

Research on the Integrated Development of Youth Basketball Leagues and Professional Leagues

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Abstract

To explore how to promote the better development of China's youth basketball leagues and professional leagues, this paper adopts methods such as literature review and mathematical statistics to conduct an in-depth understanding of the development status and existing problems of China's professional basketball leagues and youth basketball leagues. Through analysis, it is found that China's professional basketball leagues have problems such as insufficient market vitality, a large gap in competitive strength, weak awareness of internal cultural construction, a small base of reserve talents, and imperfect echelon construction. The development of youth basketball is in full swing, with a certain scale of participating population and a number of young stars emerging. However, during its development, there are problems such as weak teaching staff, lack of social support, and imperfect league organization. The professional leagues have many senior coaches with rich teaching and training experience, and the players in the youth basketball leagues are potential talents for future professional leagues. There is a relationship of common development and shared destiny between the two. Therefore, this paper aims to explore the integration of the two events to broaden the talent reserve channels, enhance the influence of the two events, integrate resources, and expand the market, so as to provide a reference for the development of China's basketball in the new era.

Keywords

Youth basketball league; Professional league; Integrated development; Talent reserve.

1. Introduction

Since the proposal of the youth basketball development plan in November 2017, China's youth basketball has developed rapidly. At the national level, various policies to promote the development of youth sports have been introduced one after another, and the policy orientation of giving priority to the development of the three major ball games has given great support to basketball. At the social level, basketball training institutions have shown explosive growth, enriching basketball market resources. In this favorable environment, the number of people participating in youth basketball in China is increasing, and the holding of youth basketball events has ushered in a wave of upsurge. Among them, the more influential events include the "Miaomiao Cup" youth basketball league, NYBO National Youth Basketball Open, Beijing Division Youth Basketball League, CCWBA Youth Basketball League, etc. According to statistics, in 2018 alone, 192 cities held youth basketball leagues, with a total of 334 divisions, 15,000 teams registered for the competition, and more than 100,000 participants [1]. The number of participants reached 1.07 million from 2018 to 2024, and 2024 set a new record of 280,000 participants [2]. Although there are many youth basketball events in China, the level of competitions is relatively single. How to innovate the development path of youth basketball events and promote the healthy development of youth basketball is a matter that will benefit

both the present and future generations. The youth basketball league and the CBA league are both managed by the Chinese Basketball Association. The development level of youth basketball events is related to the development level of future professional leagues, and the two have a relationship of development community and community of shared future. In combination with China's plan to promote the development of youth basketball, and the current situation of the CBA league, such as a single development model, lack of talent reserves, insufficient market vitality, and low audience attendance, this paper aims to explore an innovative integration mechanism of the two events to achieve resource complementarity and coordinated development.

2. The Value of Integrated Development of the Two Events

2.1. Conducive to Talent Reserve and Echelon Construction

Among the 354 registered domestic players in the 2023-2024 CBA season, 265 are from the youth teams of various CBA clubs, with the youth team contribution ratio as high as 74.86% [3], which also shows to a certain extent that the sources of young talents in China's professional leagues are relatively single, mainly relying on players trained by youth teams. This single player supply model is not conducive to the diversified development of China's professional basketball. The youth basketball events have a large number of participants, covering teenagers of all ages. Through integration with professional leagues, potential basketball talents can be discovered from a broader base. For example, in youth basketball events, children who show excellent physical fitness, basketball awareness, and teamwork ability can be noticed by scouts of professional leagues. It is like looking for precious wood in a vast forest. The integration mechanism can give professional leagues more opportunities to discover future stars hidden among many young players, which helps to establish a complete talent training echelon. Starting from youth basketball events in childhood, gradual screening and training are carried out until qualified talents can be delivered to professional leagues, ensuring a continuous talent supply chain for professional leagues.

This integrated environment allows young players to be exposed to the concepts, tactics, and professional training methods of professional leagues at an early age. Coaches and players of professional leagues can guide youth basketball events, impart basketball skills and tactical thinking, so that young players can have a preliminary understanding of more complex tactics at an early stage. Integration with professional leagues also provides more challenging competition opportunities for youth basketball players. When youth basketball teams can compete on the stage of professional leagues, young players can improve their competition ability in actual combat, better adapt to the high-intensity competitive environment, and thus accelerate their growth process.

