European talent as well.

As the perception of European talent is on the rise due in part to the NBA's recognition of it, but also as a result of the recent success that European teams have had against the U.S.A. in international competition, we can see the shifting power balance in an evolving figuration. The view that America is the single dominant source of talent is becoming growingly debatable, as is the perception of NBA basketball as the best in the world. This potential 'changing of the guard' however does not address the issue of where the overspill of American talent may be employed if not on an NBA roster. In time we may truly see the degree to which U.S. talent remains highly mobile in the global basketball arena, but until then, we may use studies such as this to make educated and informed predictions of how the conditions of this sport market influence selection.

Basketball provides a unique opportunity for inquiry with regard to its growing global appeal, and its nuanced international exchange which have shown to influence cultural dynamics (Dyson, 1993) and migrant labor issues (Olin, 1984). Additionally, basketball is one of the few sports with a dual gendered global presence, where trends of player selection (as well as other aspects within the sport) may be analytically compared against each other. This study's attempt to investigate a relatively unexplored topic within an underrepresented sport has been done so in the hope to initiate further interest for future studies of basketball, and migrant athlete selection alike.

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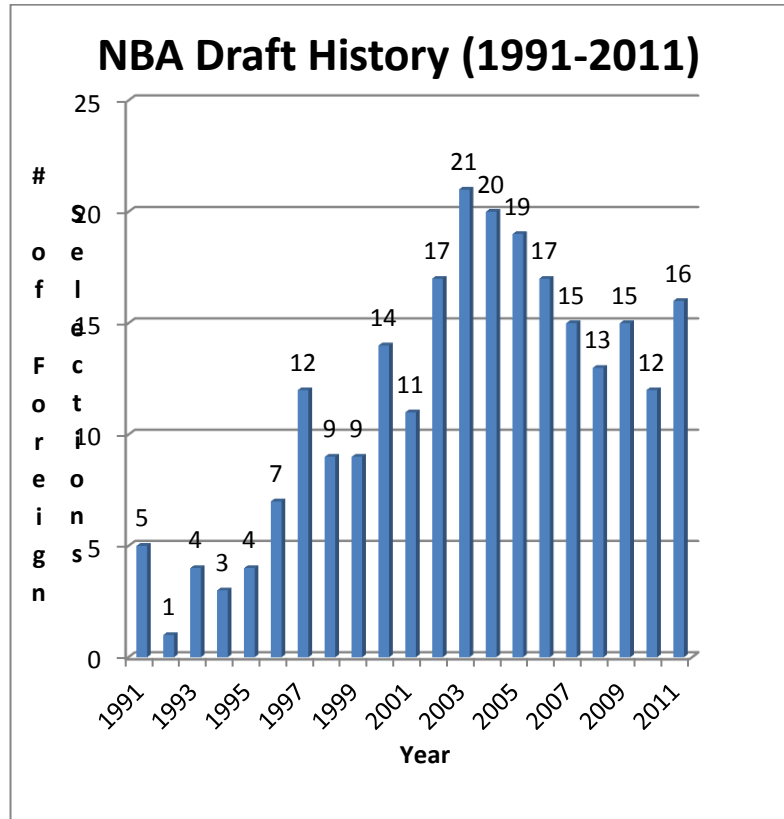
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Appendix I

Figure 2: NBA Draft foreign player selection trends

| Year | # of Foreign Players | First Round | Second Round |
|------|----------------------|-------------|--------------|
| 2011 | 16 | 9 | 7 |
| 2010 | 12 | 2 | 10 |
| 2009 | 16 | 6 | 10 |
| 2008 | 13 | 4 | 9 |
| 2007 | 15 | 6 | 9 |
| 2006 | 17 | 6 | 11 |
| 2005 | 19 | 7 | 12 |
| 2004 | 20 | 8 | 12 |
| 2003 | 21 | 9 | 12 |
| 2002 | 17 | 6 | 11 |
| 2001 | 11 | 6 | 5 |
| 2000 | 14 | 7 | 7 |
| 1999 | 9 | 3 | 6 |
| 1998 | 9 | 6 | 3 |
| 1997 | 12 | 4 | 8 |
| 1996 | 7 | 6 | 1 |
| 1995 | 4 | 1 | 3 |
| 1994 | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| 1993 | 4 | 1 | 3 |
| 1992 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 1991 | 5 | 3 | 2 |

*Archival data of draft history taken from apbr.org



Appendix II

Labor Laws

Country and league-specific labor laws are diverse and in continuous flux.

-Spain (Liga ACB) – “The number of foreign players not trained by Spanish clubs is limited to two.”

-Germany (Bundesliga) – Teams must have a minimum of 5 national players out of 12 on the roster.

-France (Pro A) – Required to employ at least four ‘locally-trained players’.

-Italy (Serie A) – “Maximum 6 foreign players, of whom no more than 2 can be non-European (EU), or alternatively up to five, of whom no more than 3 can be non-European (EU).”

