

Causes of the decrease in viewership rate of the NBA All-star game

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Abstract. The intensity of the NBA All-star game often determines the viewership rate, which also affects the revenue, demonstrating how many audiences are willing to spend time watching the exhibition. However, recent reflections from players and head coaches and data collected by media indicate that the competitiveness of the showcase is declining, resulting in criticisms and a reduction in the viewership rate. Numerous reasons and phenomena contribute to its downfall. Modifications to the processes and management of the NBA All-star are required in order to restore previous success and raise revenue.

Keywords: NBA All-Star game; Competitiveness; Viewership rate.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The National Basketball Association All-Star Game is a showcase event hosted by the NBA every year in February. It is the personification of the NBA All-Star Weekend. Each year, voting from current players, fan bases, and media groups selects 24 players in the league to participate in this featuring event. The All-Star title symbolizes recognition from the NBA, the states, or even the world. Previously, in the 80s and 90s, players emphasized on the results of the game, striving to compete against others and aiming for victory. However, this iconic event is diminishing its competitiveness through years of development, as shooting, especially three points shots, are replacing muscle collisions and physical interactions. Current players also place less importance on the All-Star game. It is frequent to see participants of the All-Star game not playing intense defense as they would play during a regular season game. In the end, the All-stars become more entertaining rather than competitive. This report focuses on the causation of this undesiring phenomenon while seeking methods to enhance the existing situation.

1.2 Research Gap

After receiving criticism from players, coaches, and fans for years, it is undeniable that the current All-star game is losing competitiveness. However, the National Basketball Association has no accomplishments and intentions to improve the contemporary results. For the fan bases, although demonstrating drawbacks, the All-Star game is still one of the most well-received NBA events. For NBA, the all-star game could generate billions of dollars, drawing advertisements and pushing local economic activities, creating great revenues. But, as the showcase event loses intensity and becomes more monotonous, the money-driven event loses revenue and viewership rate. From the 2018-2019's season to 2019-2020's, NBA revenue dropped from 8.8 billion to 8.3 billion. And in terms of viewership rate, the NBA lost 18 percent of its audience from 2020 to 2021, which is a significant amount. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is non-negligible, but the overall trend is still decreasing. Because of the current direction, the NBA is not only losing fans but as a consequence, also decreasing income, which is a concern for NBA event managers.

This report aims to identify the causes of the issues that are happening now, and explore the reason from players' and fans' perspectives, trying to raise viewership rate for the National Basketball Association to increase the revenue of the NBA.

1.3 Structure of this paper

The purpose is to make audiences and players more engaged in the NBA All Star game by increasing the competitiveness of the game, raising viewership and revenue for the NBA. Firstly, this paper examines the possible reasons for the decline of intensity from multiple standpoints. Secondly, this paper analyzes the strength, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats the NBA All-star game possesses and presents. Thirdly, based on previous evaluations, this paper presents suggestions and potential solutions to the issues mentioned while using statistics as evidence. Lastly, this paper delivers a concluding remark.

2. Analysis on the lack of competitiveness

2.1 Cause and effect

Firstly, the player's friendship and relationships. To present an amiable, affectionate, and all-encompassing game, the NBA utilizes social media and technology to construct a friendly environment on and off the court. As a result, players have more frequent contact with other players not on their team and are more conscious of the reality that the NBA is nothing more than a business league. Therefore, the sense of pride and loyalty to a team diminishes, not as substantial as in previous players, and tensions between players within the league decline over time. Consequently, as stars like LeBron James and Stephen Curry encounter each other during an entertaining game like the All-stars, it is more reasonable to portray them as a group of friends or co-workers playing instead of enemies or rivals. The pursuit of triumph, in turn, would not be as profound as the results of a playoff game where the stars are in opposition. As the level of competitiveness stays low, the less intense competition, the fewer audiences enjoy watching, causing viewership to decline and revenue to decrease.

Secondly, the lack of parity makes the All-star game less desirable. For many years, it has been a situation where the West All-stars are overpowering, and the East All-stars are less intimidating and more powerless on paper. However, the NBA improved the drafting system of the All-stars, alternating the original East-West competition to picking players by team captains. But this new system is not as effective since personal preferences and biases involve as the draft onsets. During the 2022 All-star team selection, Kevin Durant, a team captain, purposefully avoids and ignores James Harden - a two times Most Valuable Player - after he transferred to a team without Durant. However, whether juxtaposed from an honors and historic recognition perspective or an ability and skills perspective, Harden does not deserve the last pick. After all, James Harden is one of the best 75 players ever played in the league. As these grudges and preferences exist during the drafting process, it is challenging for the NBA to exhibit a fair and equivalent competition. Since team selection depends on the team captain's personal preferences, the teams may display incomparability. And this sense of lack of parity does not just live during the team selection. It also exists before the team selection stage.

