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# Soft Power Played on the Hardwood: United States Diplomacy through Basketball

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SOFT POWER PLAYED ON THE HARDWOOD

United States Diplomacy through Basketball

by

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis demonstrates the importance of basketball as a form of soft power and a diplomatic asset to better achieve American foreign policy, which is defined and referred to as basketball diplomacy. Basketball diplomacy is also a lens to observe the evolution of American power from 1893 through present day. Basketball connects and permeates foreign cultures and effectively disseminates American influence unlike any other form of soft power, which is most powerfully illustrated by the United States' basketball relationship with China. American basketball diplomacy will become stronger and connect with more countries with greater influence, and exist without relevant competition, until the likely rise of China in the indefinite future. As a result of basketball diplomacy, Chinese culture has internalized American influence, likewise for many other countries, which will positively benefit the United States as China possibly challenges American hegemony.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Chapter 1 - Introduction.....</b>	<b>6</b>
Why Basketball? .....	6
Basketball Diplomacy.....	11
<b>Chapter 2 - The Fundamentals to Understanding Basketball Diplomacy .....</b>	<b>16</b>
International Relations: Realists and Liberals.....	16
“New” Diplomacy: Can Non-State Actors Play Too?.....	19
Soft Power .....	24
Defining Basketball Diplomacy .....	25
Three Eras of Basketball Diplomacy.....	26
<b>Chapter 3 - The Origin of Basketball Diplomacy .....</b>	<b>28</b>
I Hope They Love This Game.....	28
Game Time Adjustments .....	33
It’s Fun to Play at the Y.M.C.A. ....	34
<b>Chapter 4 - Goodwill and Basketball Diplomacy.....</b>	<b>38</b>
Playing Around the Rim: Basketball Diplomacy in the Pacific .....	38
The Euro-step Towards Globalized Basketball: Basketball Diplomacy in Europe.....	42
<b>Chapter 5 - Prestige and Basketball Diplomacy .....</b>	<b>45</b>
Court Visionaries: Realizing America’s Potential for Basketball Diplomacy .....	46
Ambassadors of Goodwill .....	48
The Cold Warriors .....	51
<b>Chapter 6 - Playing for the Contract: Capitalism and Basketball Diplomacy Today .....</b>	<b>57</b>
United States State Department .....	58
Basketball Diplomacy Through the State.....	59
Where Diplomacy Happens: Basketball Diplomacy Through the NBA .....	61
<b>Chapter 7 - Pass the Ball, China is Open: American Basketball Diplomacy in China .....</b>	<b>65</b>
Bringing People Together .....	66
Basketball in China.....	68
Pumping Up the Balls.....	69
Sino-NBA Relations .....	72
Channeling Connections: Old to New Media .....	73
Wheeling and Dealing: NBA Merchandise .....	76
The NBA’s Influence: Teaching the Game.....	77
The Chinese Basketball Association.....	79
Transnational Corporations .....	83
Celebrity Athletes .....	84
Basketball’s Diplomatic Influences on China .....	87
<b>Chapter 8 - Conclusion: Manifest Destiny? .....</b>	<b>89</b>
Around the World .....	92
The Future of American Basketball Diplomacy.....	94
Consuming vs. Playing .....	95
The Prospect of Basketball Made in China .....	97
Recommendations.....	98
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>99</b>

“Basketball is a vehicle to achieving other things.”

-Jim Eyn, Dad and Coach

## Chapter 1 - Introduction

*Basketball has been one of our lines of communication that that has helped us be involved with the entire world. –Bill Bertka<sup>1</sup>*

The United States would be best served if it supplied countries with basketballs, "good American ones, the kind with the seams," and sneakers, instead of "unneeded hardware," for "if it weren't for the State Department, natives of countries around the globe would play better hoop and learn to love the United States." Red Auerbach of the Boston Celtics said this in 1979, one of the most successful and charismatic basketball coaches of all time. He argued that "all foreign service officers" come from the same breeding institutions where "they learn which fork to use and what to say and how to kiss rear ends... What they don't learn is how to deal with people."<sup>2</sup> Auerbach suggested that diplomacy should be conducted through a strategy based on creating bonds with people, utilizing culture as a medium, or in his words, basketball. This thesis argues that American basketball, a form of American soft power, is an effective diplomatic tool, proven historically as well as practiced today, and it will likely become more influential as basketball continues to grow internationally.

### ***Why Basketball?***

With the broadcasting of the National Basketball Association (NBA) in more than 215 countries and in more than 47 languages, basketball is in a league of its own as a truly global, yet American, entity.<sup>3</sup> Basketball has achieved an unimagined level of popularity

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Bertka, videoconference with author, April 22, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> William E. Mckibben, "Red Auerbach Touts Hoop Diplomacy," The Harvard Crimson, December 5, 1979, accessed April 1, 2015, <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/1979/12/5/red-auerbach-touts-hoop-diplomacy-pif/>.

<sup>3</sup> Emily Steel, "The NBA Makes a Play to Slam-Dunk the World," Financial Times, October 24, 2014, accessed May 4, 2015, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/9bfe3354-2c09-11e3-acf4-00144feab7de.html#axzz3VcKenscD>.

around the world. Some forecast basketball to overtake soccer as the most global sport, which may seem presumptuous considering soccer's much deeper history in many more corners of the world, but basketball is quickly gaining ground, well suited for an increasingly urbanized and digitalized world.<sup>4</sup> China, the world's largest country, will soon have more people playing basketball than there are American citizens. And China does not follow just *any* basketball, it is obsessed with *American* basketball, for it is estimated that there are 450 million Chinese viewers of the NBA.<sup>5</sup> The NBA's penetration of China is renowned as a tremendous success, and the NBA is expecting and pursuing similar victories in many other countries, notably India, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Brazil, countries with large, urban, highly populated cities of young basketball fans and immature basketball infrastructures. Considering the potential of these markets, the NBA's double-digit growth over the past twenty years is only a taste of its international potential.<sup>6</sup>

Few American exports can claim the widespread and immersive success achieved by the NBA in such politically and economically important countries. However, this thesis is not limited to its recent NBA-related success, it also highlights how the tradition of spreading basketball has been customary since it was created and has been shepherded by a diversity of actors. The NBA is simply the most active source of basketball diplomacy today, one of the many forms of culture that powers America's diplomacy.

This thesis argues that basketball is an influential piece of American culture, and when spread abroad, it behaves diplomatically and influences American foreign relations,

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<sup>4</sup> James Montague, "Why Soccer Should Fear the NBA," CNN.com, October 8, 2010, accessed April 1, 2015, <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/SPORT/football/10/07/football.nba.fear.world/index.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Steel, "The NBA Makes a Play."



which will be referred to as basketball diplomacy. A similar term already in use is sports diplomacy, which is defined as follows:

“Sports-diplomacy falls under the wide umbrella of public diplomacy. It involves representative and diplomatic activities undertaken by sports people on behalf of and in conjunction with their governments. The practice is facilitated by traditional diplomacy and uses sports people and sporting events to engage, inform and create a favourable image among foreign publics and organisations, to shape their perceptions in a way that is (more) conducive to the sending government’s foreign policy goals.”<sup>7</sup>

Most sports diplomacy literature - exemplified by the definition above - only acknowledge the power of sport through traditional diplomatic actors. However, as will be argued in chapter two, that assumption is limiting to how basketball has in the past and continues to influence diplomacy. Basketball diplomacy has been utilized by non-state actors throughout its history and consequentially aided in achieving or directly serving America’s foreign policy interests. Its influence is also not limited to the *public*, for basketball diplomacy also permeates foreign governments and corporations. Furthermore, basketball deserves to be distinguished from other sports because of its rich potential and accomplished diplomatic history incomparable to any other American sport. It is arguably one of America’s strongest cultural exports and valuable sources of soft power.

To contextualize how it fits into American foreign policy, as with any form of cultural diplomacy or soft power, basketball diplomacy does not supplant nor diminish the need for hard power and traditional diplomacy. Characteristic of non-traditional diplomacy, it has its limitations, for non-state actors can sometimes be less dependable or controllable by the government compared to traditional diplomatic actors. Diplomacy through sport can be “sporadic,” typical of most cultural influences, and is not necessarily appropriate for all situations and may be received differently by various countries. Nevertheless, basketball

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<sup>7</sup> Stuart Murray, "Sports-Diplomacy: A Hybrid of Two Halves," (paper presented at The International Symposium on Cultural Diplomacy in Berlin, May 11 –15, 2011), 8.

diplomacy is a unique and effective cultural, corporate, and politically influencing export that supports American interests and is accessible to the U.S. government. Following is a list of characteristics of basketball that distinguish it from other cultural exports and predispose it as an ideal form of American soft power:

- Basketball is the quintessential American sport, for it was invented in the United States and is where the epicenter sits today.<sup>8</sup> It was also created in the light of Protestant Christianity and eventually became a vessel to teach traits like teamwork, discipline, and sportsmanship.
- Representative of its American spirit, basketball is a global sport. It spread around the world within a year of its invention and became localized and culturally significant in many countries, even the national sport for some.
- Basketball is fun, simple to play, and appropriate for anybody. Resultantly the game spreads easily, which is consequential for its own dissemination, as well the diffusion of American values and facilitation of cross-cultural relationships.
- It is disseminated (practiced, played, coached, financed, advertised, broadcasted, promoted, discussed by, etc.) a diversity of actors.
- Basketball thrives in urban settings and small spaces, it experiences great popularity among younger generations, it is cheap, and the dominant brand of the game is American.

These qualities supply basketball with its value and power and set it apart from other pieces of American culture, which are echoed by Caroline Walters in her commentary about sports:

“Only certain cultures or segments of society show strong interest in speaking English, travelling to the United States, attending a classical music event, or

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<sup>8</sup> Unlike soccer, baseball, and football

participating in a discussion on human rights. On the other hand, virtually all cultures and all citizens have an interest in and appreciation for sport.”<sup>9</sup>

Its value and power is further observed by the U.S. Government, who after 9/11, recognized sport as a way to engage young Muslims across “Africa, the Middle East and South Asia – a demographic that has remained relatively untouched by U.S. education and exchange programs until now.”<sup>10</sup>

American movies, music, and television enjoy terrific success internationally, but their proliferation abroad can be less fluid due to the “vulgarity, violence, and vitriol” often associated with American popular culture.<sup>11</sup> These cultural exports sometimes breach social norms and values abroad, which can be subject to resistance and even censorship. Also, these examples involve the English language, which does not always translate easily across cultures. Conversely, basketball is played by internationally understood rules independent of a single language. Unlike books, movies, or music, individuals can still meaningfully engage socially through basketball without speaking the same language, in addition to eliminating a bevy of other barriers too: race, social status, economic status, political beliefs, sexual orientation, religion, and so on. Basketball exceptionally connects people and permeates societies, and this thesis will show how that contributes to America’s diplomatic abilities.

In an international system characterized by more non-state networks and actors, and an environment less conducive to statist-only international relations, basketball diplomacy contributes to a more complete U.S. foreign policy strategy.<sup>12</sup> If diplomacy is a means to a state’s foreign policy ends, basketball diplomacy is one of the means to the means of those

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<sup>9</sup> Caroline Walters, “Sports Diplomacy is the New Comeback Kid,” *CDP Blog*, August 3, 2007, accessed April 29, 2011, [http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/070803\\_sports\\_diplomacy\\_is\\_the\\_new\\_comeback\\_kid](http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/070803_sports_diplomacy_is_the_new_comeback_kid).”

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Martha Bayles, *Through a Screen Darkly: Popular Culture, Public Diplomacy, and America's Image Abroad* (Yale University Press, 2014), 5.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Jackson and Georg Sørensen, *Introduction to International Relations: Theories and Approaches*, 4th Ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 105.

ends.<sup>13</sup> According to Derek Shearer, “Sport in our globalized era... doesn’t substitute for traditional diplomacy and smart use of hard power, but it can be a virtuous form of soft power,” and thus a valuable diplomatic tool.<sup>14</sup>

### ***Basketball Diplomacy***

The spread of basketball around the world by the United States government and private actors has historically contributed to American diplomacy and continues to do so. Basketball creates cross-national relationships and permeates societies, which results in the spread of cultural, political, and economic values, as well as promotes relationships at the individual, business, and political levels. Goodwill, prestige, and capitalism are the factors that have historically and currently influence basketball diplomacy actors. They have interconnectedly worked together since basketball’s inception while taking turns as the primary overarching influence. The thesis is organized into three eras, each labeled after the predominant influence of its time. Together, they create a timeline of basketball diplomacy characterized by themes evident throughout its history, and also demark the symbolic changes basketball diplomacy experienced from era to era.

In addition, there are also noteworthy themes of basketball diplomacy across its history. Firstly, media (print, then TV, and now digital) has always been integral to the successful dissemination of basketball. Next, basketball diplomacy has always been attractive to and directly targeted towards younger populations, most notably through state education systems. Basketball was also invented to be easy, fun, and universal, which are qualities that

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<sup>13</sup> Influenced by the original quote, “[i]f traditional diplomacy is the means to a state’s foreign policy ends, sports diplomacy is one of the means to the means of those ends.” From Stuart Murray, “Moving Beyond the Ping-Pong Table: Sports Diplomacy in the Modern Diplomatic Environment,” *Public Diplomacy Magazine*, Issue 9 (Winter 2013): 12.

<sup>14</sup> Derek Shearer, “To Play Ball, Not Make War,” *Harvard International Review* 36, no. 1 (Summer 2014), accessed March 3, 2014, <http://hir.harvard.edu/archives/7309>.

continue to explain its globalization and success spreading American values. Moreover, basketball diplomacy has been consistently used to promote peace and help *develop* communities abroad (both basketball-wise and generally). Lastly, basketball has not only been an active force in the United States' diplomacy, but it is also an ideal frame in which to observe the evolution of American power.

During the era of goodwill diplomacy, the United States was a modest international actor with a small military and limited interests abroad. It was one of the few countries in the world without conscription, relying on non-governmental actors to help project international influence. The United States was also one of the first countries to embrace mass secondary education, which was a prime focus of the Y.M.C.A, the house in which basketball was created and the first driver of basketball diplomacy. By World War II, with prestige driven basketball diplomacy close to full swing, America had become a Global Power. Isolationism no longer dictated the U.S.'s foreign policy and it had a large, permanent, standing military with presences around the world. Inspired by Americanism and threatened by Communism, the U.S. wanted to spread American values around the world and strengthen its image to win its ideological war with the Soviets. They used racially integrated basketball tours to portray American interracialism to the world, and emphasized success in international competition as a symbol of American strength and superiority. Lastly, after the Cold War, basketball diplomacy has been influenced by an economically minded State Department and profit driven corporations, which parallels the proliferation of global capitalism by the United States – one of the means by which it projects its power today. The actors of basketball diplomacy in the eras prior were strictly amateur, but as wealth and politics have merged in this age of economic inequality, so has basketball diplomacy; the primary basketball

diplomacy actors are now millionaire athletes along with the billion-dollar “(Trans)National Basketball Association.”<sup>15</sup>

The arguments of this thesis are supported by various literature connecting sports and culture with diplomacy and soft power. It also relies on interviews with experts on this subject. I interviewed Kobe Bryant - NBA champion, Olympic gold medal winner, and future Hall of Famer - about promoting intercultural awareness between the U.S. and China in addition to the values that can be shared through basketball. Scott Blackmun - Chief Executive Officer of the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) - offered insight into what Olympic basketball means for the United States as a country. Neal Meyer - Senior Director of Basketball Operations in Europe and the Middle East - discussed with me the NBA’s international goals and strategies for developing the game and the NBA’s influence abroad. Mark Madsen - assistant coach of the Los Angeles Lakers and former NBA player - recounted his mission to Tunisia as a basketball ambassador. Lastly, Bill Bertka - a long time Lakers coach and forty-seven year veteran of the NBA - detailed his international coaching experiences with collegiate and professional basketball and as a scout of the 1992 Dream Team. The insight of these primary sources is among the most qualified in the world to help investigate the prevalence and impact of American basketball diplomacy.