2.2. Conducive to Event Linkage and Brand Promotion

The competition organization form of youth basketball events is relatively single, mostly held separately in regions. On the one hand, young players have few opportunities to participate in competitions and matches, so the effect of improving competitive level is not ideal. On the other hand, the communication channels are narrow, and the audience that can be reached is limited. However, CBA has various publicity channels and receives attention from many aspects. With the help of the brand popularity and media resources of professional leagues, youth basketball events can get more extensive publicity. Professional leagues usually have a large fan base and mature media communication channels in the sports world. When youth basketball events are integrated with professional leagues, these resources can be shared. For example, the official websites and social media accounts of professional leagues can promote youth basketball events, and TV stations can appropriately insert promotional advertisements of youth

basketball events when broadcasting professional leagues. This enables youth basketball events to move from a relatively small circle to a broader stage, attracting more audiences and participants.

In the integration process, youth basketball events can learn from the rules and regulations of professional leagues, which helps to improve the professionalism and standardization of their events. The competition rules and referee standards of professional leagues can be properly reflected and guided in youth basketball events, making the organization and operation of youth basketball events more standardized, thus improving the quality and reputation of the events. On the other hand, this integration can enrich the event system of professional leagues, adding new performance events to the leagues, and providing audiences with one more choice in viewing. In the long run, youth basketball events provide a solid reserve foundation for professional leagues and improve the ecological system of the entire basketball events. Youth basketball events can serve as a supplement to professional leagues, providing event content during the off-season or warm-up stage of professional leagues.

From a commercial perspective, this integration is conducive to brand promotion. Both professional leagues and youth basketball leagues have their own brand sponsors. The integration of the two events can integrate resources. Professional leagues can expand their audience groups with the appeal of youth basketball events, and youth basketball events can obtain more sponsorship and support with the platform advantages of professional leagues. For sponsors, this integration provides a more comprehensive marketing platform, allowing them to carry out brand promotion at the same time and cover a wider range of target audiences. The integrated events can generate synergistic effects in market development. Commercial activities such as ticket sales and peripheral product development can be integrated. For example, joint tickets can be launched, or peripheral products with integrated characteristics can be developed, such as dolls and commemorative badges with the images of young players and professional players, so as to increase commercial revenue.

3. Potential Difficulties in the Integration Process

3.1. Problems of Differences in Competitive Levels

Due to differences in mentality, physical quality, the integration of youth basketball leagues and professional leagues will encounter many difficulties. First, differences in technical and tactical levels. The players participating in youth basketball events are mainly children aged 6-12, with a generational gap in physical development and skill maturity. Children in this age group have fragmented technical movements, mainly learning basic techniques such as dribbling, passing, and shooting, with fragmented training time, and their understanding of basketball techniques and tactics is far from that of professional players. Unlike professional basketball players with automated technical movements and systematic and data-based training time, high-post screening and horn tactics common in professional leagues are too complex for young players, and it is difficult to meet the corresponding execution requirements in integrated events. Second, differences in game intensity and rhythm. The game intensity and rhythm of professional leagues are very fast, and players need to make quick decisions and complete actions under high-intensity confrontation. The rhythm of youth basketball events is relatively slow, and the intensity of confrontation is also low. This difference may cause young players to have difficulty adapting to the game rhythm during integration, resulting in frequent mistakes or physical exhaustion. Young players may lose the ball frequently due to the opponent's pressing defense. In the integration process of the two events, this difference should be considered and corresponding improvement measures should be adopted.

