

The Impact of Professionalization in Japanese Basketball for Youth Generation: Focusing on the Membership of the Japan Basketball Association, Basketball Participation Rates, and Spectator Attendance Rates

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Abstract

Purpose: The shift to a professional model appears to have brought significant changes to the structure and governance of Japanese basketball. This study aims to conduct a comprehensive analysis of youth basketball, focusing on key indicators such as changes in Japan Basketball Association (JBA) membership, participation rates, and trends in spectator attendance.

Methods: By understanding trends in JBA membership, basketball participation, and viewership, this research seeks to elucidate the impact of professionalization on youth involvement in basketball.

Results: The study examined to 1. Understand the transformative impact of the professionalization of basketball in Japan by following the establishment of the B. League in 2016 and 2. View the impact of the professionalization of basketball among youth generation in Japan. A linear regression analysis suggests that the number of JBA-registered youth players is decreasing at a rate of approximately 9,800 individuals per year. The B. League does not appear to have had a positive impact on the participation rate among youth generation, and there was no significant relationship observed between the development of the B. League and the proportion of live game attendance at the venue. However, since the launch of the B. League, the media viewership rate has increased significantly.

Conclusion: Based on these findings, the JBA, in collaboration with the B. League, should devise and implement strategies to convert media viewers into participants and live spectators.

Keywords: Professionalization, Youth basketball, Japan Basketball Association (JBA), Basketball participation rates, Spectator attendance.

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Introduction

Historically, basketball in Japan was organized primarily around amateur league, the National Basketball League (NBL), with the top league consisting mainly of teams sponsored by major corporations. However, the shift to a professional model appears to have brought significant changes to the structure and governance of Japanese basketball. During the NBL era (prior to the B. League's launch), basketball had relatively limited exposure, but the launch of B. League led to heightened media attention and accessibility. The league's opening game, for example, was broadcasted live on national television, marking a major step toward the better visibility of Japanese basketball. Additionally, there has been a substantial rise in online streaming options, including live broadcasts of B. League games through various platforms such as Dazn or Basketball Live and specialized apps, which cater to both domestic and international audiences. These efforts have greatly enhanced the exposure of Japanese basketball, contributing to increased viewership and fan engagement, as well as promoting the sport to new audiences across different media platforms.

The professionalization of the sport has had a broad impact not only on the development of elite players and teams but also on grassroots participation, fan engagement, and the overall popularity of basketball in Japan. The establishment and growth of the B. League are thought to have influenced basketball participation rates, the membership base of the Japan Basketball Association (JBA), live game attendance, and media viewership (Taks et al., 2013; Weed et al., 2015; Winell et al., 2022). Changes in participation rates are expected to have a particularly strong impact on youth players, as they have greater access to environments where basketball can be played both in schools and local communities compared to adults.

Given the rapid growth and evolving landscape of the B. League (Fig 1), it is essential to examine how these changes have affected the spread and appeal of the sport among youth. This study aims to conduct a comprehensive analysis of youth basketball, focusing on key indicators such as changes in JBA membership, participation rates, and trends in spectator attendance. By understanding trends in JBA membership, basketball participation, and viewership, this research seeks to elucidate the impact of professionalization on youth involvement in basketball.

Weed et al. (2015) conducted a scoping review to assess how sports events, particularly mega-events like the Olympics Games, can influence sports participation. The findings emphasized that while sports events may not inherently lead to increased participation, strategically leveraging these events can lead to positive outcomes, including greater grassroots involvement. Event leveraging is seen as a key factor in achieving participation-related goals. Hahm et al. (2021) explored how the FIFA World Cup (2002) in South Korea and Japan influenced both sports spectatorship and participation. By examining the mediating effect of nostalgia, the research suggested that mega-events can have long-lasting effects on both viewership and participation in the host countries, encouraging broader engagement in sports. Funk et al. (2002) showed that individuals who participate in sports tend to have a higher interest and loyalty to the sports that they watch, and they are strongly motivated as spectators, particularly in the sports that they are participating due to the technical understanding and strategic knowledge they have through playing, which enhances spectating behavior. Trail et al. (2003) pointed out that the spectating behavior of sports participants holds significance beyond mere entertainment because sports participation contributes to reinforcing self-identity and social identity. Specifically, the self-efficacy and community connections gained through