Following this introductory chapter is a theoretical foundation for the diplomatic power of basketball and provides context to why basketball diplomacy evolved throughout the course of its history. It argues the increasing usefulness of and necessity for soft power and non-traditional diplomacy to achieve an effective, comprehensive foreign policy. It

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<sup>15</sup> Termed by Steven J. Jackson and David L. Andrews in “Excavating the (Trans)National Basketball Association: Locating the Global/Local Nexus of America’s World and the World’s America,” *Australia and New Zealand American Studies Association* (June 2014).

proves non-state actors can be diplomatic forces. Lastly, it legitimizes basketball diplomacy by connecting it to established diplomatic strategies.

Chapter three is a history of basketball's invention and how the game was created to be fun, accessible, and universal through the Y.M.C.A, which resulted in its prolific ability to spread globally. Chapters four, five, and six recount the history of basketball diplomacy. Chapter four explains how goodwill was the predominant inspiration driving basketball diplomacy until World War I. Chapter five shows how prestige gradually became the overarching influence during the Interwar period and peaked during the Cold War, for "the rhetoric and the practices of goodwill continued... [but] there was a shift in government attitude towards sport from a belief in its value for establishing international goodwill to a concern for prestige through success."<sup>16</sup> In chapter six, with the end of the Cold War, capitalism became the new driving motivation while goodwill and prestige, still present, took a back seat.

Chapter seven is a case example of American basketball diplomacy in China, appropriate considering the significance of Sino-American relations today and the prominence of basketball in Chinese culture. The chapter discusses how basketball has effectively helped American values penetrate Chinese society, conducted by actors seeking profit, in addition to being inspired by goodwill and, to a lesser extent, prestige. In light of China's strict policies towards foreign media and business, the success basketball has had connecting America to and influencing Chinese society is remarkable.

Chapter eight wraps-up the arguments and highlights the themes. It also considers if the success experienced in China will be replicated in other countries, including India,

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<sup>16</sup> Lincoln Allison and Terry Monnington, "Sport, Prestige and International Relations," *Government and Opposition* 37, Issue 1 (January 2002): 106-134, accessed February 2, 2015.

Indonesia, Brazil, and the Philippines. Lastly, this chapter concludes the thesis with a prediction for Sino-American relations within the context of basketball diplomacy.



## Chapter 2 - The Fundamentals to Understanding Basketball Diplomacy

Before delving into basketball diplomacy's history, this thesis will first establish a theoretical foundation for the diplomatic power of basketball and provide context to why basketball diplomacy evolved through the course of its history. This chapter will accomplish the following:

- It will argue the increasing usefulness of and necessity for soft power and non-traditional diplomacy to achieve an effective, comprehensive foreign policy.
- Prove non-state actors can be diplomatic forces.
- Legitimize basketball diplomacy by connecting it to established diplomatic strategies.

In pursuit of this, first there will be a description of how International Relations has evolved, which is important for understanding why basketball diplomacy correspondingly evolved throughout this thesis. Then this chapter will address why non-state actors can be diplomatically influential through basketball. Lastly, the established diplomatic strategies that support the legitimacy of basketball diplomacy will be introduced and defined, concluding with a definition for basketball diplomacy.

### *International Relations: Realists and Liberals*

The evolution from state-centric, Westphalian international politics to a system now including “private individuals, groups, and societies” causes significant debate in the field, to the extent of disagreeing on the discipline's name.<sup>17 18</sup> The classical dichotomy is between

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<sup>17</sup> Jackson and Sørensen, *Introduction to International Relations*, 29.

realism and liberalism. Liberals have an optimistic view of human nature, believing reason and rational principles can lead to mutually beneficial cooperation and collaboration. Liberal ideology became very influential after World War I, with liberals placing blame on distrust, competition, and aggressiveness between countries prior to the war, as well as caustic, intertwined alliances. The League of Nations and Kellogg-Briand Act were examples of liberals' attempts for peace, but they ultimately proved too idealistic and the international community - handcuffed by its fear of war - gave way to aggression and totalitarianism with World War II, which brought down liberalism and life to realism.

Realists argue that there cannot be international order - anarchy is unavoidable - and states engage in a self-help system in which the problems are solved militarily.<sup>19</sup> Individuals, international governmental organizations (IGO's), non-governmental organizations (NGO's), transnational corporations (TNC's), and other non-state actors take a back seat to the state-centric world politics, which realists recognize as "a struggle between the great powers for domination and security."<sup>20</sup> This paradigm describes Cold War international relations and influenced the diplomatic strategies of the United States, including basketball diplomacy. Chapter five will show how sports and cultural (and thus basketball) diplomacy were mostly conducted by private organizations before and after the Cold War, but during, due to the "cultural war" with the Soviets, the U.S. State Department temporarily assumed more involvement to combat the Soviet's powerful state directed sports and cultural programs.

Realism became gradually less descriptive of the international system as international institutions grew in capacity and the world became increasingly interdependent, and

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<sup>18</sup> Some argue International Studies or Global Politics are more appropriate to describe the field; an over emphasis in the interaction of states (and more incorrectly nations) unsatisfactorily portrays the nature of the world's political issues and its various (state and non-state) actors.

<sup>19</sup> Jackson and Sørensen, *Introduction to International Relations*, 59.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

furthermore with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent surge in economic and information interconnectedness. The end of a bipolar international system, dominated by competing hegemony, dissolved many military and political conflicts and opened up more of the world to democracy and capitalism. Liberals argue that war is less relevant today and international influence can and must be projected through other means. Two post-World War liberal ideologies, sociological liberalism and interdependence liberalism, provide context to why diplomacy became more oriented towards *the people* and less towards government officials.

At the core of sociological liberalism is the premise that *international* relations are not limited to *state-to-state* relations, but it includes relations between “people, groups and organizations belonging to different countries,”<sup>21</sup> namely transnationalism, which is defined as “the processes whereby international relations conducted by governments have been supplemented by relations among private individuals, groups, and societies that can and do have important consequences for the course of events.”<sup>22</sup> This acknowledges the pluralistic nature of international relations, and furthermore, the “high degree of transnational ties between societies leads to peaceful relations” and a “sense of community.”<sup>23</sup> This sentiment is repeated throughout the history of basketball diplomacy because of its ability to create relationships and thus promote peace, products of its cosmopolitanism. Lastly, the argument of complex interdependence by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye identify a shift from the “high politics” of national security towards the “low politics” of welfare. The take away point is that using military resources to project power is now less useful while non-violent

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<sup>21</sup> Murray, "Sports-Diplomacy," 4.

<sup>22</sup> Definition of transnationalism by James Resenau, in Jackson and Sørensen, *Introduction to International Relations*, 99.

<sup>23</sup> Said by Karl Deutsch, *Ibid.*

forms of influence and attraction are now more valuable, like soft power and public diplomacy through culture.

To backtrack from present day to when basketball diplomacy first began, the realist versus liberalist conversation was not what it is today simply because the liberalism dogma did not develop in the United States until World War I. Considering imperialism characterized the foreign policy of The Great Powers at the turn of the century, it is safe to say that the international system was dominated by state, security-seeking behavior. However, a rise of internationally oriented organizations at the time - such as the Red Cross and Y.M.C.A - were interested in peace and equality, conceivably sparking what would become liberalism (which was essentially the internalization of internationalism by state governments).

Illustrating the evolution of international relations helps explain the environment in which basketball diplomacy emerged and continues to act. Much of liberal sentiments were demonstrated by the Y.M.C.A. at the turn of the century and once again are increasingly prevalent since the end of the Cold War. This chapter goes forth to argue the role of non-state actors in American diplomacy and then discusses those forms in order to legitimize the power of basketball diplomacy.

### ***“New” Diplomacy: Can Non-State Actors Play Too?***

Diplomacy, traditionally, is “the conduct of relations between sovereign states with standing in world politics by official agents and by peaceful means.”<sup>24</sup> This was historically the only form of diplomacy between states because only states had the organization and resources necessary for international communication and transportation. Eventually however, along with the change from a realist to liberalist international system, diplomacy became less

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<sup>24</sup> Murray, "Sports-Diplomacy," 4.

state oriented, which is now called public diplomacy. Public diplomacy is an “instrument governments use to mobilize.... [soft power] resources to communicate with and attract the publics of other countries,” according to Nye.<sup>25</sup> It is distinct from traditional diplomacy in that the target of foreign policy is no longer limited to state officials; the public opinion of citizens from other countries are now deemed valuable and targeted by other governments.

In addition to the dichotomy between traditional and public diplomacy, “[p]ublic diplomacy studies differentiate between the ‘old’ modus operandi via ‘hierarchical state-centric structures’ on the one hand and the ‘new’ model of a ‘network environment’ in which several actors, of which the state is but one, undertake public diplomacy.”<sup>26</sup> This is a question of whether diplomacy must be directly a product of either “official government efforts” and “government-sponsored programs,” or if it can also originate from non-governmental individuals and organizations.<sup>27</sup> The ambiguity is evidenced by the definition provided by the United States Information Agency, which directed U.S. public diplomacy from 1953-1999:

“Public diplomacy seeks to promote the national interest and the national security of the United States through understanding, informing, and influencing foreign publics and broadening dialogue between American citizens and institutions and their counterparts abroad.”<sup>28</sup>

The USIA does not clarify from whom the diplomatic influence must come from: must it be a state official or can it be anybody promoting United States foreign policy? A strict, conservative definition of public diplomacy is as follows:

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<sup>25</sup> Jonathon Grix and Barrie Houlihan, "Sports Mega-Events as Part of a Nation's Soft Power Strategy: The Cases of Germany (2006) and the UK (2012)," *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 16, (2014): 577.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Hans N. Tuch, *Communicating With the World* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), found in "About U.S. Public Diplomacy," *PublicDiplomacy.org*, accessed April, 24, 2015, [http://pdaa.publicdiplomacy.org/?page\\_id=6](http://pdaa.publicdiplomacy.org/?page_id=6).

<sup>28</sup> "Dictionary of International Relations Terms," *U.S. Department of State* (1987): 85, found in "About U.S. Public Diplomacy," *PublicDiplomacy.org*, accessed April, 24, 2015, [http://pdaa.publicdiplomacy.org/?page\\_id=6](http://pdaa.publicdiplomacy.org/?page_id=6).

“The strategic planning and execution of informational, cultural and educational programming by an advocate country to create a public opinion environment in a target country or countries that will enable target country political leaders to make decisions that are supportive of advocate country's foreign policy objectives... As this definition clearly shows, public diplomacy involves the active, planned use of cultural, educational and informational programming to effect a desired result that is directly related to a government's foreign policy objectives.”<sup>29</sup>

This logical perspective deserves exploration, for international relations conducted beyond the realm of the government begins to lose the meaning of what is *diplomacy*. As a category becomes more inclusive, it loses specificity and descriptiveness. If everything that is spread between cultures is given a hyphen and called *something-diplomacy*, the meaning of diplomacy is degraded and less useful.<sup>30</sup> Intercultural experiences should not be instinctively translated to diplomacy; it would be disingenuous to consider traveling the world, playing and teaching the guitar, *guitar-diplomacy*. At some point there must be a line between *relations* and *diplomacy*, as argued by Richard Arndt, who says cultural relations “grow naturally and organically, without government intervention” and “cultural diplomacy can only be said to take place when formal diplomats, serving national governments, try to shape and channel this natural flow to advance national interests.”<sup>31</sup>

Likewise, Yudhishtir Raj Isar argues that it is problematic to consider a “multi-national corporation, non-governmental organization, international organization, terrorist organization/stateless paramilitary organization or other player on the world stage” in the discussion of cultural diplomacy.<sup>32</sup> Isar doubts if artists and these non-state actors are overtly

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<sup>29</sup> Michael McClellan, “Public Diplomacy in the Context of Traditional Diplomacy,” PublicDiplomacy.org, October 14, 2004, accessed April 1, 2015, <http://www.publicdiplomacy.org/45.htm>.

<sup>30</sup> Murray, “Sports-Diplomacy,” 22.

<sup>31</sup> Arndt, in Yudhishtir Raj Isar, “Cultural Diplomacy: An Overplayed Hand?” *PD Magazine*, last modified August 10, 2010, accessed April 1, 2015, <http://publicdiplomacymagazine.com/cultural-diplomacy-an-overplayed-hand/>.

<sup>32</sup> Cull, in Isar, “Cultural Diplomacy.”

representing government foreign policy and “interested in singing the government-led tune.”<sup>33</sup>

Despite Arndt and Isar’s skepticisms, this thesis will nevertheless use *diplomacy* for explaining the impact of basketball abroad because its influence is not limited to merely cultural exchange. The cultural exchange translates to diplomatic influence through the game itself and the baggage it carries with it. Also, the desired outcomes of spreading basketball by the United States government are identical to that of the non-state actors; in fact, the two often collaborate on many issues, which will be evidenced later on.

Furthermore, Isar questions the success of cultural diplomacy and if it actually permeates a mass audience, or simply a select target audience. One example is the successful penetration of American basketball into Chinese society, proving basketball as an exception to his argument. The NBA is the most popular sports league in China, the prime minister of China is a self-declared Lakers fan, the ministry of physical education has established a relationship with the NBA, and the NBA has a strong relationship with the Chinese government.<sup>34</sup> There is no question that basketball has permeated Chinese society on a mass societal and political level. Chapter seven will address these assertions in more detail.

Lastly, some scholars question if the “nation-state is the right container for culture,” and suggest “abolishing the idea of diplomacy itself,”<sup>35</sup> in which Robert Jackson argues that a pluralistic means of conducting international relations “must not be merely fitted into the state system. It must displace the politically pragmatic and morally compromised

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Becky Davis, “China Responds Well to Hardwood Ambassadors,” *NY Times*, October 16, 2014, accessed April 2, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/17/sports/basketball/nets-and-kings-continue-nbas-basketball-diplomacy-in-china.html>.

<sup>35</sup> Isar, “Cultural Diplomacy.”

arrangements of conventional diplomacy.”<sup>36</sup> Border porosity is so great that “the purposes of mutual understanding are being achieved far more effectively by direct cultural interactions at the civil society level.”<sup>37</sup>

This is an interesting argument in relation to basketball diplomacy, for a large portion is targeted at the grass roots level (in other countries) and is conducted by American non-state actors. Therefore, on the surface, because governments appear to be uninvolved, basketball diplomacy would conceivably be at the global civil society level. However, governments do play a role, and an effective and important one at that. The U.S. Consulates and Embassies as well as the foreign governments help plan trips and provide resources for American organizations abroad; the State Department supports these organizations in non-financial ways, as evidenced in chapter six with the NBA. Moreover, even if the NGO’s, TNC’s, and the NBA are considered a part of *global civil society*, John Keane presents the question if those “organizations constitute a new, increasingly autonomous realm or are merely artifacts of Western liberal society,” and the answer in regards to basketball diplomacy is the latter; Protestant and American values, which are *Western*, are reflected throughout the history of basketball diplomacy. Therefore, the distinction is unnecessary because basketball diplomacy aids U.S. foreign policy interests regardless of how they are categorized.

Therefore, after concluding that diplomacy can occur through non-state actors and that basketball diplomacy should be considered *diplomatic*, basketball diplomacy will reflect this definition of public diplomacy, “Governments, private groups and individuals influence

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<sup>36</sup> Jackson cited in Murray, "Sports-Diplomacy: A Hybrid of Two Halves," 7.

<sup>37</sup> Isar, "Cultural Diplomacy."



the attitudes and opinions of other peoples and governments in such a way as to exercise influence on their foreign policy decisions.”<sup>38</sup>

### *Soft Power*

*Even popular sports can play a role in communicating values. –Joseph Nye*<sup>39</sup>

If diplomacy is the means to a state’s foreign policy ends, then soft power is the means towards a diplomacy strategy. The arsenal of a country’s soft power dictates how it behaves diplomatically. Logically, a country with a strong cultural tradition will most likely produce cultural diplomacy, a country with powerful corporations will lead to corporate diplomacy, and so on.

An important scholar on soft power and *non-traditional diplomacy* is Joseph Nye. His book *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* argues the importance of utilizing the power of attraction through soft power in addition to coercive hard power, a combination he calls smart power.<sup>40</sup> Nye says soft power “co-opts people rather than coerces them” by “getting others to want outcomes you want.”<sup>41</sup> Nye also argues that by using “carrots” instead of “sticks,” the cost to lead diminishes because target countries will be more willing to follow a leader that “represents values that [they] want to follow.”<sup>42</sup> In chapter seven, China was attracted to the U.S.’s athletic success and subsequently opened up their borders to accept its influence.