3.2. Conflicts in the Distribution of Commercial Interests

The economic foundation determines the superstructure. The development of professional leagues requires continuous profits. Whether the economic foundation is stable and the interest distribution is reasonable determines whether the integration of youth basketball leagues and professional leagues can develop healthily. In the integration process, there will inevitably be problems of interest distribution. Conflicts in the distribution of commercial interests are mainly reflected in two aspects. First, conflicts of interests of sponsors. After the integration of youth basketball events and professional leagues, there may be problems in the distribution of sponsors' rights and interests. Sponsors have different investments and expected returns for the two events, and there may be conflicts in rights and interests such as brand exposure and advertising placement. Some sponsors expect to expand brand exposure, while others expect to promote product sales. It is necessary to safeguard the rights and interests of each sponsor according to their different needs. Second, the sharing of event revenue. At present, the ownership of professional basketball clubs in China mainly falls into three categories: the Basketball Management Center (official), investment enterprises (market), and the joint ownership of the Basketball Management Center and enterprises (semi-official) [4]. It is necessary to coordinate the revenue distribution among different departments. In terms of commercial revenue from integrated events, such as ticket revenue, broadcasting rights revenue, and peripheral product sales, the relevant parties of youth basketball events and professional leagues need to reasonably distribute the revenue. In terms of revenue sharing, it is necessary to respect the dominant position of professional leagues and ensure the sustainable development of youth basketball events.

3.3. Difficulties in Integrating Coach and Referee Resources

There are certain differences in coaching concepts and methods between the two systems, and the referee enforcement standards are also different. The differences in teaching concepts and training methods between youth basketball coaches and professional league coaches are caused by differences in players' mentality and physical conditions on the one hand, and by the coaches' own educational level and professional quality on the other hand. To follow the law of children's physical and mental development, youth basketball coaches pay more attention to interest and foundation in the coaching process, while professional league coaches emphasize competitiveness and professionalism. In the integration process, young players may resist the overly strict and high-intensity training methods of professional league coaches. How to make the two different coaching concepts and methods complement each other is a problem that needs to be solved.

The referee enforcement standards of youth basketball events and professional leagues are mainly determined based on the age characteristics, physical development level, and event goals of players. Considering that children's physical functions are not yet mature and the focus is on interest cultivation, the rules focus on safety protection, with small venues, low baskets, short time, and penalty standards emphasizing no physical contact and tolerance reminders, so as not to affect participation enthusiasm due to strict penalties. Professional leagues emphasize the professionalism and fairness of referee enforcement to ensure the fairness of competitive results. In integrated events, referees need to find a balance between the two, ensuring the fairness of the game while considering the psychological endurance of young players and the appreciation of the game. It is always necessary to keep in mind the purpose of changing adult game rules to suit children's physical and mental development [5]. The youth basketball rules do not have strict regulations on traveling and offensive time limits. In the competition on professional venues, the penalty standards for young players' traveling violations and offensive time need to be carefully handled, otherwise, it may affect the fairness of the game and the participation experience of young players. In the integrated youth basketball events, some

competition rules and referee standards of professional leagues can be appropriately introduced to allow young basketball players to adapt to the requirements of professional games in advance. For example, gradually increase the game time and improve the strictness of foul penalties, but attention should be paid to reasonable adjustments according to the age and physical characteristics of young basketball players.

3.4. Increased Complexity of Event Organization and Management

Youth basketball training needs to handle the contradictory relationship between learning and training, while integrated events need to handle the contradictory relationship between learning and competition. Both youth basketball events and professional leagues have their own schedules. Youth basketball leagues are usually arranged to avoid students' school hours, but the schedules of professional leagues often conflict with students' school hours, which may prevent young players from participating in the competition. Therefore, in the integration process, it is necessary to coordinate the game times of the two to avoid conflicts. For example, the finals of youth basketball events may coincide with the key game period of professional leagues, which requires reasonable adjustment of the schedule to ensure the smooth progress of the events. Integrated events can be arranged in professional leagues on weekends or holidays, which will not affect the schedule of professional leagues and ensure the normal development of integrated events.

It is necessary to formulate a set of competition rules that are both suitable for young players and can be connected with professional league rules, making integrated events more standardized and manageable. The requirements for young players' games can be appropriately relaxed, but there must be unified standards. At the same time, due to the physical characteristics of young players and their insufficient self-safety awareness, more attention needs to be paid to safety protection.