The limitations and rules of the NBA All-star, including the voting process, are destined to make the teams unfair. Especially the conference affiliation when it comes to voting, where each conference generates 12 All-stars. It is unfair because of the limit on numbers. For example, the 13th player in the western conference has better stats, reputation, and honors than the 10th player selected in the eastern conference. However, due to the restriction on numbers, the player in the west fails to be an All-star. Similar situations can also happen due to the drafting since fans' voting contributes fifty percent to the All-star selection. In this case, a player that comes from a larger city or another nation where it has more fans' support may have advantages over the player that is from a less populated region.

At last, certain players with good performances during the season can be eliminated because of the city they represent. Fans do not like to see that the player they have been rooting for loses in the competition, and their resentment is a potential cause of the decrease in the viewership rate.

Thirdly, many players in opposition to the All-star event criticized its management, importance, and level of intensity. As a result, many players participating in the show do not intend to partake. Playing the game is more like a force of action by the NBA contract. In 2021, because of the Covid-19 pandemic, current Log Angeles LeBron James publicly said he has “zero energy and zero excitement about an All-Star game this year.” Not only LeBron, other All-star players like Giannis Antetokounmpo from Milwaukee Bucks, Kawhi Leonard, and Paul George from Los Angeles Clippers all criticized the logic of having an Of course, being an NBA All-star player is worth mentioning, but that's not enough for most players. Since the event takes place in February, players do not want to risk the opportunity of getting injured. The absence of these All-star players can reverse the situation during a playoff series. Players, coaches, and fans do not want to see these superstars fall because of an entertaining game. More players would prefer to treasure the time and spend it with their families, or even take a rest and get prepared for upcoming games. irrelevant in such a compressed season, especially when the playoffs are approaching.

Well-known head coach of the Golden States, Steve Kerr, concurs that the NBA All-star game is no longer competitive, where there is little resistance from both ends of the floor. Steve Kerr added " In my mind, what's happened is everybody is trying to be so cool out there that you almost feel guilty if you play hard," Kerr said. “Maybe the best thing to do will be to watch a tape of an All-Star Game from about 1985, because it was a different game back then. It wasn't like guys were diving on the floor for loose balls and taking charges, but it was competitive. And I think you're just as likely to get hurt not trying than you are competing at 75 percent. And that's all they need to do, is compete at 75 percent. Right now, they're like at 10 percent, and that's embarrassing."

The importance and reward of the All-star game are insufficient for the players to go hard, so players will not take the show as significant as the conference finals. The amount of energy committed to defense and offense is lacking. Consequently, fewer players commit to the game. The games are emerging as less competitive and aggressive since there is not much value in triumph.

If the players do not commit and enjoy playing, how is it plausible for the fans to do the same? In the end, the NBA All-star game is nothing more than an entertaining exhibition. Even though the viewership rate demonstrates remarkable results as the celebration of the 75th anniversary and the top 75 in the NBA in 2022, viewership, in general, is still lower than usual. Compared with previous All-stars, ratings dropped by 24 percent, and the viewership rate fell by 14 percent, displaying the diminishing audiences and a decrease in a good experience.

2.2 SWOT Analysis

The strength of the NBA enables the NBA All-stars's success and prosperity. Firstly, the National Basketball Association is the leading institution of basketball. Only the best out of the best receive chances to play in the NBA. It symbolizes and represents the highest level of basketball that the world can play. Strong individualism and heroic moments attract fans globally, making it the most well-known association of any other basketball league. With the help of social media and television, the NBA can spread its influence to continents and broadcast its games worldwide. Any event hosted by the NBA will receive global support, not to mention one of its most iconic events. Secondly, for events with such high numbers of publicity, advertisements come in, and economic activities are always involved, making the NBA one of the wealthiest sports event organizations in the world, earning billions of dollars annually. The NBA All-star game, just like any other game, makes a considerable amount of money based on sponsorships.

The National Basketball Association needs to improve certain aspects to comprise its weaknesses. Firstly, even though the NBA is already prominent and renowned in the world, there are still certain places that are unaware of the association or not having any chance to broadcast its events. To raise viewership rates and attract more audiences for the NBA All-star game, the NBA can publicize its events to more regions where they are unfamiliar with basketball or the NBA. Secondly, the NBA has fewer advantages when competing in a foreign country. Since it has its origin and base in the United States, entering and dominating another nation may face obstacles, promotions on local

institutions, technical limitations, and restrictions on foreign events publications may lead to a decline in viewership. In some countries with poor internet and television, people will not have access to the NBA All-star game. The National Basketball Association can donate signal bases, televisions, or basketball courts to expand its influence, benefiting the people by improving infrastructures while letting people recognize the existence of the NBA, which then solves the viewership issue.