Nye also argues that the global spread of technology will diminish “America’s relative preeminence” as “the information revolution is creating virtual communities and

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<sup>38</sup> As defined by Edmund Asbury Gullion, former U.S. diplomat and Dean of the Fletcher School, in “Definitions of Public Diplomacy,” *The Edward R. Murrow Center of Public Diplomacy*, accessed April 1, 2015, <http://fletcher.tufts.edu/Murrow/Diplomacy/Definitions>.

<sup>39</sup> Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means To Success In World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), EBSCOhost eBook Collection.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

networks that cut across national borders,” creating greater roles for transnational corporations and non-state actors, which could “attract citizens into coalitions and cut across national boundaries” themselves.<sup>43</sup> Through media and merchandise, basketball - namely the NBA - does exactly that by penetrating political borders and creating non-political communities as described above, China being a prime example. As a result, basketball effectively fills a void left by traditional and state directed diplomacy.

### *Defining Basketball Diplomacy*

In addition to public diplomacy and sports diplomacy, cultural diplomacy has been mentioned yet not defined. It is a category of public diplomacy in which sports and thus basketball diplomacy fall under:

“Cultural Diplomacy may best be described as a course of actions, which are based on and utilize the exchange of ideas, values, traditions and other aspects of culture or identity, whether to strengthen relationships, enhance socio-cultural cooperation or promote national interests; Cultural diplomacy can be practiced by either the public sector, private sector or civil society.”<sup>44</sup>

Two other forms need mentioning are corporate diplomacy and business diplomacy. These are two categories of diplomacy in which private actors influence foreign publics through their economic behavior abroad. They are defined as follows:

“[C]orporate diplomacy is an attempt to manage systematically and professionally the business environment in such a way as to ensure that ‘business is done smoothly’ - basically with an unquestioned ‘license to operate’ and an interaction that leads to mutual adaptation between corporations and society (in a sense of co-evolution).”<sup>45</sup>

“[B]usiness diplomacy generally refers to activities conducted between economic actors that are not necessarily corporations or that do not pursue the interest of any specific company. Business diplomacy, in this sense, may be performed by

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>44</sup> “What is Cultural Diplomacy?” *Institute for Cultural Diplomacy*, accessed April 1, 2015. [http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/index.php?en\\_culturaldiplomacy](http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/index.php?en_culturaldiplomacy).

<sup>45</sup> Ulrich Steger, *Corporate diplomacy: The strategy for a volatile, fragmented business environment* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2003): 6-7, found in Alberto Asquer, “What Is Corporate Diplomacy? And, Why Does It Matter?” *Journal of Multidisciplinary Research* 4, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 55.

entrepreneurs and businesspersons as individuals who seek to attain personal economic benefits, rather than to pursue organizational objectives.”<sup>46</sup>

Basketball diplomacy is driven by both state and non-state actors, and it affects mass society, corporations, and governments, as a result, it is characteristic of all five of these diplomacies, yet without completely fitting within any one of them. Basketball diplomacy should be considered as a legitimate force because it is founded on these already established ideas and definitions.

### *Three Eras of Basketball Diplomacy*

The following chapters illustrate the evolutionary history of basketball diplomacy from the 1890’s to present. The history is divided into three eras. Each era is distinct by the predominant factor driving basketball diplomacy of that time. Beginning in 1893, basketball diplomacy was inspired and spread by goodwill. Through basketball, the Y.M.C.A. and its influential missionaries facilitated peaceful relationships and spread Protestant and Western values around the world, which directly influenced and predisposed foreign cultures to future American influence.<sup>47 48</sup> Capitalism and prestige were present, but goodwill was the over-arching influence.

The interwar period marked a transition when prestige became a more significant factor. By the 1950’s, with the athletic success of the Soviets, America’s motivations had definitively changed.<sup>49</sup> Goodwill, and to a much lesser extent capitalism, continued to be prevalent, but prestige was the predominant force.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Asquer, “What Is Corporate Diplomacy? And, Why Does It Matter?” 60.

<sup>47</sup> Donald S. McCuaig, “Basketball: A YMCA Invention,” *World YMCA*, <http://www.ymca.int/who-we-are/history/basketball-a-ymca-invention/>.

<sup>48</sup> Allison and Monnington, “Sport, Prestige and International Relations.”

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>50</sup> *Prestige* is used by Monnington, Keys, and LaFeber.

The end of the Cold War brought an end to prestige as the primary influence. Prestige and goodwill are still important influences and are especially evident rhetorically, but basketball diplomacy for capitalistic reasons is the most prevalent and significant factor today.

### Chapter 3 - The Origin of Basketball Diplomacy

*The most globalized business in the world, and the most lucrative, is the drug trade... But for legitimate businesses, sports is probably number one. –Walter LaFeber<sup>51</sup>*

The NBA began the 2014-2015 season with a record number 101 international players on NBA teams from 37 countries and territories, indicating the spread and depth in which basketball is now played around the world.<sup>52</sup> This story of supreme globalizing success however begins in small-town America. The history of its inception and subsequent transfusion around the world is critical for understanding how basketball has become what it is today. This chapter illustrates the evolution of basketball diplomacy, beginning with a section explaining its creation, highlighting the characteristics that made basketball a unique globalizing and cosmopolitan force, which are now fundamental to basketball's diplomatic success.

#### *I Hope They Love This Game<sup>53</sup>*

Basket Ball, or Naismith Ball as suggested by a student, was invented by Dr. James Naismith in 1891.<sup>54</sup> <sup>55</sup> Naismith was born in 1861 in a Canadian farm town, Almonte, Ontario, and grew up as a skilled farmhand and enthusiast of games. Lifting anvils, tug-of-war, wrestling, fighting, and high jumping were some of his favorite boyhood activities. As a fit, young man, he went on to study theology at McGill University (a Presbyterian college in

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<sup>51</sup> Walter LaFeber, *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism, Expanded Ed.* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), 19.

<sup>52</sup> "NBA sets record with 101 international players from 37 countries and territories," *NBA.com*, October 10, 2014, [http://www.nba.com/global/nba\\_sets\\_record\\_with\\_101\\_international\\_players\\_37\\_countries\\_territories\\_2014\\_10\\_27.html](http://www.nba.com/global/nba_sets_record_with_101_international_players_37_countries_territories_2014_10_27.html).

<sup>53</sup> This is in reference to the uncertainty Dr. Naismith had when showing his students basketball for the first time, and is a play on the phrase, "I Love this Game," which was the NBA slogan from most of the 1990's and 2000's.

<sup>54</sup> Naismith, *Basketball: Its Origin and Development* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996).

<sup>55</sup> *Basket Ball* was original spelling for *basketball*.

Montreal) to enter the ministry, for he said, “[T]he only real satisfaction that I would ever derive from life was to help my fellow beings.”<sup>56</sup> There he discovered and played football, soccer, and gymnastics. His enjoyment for playing sports led him to believe “that there might be other effective ways of doing good besides preaching.”<sup>57</sup> He contemplated leaving school immediately to pursue work in a field related to sports, but in the end decided to finish his studies. Afterwards he visited various Y.M.C.A.’s around the United States and eventually enrolled at the Y.M.C.A. International Training School at Springfield, Massachusetts, where he became a faculty member the next year.

In the summer of 1891, Y.M.C.A directors from around the country met in Springfield, and the topic of conversation was how to increase their appeal to a new generation. According to Naismith, the late 1870’s marked a time when intercollegiate sports rose in popularity. After college and upon arriving in cities seeking work, naturally these young men sought athletics as a means of leisure. Y.M.C.A.’s and other athletic clubs provided such refuge, except in the winter months when the popular outdoor games became unplayable. The only indoor activities available at Y.M.C.A.’s were bodybuilding and gymnastics, yet those were not attractive to the young men, who were more interested in competition than strictly exercise. Naismith said:

“The former college men were natural leaders in their communities. When they compared the thrills of football with those of mass and squad gymnastics, they were frankly discontented. The expert gymnast got all the excitement from the perfect performance of a daring stunt and the football player from winning an intercollegiate contest. What the new generation wanted was pleasure and thrill rather than physical benefits.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Naismith, *Basketball*, 19.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

After much deliberation, the meeting absolved without finding a solution. A season of fall sports passed, but upon the arrival of winter, the unsolved problem once again reared its head. This time it was at the Springfield Y.M.C.A. itself. Naismith recounts how the school had been training “two classes of leaders, one as physical directors and the other as secretaries.”<sup>59</sup> During the fall they exercised outside together, but in the winter, they exercised in the gymnasium separately.

“[The physical directors] were interested in getting as much as possible out of their regular class work, because it trained them for their profession. It was comparatively easy to teach this group. The secretaries, however, had a different attitude toward physical activities; they had all the physical development they needed and were not interested. They were, nevertheless, required to spend an hour each day in what was to most of them distasteful work.”<sup>60</sup>

The first instructor for the class of “secretaries” was an expert in marching and mass calisthenics, but such activities quickly failed only inciting further resentment to exercise among the students. The next in line was a quality gymnast and athlete, who rid of the marching and calisthenics, and rather incorporated “apparatus work, mixing in such athletic events as could be carried on in a space sixty-five by forty-five feet.”<sup>61</sup> This soon failed too. Naismith voiced that “[t]he trouble is not with the men but with the system that we are using. The kind of work for this particular class should be of a recreative nature, something that would appeal to their play instincts.”<sup>62</sup> Sure enough, the head director assigned Naismith to the class. Naismith immediately resisted, arguing that his instructional proficiency rested in “boxing, wrestling, swimming and canoeing,” not gymnastics.<sup>63</sup> The head director then suggested that Naismith invent a new game, giving him two weeks to experiment.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 34-35.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 34.

“When he had assigned me the class of the incorrigibles, I had felt that I was being imposed on; but when he told me to do what all the directors of the country had failed to accomplish (invent a winter game), I felt it was the last straw... There was little left for me to do but to accept the challenge.”<sup>64</sup>

Naismith first considered modifying outdoor sports to be compatible with an indoor space. But soccer, rugby, football, lacrosse all proved too physical for the gymnasium, “the beginners were injured and the experts were disgusted (with the modifications).”<sup>65</sup>

Naismith’s game had to discourage physical contact, falling on the hard floor or into walls, and the possibility of errant equipment (such as a ball breaking a window). He figured this would be best encouraged by a game that rewards finesse. Eventually he resorted to inventing a new game, drawing on certain characteristics of various games, hoping to combine them into something enjoyable yet safe. These were some of his thoughts in the process:

- “It was necessary to have some permanent objective that would keep the mind of the participants active and interested.”
- “[A]ll team games used a ball of some kind; therefore, any new game must have a ball.”  
Ultimately he decided to use a large ball, because games with small balls required “intermediate equipment”, which would only make the game more difficult. The ball would be large and light.
- Inspired by American Rugby, in which he considered the “most interesting” game, Naismith concluded that tackling was used in order to stop player movement, therefore if player movement with the ball is outlawed, tackling and thus physicality would be eliminated. Therefore, the new game would not allow players to move with the ball.
- Players could pass or bat the ball with their hands, but not with a closed fist.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 41.



- For a goal, Naismith was inspired by a childhood game called Duck on the Rock, which was played by trying to throw a rock at another rock, knocking it down from its perch. In order to not be penalized by how far one missed, it was in the thrower's best interest to loft the rock when it was thrown. Naismith figured that requiring a lofted shot would discourage forceful throws, and thus roughness. This was applied by putting two boxes on either side of the gym, and the goal was to put or toss the ball into the box.
- He soon realized though by raising the goal above the ground, it would further require finesse, and disallow the defending team to create a human wall in front of the goal. Now, a wall would be ineffective because the goal would be above their heads.<sup>66</sup>

These and a few other rules were the foundation of Naismith's new game. As for equipment, he decided to use a soccer ball rather than a rugby ball. For the goals, the superintendent of buildings did not have "two boxes about 18 inches square," but did have old peach baskets. Accordingly, Naismith then nailed the baskets to "the lower rail of the balcony, one at either end of the gym."<sup>67</sup> And just like that, with the 13 rules posted on the bulletin board, the new game was ready to be played.

The class consisted of 18 people: 9 vs. 9. Despite excess fouling and haphazard strategies, the game was an immediate success. The class of unruly students was enjoying the game and within days it even began drawing "a gallery." Spectators were often amused at the grown men and their unrefined skills.

"Sometimes when a player received the ball, he would poise with it over his head to make sure that he would make the goal. About the time that he was ready to throw, someone would reach up from behind and take the ball out of his hands. This occurred frequently and was a never-ending source of amusement... His embarrassment only added to the laughter of the crowd."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 44-52.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 58

Naismith recounts the daily attendance by teachers from the Buckingham Grade School across the street, investing so much interest that they sometimes would forget their lunch.<sup>69</sup> One day these teachers inquired about letting girls play the new game, and Naismith found no reason why they could not. Soon enough, women were playing basketball within a year of its invention. This is a noteworthy detail when considering the universality of the game.

To conclude the game's creation, Naismith along with a student decided to aptly call it Basket Ball (as spelled on the first rule book in 1892), dismissing the student's suggestion of Naismith ball. In the end, Naismith successfully invented a game to captivate his class, and more significantly, invented a game for Y.M.C.A's everywhere.

### *Game Time Adjustments*

Once Dr. Naismith got the ball rolling, basketball was destined for widespread success, which is not surprising considering it was designed to be an easy and attractive game. It did however continue to evolve, especially early on. There were several changes: including the number of players per team, the use of penalties, the use of a pivot foot, and most notably the emergence of the dribble. The original rules state that a player could not run while holding the ball, but players soon realized that bouncing it against the floor was technically not a violation. Initially it was a measure of last resort to avoid the defense, but soon it became an offensive strategy. Naismith did not object to this addition, and by 1896, it had been incorporated into the game to the extent Yale's style of basketball was called the "dribble game."<sup>70</sup> Rule modifications continued for decades, despite having spread around the world, eventually leading to various rules organizations, nationally and internationally.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 65.

Despite slight variations and modifications, Naismith summed up the game into five fundamental principles:

1. There must be a ball; it should be large, light, and handled with the hands.
2. There shall be no running with the ball.
3. No man on either team shall be restricted from getting the ball at any time it is in play.
4. Both teams are to occupy the same area, yet there is to be no personal contact.
5. The goal shall be horizontal and elevated.

Again, some rules have been added since, but this is the essence of the game. Even today, slight modifications continue to occur. But at its foundation, the rather simple game is largely unchanged since its first day.

The various events and inspirations that influenced Dr. Naismith were fundamental to how basketball has become a globalized, diplomatic influence today. The objectives that inspired its design in 1891 led to qualities that encouraged its immediate internationalization and continue to captivate men and women, boys and girls, of all races, regardless of social class, or any other barrier that exists beyond the basketball court. Enjoyable, easy to play, and indoor friendly were Naismith's goals; today, consequentially, accessibility and universality are the foundations of basketball's cosmopolitan nature.

***It's Fun to Play at the Y.M.C.A.***

The invention of basketball through the Y.M.C.A. was also crucial to its international success. Within months of its invention, students at college visited home for winter break and taught basketball by memory.<sup>71</sup> And because Springfield was an *International Training*

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 59.

School, *home* included France and Japan for two students.<sup>72</sup> In addition, another immediate form of dissemination was through the *Triangle*, the school's paper. By January 1892, the rules and details, titled "A New Game", were sent around the country, and soon after around the world.<sup>73</sup>

Following in the footsteps of British and American Imperialism, the Y.M.C.A - founded in 1844 in England - had an Imperial footprint around the world, while still maintaining organization and cohesiveness through The World Alliance of Y.M.C.A.'s. Basketball thus had access to the far corners of the world and premier propagation resources, for missionaries and Y.M.C.A literature circulated the Protestant empire regularly. Basketball did not indirectly or passively benefit from the Y.M.C.A.'s influence, rather missionaries aggressively disseminated basketball as an "instrument to 'civilize' people or - more correctly - to teach certain norms and behavioral patterns" out of good faith, or *goodwill*.<sup>74</sup> Goodwill was the initial driving influence behind the spread of basketball and modern sport, which continues to be echoed today.