4. Exploration of Integration Mechanism

4.1. Construction of Multi-Level Event Connection System

The establishment of a system is based on objective things. Solving objective problems cannot rely on a single system, but on a system of interrelated systems. Young player talent echelons can be divided according to age groups, and multi-level competitions can be set up, such as the pyramid model for talent selection in Spanish youth leagues, selecting 120 players from U8, 80 from U9, 45-50 from U10, and 30-40 from U11 [6], forming a bottom-up selection mechanism, selecting the best from the best, and the finest from the finest. A CBA youth competitive sports department can be established to be responsible for event operations, allowing teenagers with potential to become high-level athletes to accumulate competition experience through high-level events and become excellent basketball reserve talents. Establish a talent pool for young players, include the information of outstanding players in youth basketball events into a unified talent pool management, record their game data, technical characteristics, physical fitness and other information, provide data analysis for training, and provide references for the selection of professional league teams. The Chinese Basketball Association can further improve the information statistics system of youth basketball events to ensure the accuracy and completeness of data. Do a good job in the registration of young players to provide data support for talent selection in higher-level events.

Formulate clear promotion rules and assessment standards, combine online and offline, with data as a reference and competitive ability as a measurement standard, conduct regular assessment and selection, so that outstanding youth basketball players can have the opportunity to enter the youth training echelon of professional leagues for more professional training. Players who have won specific awards or reached a certain technical level in youth

basketball events shall be eligible to participate in the selection of youth teams of professional leagues, thereby opening up professional system channels.

4.2. Policy Guidance and Market Integration

China's youth basketball league has a development history of several decades, but there was almost no qualitative development in the early stage. It was not until 2017 when the Chinese Basketball Association announced the restart of the youth basketball plan that youth basketball leagues developed like mushrooms after rain. In this exploration process, the policies and systems related to youth basketball leagues are not perfect, which to a certain extent restricts the development of youth basketball. In the process of exploring the integration of the two events, the integration of youth basketball leagues and professional leagues also requires certain institutional guarantees for sustainable development. Therefore, there should be requirements in terms of policy and institutional guarantees. Government sports departments should formulate clear development goals and requirements, give full play to their leading role, attract social grass-roots clubs, social enterprises and other subjects to actively participate, such as providing certain tax reductions for enterprises sponsoring events, and building a three-in-one event development model of government, society, and market [7]. In terms of policies, it is necessary to provide guarantees for basic infrastructure and funds, establish relevant management departments, be specifically responsible for various affairs of the event, and do a good job in coordinating, supervising, and promoting the event [8]. The Basketball Management Center should recognize the event, reduce the barriers to the registration identity recognition of young athletes, recognize the talent delivery channels of the league, and deliver outstanding talents through the training and discovery of young players by the league. The Chinese Basketball Association should provide operational systems for the development of such integrated events from a national perspective, gradually promote the commercial development model of such events, and gradually improve the qualification review system for athletes, coaches, and referees under such event systems [9].

In terms of market competition, the development of the NBA professional league has occupied the share and space of the Chinese basketball market. The CBA league is facing competition with the NBA league for the Chinese market. The income of China's professional basketball leagues mainly relies on event broadcasting rights and corporate sponsorship. Due to the long-term low attendance rate, ticket revenue is small. Migu Company signed a five-year CBA broadcasting right for 2 billion yuan, and Li-Ning signed a five-year sponsorship contract for 1 billion yuan. These two large contracts bring 500 million yuan to the league every year on average, with each team earning about 50 million yuan per year on average. After deducting the high salaries of foreign players, salaries of local players and coaches, this amount seems to be stretched. However, NBA revenue has been growing continuously in the past decade, from 4.56 billion US dollars in the 2012-2013 season to 11.3 billion US dollars in the 2023-2024 season. The survey found that 90% of Chinese fans pay attention to the NBA, and the NBA's Chinese business is as high as 5 billion US dollars [10]. This comparison shows that there is a huge gap between China's professional basketball leagues and the NBA in terms of market. The CBA league can only take a leading position and advantage in the competition of domestic and foreign basketball events by actively exploring and occupying the market [11]. The integration of youth basketball events and professional leagues helps to explore the youth sports market. Young fans are the main group of sports consumption in the future. Cultivating their attention to this event at an early stage helps to accumulate consumer groups and form a fan economy. For example, the NYBO National Finals held in Xiamen in July 2024 attracted much attention. The outstanding performances of excellent young players such as internet celebrities "Xiao Caiji" and "Ji Rou Ge" won numerous fans for the event and inspired many parents' enthusiasm for cultivating their children's basketball skills. The integrated events can better meet market demand. By