The opportunities that the NBA owns can make further contributions to its success. Firstly, the NBA can reach different countries that have not previously been exposed to it. If the fans in the United States lose passion for the NBA All-star game, the league can make exhibition games outside of the United States. Consequently, the association increases publicity in foreign markets. At the same time, the tickets and advertisers can also provide the NBA with significant revenue. Secondly, the NBA can bring in players globally. The success of Yaoming and the Houston Rockets remains. The NBA can bring in players of different ethnicities to promote diversity during the NBA All-Star game. Ten more Yaomings would definitely make an improvement on the viewership rate of the NBA All Star. Meanwhile, the representing country will grant supporters, allowing the National Basket Ball association to receive a wide range of audiences to increase the NBA All-star's viewership rate.

The NBA also has threats that can be detrimental to the development of the NBA. The expansion of other sports and leagues will compete against the NBA for the market, so there will be less viewership for the NBA, including the NBA All-stars. The growth of major league sports may also drive out pre-existing NBA events, where a country focuses on football, or soccer may receive support from the government to promote football nationwide. The NBA can be eliminated through this competition due to country preferences.

3. Suggestions

There are multiple potential solutions to the decrease in competitiveness and the decline in the viewership rate. This section will make suggestions based on the information provided earlier in the paper.

One way of restoring intensity is to increase the reward. The conversation between the Golden States Warriors and coach Steve Kerr leads us to more insightful perspectives, where players express their thoughts. Forward Draymond Green offers a simple solution when ESPN asks. "Raise the money." Draymond says, "I'm serious. That's how you're going to make it more competitive." Guard Klay Thompson presents a similar answer "Incentives? Raise the money or maybe a nice car if you win? I think that would make guys play harder." Currently, players on the winning side are receiving 100,000 reach. However, this money is not significant to the All-stars, considering the salaries these players earn annually. The winning prizes are a mere proportion of their income. Consequently, players care less about the victory, and the level of intensity decreases, causing the exhibition to be less favorable. So, to make an impact, the NBA should increase the prizes by a greater degree. If the awards are tempting enough, the players would have a reason to compete hard.

Secondly, the triumph of the All-star can embody further implications. To make the All-stars play for something substantial. In 2020, due to Kobe's helicopter crash, the National Basketball Association renamed the Most Valuable Player trophy and set a specific number for the teams to reach. In the name of Kobe Bryant, and to honor him, players on both teams showed greater ambitions to win than in any other All-star game. Especially in the last quarter, players demonstrated great defense and excellent offense, creating tension and suspense, and ending the game with a minor difference. In turn, the viewership rate also increases by 8 percent from last year due to the accident. If the players know they are playing in honor and something more meaningful, they will play tough. For example, if the players comprehend that their victory could lead to a donation to poor children, they would have incentives and purposes to compete with each other and play seriously. As the competitiveness of the games increases, more people will be willing to watch the game, so the viewership of the NBA All-star game raises.

Thirdly, as mentioned above, the NBA could present a combination of foreign players. By displaying foreign players in the All-Stars, the game promotes diversification. Not only extending the curiosity of the local audiences but also bringing in foreign spectators. This course of action can attract a substantial number of overseas fans and introduce the NBA to foreign markets. It can swiftly boost the viewership rate for the league if they want to.

Fourthly, the National Basketball Association can postpone the All-star showcase after the playoffs. Since players complain and criticize the time the All-star game happens, the NBA can delay the event to satisfy the players' needs. After the finals, players go into the off-season, which they do not have to work. At this point, it is more suitable for the association to operate an event like the All-stars because the players would have fewer worries. However, this does not mean that the players will play the All-star game as hard as they would in the finals since they do not want to have injuries at any point of their career. In general, the game keeps its entertaining characteristics and adds intensity. The NBA can reschedule the exhibition to June or July when more people have more leisure time because of the summer break. To conclude, there are much better times in a year than February.

4. Conclusion

In summary, there are many ways for the National Basketball Association to improve the current situation of the NBA All-star game. Especially when technology is mature, communication is simple. Many aspects guarantee the success of the association. Despite this, it is also clear that the fans are losing interest in the NBA All-star game, so the steps taken by the league are substantially crucial. While the institution works for change, improving both the players and the fans, it is more important that the participants apprehend and demand change. After all, the players are the ones that are being broadcasted globally instead of the sports event managers. With modifications and refinements, the NBA All-stars will still be one of the most featured events of the NBA. If they fail to change, the appearances of the superstars are still going to be tempting for fan bases and media, ensuring a minimum amount of audience for the NBA. Now, it is up to the NBA managers to decide whether to demand to improve.

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