Protestantism was fundamental to the creation and dissemination of basketball due to the inspiration of *muscular Christianity*, which is the belief that "a strong and healthy body... [is] deemed as necessary as training the mind and spirit for improving oneself and for supporting the community."<sup>75</sup> The newfound appreciation of "health and manliness" was a transformation from previous Protestant ideology that disapproved of sports as a meaningless use of time. Muscular Christianity emerged - following English industrialization and

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>74</sup> Stefan Hübner, "Muscular Christianity and the 'Western Civilizing Mission': Elwood S. Brown, the YMCA, and the Idea of the Far Eastern Championship Games," *Diplomatic History Advance Access* (December 9, 2013): 1-27.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 6.

urbanization in the mid-1800's - as quality of life improved and the "degeneration of the white Protestant Anglo-Saxon race" became a concern, when compared to the more physically fit, lower class Catholic immigrants that worked more labor-intensive jobs.<sup>76 77</sup>

Out of this paranoia the Y.M.C.A was born. Protestantism came to recognize that amateur team sports serve as a unifying force in a community, bond people from different parts of society, and promote teamwork, fair play, and the adherence to rules, and "[provide] young men with the opportunity to engage in both healthy physical activity and in rational, innocent, and educative type of recreation."<sup>78</sup> In addition to values and exercise, they also distracted young men from "city-vices," promoting a Protestant work ethic, particularly important in urban cities filled with drinking and gambling.<sup>79</sup> Decades after England, America experienced its own urbanization and industrial revolutions, and correspondingly, muscular Christianity arrived along with the Y.M.C.A.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was an increasing concern and interest in the international affairs of the *West*, evidenced by emerging non-state actors and expansionist foreign policies. These new international actors sought "a more peaceful world order by strengthening international exchange, cooperation, and regional integration."<sup>80</sup> The Y.M.C.A. was an example, pledging towards "[bringing] social justice and peace to young people and their communities, regardless of religion, race, gender or culture," in addition to promoting peace, development, and equality internationally.<sup>81</sup> Team sports, especially basketball,

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<sup>76</sup> Clifford Putney quoted in Hübner, "Muscular Christianity," 5.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>78</sup> Hübner, "Muscular Christianity," 6.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> McCuaig, "Basketball: A YMCA Invention."

became a means to achieving those goals. Chapter four will explore the spread of basketball, explain its diplomatic affects, and connect it to American power during this era.

## Chapter 4 - Goodwill and Basketball Diplomacy

The Y.M.C.A., through the facilitation of influential individuals, was the first employer of basketball diplomacy. It was utilized to spread and teach Protestant and Western values as well as create relationships to promote peace, while simultaneously spreading basketball itself. The first section will discuss basketball diplomacy in the *Far East* (focusing on China and the Philippines) through the Y.M.C.A. - an N.G.O. - and its missionaries. Evidence of basketball influencing culture and politics were most prevalent here due to prevailing racist and imperialistic ideologies to “[uplift]’ local people to white American Protestant standards.”<sup>82</sup> Following will be a section on basketball diplomacy in Europe, enacted by the Y.M.C.A. director from the Pacific, supported by the Y.M.C.A., and encouraged by the U.S. military.

### *Playing Around the Rim: Basketball Diplomacy in the Pacific*

Western Imperialism at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century led to Y.M.C.A. missions in the Pacific and eventually the establishment of Y.M.C.A. facilities. To help promote their values and create relationships that promoted peace in the region, the Y.M.C.A. brought “[m]odern sports,” [which are] characterized by secularism (in that basketball was not a form of worship), equality, bureaucratization, specialization, rationalization quantification, and an obsession with records.” Modern sports were a tool that contributed to the “Western Civilizing Mission,”<sup>83</sup> which spread “‘Western’ middle class values such as rationality, empiricism, progressivism, systematic inquiry, industriousness, discipline, punctuality, and

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<sup>82</sup> Allison and Monnington, “Sport, Prestige and International Relations,” 112.

<sup>83</sup> Allen Guttman and Lee Thompson in Hübner, “Muscular Christianity,” 3.

honest dealing”<sup>84</sup> in comparison to the “superstitious, indolent, reactionary, oblivious to time, passive, and showing an excessive emotionalism” qualities exhibited by the “natives.”<sup>85</sup>

Basketball was used to promote these “Western” and, as mentioned earlier, Protestant values, while basketball itself was also disseminated at the same time. Furthermore, the Y.M.C.A. was not preaching from the periphery, they were deeply involved within society and politics, exemplified in the Philippines, where “the Y.M.C.A. gained *de facto* control of more or less all physical education programs and amateur sports championships,”<sup>86</sup> and in China, where America was directly involved with “the formation of Chinese sports” through the Y.M.C.A.<sup>87</sup> The impacts were so pervasive, the Y.M.C.A. director of the Philippines, Elwood Brown, claimed his programs had “‘cured’ the inappropriate doings of the Filipino clerks”<sup>88</sup> and “the problem of school discipline [had] been reduced to the very minimum.”<sup>89</sup> For China, the physical education director of the Y.M.C.A.’s International Committee said, “The ideal of all-round manhood, well-balanced in it’s physical, mental and spiritual aspects, is rapidly gaining ground... A rapid change of conception of the place of the body in the national life; a change from the conception of exercise as undignified to that of its being necessary to the national welfare.”<sup>90</sup> The Y.M.C.A.’s impact on the Chinese perception of sports was transformative, and they anticipated the change to have deep implications, “China is very weak at present” and, “physical education, if properly directed, leads people to form

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<sup>84</sup> Michal Adas in Hübner, “Muscular Christianity,” 4.

<sup>85</sup> Major George Wythe, *The Inter-Allied Games: Paris, 22<sup>nd</sup> June to 6<sup>th</sup> July, 1919*, edited by Captain Joseph Mills Hanson and Captain Carl V. Burger (Paris: The Games Committee, 1919), accessed February 11, 2015, <http://www.archive.org/details/cu31924014114353>.

<sup>86</sup> Hübner, “Muscular Christianity,” 13.

<sup>87</sup> Judy Polumbaum, “From Evangelism to Entertainment, the YMCA, the NBA, and the Evolution of Chinese Basketball,” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 14, no.1 (Spring 2002): 194, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41490870>.

<sup>88</sup> Hübner, “Muscular Christianity,” 8.

<sup>89</sup> The statement was likely in reference to his community, not China as a whole. In fact, YMCA activity was limited to coastal areas.

<sup>90</sup> Max J. Exner in Polumbaum, “From Evangelism,” 192.



good habits in their early years, therefore it is character forming.”<sup>91</sup> The targeting of youth and education systems were certainly intentional, attempting to target the community systematically and at an impressionable age, while using sport programs “to catch their attention and provide them an opportunity for recreation.”<sup>92</sup> In addition to the grassroots level, sports also directly affected politics. It was recognized as a “unifying power” that “[fostered] patriotic sentiment for ‘the betterment of China’” during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>93</sup> and “coincided with the *Hundred Day’s Reform* in 1889, which was led by Chinese scholars and officials deeply affected by Western economic and political ideologies in favor of creating a constitutional monarchy in China.”<sup>94</sup>

The Y.M.C.A. also facilitated regional sports competitions in the *Far East*. Intending to not only “attract interest in ‘modern’ sports in as many countries of the ‘Far East’ as possible,” but “hoped they would also affect his many people as possible” and “always keeping it to the fore the general idea, the mass idea, play for everybody, and [they] continued it at every series of games to give demonstrations.”<sup>95</sup> These games were another way to help spread modern sports and basketball. In the case of the first “Far Eastern Olympic Games,” the Y.M.C.A. brought Japan, China, and the Philippines together, despite tense political relations.<sup>96</sup> The games achieved such success a “permanent organization was formed... and the games were made permanent biannual events... At the Shanghai Games (1915) from 15,000 to 20,000 spectators daily attended the events, which roused such widespread interest” that upon Brown’s arrival in Peking “they were summoned to an

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<sup>91</sup> Chinese Y.M.C.A. national committee in Polumbaum, “From Evangelism,” 194.

<sup>92</sup> Hübner, “Muscular Christianity,” 7.

<sup>93</sup> M.J. Exner, in Polumbaum, “From Evangelism,” 192.

<sup>94</sup> Pu Haozhao, “From ‘Ping-Pong Diplomacy’ to ‘Hoop Diplomacy’: Yao Ming, Globalization, and The Cultural Politics of U.S.-China Relations” (Master’s Thesis, Florida State University, 2012), 35.

<sup>95</sup> Hübner, “Muscular Christianity,” 13.

<sup>96</sup> Japan had invaded Manchuria.

audience by Yuan Shi Kai, the President of China.”<sup>97</sup> <sup>98</sup> Furthermore, the image of “three types of oriental peoples competing in purely American contests and using the English language” is a powerful allusion.<sup>99</sup>

In addition to spreading the sport and subsequent American values, these regional games also provided a forum for countries to peacefully interact. It was a forum “in which a Chinese, a Japanese, and a Filipino could meet in friendly, social intercourse without arousing the racial antagonisms that constantly appeared in business, religious, and social affairs.”<sup>100</sup> Elwood Brown, who became the secretary of the Far Eastern Athletic Association, was ecstatic about the “civilizing” success of these games, particularly in light of the violence of World War I that shell-shocked Europe. According to him, it was an example of cooperation and interdependence in a “regional order,” contrasted with the “realist order” of Europe, in which “anarchy” resulted in war.<sup>101</sup> His optimism due to the success in the “Far East” led him to believe a similar phenomenon of peace could happen in the Middle East, India, Latin America, and so on.<sup>102</sup> In reaction to the League of Nations, and inspired by “internationalism and democratic rule,” he envisioned, “the “Y.M.C.A. to assist in establishing civil societies based on Christian values and behavioral patterns all over the world... to support a change of the whole world order... to [not only] a more egalitarian, but also more U.S.-centered one.”<sup>103</sup> Despite his optimistic hopes never came to fruition, they are certainly indicative of how the Y.M.C.A. conceptualized its influence during those years.

Even though the United States was not involved with the Y.M.C.A.’s operations, the

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<sup>97</sup> The four events were as follows: Manila, Philippines, 1913; Shanghai, 1915; Tokyo, 1917; and Manila, 1919; according to Wythe, *The Inter-Allied Games*, 13.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> Hübner, “Muscular Christianity,” 12.

<sup>100</sup> Elwood Brown, in Hübner, “Muscular Christianity,” 14.

<sup>101</sup> Hübner, “Muscular Christianity,” 15.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

consequences of the Y.M.C.A.'s behavior, through basketball, certainly benefited and continue to benefit the United States.

While the Y.M.C.A. spread basketball throughout the *Far East*, basketball simultaneously shared American and Protestant values and promoted regionalism through its attractiveness and permeability. The Y.M.C.A. - with the influence of prominent individuals like Elwood Brown - shaped the sports culture and transformed how the *Far East* perceived team sports (which is particularly notable for China, who's sporting culture today is now inspired by nationalism). Their adoption of basketball, an *American sport*, is significant in that they are now practicing and internalizing *American* values, as well as it creates a "common denominator" between the U.S. and these various countries; a valuable asset for future basketball exchanges and diplomatic relations in general.<sup>104</sup> Lastly, the spread of American influence abroad through education is representative of the proliferation of mass secondary education at home in America, which was likely because Massachusetts, home to the Y.M.C.A. International Training School, was an early model for the U.S. public education system.<sup>105</sup>

***The Euro-step Towards Globalized Basketball: Basketball Diplomacy in Europe***

The power of sport to strengthen American foreign policy was demonstrated in the *Far East* and was soon after implemented in Europe. Once again, the driver was Elwood Brown (the Y.M.C.A. director from the Philippines), who was transferred to the European theatre as the Y.M.C.A. director of physical activity in France. He and other missionaries

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<sup>104</sup> Hübner, "Muscular Christianity," 24.

<sup>105</sup> Gerald Gems, *The Athletic Crusade: Sport and American Cultural Imperialism*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006): 35.

helped the war effort by using sports to improve morale, as well as “use sports as diversionary tactics to keep men out of brothels and bars.”<sup>106</sup>

Upon the war’s end, Brown was concerned about how to channel the soldier’s free time and “physical energies” previously occupied by combat and training.<sup>107</sup> Also, in light of the severe death and destruction, and optimistic by his success in the *Far East*, Brown wanted to use sports to facilitate relationships among the “multitudes of men bound together by strong ties of sympathy in the common ideals for which they were fighting, yet often knowing each other not at all... in varied and widely separated fields all over Europe.”<sup>108</sup>

Brown - with support from the Y.M.C.A. and encouragement by the United States military - proposed a “Military ‘Olympic’ [that] would bring together the best athletes in every sport from all of the Allied Armies and would undoubtedly be the greatest gathering of athletes ever seen.”<sup>109</sup> The invitation would be extended to the 29 countries with militaries stationed in France (18 accepted),<sup>110</sup> the games were open to only troops that participated in the war, and they would not discriminate against professional and amateur athletes (noteworthy considering the Olympics were open to only amateur athletes).<sup>111</sup> With “full cooperation from the Army and the Y.M.C.A. headquarters,” the games, called The Inter-Allied Games, were held in France in the summer of 1919.<sup>112</sup> Eighteen sports were played, including “two of America’s ‘Big Three,’” baseball and basketball (not football). Brown said:

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<sup>106</sup> Chad Carlson, “The Motherland, the Godfather, and the Birth of a Basketball Dynasty: American Efforts to Promote Basketball in Lithuania,” *Faculty: Research and Creative Activity* (August 1, 2011): 5, accessed May 4, 2015, [http://thekeep.eiu.edu/kss\\_fac/10](http://thekeep.eiu.edu/kss_fac/10).

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Wythe, *The Inter-Allied Games*, 14.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>111</sup> Carlson, “The Motherland,” 5.

<sup>112</sup> Wythe, *The Inter-Allied Games*, 14.

“[A]fter the triumph of the cause for which they all were striving, as many of these men as possible should be brought together in order that they might know each other face to face and thus lay the foundations for those enduring friendships which can come only from personal contact and which, in this case, were of such fundamental importance to the future welfare of the world. In what manner could they be brought together which would be most revealing, most harmonizing, most natural? The answer was obvious: by bringing them together as athletes.”<sup>113</sup>

Motivated by goodwill, Brown used sports to facilitate person-to-person relationships in the interest of peace and welfare. Basketball was one of the tools, and its presence in these games was vital to its own subsequent growth. The United States, Italy, and France were the only countries that competed in basketball, and the games were not close. The U.S. beat Italy 55-17 and France 93-8. Despite the introduction of basketball to Europe more than 20 years prior, it was not until the 1930’s that it was truly embraced. But the games were instrumental to that change, for “the nations without basketball teams received a taste of hoops as large crowds gathered... to watch the high caliber soldier-turned-athletes,” and several countries “claim 1919 as a cornerstone year in their development of basketball.”<sup>114</sup> Evidence of its increased popularity is the foundation of the International Basketball Federation (FIBA) in 1932 and the inclusion of basketball in the 1936 Olympics, competed by 22 countries. Because basketball was adopted around the international community, it gave perspective and legitimacy to America’s dominance, and eventually the potential to gain prestige through basketball success.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>114</sup> Carlson, “The Motherland,” 6-7.

<sup>115</sup> To contrast, America’s global dominance of American football was meaningless because other countries – because they did not play - did not relate or care; therefore there was no prestige to be gained.

## Chapter 5 - Prestige and Basketball Diplomacy

As America's Great Power status cemented following World War I, spreading "Americanism" and combating Fascism and Communism became its new priorities. It was no longer interested in its isolationist policies of the previous era. Also, athletics became a defining aspect of American culture and its success in international competition became a source of pride and won prestige from other countries. Basketball was certainly one of those sports. American dominated and originated, its excitement and international popularity translated to a source of soft power.