providing high-quality youth basketball event experiences, more families can be attracted to pay attention to basketball, which in turn drives the development of related industries such as basketball training and basketball equipment in the youth market. This integration can also enhance the competitiveness of basketball in the entire sports market. By building a complete basketball event industry chain from youth to professional stages, more audiences and investors can be attracted, enabling basketball to occupy a more favorable position in the competition with other sports for market share.

4.3. Educational Integration and Coach Training

Education is the foundation of a nation's plan. Competitive sports in the new era need to achieve better talent development through educational integration. Education departments often neglect the development of school physical education due to their emphasis on enrollment rates. How to handle the contradiction between sports and studies is an important matter. First of all, we must clearly recognize that sports and education are not opposites; sports itself is a form of education, and they have a dialectical unity relationship. As young players in the league, they face the dual pressures of studies and competitions. Coordinating the relationship between studies, training, and competitions is the basis for ensuring the comprehensive development of young players. For example, Spanish youth basketball clubs have mandatory requirements on players' study time. Players need to complete a certain amount of study every day, focusing on both skill development and academic performance. This integration responds to the different demands of education departments, sports departments, and relevant social departments from the perspective of youth growth. Coaches should learn to integrate educational concepts into their coaching process and guide players' development through encouraging education. For example, the NBA's model of setting up youth basketball games during halftime is highly innovative. The games are in the form of 5v5 between two teams, with one coach per team. However, unlike the professional game model, the young players arranged to play have the privilege of free play. Coaches do not assign corresponding tactics to the children; instead, they mainly encourage the participating players off the court, including verbal encouragement and physical gestures of encouragement. This encouraging education allows young players to show themselves more, increases their confidence, and stimulates their creativity. Many children dare to use various ways to get past opponents and complete finishes, which plays a good role in cultivating young players' personal offensive ability at an early stage.

At the same time, it is necessary to do a good job in coach training. According to a questionnaire survey conducted by Professor Wang Shouheng on some youth basketball coaches in China, the results show that among the 404 surveyed coaches, the age structure is as follows: 25 are over 55 years old, accounting for 6.1%; 60 are 45-54 years old, accounting for 14.8%; 123 are 35-44 years old, accounting for 30.4%; 172 are 25-34 years old, accounting for 42.5%; and 24 are under 25 years old, accounting for 5.9%. The survey shows that young coaches have become the main force in cultivating youth reserve talents [12]. Young coaches have less practical experience and immature teaching concepts and methods. The organic integration of the two events can build a platform for coaches to communicate with each other, allowing youth basketball coaches and professional league coaches to exchange ideas and discuss, and improve their coaching levels together. The coaching teams of professional leagues can provide training courses and guidance for youth basketball coaches, sharing advanced training methods, tactical concepts, and game experience. Regularly organizing youth basketball coaches to observe and learn from professional league teams can promote their professional growth, enabling them to better coach teenagers. The improvement of teenagers' skills, in turn, provides more excellent talents for professional leagues, thus forming a virtuous circle (Fig. 1).