-Greece (A1 League) – Maximum of 3 non-EU foreign players allowed per roster

-Australia (National Basketball League) – Maximum of 2 foreign players allowed on roster

-PR China (Basketball Association) – Maximum of 2 foreign players allowed on roster

-Argentina (Liga A) - Maximum of 3 foreign players allowed on roster

-Ukraine (Superleague) – Maximum of 5 foreign players allowed on roster

*Data taken from CIES-FIBA (2012) study.

Appendix III

Does Height Matter?

From a sample of the 12 most American-import populated leagues European, the height of randomly sampled athletes (n=2477) within these leagues were as follows;

> 6'0 - 4%

6'-6'4 - 31%

6'5-6'9 - 58%

6'10< - 7%

*Player profile information was gathered via eurobasket.com, and then statistically analyzed by the researcher.

Appendix IV



UNIVERSITY OF
ALBERTA

Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation

E471 Van Vliet Centre

Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6G 2H9

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Study Title: Athlete Oversupply and Professional Basketball Player Selection

Principal Investigator

Daniel Ferguson

Graduate Student

Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation

University of Alberta

Tel (780) 263-5013

E-mail: djfergus@ualberta.ca

| | | |
|--|-----|----|
| Do you understand that you have been asked to participate in a research study? | Yes | No |
| Have you read and received a copy of the attached Information Letter? | Yes | No |
| Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this research study? | Yes | No |
| Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study? | Yes | No |
| Do you understand that the interview will be audio recorded? | Yes | No |
| Do you understand that you are free to refuse to participate, or to withdraw from the study at any time, without consequence, and that your information will be withdrawn at your request? | Yes | No |
| Has the issue of confidentiality been explained to you? Do you understand who will have access to your information? | Yes | No |

I agree to take part in this study:

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Appendix V



Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation

E471 Van Vliet Centre

Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6G 2H9

INFORMATION LETTER

Athlete Oversupply and Professional Basketball Player Selection

Principal Investigator

Daniel Ferguson
Graduate Student
Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation
University of Alberta
Tel (780) 263-5013
E-mail: djfergus@ualberta.ca

Dear Participant,

Background

I am a graduate student at the University of Alberta, and am currently conducting a study on the recruitment of foreign basketball players in professional leagues. These foreign players compete for fewer spots on a given team due to varied labor restrictions in different countries. The purpose of this study is to receive input from you the expert in order to identify the processes of selection. Coaches, managers, agents, and players with experience related to import player selection will be interviewed. These interviews will be done under voluntary participation.

Purpose

This study will be undertaken to complete the requirements of a graduate thesis.

Procedure

Semi-structured interviews will focus on import player recruitment within FIBA-Affiliated Leagues. The questions will regard the characteristics of selected import players, your access to these players, and the context under which your selection may be influenced (e.g. player budget, location of team, etc.). The interview will take no more than 45 minutes, will be audio recorded, and later transcribed verbatim.

Benefits/Risks

The primary benefit is that by participating in this study you will gain a better

understanding of recruitment processes within varied league levels and countries which may also assist in cost depreciation strategies within your organization. This study will also contribute to athlete recruitment and selection as it exists within Sport Labor Migration. The risks of this study are minimal to none.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

Your email submission is voluntary and only requested so that results may be sent to you at a later date. Your email address will be anonymized immediately, and will never be traceable to your completed interview. The interview data will be kept by the principal investigator for no longer than five years. At the end of this retention period, the data will be destroyed. Data will be saved on a USB stick and locked in a cabinet on the 6th floor GSB at the University of Alberta Campus. I, the principal investigator will be the only one with access to the data.

Freedom to Withdraw

Your participation in this study is voluntary.. You may withdraw from the study, without consequence, and your information will be withdrawn at your request. If you wish to withdraw, please contact me within 14 days from the day you were interviewed.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a participant, or how this study is being conducted, you may contact the University of Alberta's Research Ethics Office at 780-492-2615. This office has no affiliation with the study investigators.

Sincerely,

Daniel Ferguson (Principal Investigator)

Graduate Student
Tel: (780) 263-5013
E-mail: djfergus@ualberta.ca
Physical Education and Recreation

Graduate Supervisor

Marvin Washington
Associate Professor
Tel: (780) 492-2311
E-mail: washingt@ualberta.ca
Department: Strategic Management and Organization

Appendix VI

Interview Guide

1. How long have you been in your position and in what countries and levels have you coached?
2. Import Player Characteristics
 - Describe how you identify the players that you end up recruiting. How do you become aware of them? Can you give some insight into how this is achieved?
 - Describe about some general characteristics of the kind of import players you select.
 - Describe how you evaluate prospective import players while considering the context of a players' resume and past performance across many different levels?
 - Describe if any some factors that you believe distinguish import players that get selected from those who don't get selected?
3. Processes and Access
 - Would you be able to bring light to some of the challenges you face when considering the selection of North American Import players?
 - Describe the general process of import player recruitment and selection; the steps you take, the people you contact, what prospects you consider first?
4. Import Player Expectations
 - Why is the presence of American players so prevalent?
 - If you had one sentence to explain the phenomenon of recruiters selecting North American import players, what would you say?
 - Given your experience with recruitment and player selection, describe any significant adjustments you have made over the course of your career toward greater success?
 - Are there any topics we have failed to touch on or questions you had wished I'd asked in regards to the selection of import players from North America?