Despite the new emphasis for success and the desire for prestige, goodwill was still prevalent in basketball diplomacy, evident in that sports were still considered "the language of the world... [and] the universal meeting ground of common understanding" in which "sport and sportsmanship... could implant a moral code that would bring other nations toward democracy and peace." Peace and uniting people are reminiscent of the goodwill era, but a new feature was the idea of spreading democracy. Many believed sports "offered the most potent means to train minds and characters in the spirit of democracy." It was "a medium for reaching the hearts and minds of hundreds of millions of the human race" and "would infiltrate other areas of life and become the governing principle in political and international relationships."<sup>116</sup> The more frequent references to democracy and *American* values were due to the emergence of an "American way of life" during the interwar years.<sup>117</sup> The values disseminated - previously referred to as "Protestant" and "Western" - became distinctly referred to as "American" and "part of a moral crusade to spread 'Americanism'

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<sup>116</sup> Barbara Keys, "Spreading Peace, Democracy, and Coca-Cola®: Sport and American Cultural Expansion in the 1930s," *Diplomatic History* 28, Issue 2 (April 2004): 194.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

throughout the world.”<sup>118</sup> Basketball diplomacy was integral in spreading those values and more directly represented and actively served U.S. foreign policy goals. Furthermore, spreading values and basketball in the name of America bolstered the country’s image, associating itself with peace and benevolence.

This chapter will begin with the first basketball diplomacy examples facilitated through American, private organizations like the Amateur Athletic Union (in contrast to the Y.M.C.A., which was *international* and Protestant). Then, in response to the Soviet Union’s state-run athletic programs, the United States government gradually increased its own involvement. The Harlem Globetrotters were an example of how the U.S. entered the realm of basketball diplomacy without state support. However, it eventually led to gradually more government involvement in response to the Soviet Union’s athletic rise. The U.S. and U.S.S.R. competition became a *cultural* – or more specifically, *basketball* – war.

***Court Visionaries: Realizing America’s Potential for Basketball Diplomacy***

After witnessing sports’ unifying potential and appeal in the Inter-Allied games, and the United States’ athletic dominance in the subsequent Olympics, “the American government took political and financial interest in exploring sports for markets... during the 1920s. The federal government sent messages to embassies across the globe inquiring about the interest in American sports and marketability of those sports and their equipment.”<sup>119</sup>

Conveniently, America had an interested crowd:

“In the years following the First World War sport was increasingly linked to conceptions of public health, military strength, and national power, and participation in international competitions was widely viewed as a necessary means of demonstrating membership in the international system and as a means of gaining prestige. As a result, governments in Europe, Latin America, and Asia took on larger

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>119</sup> Carlson, “The Motherland,” 7.

roles in promoting sports and fitness programs at home and in funding teams for international competitions. In doing so they turned to the United States.”<sup>120</sup> <sup>121</sup>

However, this does not mean the United States Government directly “fund[ed] or promot[ed] international sports events.” It “[kept] with its view of cultural relations as an arena appropriate only for private intervention... as in other areas of culture.”<sup>122</sup> The American government maintained this stance through the Cold War and is still practiced today.

Amateur sports exchanges, predominately through the Amateur Athletic Union, had tremendous diplomatic impact as “the most extensive channel of cultural exchange.”<sup>123</sup> American athletes were viewed as celebrities and “treated as emissaries of the American way of life both by foreign government officials and U.S. diplomats” and “were exhorted to present themselves as American representatives, purveyors of the American way of life.”<sup>124</sup> Professional “barnstorming tours” were equally successful. The impact of Babe Ruth in Japan was “worth a hundred ambassadors,” and likewise was the influence of the Harlem Globetrotters, who will be discussed in the next section.<sup>125</sup>

The United States Government became more involved with international sports in response to the behaviors around the international community. The Berlin Olympics in 1936 were highly controversial and political, garnering significant attention from the U.S. government. These games shed a new light on how the Olympics and sports could be used nationalistically to gain prestige. Then after World War II, the Soviet Union became involved in the international sporting community and transformed international sports through state

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<sup>120</sup> Keys, "Spreading Peace, Democracy, and Coca-Cola®," 179 -180.

<sup>121</sup> The increased activity of foreign governments in sports and physical education were a reason why the Y.M.C.A. gradually lost influence in the sporting culture and politics.

<sup>122</sup> Keys, "Spreading Peace, Democracy, and Coca-Cola®," 184.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.



directed and funded programs becoming one of the two premier sporting countries of the world.<sup>126</sup> International sporting competition, because of the prestige associated with winning, caused “a shift in government attitude towards sport from a belief in its value for establishing international goodwill to a concern for prestige through success.”<sup>127</sup> Nevertheless, “the rhetoric and the practices of goodwill continued,”<sup>128</sup> but they were certainly overshadowed by “the new and predominant drive of governments’ interest in sport... for prestige which could only be attained through success.”<sup>129</sup> A prominent and early example of the U.S. Government’s increased activity in basketball diplomacy is its relationship with the Harlem Globetrotters. The government jumped from merely recognizing and encouraging basketball (and other sports) diplomacy to facilitating its dissemination.

### *Ambassadors of Goodwill*

In 1926, Abe Saperstein - entrepreneur and basketball aficionado - partnered with five black basketball players from Chicago to create an all-black professional team. This was at a time when blacks were excluded from the established (all-white) professional teams. Saperstein - the coach and owner - and the players traveled by car “barnstorming” around the country. They became a sensation for their outstanding skill and entertaining style of play, and received notoriety as *the* all-black team. Originally called the Savoy Big Five, Saperstein re-named them the Harlem Globetrotters alluding to Harlem’s black culture, even though the team originated from Chicago. Ironically, despite being the *Globetrotters*, it took them almost 25 years before they crossed the Atlantic, and even more ironic, they did not play in

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<sup>126</sup> Kevin B. Witherspoon, “‘Fuzz Kids’ and ‘Musclemen’: The US-Soviet Basketball Rivalry, 1958- 1975,” in *Diplomatic Games: Sport, Statecraft, and International Relations Since 1945*, eds. Heather L. Dichter and Andrew L. John (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014).

<sup>127</sup> Allison and Monnington, "Sport, Prestige and International Relations," 115.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 116.

Harlem until 1968.<sup>130</sup> Nonetheless, they were “self-styled missionaries spreading the gospel” of basketball and their performances were hailed “fantastic,” “incredible,” “extraordinary,” and “the greatest sports spectacle.”<sup>131</sup>

In 1950, the Globetrotters made their first trans-Atlantic trip, playing “73 games in nine European and North African countries: Portugal, Switzerland, England, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Morocco, and Algeria.”<sup>132</sup> They played (and defeated) local amateur teams or the “American All-Stars” - their “white traveling companions” - in addition to conducting clinics and teaching basketball fundamentals.<sup>133</sup> They became known as the “Ambassadors of Goodwill” because of their popularity and ability to transverse borders, evidenced in an American Consulate report that describes their influence as an “unusually wide and deep impression of open friendliness both inter-rationally and inter-nationally.” Consequentially, the U.S. State Department became aware and interested in their potential to “to act as a cultural bridge across imposing racial, political, social, cultural, and linguistic barriers.”<sup>134</sup>

John J. McCloy, U.S. high commissioner in Germany, connected with the Globetrotters while they were in Frankfurt. McCloy persuaded the Globetrotters to play in West Berlin in an effort to counter communist propoganda that denounced the United States as a hypocritical, racist country, and to serve as “a fine advertisement for American democracy.”<sup>135</sup> The State Department was particularly motivated to contact the Globetrotters because of an ensuing “Communist-sponsored Third World festival of youth and students

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<sup>130</sup> Named because they initially played at Chicago's Savoy Ballroom.

<sup>131</sup> Damion L. Thomas, *Globetrotting: African American Athletes and Cold War Politics* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2012): 45.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

scheduled for August 1951 in East Berlin. Two-million youth from more than 50 nations were expected to convene,” and the U.S. was fearful that the “festival would contain rhetoric that the United States was an imperialist power that sought to dominate all people of color.” “Enlisting” the Globetrotters was thus a preemptive response. The game achieved incredible success, attended by an unbelievable seventy-five thousand people, the largest basketball crowd ever for that time, as well as a half-time performance by Jesse Owens.<sup>136</sup> Secretary of State Dean Acheson was impressed by the success:

“The Department has been following the progress of the Harlem Globetrotters (Negro basketball players) and recognizes their value as ambassadors of goodwill, particularly in countries that are critical of U.S. treatment of Negroes... [T]heir attraction consists not only in superb skill but also showmanship and broad humor which is intelligible to all regardless of race, language or knowledge of basketball.

*The department feels that there are unlimited possibilities for racial understanding and good will in the visits of these teams as already demonstrated in Latin America, Africa, the Near East and Europe, which may provide an effective answer to Communist charges of racial prejudice in the USA... [and] might tie in with various physical education programs in prospect in nearly all for eastern countries.”<sup>137</sup>*

The State Department’s relationship with the Globetrotters is an example of using basketball, in this case through a private organization, to spread goodwill (through entertainment and teaching basketball) around the world while disseminating a favorable image (in terms of race-relations) of the United States and gaining prestige because of their basketball excellence. However, despite the State Department’s full (yet non-financial) support of the Globetrotters (and other sports diplomacy actors) abroad, they upheld their policy to not directly subsidize sports. The U.S. persistently maintained the private nature of American sports and sports diplomacy, particularly in light of and in competition with the Soviets, hoping to “claim that America’s free-enterprise social system produced better

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<sup>136</sup> NBA arenas usually seat around 20,000 people

<sup>137</sup> Thomas, *Globetrotting: African American Athletes and Cold War Politics*, 45.

athletes and sports teams than the Soviet state-sponsored system.”<sup>138</sup> However, as athletic competition and the Cold War became progressively intense between the U.S. and Soviets, the U.S. gradually conformed and became further invested in basketball and sports diplomacy.

### *The Cold Warriors*

*[American athletes are] the living testimonials of the excellence and superiority of the free American system. –Senator John Butler, Maryland*<sup>139</sup>

*[T]he triumph of the Soviet athletes is a victory for the man of the new Socialist Society. –Premier Nikita Khrushchev*<sup>140</sup>

The 1948 London Olympics awarded the United States basketball team another gold medal on the international stage. Dominating the competition, their basketball superiority was unrivaled, but that quickly changed four years later. The Soviet Union did not compete in the 1948 Games, but they observed from the sidelines and took notes, preparing to surprise the Western world. They won the second most gold medals in 1952 at the Helsinki Olympics. Fortunately for the U.S., their basketball team prevailed with a gold medal victory against the Soviets, but it would mark the end of the United States’ unchallenged basketball dominance and the beginning of the most intense international athletic rivalry that would last for forty years. The Soviet’s “embraced the opportunity... [to defeat] the American’s in their ‘own’ sport, basketball,... [as] the ultimate representation of Soviet organization, physical and mental acumen,”<sup>141</sup> and equated victory with “irrefutable proof of the superiority of socialist culture over the moribund culture of the capitalist states.”<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Thomas, *Globetrotting: African American Athletes and Cold War Politics*, 47.

<sup>139</sup> Thomas, *Globetrotting: African American Athletes and Cold War Politics*, 83.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Witherspoon, “‘Fuzz Kids’ and ‘Musclemen,’” 300.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

The Soviet Union was initially resistant to the Olympics, considering the Games “elitist” and “bourgeois.”<sup>143</sup> They gradually softened their stance through the 1930’s becoming more involved with “mainstream sport relations,” and then they completely changed course after World War II.<sup>144</sup> Soviet leadership viewed sports as a means to connect with developing countries and bring socialism to the forefront of the international athletic community. Through missions, exchanges, international tours, and international competition, the Soviets used basketball and other sports to gain prestige and engage with the world, particularly with the U.S., “serv[ing] as a proxy for combat in the atomic age.”<sup>145</sup>

Soviet government and culture existed behind a veil of secrecy and mystery coming out of World War II, but only a few years later they reversed their position 180 degrees, aiming to jump over the United States and dunk Soviet culture on the rest of the world:

“In 1950 the Soviet union sent 39,000 athletes, scientists, writers, artists, musicians, and ballet dancers abroad. The Soviet’s 1950 budget for cultural exchange programs in France was estimated at \$150 million. That’s more than the United States spent in cultural exchanges worldwide. By 1952 the United States annually spent \$88 million on propaganda as the Soviets invested about \$1.5 billion. The number of Soviet athletic teams sent abroad on goodwill tours increased from 29 trips in 1950 to 68 international tours in 1953. During 1955 the United States sent 15 tours abroad, but the Soviets far outdistanced United States efforts by sending 148 cultural sport delegations around the world. As late as 1957, for every exchange conducted by the United States, the Soviet Union conducted 15.”<sup>146</sup>

They built sports facilities, provided equipment, and sent athletes and coaches to developing countries - who were interested in the prestige brought by sports - along with

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<sup>143</sup> Jenifer Parks, “Welcoming the ‘Third World’: Soviet Sport Diplomacy, Developing Nations, and the Olympic Games in *Diplomatic Games: Sport, Statecraft, and International Relations Since 1945*, eds. Heather L. Dichter and Andrew L. John (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 88.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Thomas, *Globetrotting: African American Athletes and Cold War Politics*, 78.

<sup>146</sup> Thomas, *Globetrotting: African American Athletes and Cold War Politics*, 82-83.

Marxist-Leninist ideology and socialist influences.<sup>147</sup> In addition to missions and exchanges, the Soviets also sought their own prestige through international competition.

At the 1953 World Basketball Tournament in Chile, the Soviets won the championship against a lackluster American team, only six years after the U.S.S.R. national team was founded, and incited disbelief and outcry from Americans, “Some lame-brain [government official], who apparently doesn’t know a hoop from a hula, [was] permitted to risk America’s fading sports prestige in, of all places, South America where our diplomatic position has faltered considerably of late.”<sup>148</sup> The U.S. Information Service in Lima, Peru, demanded that the State Department provide greater “influence, either directly or indirectly, [for] the selection of only the highest caliber teams” to avoid such embarrassment and damage to American prestige.<sup>149</sup> Latin Americans viewed the third-rate team, especially because it was against the Soviets, as a representation of the U.S.’s view of the region – unimportant. Senator Henry Styles Bridges of New Hampshire speaks of basketball’s magnitude by comparing it to the space race:

“The United States is in direct competition with Russia in all aspects and on all fronts... Can you imagine the fuss and furor that would result if the United States government sent a group of college science students down to Cape Canaveral to take over the important job of beating the Russians in the race for space?”<sup>150</sup>

The U.S. was home to the best basketball talent in the world, and was very successful internationally, but the Soviet Union got the best of the United States several additional times during the Cold War, in both friendly exhibitions and international competition, most famously in 1972 at the Munich Olympics. Even with the reaction from Chile, U.S. basketball would continue to field teams inferior to its potential. International competition

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<sup>147</sup> Parks, “Welcoming the “Third World”, 95.

<sup>148</sup> Thomas, *Globetrotting: African American Athletes and Cold War Politics*, 76

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 77-78.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

was taken less seriously by Americans compared to Soviets, and the amateurism rule was strictly followed by the U.S., which disqualified many of their best, professional basketball players. The Soviets on the other hand were accused of illegally using paid players. This trend continued until the 1992 Olympics when professional players were officially permitted to compete for the first time, allowing the U.S. to bring its NBA talent and effectively sweep the field. Up until that time however, the U.S. adapted with the U.S.S.R.'s state-sponsored sports programs and aggressive cultural diplomacy.

