Examining Inefficiencies in NBA Player Development and Potential Solutions

Abstract

Though the United States has maintained an impressive performance record in international athletic competition, its amateur sport infrastructure has become less efficient than that of many other countries, hurting the NBA's ability to expand. For late-development sports like basketball, in which early athletic training should be varied early and specialized late, these training inefficiencies have led to diminished skills among players at the highest level, like those in the NBA. Basketball-specific factors, like the preps-to-pros era coinciding with the post-Jordan generation, have severely affected the training methods in American basketball. The NBA and its teams have taken note of this change. As the San Antonio Spurs make headlines with a roster of imports, the percentage of foreign players in the NBA has never been higher. As rule changes in the NBA have made for a faster game predicated on skill and savvy, the American player pipeline has never been less prepared. This thesis will define problems with the current system in areas of physical, athletic, and mental athlete development and examine player development models through a holistic lens, digging into the underlying causes of skill deficiencies in the NBA player pool. This research points to the unstructured nature of youth basketball, which is the root cause of paramount issues like the lack of coaching educational standards, as well as many other underlying problems which pervade the NBA player development pipeline. After doing this, it will attempt to solve some of the major issues facing American basketball player development, for example, transitioning players into the NBA and how to systematically train the vast numbers of youth participants. Systems like Canada's Long Term Athlete Development and the youth academy system in German club football headline a comprehensive list of alternatives to assess. By taking the best aspects of each model and adjusting them to the NBA environment, a better system can be designed, giving the NBA more control of its talent pipeline and further ability to expand and scale.