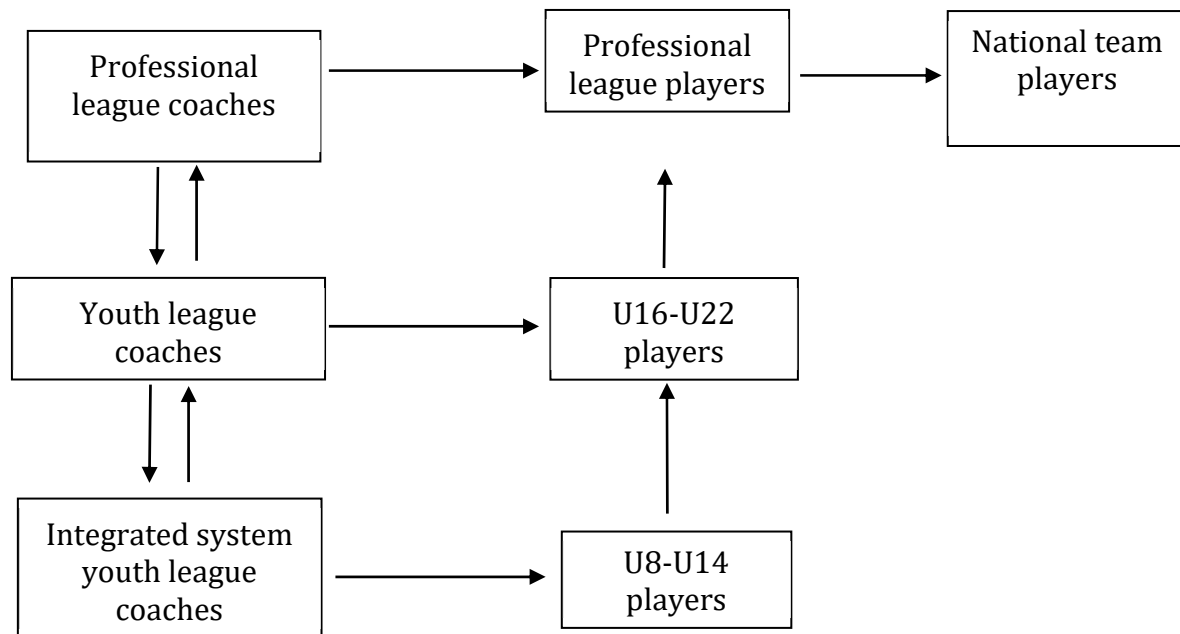


Figure 1. The Connection Mechanism for Coaches and Players Training in Integrated Competition System

4.4. Cultural Construction and Inheritance of Values

We should do a good job in basketball cultural construction and the inheritance of values. The spirit of unity and hard work contained in basketball is consistent with the collectivist spirit of national unity, hard work, and self-improvement. However, under the influence of complex social trends and multicultural backgrounds, some players lack morality and beliefs. This is contrary to the inherent spirit of basketball, such as unity, responsibility, courage, dedication, and has become an obstacle to the innovative development of Chinese basketball culture [13]. Professional league teams can go deep into schools and communities where youth basketball events are held to carry out basketball culture publicity activities, telling the history and stories of professional leagues. This is not only conducive to establishing a positive image of professional basketball clubs but also helps to convey the spirit and values of basketball. Youth basketball players can feel the atmosphere of professional basketball by visiting the training bases and competition venues of professional league teams, enhancing their love and pursuit of basketball, so that the spirit and values of professional leagues can take root in younger groups, ensuring the continuity and development of professional league culture. As professional league players, they should set a good example. Actively participate in activities related to youth basketball events, interact and communicate with youth basketball players, share their growth experiences and success stories, and inspire young basketball players to train hard and pursue their dreams. As coaches, they should play a good role as guides. While teaching young players skills, coaches should instill in them the spirit of patriotism, tenacious struggle, unity and cooperation, and never giving up, cultivating children's fine qualities. As referees, while enforcing impartially, they should play their role as educators. Referees should not be limited to blowing whistles and making penalties; they should also guide young players to master the rules and learn to compete fairly, thus helping teenagers establish behavioral and moral awareness in line with social norms.

5. Conclusion

The integration of youth basketball events and professional leagues is an exploration concerning the development of basketball in China. Its advantages are that it can expand the talent selection channels for China's basketball development, innovate the operation mode of

professional leagues, and the combination of the two is conducive to integrating resources and enhancing the brand influence of both events. In the integration process, factors such as differences in player training paths, differences in coaching concepts, and schedule arrangements between the two events should be considered, and the distribution of interests among various departments should be coordinated. Strengthen the learning and communication between coaches and referees in the two systems, improve the training system for young players, and effectively connect the two talent training systems. Enhance basketball cultural construction and publicity, convey the spirit and values of basketball, and strengthen young players' love and pursuit of basketball.

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