playing sports are further strengthened through spectating. Wann et al. (2000) reported that sports participants attend sports events more frequently and spend more time watching sports through media than non-participants. Their research indicated that sports participants actively became spectators and showed a high overall interest in sports. This suggests that playing sports is one of the key factors promoting spectating behavior. Koronios et al. (2020) examined the factors motivating individuals' consumption of sports media and how those who actively attended live sports events also tend to engage more with sports media. The analysis found that those with a strong attachment to their team and higher social engagement during live sports events were more likely to consume sports through media. The study emphasized how live spectatorship serves as a key factor in enhancing overall media consumption behavior. Kim et al. (2009) focused on the relationship between live sports engagement and media consumption in the context of mixed martial arts. The findings showed that fans who actively attended live events also displayed greater engagement with sports media, such as watching broadcasts or following sports news. The study highlighted cross-national differences, examining American and South Korean spectators, but the overall conclusion supported the idea that live spectatorship drives more active media consumption. Thus, the relationship between sports spectatorship and participation has been recognized as multifaceted. There is a diverse body of research examining the influence of sports spectating on sports participation, the impact of sports participation on sports spectating, or the relationship between the two.

Based on the aforementioned points, this study examines the impact of the professionalization of basketball in Japan on youth participation in basketball, JBA registrations, and basketball spectatorship (both live and through media), using available data.

This study focuses on understanding the transformative impact of the professionalization of basketball in Japan, particularly following the establishment of the B. League in 2016 and aims to examine the impact of the professionalization of basketball among youth generation in Japan, which has accelerated since 2016, from the following four perspectives:

1. The relationship between professionalization and the number of registered members of the Japan Basketball Association (JBA) from 2015 to 2023.
2. The relationship between professionalization and the basketball participation rate among the general population from 2015 to 2023.
3. The relationship between professionalization and the basketball viewership rate among the general population from 2015 to 2023.
4. The relationship between professionalization and the viewership rate among basketball participants from 2015 to 2023.

Materials and Methods

To explore the relationship with the professionalization initiated in 2016, the study will analyze the following available secondary data:

1. Information on the number of registered members published by JBA (2015, 2017, 2019, 2021, 2023).
2. Raw data from nationwide surveys, with permission for use (secondary data from surveys conducted biennially by the Sasakawa Sports Foundation (SSF) targeting youth generation).

Data Analysis

The raw data from a series of nationwide surveys, for which permission was obtained from SSF, consisting of five datasets collected every two years since 2014, were analyzed. The analysis estimated (1) basketball participation

rates, (2) live attendance rates at basketball games, and (3) Basketball media viewership rates of basketball games. The time-series trends of these variables were then examined through regression analysis using linear approximation.

Results

1. The relationship between professionalization and the number of registered members in JBA.

Since the launch of the B. League in 2016, there has been a downward trend in the number of youth players (ages 12 to 22) registered with the JBA for competitive activities. A linear regression analysis suggests that the number of JBA-registered youth players is decreasing at a rate of approximately 9,800 individuals per year ($R^2=0.46$).

++ INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE ++

2. The relationship between professionalization and the basketball participation rate among the general population.

The basketball participation rate among the youth demographic (ages 12 through 21), defined as the proportion of individuals who played basketball at least once in the past year, was recorded at 19.1% in the most recent 2023 survey. Since the launch of the B. League in 2016, the participation rate for this age group has been declining at an approximate pace of 2% every two years ($R^2=0.80$). As indicated in Fig. 3, the B. League does not appear to have had a positive impact on the participation rate among youth generation.

++ INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE ++

3. The relationship between professionalization and the basketball live attendance rate

Among the youth demographic (ages 12 through 21), the proportion of those who attend basketball games live at the venue at least once in the past year has remained relatively low. As shown in Fig. 4, there was no significant relationship observed between the development

of the B. League and the proportion of live game attendance at the venue.

++ INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE ++

4. The relationship between professionalization and the basketball media viewership rate

Among the youth demographic (ages 12 through 21), the proportion of those who watch basketball games through media such as television or the internet has been steadily increasing each year. As shown in Fig. 5, it became evident that since the launch of the B. League, the media viewership rate has increased significantly ($R^2=0.80$).

++ INSERT FIGURE 5 HERE ++

Discussion

The present study aimed to conduct a comprehensive analysis of youth basketball, focusing on key indicators such as changes in JBA membership, participation rates, and trends in spectator attendance. By understanding trends in JBA membership, basketball participation, and viewership, we were seeking to elucidate the impact of professionalization on youth involvement in basketball. The four perspectives were examined to 1. Understand the transformative impact of the professionalization of basketball in Japan by following the establishment of the B. League in 2016 and 2. View the impact of the professionalization of basketball among youth generation in Japan. The four perspectives are: 1. the relationship between professionalization and the number of registered members of the Japan Basketball Association (JBA) from 2015 to 2023, 2. The relationship between professionalization and the basketball participation rate among the general population from 2015 to 2023, 3. The relationship between professionalization and the basketball viewership rate among the general population from 2015 to 2023, and 4. The relationship between professionalization

and the viewership rate among basketball participants from 2015 to 2023.

The relationship between the expansion of the B. League and the decline in youth registrations with the JBA is not direct. In other words, numerous variables likely mediate this relationship, making it problematic to directly link the two. However, as indicated in Fig. 2, the B. League does not appear to have had a positive impact on the number of youth registered with the JBA. The decline in youth registrations with the JBA was considered to be related to the decrease in basketball participation rates. In Japan, a decline in the membership rates of sports clubs (school sports clubs, private sports clubs, and community sports clubs) among the youth demographic has been noted, and the decrease in basketball registrations and participation rates was considered to align with these observations (Sasakawa Foundation, 2016, 2018, 2019, 2021, 2023). According to this study, no positive relationship was identified between the expansion of the B. League and the number of basketball registrations or participation rates.

The rate of live basketball game attendance has remained relatively low, and no relationship with the development of the B. League could be identified. One possible explanation for this is that the data in this study were collected through a nationwide survey, and many of the respondents may not have had access to a facility near their place of residence where a B. League team is based. This study revealed that the proportion of those who watch basketball games through media such as television or the internet has been steadily increasing each year. While DAZN previously handled the B. League's online streaming, Basketball Live is now the primary platform, offering many games free of charge, with subscription fees remaining affordable. It has been noted that among the youth demographic, there is a marked trend toward online streaming rather than television viewing (Newman & Walker,

2023). This suggests that the absence of geographical and economic constraints, along with the convenience of viewing platforms, are key factors driving the popularity of B. League streaming.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between the development of the B. League and the number of JBA registrants, basketball participation rates, live game attendance rates, and media viewership rates among the youth demographic. It was revealed that the media viewership rate for basketball had expanded in line with the growth of the B. League. However, the number of JBA registrants, basketball participation rates, and live game attendance rates did not correspond with the increase in B. League attendance and media exposure. This is considered to be influenced by the declining sports club membership rates among the youth demographic and the geographical limitations of B. League venues. It was suggested that the JBA, in collaboration with the B. League, should devise and implement strategies to convert media viewers into participants and live spectators.

Several variables examined in this study were not directly related to each other, with many intervening variables influencing both. While this analysis was initially approached as an exploratory study with a macro perspective, it was suggested that future research should focus on explaining the outcomes of professional sports development within the context of a more complex interrelation of variables.

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