To combat the Communist cultural and athletic crusade, The Cultural and Athletic Exchange Program under the State Department and the United States Information Agency were created.<sup>151</sup> In 1954, President Dwight Eisenhower asked Congress for special emergency funding towards cultural exchanges and received five million dollars for the “President’s Special International Program” - which became the Cultural and Trade Fairs Participation Act of 1956 - sending “sixty-two groups of athletes, most of which were integrated (racially),... to more than one hundred countries to perform demonstrations and conduct clinics... between 1954 and 1963.”<sup>152</sup> Africa - and other nations of color - were distinctly targeted by athletic tours because they were opportunities to promote American interracialism and “sports were overwhelmingly popular on the African continent.”<sup>153</sup> And sports exchanges were “the most effective thing we’re doing in the Orient,” according to Theodore Streibert, the director of the USIA during the 1950’s, who recognized sport as one of the Cold War’s most important “weapons” during that time.<sup>154</sup> Despite the importance of sports diplomacy, it was commonly agreed, “[W]hile the government should supplement the

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 90-91.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 95.

activities of the private sector, the initiative, vigor, diversity, and dynamism of the private efforts were America's strengths."<sup>155</sup> To encourage mutual accessibility between the state and private actors, assistant secretary of state Abbott Washburn suggested there be a private "committee that would work closely though informally and entirely unofficially, with the USIA, CIA, and the State Department," while all finances of the missions were covered privately.<sup>156</sup> This private-public partnership provided the government a cheap and easy source of diplomacy, as reiterated by U.S. ambassador Taylor Belcher:

"Sports sell themselves... they are a real people to people program region right down into a cross-section – touching the interest of all people in all economic strata and all age levels... A first-class athlete has a message that everyone understands."<sup>157</sup>

This relationship continues today, which will be apparent in chapter six. Lastly, likewise to the previous era of basketball diplomacy, basketball was used to unify peoples. Through the goodwill missions - which spread American prestige, American values, plus political and economic influence - basketball helped unify dissimilar groups of people and was a "tool for nation building" who (the nations) would "identify their progress with our help," according to Nicholas Rodi, the head of the Office of International Athletics in the State Department.<sup>158 159</sup> In addition, basketball created connections between countries, most notably the U.S. and U.S.S.R. during the Cold War. Soviet and American teams traveled to the respective countries despite actively uneasy political relations. This speaks to the power of basketball diplomacy as a useful tool appreciated and utilized by both the Soviets and U.S., as well as an effective bridge between the two during an era of high tension.

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 92.



Basketball diplomacy during the Cold War was motivated by international prestige. The full-court press of Soviet sports challenged American global preeminence and forced the U.S. to evolve its public diplomacy strategy, creating a cultural war between the two countries. The public and private relationship of America that continues today was in response to the Soviet Union's state-driven sports factories that created "paid propaganda agents" and "human weapons in the Communist conspiracy's cold war arsenal."<sup>160</sup> America used basketball missions, exchanges, and international competitions to capture prestige and the influence of other countries. American values and democracy along with capitalism were promulgated, particularly in response to Communism. For each basketball diplomacy success during this era, individuals and governments were further exposed to free markets and consumerism, which led up to and contributed to today's age of basketball diplomacy, one that is driven by global capitalism.

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 89.

## **Chapter 6 - Playing for the Contract: Capitalism and Basketball Diplomacy Today**

If the Cold War basketball rivalry between the Soviet Union and United States represented international politics of the time, an appropriate capstone to that conflict and a metaphor of the succeeding era was the U.S. Dream Team in 1992. The combined dissolution of the Soviet Union and a reinvigorated, better than ever United States led to American dominance, who spread its wings and skied high above all competition. The U.S. was the undisputed best, but only for a limited time before the international community eventually closed the gap. The relative U.S. decline was partially a result of growth in other countries (often from U.S. influence), but also due to the faults of the United States; they lost touch with the qualities that distinguished themselves in years prior. In the past, despite their outstanding skill, the U.S. also excelled on a foundation of substance and discipline with a blue-collar work ethic second to none. America lost dominance when it became overcome by individual interests and consumed by entertainment, spectacularity, and flash that blinded America to the qualities that originally set it apart and leveraged its past success.

The above description highlights the similarities of the U.S. basketball team and U.S. economy post-Cold War. It speaks to how America's economic policies and global capitalism severely impacted its domestic economy, which were arguably caused by attitudes and interests similar to what affected the U.S. basketball team at that time. In a similar manner, the following chapter will provide a parallel between basketball and America's foreign policy.

This chapter outlines the actors of basketball diplomacy today, which is primarily driven by government, corporate, and individual economic interests. Goodwill is still an

underlying motivation and justification, but mostly in conjunction with the pursuit of profit. The factor of prestige is weaker today than in the past, for year-round domestic leagues consume the attention of sporting fans, but as exemplified by the 2008 Olympics, it can still play a factor.

This chapter serves as an introduction to chapter seven, America's basketball diplomacy in China, in which many of these present-day actors are examined in-depth. That chapter will look at specific examples of basketball diplomacy today and their affects. However, basketball diplomacy in China excludes several noteworthy examples which will be mentioned in this chapter.

### *United States State Department*

With rapidly improving economic and communication interconnectivity during the 1990's and early 2000's, there was a rise in non-state actors and networks that transverse political boundaries. This created new challenges around the world for governments and traditional diplomacy. In addition, the combination of neo-liberal policies and the end of the Soviet-U.S. cultural war relaxed and diminished the government's role in public diplomacy. In 1999, the United States Information Agency, previously in charge of American public diplomacy, was dissolved and its responsibilities were split between the State Department and Broadcasting Board of Governors. "Consolidating" costs and the reasons mentioned above justified its restructuring and resulted in a smaller staff for the job.<sup>161</sup>

In the late 2000's, in light of abysmal public relations abroad, President Bush reinvigorated the U.S.'s public diplomacy, notably involving sports. Secretary of State Hilary

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<sup>161</sup> Mark Dillen, review of *The Decline and Fall of the United States Information Agency: American Public Diplomacy, 1989-2001*, by Nicholas J. Cull, *American Foreign Service Dispatches and Periodic Reports on U.S. Foreign Policy* (February 2013), accessed April 12, 2015, [http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/item/2013/0105/bk/book02\\_dillen\\_usia.html](http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/item/2013/0105/bk/book02_dillen_usia.html).

Clinton emphasized the importance of smart power along with utilizing “the full range of tools at our disposal.”<sup>162</sup> Ann Stock, the State Department's assistant secretary of state for educational and cultural affairs and overseer of SportsUnited said that a “tool we're using at our disposal right now is basketball... it brings people together in ways that we often can't bring people together.”<sup>163</sup> <sup>164</sup> The State Department conducts missions and exchanges through the Sports Visitor Program, which brings “non-elite athletes and coaches” to the U.S., and Sports Envoy Program, which sends coaches and athletes abroad to teach sports, values, and engage in the community.<sup>165</sup> It is a key player in America’s Sports Diplomacy program, which is defined on the State Department’s website as follows:

“Sports Diplomacy... [is an] integral part of efforts to build ever-strengthening relations between the United States and other nations... [I]t increase[s] dialogue and cultural understanding between people around the world... [and] exposes foreign participants to American culture while providing them with an opportunity to establish links with U.S. sports professionals and peers.”<sup>166</sup>

The United States has embraced sports and particularly basketball as a component of their diplomatic strategy, which is reminiscent of the U.S. government during the Cold War, but distinct in that it is more corporate driven today.

### ***Basketball Diplomacy Through the State***

Sports Envoys are directed by SportsUnited under the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, a branch of the Department of State. The State Department often works with the National Basketball Association (NBA), typically recruiting individuals from the NBA

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<sup>162</sup> “Clinton: Use ‘Smart Power’ in Diplomacy,” *CBSNEWS*, January 13, 2009, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/clinton-use-smart-power-in-diplomacy/>.

<sup>163</sup> “Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs,” *United States Department of State*, accessed 5 April, 2015, <http://eca.state.gov/programs-initiatives/sports-diplomacy>.

<sup>164</sup> “SportsUnited, ECA’s Division devoted to sports diplomacy, taps into sports diplomacy’s ability to increase dialogue and cultural understanding between people around the world,” according to “Bureau of Educational and Cultural.”

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>166</sup> “NBA and State Dept. team up on trip to Venezuela,” *CBS Sports*, June 15 2011, accessed March 13, 2015, <http://www.cbssports.com/nba/story/15234346/nba-and-state-dept-team-up-on-trip-to-venezuela>.

and WNBA for a one to two week mission, as experienced by Mark Madsen, a former Los Angeles Lakers player and current Lakers coach. He traveled to Tunisia, a Middle East country not usually associated with basketball. In an interview, he explained that his trip consisted of teaching basketball to kids and coaches, interacting with locals, meeting with the Tunisian Minister of Sports, as well as the USA Consulate who organized the mission. Madsen was amazed by the popularity of basketball and emphatically believed “100%” that this kind of mission produced a favorable image of the United States among Tunisians.<sup>167</sup>

In addition to sending Americans abroad, five years ago, 22 Russian kids visited the White House and shot hoops with President Obama, watched the Washington Mystics play, and visited American students, all intended “to establish a lasting dialogue between Russian and American youth.”<sup>168</sup> Among others, some notable visits to America include coaches from South Africa and India, and other Envoys include Indonesia, Malawi, Serbia, and Venezuela.<sup>169</sup> <sup>170</sup> <sup>171</sup> Similarly, the NBA also facilitates missions under its own brand, partnering with the State Department. That will be discussed in a moment, but first will be the role of the Olympics, another state driven example.

The 1919 Inter-Allied Games demonstrated friendly competition for peace and goodwill, while the Olympics during the Cold War were battles for prestige. Today, in addition to those characteristics, the Olympics are hugely driven by corporate sponsors and athletes advertising brands. The Beijing Olympics in 2008 was the most extreme example, in

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<sup>167</sup> Mark Madsen, phone conversation with author, April 25, 2015.

<sup>168</sup> Richard Solash, “Basketball Exchange Shows Lighter Side Of U.S.-Russia Relations,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, May 24, 2010, accessed March 2, 2015, [http://www.rferl.org/content/Basketball\\_Exchange\\_Shows\\_Lighter\\_Side\\_Of\\_USRussia\\_Relations/2051502.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/Basketball_Exchange_Shows_Lighter_Side_Of_USRussia_Relations/2051502.html)

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> “Basketball Coaches' First Visit from India,” *United States Department of State*, accessed April 4, 2015, <http://eca.state.gov/gallery/basketball-coaches-first-visit-india>.

<sup>171</sup> “Basketball Envoy Program in Venezuela,” *United States Department of State*, accessed April 4, 2015, <http://eca.state.gov/gallery/basketball-envoy-program-venezuela>.

which Dave Zirin called a "commercial, privatized, hyper-logoed atmosphere," and that it "has certainly accelerated as part of the Olympic Games since 1984, which was the first privately funded Olympic Games. This year is like commercialization on steroids."<sup>172</sup>

Nevertheless, the Olympics still encourage goodwill, as affirmed by Scott Blackmun, Chief Executive Officer of the United States Olympic Committee (USOC), in an interview, "The Games are about bringing people together in celebration of values like respect, friendship and excellence. One of the special things about the Games is that that's true regardless of the political issues of the day." Furthermore, prestige is also still present, evidenced by the "Redeemed Team" in 2008. United States basketball had not won a major international competition in eight years, which motivated USOC and NBA players to reinvigorate and refocus their attention towards proving America's basketball superiority. Blackmun said, "The success of our Olympic and Paralympic teams generally, and our basketball teams specifically, can be incredibly positive for our country's image abroad. That is especially true when our teams conduct themselves off the court with the same excellence they demonstrate on the court."<sup>173</sup> Prestige, goodwill, and now hyper-capitalism are all motivations for competing in the Olympics and contribute to basketball diplomacy, in addition to spreading basketball "to all corners of the globe."<sup>174</sup>

***Where Diplomacy Happens: Basketball Diplomacy Through the NBA***<sup>175</sup>

*[W]ith offices in 13 markets worldwide, games and programming in 215 countries and territories in 47 languages, and NBA merchandise for sale in more than 125,000 stores in 100 countries on 6 continents. NBA rosters at the start of the 2014-15 season featured a record 101 international players from 37 countries and territories. NBA Digital's assets*

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<sup>172</sup> Zirin quoted by Jennifer Wedekind in "The Commercial Games: Selling Off the Olympic Ideal," *Multinational Monitor*, no. 2 (September/October 2008), <http://www.multinationalmonitor.org/mm2008/092008/wedekind.html>.

<sup>173</sup> Scott Blackmun, emailed interview with author, April 15, 2015.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>175</sup> This in reference to the NBA's motto "Where Amazing Happens."

*include NBA TV, which is available in 60 million U.S. homes, and NBA.com, which recorded 26.9 billion page views during the 2013-14 season, with more than half of all visitors originating from outside of North America. The NBA is the No. 1 professional sports league on social media, with more than 750 million likes and followers globally across all league, team, and player platforms. –NBA.com<sup>176</sup>*

Likewise to the Y.M.C.A. empire more than 100 years ago, the NBA today has an impressive international footprint of its own, evidenced by the NBA's statement on their press release cited above. Not only is the NBA widely spread, but it is also deeply immersed in certain countries, such as China as described in the next chapter. However, a few key ways in which the NBA performs diplomatically are not present in China, and will thus be described here. The first point to mention is the NBA's strategy, which was described in an interview with Neal Meyer, the Senior Director of Basketball Operations in Europe and the Middle East:

“The NBA's biggest goal is to get kids bouncing ball... creating an awareness for basketball, using the NBA brand to enhance it... [and] create future fans and get them exposed to the NBA brand, whether it's through our players, our clinics, through our marquee events when we bring NBA games over, through digital and social media, etc... [In addition] getting more people to participate in that country... will hopefully improve that Federation and national team, because they will have more people participating, a better chance of finding talented players that can feed into the pipeline and potentially, and hopefully, make it to the national teams. Which in turn helps the NBA's possibility of having more international players.”<sup>177</sup>

While spreading and improving its brand, the NBA uses goodwill along the way to help develop basketball and leave a positive mark on the community. In addition to the values that are practiced through playing basketball, the NBA encourages to be a “STAR,” “Sportsmanship, Teamwork, Attitude, and Respect,” as well as promoting health and nutrition.

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<sup>176</sup> “NBA, Tencent announce China digital partnership,” *NBA.com*, January 29, 2015, <http://www.nba.com/2015/news/01/29/nba-tencent-announce-china-digital-partnership/>.

<sup>177</sup> Neal Meyer, videoconference with author, April 10, 2015.

One way that the NBA reaches out is through one to two week camps and clinics. The next chapter will explain the workings of these missions in detail, but what is notable is the NBA's close relationship with the State Department in the process, the U.S. Envoy program, and the U.S. Embassy in a given country. In fact, the State Department through the Embassy organizes and builds a program for the NBA, often including a theme related to an important, regional issue, such as in Greece where the NBA brought awareness to sex-trafficking.<sup>178</sup> The State Department will also suggest certain locations to the NBA that are of the U.S.'s political or economic interests.<sup>179</sup> Furthermore, the NBA does not go to areas against the State Department's will.

A prime example of NBA-State Department relations was a recent, four-day camp in Cuba directed by the NBA and FIBA, which came only months after the improvement in Cuban-American relations. They wanted to be the first major sports league in that country. Through developing the basketball infrastructure - building courts and teaching the game to coaches and players - the NBA hopes Cuba will become another NBA market in the future, which Meyer acknowledges is a very long term goal considering Cuba's current economic situation. The mission is also used to "bridge Cuban and American culture and to [share] the values of our game with Cuban youth and learning together through the common language of sports," said NBA Deputy Commissioner Mark Tatum.<sup>180</sup>

Evidenced by its impressive resume at the beginning of this section, the NBA is probably the most active player in basketball diplomacy today. Nevertheless, they are still influenced and supported by the U.S. State Department, as well as promoted by - and help

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> "NBA to put on four-day camp in historic visit to Cuba," *NBA.com*, April 7, 2015, <http://www.nba.com/2015/news/04/07/nba-to-visit-cuba/>.



promote - other corporations and prominent basketball athletes. This interdependence and further examples of basketball diplomacy are evidenced in the next chapter.

## Chapter 7 - Pass the Ball, China is Open: American Basketball Diplomacy in China<sup>181</sup>

Today, the United States is the most powerful country in the world with the largest military and economy. However, China is close behind economically, which is still growing at a rapid rate, and is beginning to challenge America's hegemony as it expands its political and economic influence and capabilities around the world. Due to competing interests and governmental distrust, tensions periodically rise between the two powers, but their economic interconnectedness persistently holds the relationship together. As a result, because traditional diplomacy is often met with challenges, non-traditional diplomacy is a logical detour. Such diplomacy enables America to project its influence and spread its culture and values through China economically, using corporate, business, and cultural diplomacies.

However, unlike most countries that are economically open to the United States, China is relatively closed to American and Western liberal values. The authoritarian Communist Party is fearful of the growing middle and consumerist class, censoring and blocking any media that might have anti-Party rhetoric and conceivably compromise or threaten its power. Furthermore, China's economic environment is becoming less friendly to foreign and multinational corporations, particularly American technology companies like Facebook and Twitter, which are blocked.<sup>182</sup> Beijing has become more skeptical of multinational corporations and is enforcing stricter regulations. Chinese corporations have also been emerging, increasing competition or even pushing out foreign players, such as in the mobile phone industry, as well as providing domestic alternatives to Western services,

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<sup>181</sup> In reference to the "opening of China"

<sup>182</sup> Bein Xu, "Media Censorship in China," *Council on Foreign Relations*, April 7, 2015, <http://www.cfr.org/china/media-censorship-china/p11515>.

like social media.<sup>183</sup> The potential for America to influence the Chinese people through any form of public diplomacy appears very difficult or even impossible. Due to the Chinese government, there is a wall that stops the penetration of American culture and values, but with an exception, and that is the highflying appeal of American basketball.

This chapter is a case example of American basketball diplomacy in China. China is used in this thesis because basketball has a long history and cultural significance in China, Chinese basketball is deeply connected to the United States (beginning more than 100 years ago), Sino-American relations is and will continue to be in the global spotlight, and basketball diplomacy is only becoming stronger in China. The chapter begins with a history of Chinese basketball culture, and then examples of basketball diplomacy are discussed, organized according to each of the actors.

### ***Bringing People Together***

*Every time the Los Angeles Lakers have had a parade, every time we have won a world's championship, we go up and down the streets of Los Angeles, and it always amazes me to see all of those people lined up along the curb. Blacks, Whites, Asian, Filipinos, all people from different races, and they are all cheering for the same thing, to honor the Lakers basketball team. Now, tell me that isn't a healthy thing for a community. Sports give everybody a common thing to come together and root for, regardless of their religious beliefs, regardless of their political beliefs, regardless of their race. They are all cheering for and enjoying the same thing. –Bill Bertka<sup>184</sup>*

Bill Bertka, long time Los Angeles Lakers coach, observed the unifying power of sports, in this case basketball, from 11 championship parades. Few other forces can create such a cosmopolitan community. Additionally, the unifying ability of sports is not limited to a local scale; this phenomenon can even unify countries, such as the World Cup victories of

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<sup>183</sup> “China loses its allure,” *The Economist*, January 25, 2014, <http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21595001-life-getting-tougher-foreign-companies-those-want-stay-will-have-adjust-china>.

<sup>184</sup> Bill Bertka, videoconference with author, April 22, 2015.

the 1990 German football team and the 1995 post-apartheid South African rugby team.<sup>185 186</sup> For decades, Germany was divided by politics and South Africa by race. Each of their successes symbolized their new-found strengths in unity and bright futures following, respectively, reunification and the end of apartheid. Sports have also promoted peace between nations, exemplified by the Ancient Greek Olympics, where kings used sports to promote peaceful relations among otherwise violent city-states, known as the “Olympic Truce.” This sentiment is echoed today with multilateral sporting events such as the modern Olympics. Furthermore, sports can also serve as a unifier bilaterally, as famously demonstrated in 1971.

Known as “Ping-Pong diplomacy,” China invited the United States to engage in a friendly competition of table tennis, which paved the way for President Nixon’s visit to China, the first visit to China by a U.S. president in history. This marked changing tides for Sino-American relations and, by engaging in sports with the West, it was an opportunity to let the world see if “China is still an iron block [that refuses to open its door to the world],” said by Mao Zedong.<sup>187</sup> The significance of this event cannot be understated considering relations had been severely frozen since 1949 and its subsequent affects on Cold War politics and today’s globalized economy. Furthermore, in respect to Samuel Huntington’s “major civilizations,” this diplomatic instance was exemplarily because it united two distinct cultures and people. Unlike the ancient Olympics (in which the participants were all Greek), the early modern Olympics (in which the participants were mostly “Western”), or exchanges with the

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<sup>185</sup> Steffen Potter, “East and West come together in Germany,” *UEFA.com*, November 19, 2010, <http://www.uefa.com/memberassociations/association=ger/news/newsid=1564918.html>.

<sup>186</sup> The East and West German football teams joined just 49 days after German reunification.

<sup>187</sup> Fan Hong and Lu Zhouxiang, “Politics First, Competition Second: Sport and China’s Foreign Diplomacy in the 1960s and 1970s,” in *Diplomatic Games: Sport, Statecraft, and International Relations Since 1945*, eds. Heather L. Dichter and Andrew L. John (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 397.

Soviet Union, sport was bridging very different civilizations, the United States (Western) and China (Sinic).<sup>188</sup> It was also unique from America's early 20<sup>th</sup> century sports diplomacies in the Pacific, which were Imperialistic and forceful exchanges. China was now a self-sufficient, influential actor in 1971 that the U.S. could not bully around, calling for compromise and common ground, which was found through sports.

Sports were a non-political, mutually shared piece of culture that laid a table in which politics could be discussed. A year later, China and America competed in a basketball game.<sup>189</sup> This was less publicized and impactful at the time, but it was the first exchange of many centered on basketball, for basketball was "a more universal sport than ping-pong" in China, and certainly so for America. Basketball would continue to connect China and the U.S. over the decades, increasing its power and prevalence. Today, basketball is a deeply rooted (and expanding) bond between the two and is a source of American influence today.<sup>190</sup>

### ***Basketball in China***

*Inside the cobblestone courtyard of the Forbidden City and surrounded by six-century-old palaces lies an unexpected sight for foreign tourists. As they walk under the giant portrait of Mao Zedong and pour through the dark archway of the Tiananmen rostrum, they arrive at two well-maintained basketball courts, their green astroturf and gray concrete clashing with the ancient crimson columns and the dusty yellow tiles. –Helen Gao<sup>191</sup>*

Nothing symbolizes this cultural interconnectivity quite like basketball courts at the heart of Chinese culture described above. Originally an American export, basketball is now played by 300 million Chinese people, and enjoyed (formerly) by Mao Zedong and current

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<sup>188</sup> Huntington refers to Russia as a "swing civilization" due to its multiethnic and multicultural makeup, which makes it more similar to Western civilization than Sinic Civilization.

<sup>189</sup> Grix and Houlihan, "Sports Mega-Events as Part of a Nation's Soft Power Strategy," 576.

<sup>190</sup> Brook Larmer, *Operation Yao Ming: The Chinese Sports Empire, American Big Business, and the Making of an NBA Superstar* (New York, NY: Gotham, 2005), 36.

<sup>191</sup> Hellen Gao, "From Mao Zedong to Jeremy Lin: Why Basketball is China's Biggest Sport," *The Atlantic*, February 22, 2012, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/02/from-mao-zedong-to-jeremy-lin-why-basketball-is-chinas-biggest-sport/253427/>.

president Xi Jinping. “The government views basketball not only as recreation but also as a significant industry impacting both society and its commerce,” evidence that the game has become internalized and localized as a piece of China’s own, unique culture.<sup>192</sup> Because of this rooted culture, America has a portal in which it can access China. This section will illustrate the success of American basketball diplomacy, highlighting how China has been influenced and through what specific actors. First will be a historical explanation to the significance of basketball in China’s culture.

### *Pumping Up the Balls*

As mentioned in chapter four, basketball arrived in China through Y.M.C.A. missionaries. They taught locals how to play the game and facilitated regional tournaments. The Y.M.C.A. gradually lost its control of Chinese sports to the Chinese government through the 1920’s, but the Western characteristics of “rationalization, discipline, and unification” persisted.<sup>193</sup> War in the 1930’s and 1940’s occupied most of China’s attention and resources, yet basketball was still declared “a Chinese national pastime” in 1935 and was played with some success, including an Olympic victory over France in 1936 and a 5-3 record in the 1948 games.<sup>194</sup> <sup>195</sup> Basketball was particularly prevalent among the Red Army, used as training and recreation,<sup>196</sup> with instances of “furnishing their courts with bamboo baskets on bamboo poles” with a “makeshift ball of animal hide stuffed with grass [that] didn’t even bounce.”<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Fay Bou, et al., “Beyond Yao: The Future of Chinese Basketball,” *Knowledge@Wharton*, January 26, 2011, <http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/beyond-yao-the-future-of-chinese-basketball/>.

<sup>193</sup> Polumabum, "From Evangelism to Entertainment," 195.

<sup>194</sup> Bou, et al., “Beyond Yao.”

<sup>195</sup> Polumabum, "From Evangelism to Entertainment," 196.

<sup>196</sup> Haozhao, "From 'Ping-Pong Diplomacy' to 'Hoop Diplomacy,'" 35.

<sup>197</sup> Polumabum, "From Evangelism to Entertainment," 197.

<sup>198</sup> Basketball and the Chinese military would continue to have a relationship to present day, as the dominant professional team through the 1990’s had its origins with the People’s Liberation Army.

When Mao assumed power, he embraced and promoted basketball, which is noteworthy considering most other “Western imports” were expelled during the Cultural Revolution.<sup>199</sup> Basketball was used to develop the nation and diplomatically connect with other countries. In addition to the Chinese values of teamwork, self-sacrifice, and national unity - not “individual honor or personal gain” - basketball was viewed as a means for China to rid its reputation as the “Sick man of East Asia,” and as Mao declared, “To spiritually civilize the people, we need physically wild men first.”<sup>200</sup> <sup>201</sup> Mao directed a movement with the mantra “Promote Physical Culture and Build Up the People’s Health,” directed towards improving China’s “labor and military service.”<sup>202</sup> China suffered from a reputation of “physiological inferiority” compared to Western powers (and Japan) due to their recent military defeats and history with imperialism, and this “perceived inferiority further directed the Chinese to sports they believed most suited to their body structures: table tennis, gymnastics, badminton (the so called ‘small balls’),” reiterating their weak stereotype.<sup>203</sup> To masculinize and athletically compete with Western countries, Beijing focused on the “Three Big Balls” sports: soccer, volleyball, and basketball.<sup>204</sup> China’s government subsequently followed the “Soviet model” of recruiting talent “from the age of 7 or 8 years old as well as the “giants” over 7 feet.”<sup>205</sup>

China also used basketball and sports to advance its image in the international community. They withdrew from the Olympics in 1958 to protest the illegitimacy of the Republic of China, and did not reenter until 1979 after normalizing relations with the USA.

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<sup>199</sup> Haozhao, "From 'Ping-Pong Diplomacy' to 'Hoop Diplomacy,'" 35.

<sup>200</sup> Polumabum, "From Evangelism to Entertainment," 199.

<sup>201</sup> From L. Ji in Haozhao, "From 'Ping-Pong Diplomacy' to 'Hoop Diplomacy,'" 36.

<sup>202</sup> Haozhao, "From 'Ping-Pong Diplomacy' to 'Hoop Diplomacy,'" 36.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 37

<sup>205</sup> From J. Coplon in Haozhao, "From 'Ping-Pong Diplomacy' to 'Hoop Diplomacy,'" 37.

During this period, outside of the developed world's international athletic competitions, they used athletic exchanges and alternative international athletic events to acquire influence with the developing world, from the Pacific, Africa, the Middle East, and to Latin America. They traveled to other countries competing in friendly matches and teaching skills, much like the USA and U.S.S.R. Their use of sports in the sixties and seventies was "one of the most successful diplomatic initiatives [undertaken] by the PRC during the Cold War."<sup>206</sup> Their philosophy, articulated by Premier Zhou Enlai, was "Friendship First, Competition Second. Politics is the most important thing."<sup>207</sup> They would even keep games close or purposely lose to keep the game interesting and diplomatic.<sup>208</sup>

Following Mao in 1979, Deng Xiaoping transformed this ideology, emphasizing the importance of athletic success with his prestige oriented "Gold-Medal Strategy."<sup>209</sup> According to a Chinese newspaper, "To win friends we must first of all win gold medals. If we merely take part in competitions and are incapable of obtaining brilliant results, then the dignity of our country and our people will be adversely affected."<sup>210</sup> The government intensified its sports development programs, or "sports factories," recruiting, developing, and creating talent.<sup>211</sup>

Initially, in order to protect and develop China's "strategically important" basketball enterprise, it was closed off from the rest of the world. Beijing used basketball diplomacy with other developing countries, but they did not allow foreign or private influence into

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<sup>206</sup> Hong and Zhouxiang, "Politics First, Competition Second," 404.

<sup>207</sup> Hong and Zhouxiang, "Politics First, Competition Second," 397.

<sup>208</sup> Larmer, "Operation Yao," 37.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>211</sup> According to Larmer, "Center of the World," 68, "Were it not for China's ambition to raise its international stature through sports, Yao's parents (both basketball players, 6feet, 10 inches and 6 feet, 2 inches, respectively) never would have been forcibly recruited into the Chinese sports system and paired up in retirement to produce the next generation of giants."



China, and prohibited professional athletes from playing in other countries.<sup>212</sup> But as Chinese athletics matured and eventually plateaued in the 1990's, they became more open to foreign and private influences, such as the NBA and Nike, despite the threat of Western cultural threats. The value and importance of developing Chinese basketball justified Beijing to open its oft-closed cultural door.

The 2008 Beijing Olympics was a culmination and representation of Chinese athletic development. Prior to the games, a sponsor of the IOC said, "There are going to be over 4.5 billion [viewers] looking at Beijing and China with amazement... It's going to go beyond a sporting event. I think it will be a cultural, social, and economic event, the likes of which we won't see in another generation."<sup>213</sup> Hosting the games was an opportunity to portray an image of China on the largest scale and affirm their place as a global power. They also won the most gold medals of any country, signifying their growth from physical inferiority to achieving the greatest athletic success on the grandest stage. Albeit, all of their medals were in individual sports - none of the West's "Big Ball" sports - but success for them in the near future may not be a long shot, particularly in basketball. Basketball continues to grow and develop, notably through the support of the U.S. actors. The following sections will explain how American basketball diplomacy has helped further proliferate basketball in China, as well as its consequences to American-Chinese diplomatic relations.

### ***Sino-NBA Relations***

After the first Sino-American basketball exchange in 1972, initiated by the State Department, the NBA followed suite soon after. In 1979, the Washington Bullets traveled to

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<sup>212</sup> Beijing feared players would permanently leave China and also wanted full developmental control over their *investments* to achieve international athletic success.

<sup>213</sup> Quote by Brian Perkins from Johnson and Johnson, sponsor of the IOC in Carson Cunningham, *American Hoops: U.S. Men's Olympic Basketball from Berlin to Beijing* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 386.

China to play in two “goodwill” games against the Chinese National team. Six years later, the Chinese National team came to America for one month “as part of cultural and educational agreements reached between the United States and China,” which included seven exhibition games against NBA teams in addition to practice and training from NBA personnel.<sup>214 215 216</sup> But what truly anchored the league into Chinese society (and the rest of the world) was media: initially television, and today digital media. This section will also cover the NBA’s development of grassroots basketball, its influence in the CBA, and its use of merchandise in China. Spread through basketball diplomacy are cultural values, business values, corporate relations, and governmental relations.

### *Channeling Connections: Old to New Media*

In 1983, the NBA made its first international television agreement with Italy, and a few years later, it had expanded its reach into other parts of Europe and even China.<sup>217 218 219</sup> In 1987, David Stern, the NBA commissioner credited with internationalizing the league, traveled to Beijing with “a demo (video) tape in hand” and “[pled] with China Central Television to broadcast N.B.A. games.”<sup>220 221</sup> A deal was made in which the NBA would send free weekly game footage to China Central Television (CCTV) from New York, in

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<sup>214</sup> “Coming to America,” *NBAJumper.com*, accessed April 12, 2015, [http://www.nbajumper.com/china2004/friendship\\_tour.html](http://www.nbajumper.com/china2004/friendship_tour.html).

<sup>215</sup> Michael Lee, “The NBA in China: Opening a Super Market,” *The Washington Post*, October 18, 2007, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/10/17/AR2007101702218.html>.

<sup>216</sup> Alicia Jessop, “The NBA’s Unprecedented Growth in China Fueled by Jeremy Lin and Media Platform,” *Forbes*, July 27, 2012, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/aliciajessop/2012/07/27/the-nbas-unprecedented-growth-in-china-fueled-by-jeremy-lin-and-media-platforms/>.

<sup>217</sup> Bill Simmons, “Curious Guy: David Stern,” *ESPN.go.com*, n.d., <http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/page2/story?page=simmons/stern/060216>.

<sup>218</sup> Joshua Motenko, “The Globalization of Basketball: Latin America (Part 1),” *nbadraft.net*, July 10, 2006, <http://www.nbadraft.net/globalization-basketball-latin-america-part-1>.

<sup>219</sup> Larmer, “Center of the World,” 71.

<sup>220</sup> Jim Yardley, “The NBA is Missing its Shots in China,” *New York Times*, Feb 1, 2012, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/05/magazine/NBA-in-China.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/05/magazine/NBA-in-China.html?_r=0).

<sup>221</sup> Ben Sin, “NBA Looks to Asia for Next Growth Spurt,” *New York Times*, March 14, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/15/business/international/nba-looks-to-asia-for-next-growth-spurt.html>.

exchange for the NBA's exposure to Chinese viewers.<sup>222</sup> The NBA was drawn to China's famed market potential and their passion for the game. Less than twenty years later, NBA games are now broadcast on more than 50 Chinese stations<sup>223</sup> and "[average] five million viewers a game (for television)... three million more than for its cable broadcasts in the United States."<sup>224</sup> According to the NBA, in 2009, "89% of Chinese people ages 15 to 54 [were] more aware of the NBA than of the World Table Tennis Championships, the European Champions League, and even the FIFA World Cup."<sup>225</sup> As of 2012, the NBA was earning \$150 million in revenue annually in China, growing at rate of 30% to 40% each year.<sup>226</sup> Nevertheless, within the past several years, the NBA has crossed over to a new media frontier, as foreshadowed by David Stern in the early 1990's, "[W]e're going to fix it a little bit even if it isn't broken...you've got to continually examine the way you do business, audiences to whom you are trying to appeal, the technology that affects you."<sup>227</sup>

Today, the Internet is now more popular than television in China, and the NBA swiftly responded, becoming "the most popular single sports site (NBA.com/China) in China" and is "consistently the most searched sports term on Baidu.com, the top search engine in China."<sup>228</sup> Evidenced by 3.2 billion streams for NBA managed videos in the 2012-2013 season, the NBA is using the Internet to bring the brand to more people with more access than ever before. As the world's largest smartphone market with "more than 1.2

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<sup>222</sup> Eben Novy-Williams, "NBA Expands China Business with Five-Year Tencent Extension, *Bloomberg.com*, January 29, 2015, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-01-30/nba-expands-china-business-with-five-year-tencent-extension>.

<sup>223</sup> Steel, "NBA Makes Play."

<sup>224</sup> Davis, "China Responds Well."

<sup>225</sup> May Zhou, "NBA does a slam-dunk in China," *ChinaDaily.com*, April 4, 2014, [http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2014-04/04/content\\_17409032.htm](http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2014-04/04/content_17409032.htm).

<sup>226</sup> Bao, et al., "Beyond Yao."

<sup>227</sup> Jackson and Andrews, "Excavating the (Trans)national Basketball Association," 59.

<sup>228</sup> "NBA announces formation of NBA China," *NBA.com*, 14 Jan 2008, [http://www.nba.com/news/nba\\_china\\_080114.html](http://www.nba.com/news/nba_china_080114.html).

billion mobile subscribers,” the NBA has connected with China’s growing mobile industry.<sup>229 230</sup> The NBA has partnered with ZTE, “the world’s fourth-largest mobile phone producer,” as well as Tencent, “the largest Internet company in Asia... [and] most valuable Chinese brand.”<sup>231 232 233</sup> Social media and mobile devices create a two-way connection between fans and players, teams, and the league at any time, anywhere. According to the CEO of NBA China, David Shoemaker, the goal is to “get our content, whether it is live games, or highlight clips, or fun videos from the locker room, into the hands of our fans who are holding mobile handsets and tablets.”<sup>234</sup> Through Tencent and Sina, NBA games average one million viewers and 70 million followers and fans on their micro blogs combined.<sup>235</sup> The NBA’s digital media strategy provides fans an all-access experience to content, merchandise, games (live and on-demand), and highlights all on the go.

As some American companies have been challenged or pushed out of China due to new Chinese competition, the NBA has embraced and immersed itself with these Chinese products with astounding success. The NBA is becoming increasingly accessible and interactive with Chinese fans, virtually closing the Sino-American geographic gap, as well as the cultural gap. Chapter nine will contemplate the consequences of the NBA’s international growth through media and merchandise.

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<sup>229</sup> Internet streaming is a way around the Chinese government’s TV monopoly, which drives down the price of a TV contract.

<sup>230</sup> Shen Jingting, “NBA is leagues ahead in sports promotion game,” *ChinaDaily.com*, December 11, 2013, [http://www.chinadailyasia.com/business/2013-12/11/content\\_15105085.html](http://www.chinadailyasia.com/business/2013-12/11/content_15105085.html).

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>232</sup> Williams, “NBA Expands China Business.”

<sup>233</sup> A 5 year \$700 million contract.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>235</sup> Zhou, “NBA does a slam-dunk in China.”

### *Wheeling and Dealing: NBA Merchandise*

China is a strategic target for NBA stores and merchandise as the NBA's largest international market. As of 2007, NBA merchandise was sold at more than 50,000 retail locations throughout China, more than three times that of Europe, and it was expected to grow 50% more the next year.<sup>236</sup> The NBA is also expanding retail through E-commerce, a growing industry in China, which is an effective way for the NBA to ensure retail authenticity at a low cost, as well as merge it with the NBA's overall digital experience. Thirty-two percent of the NBA's retail sales are international and further growth is expected, and predictably so when considering the general attractiveness of American brands abroad, particularly in China.<sup>237</sup> Compared to the U.S., American brands have a fresh appeal to China and developing countries. Chinese consumers are not numbed to advertising and they are less cynical of corporations than are developed countries.<sup>238</sup> Moreover, in China the NBA is not faced with endless competition from other professional sports leagues nor a giant entertainment industry, so it is relatively alone on stage and when it wants to make a splash, it is heard.

An example of the NBA's creative license abroad is "the N.B.A. Center, a 130,000-square-foot structure that is part of a \$1.5 billion complex being built by a Chinese company near Beijing and is set to open next year. The center will include a restaurant, merchandise store, fitness center and multiple full-size basketball courts."<sup>239</sup> This one of several NBA centers popping up in China and other targeted markets, while there is only one NBA

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<sup>236</sup> Tim Potvak, "NBA sees millions in burgeoning China market," *SouthBendTribune.com*, October 18, 2007, [http://articles.southbendtribune.com/2007-10-18/news/26831090\\_1\\_heidi-ueberroth-nba-merchandise-china-market](http://articles.southbendtribune.com/2007-10-18/news/26831090_1_heidi-ueberroth-nba-merchandise-china-market).

<sup>237</sup> "Why China's Youth Find Western Culture Attractive," *PBS.org*, February 13, 2012, [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/world-jan-june12-china\\_02-13/](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/world-jan-june12-china_02-13/).

<sup>238</sup> "Burson Study: Chinese view corporations more favorably than Americans," *PR Week*, September 22, 2014, <http://www.prweek.com/article/1313260/burson-study-chinese-view-corporations-favorably-americans>.

<sup>239</sup> Sin, "NBA Looks to Asia for Next Growth Spurt."

directed store and one NBA themed restaurant in all of the United States, let alone theme park.

Another example of creativity and targeting of the Chinese fan-base was in the 2014-2015 NBA season, when the NBA observed Chinese New Year with a series of games in which players wore jerseys and warm ups with Chinese characters. NBA teams “[paid] tribute to Chinese culture through musical performances, showcases of Asian cuisine and Chinese partnership activation,” appealing to Chinese-Americans, while the NBA used social media to connect with Chinese fans abroad.<sup>240</sup> The combination of China’s infatuation with Western brands, particularly the NBA (and Nike), and the rise of consumerism and digital media in China’s growing middle class, is a very profitable recipe and integral to the NBA’s success. Due to this immense popularity, the NBA has used its power to not only expand its market but also leave a fingerprint on society, which is expanded in the following sections.

### ***The NBA’s Influence: Teaching the Game***

As mentioned earlier, the NBA equates more people dribbling with more people consuming the NBA brand. But in addition to marketing, they also focus on developing basketball infrastructure at a grassroots level, through relationships with the basketball federation, the basketball leagues, or the government, “targeting kids at younger ages, 6 or 7 years old, from elementary school all the way through high school.”<sup>241</sup> Through basketball, the NBA teaches its NBA values and encourages healthy lifestyles through playing. Another strategy is their “train the trainer” sessions, which develops coaches and physical education teachers throughout a city “to give them the basic knowledge to coach the game, because if

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<sup>240</sup> Jack Freifelder, “NBA games will connect with Chinese New Year,” *ChinaDaily.com*, January 22, 2014, [http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/us/2014-01/22/content\\_17249482.htm](http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/us/2014-01/22/content_17249482.htm).

<sup>241</sup> Neal Meyer, videoconference with author, April 10, 2015.

you don't have the coaches to coach, even if you have kids that want to play, they are not as likely to play, and they are not going to learn how to play properly."<sup>242</sup>

Furthermore, a recent and astounding development is a "strategic partnership" between China's Ministry of Education and the NBA, initiated to "incorporate fitness and basketball into the elementary, middle and high school curriculum across China." The partnership strives to "promote a well-rounded education, emphasizing sport to boost the country's physical education," with the goal to "provide enhanced basketball training to at least 3 million students by 2017." Part of the "curriculum" includes visits to Chinese schools by NBA players and coaches "to conduct basketball clinics, and provide specialized instruction to Chinese coaches and physical education teachers."<sup>243</sup> Neal Meyer said, "The NBA has developed a standardized curriculum that provides a groundwork for coaching from basic levels, to intermediate, and then advanced."<sup>244</sup> Similar to the Y.M.C.A. in the early 1900's and the United States government during the Cold War, American sports are being used to promote American values in foreign countries systematically and by targeting the youth.

Also, providing basketball to millions of children is a democratic transformation from the "womb-to-tomb" system in which the government selects young athletes at an early age. Outside of this elite population, most kids do not participate in recreative sports. Sports were historically unavailable to most citizens. When interviewing Kobe Bryant, he stated that China "is on the cusp" of such a cultural change that "has been so focused on academics to the point sports (particularly team sports) are just an extracurricular activity that are (thought

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> Natalie Wang, "NBA Teams up with China in Landmark to deal to promote sports... but will it work?" *thenanfang.com*, January 24, 2015, <https://thenanfang.com/nba-teams-up-with-china-in-landmark-deal-to-promote-sports-but-will-it-work/>.

<sup>244</sup> Neal Meyer, videoconference with author, April 10, 2015.

of as) meaningless and pointless because they are not advancing you towards your goal of having a government job.” He believes that sports are something that “you can learn life lessons from, that can help you with leadership, communication, and so on.”<sup>245</sup>

### ***The Chinese Basketball Association***

The NBA has also had an impact on Chinese professional basketball, the Chinese Basketball Association (CBA), which was founded in 1995. Compared to China’s former “government sponsored league... the CBA has been perceived as a breakthrough embracing the decentralization and commercialization of Chinese sports.” Provinces and municipalities initially owned the teams, but inspired by either the NBA - a model for the CBA - or “a deeper motivation of privatization” from economic reforms, “teams were then majorly purchased by (private) enterprises.”<sup>246</sup> Former NBA players and foreign investment have contributed to the CBA’s growth, but due to the market dominance of the NBA, most teams fail to return a profit. Because of the accessibility of the NBA and the extraordinary fascination for its athleticism, most Chinese consumers prefer the higher quality, American version. Andrew Morris highlights that because most Chinese people do not exhibit *dunking qualities* (tall, long, and elite jumping ability), it makes the NBA all the more mesmerizing to Chinese fans. Representative of many Chinese basketball fans, Morris quotes a fan’s letter to a basketball magazine:

“My greatest desire in this life is to truly make a real dunk, and to experience just once the feeling of being "the flier" [feiren, i.e., Michael Jordan] I am 1.75 meters [5'9"] tall, my arms spanning 1.77 meters [5'10"] I am not blessed with the best physical qualifications. Please suggest some training program for me.”

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<sup>245</sup> Kobe Bryant, interviewed by author, April 10, 2015.

<sup>246</sup> Pu, “From ‘Ping-Pong Diplomacy to ‘Hoop Diplomacy.’”



Because of this sentiment among fans, and the fact most professional Chinese players are not of the highflying sort, the CBA is always looking to attract former and current NBA players. They are immensely popular, boost the quality of play, and are "inspiring and [teach] the Chinese players."<sup>247</sup> In 2011 with the NBA lockout, in which the NBA season was temporarily suspended, several prominent NBA players left America to temporarily play in China. The lockout was a "big game-changer for the CBA... It drove ratings up in the lockout year, and CCTV ratings took over those of the NBA. It really made people take the league seriously who previously... regarded it as kind of a joke."<sup>248</sup> After the lockout, most of these players returned to the NBA, but the CBA's reputation was lifted to a new level, and is now considered a legitimate alternative for borderline or even well-established NBA players. One such player is Stephon Marbury, who will be discussed later in this chapter.

The NBA has also worked directly with the CBA, through "coaching and player-development programs" as well as from a business perspective. Meyer said, "We help them market and promote the game, improve the event and make better in-game entertainment to make the game more fan friendly, and make it more of an experience like the NBA."<sup>249</sup> The NBA is also involved with bringing NBA quality stadiums to China. David Stern identified "the lack of sufficient facilities as one barrier to the NBA being more active in China,"<sup>250</sup> which has led to a joint venture between NBA China and Anschutz Entertainment Group (AEG), "one of the leading sports and entertainment presenters in the world,... to design,

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<sup>247</sup> Quote from Terry Rhoads, former Nike's first sports marketing employee in China and now the head of the local ZOU marketing agency, referenced by Jared Zwerling, "How the Chinese Basketball Association Became the Hot Destination for NBA Talent," *Bleacher Report*, October 29, 2013, <http://bleacherreport.com/articles/1821905-how-the-chinese-basketball-association-became-the-hot-destination-for-nba-talent>.

<sup>248</sup> Said by Matt Beyer, China's first foreign sports agent given a government license, in Zwerling, "How the Chinese Basketball Association became."

<sup>249</sup> Neal Meyer, videoconference with author, April 10, 2015.

<sup>250</sup> Bao, et al., "Beyond Yao."

market, program and operate multi-purpose, NBA-style sports and entertainment arenas in major cities throughout Greater China.”<sup>251</sup> They plan to build 12 stadiums in various Chinese cities, and the NBA already had an involvement with the construction of the Beijing Olympic Basketball Arena, which is now controlled by AEG.<sup>252</sup> The NBA is undoubtedly invested in and fundamental to the growth of professional basketball in China today. The Chinese government values a successful domestic professional league, associating it with national prestige and as a source of national unity. As Stephon Marbury said in an interview on Vice Media, “It’s not just basketball here, it’s bigger than basketball.”<sup>253</sup>

Driven by the Chinese market potential and inspiration to spread goodwill through basketball, the NBA is a diplomatic actor for the USA. Through media, merchandise, business relations, and government relations, the NBA has a one-of-kind access to Chinese society. Governmentally, the NBA and Beijing have a trustful and mutually beneficial relationship, and among the people, the NBA is highly desirable. Not only is the infatuation with the NBA significant in itself - with Chinese citizens emulating and dreaming of becoming NBA athletes, and the CBA modeling its practices after the NBA - but the values preached by the NBA, and those that are internalized through playing and consuming basketball, are innately American and sometimes contrary to Chinese traditions.

Certain values like teamwork, respect, and hard work mesh with China’s culture, while self-expression, creativity, and the pursuit of individual greatness are traditionally disapproved of and suppressed in Chinese society. These values, particularly individualism,

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<sup>251</sup> “AEG and NBA China Form Joint Venture,” *NBA.com*, October 12, 2008, <http://www.nba.com/2008/news/10/12/aegchina/>.

<sup>252</sup> Broderick Turner, “NBA to operate arenas in China,” *LATimes.com*, October 12, 2008, <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/oct/12/sports/sp-nba12>.

<sup>253</sup> “A Starbury is Born,” *Vice Sports*, November 20, 2014, [https://sports.vice.com/en\\_us/video/the-coney-island-kid-a-starbury-is-reborn-in-china](https://sports.vice.com/en_us/video/the-coney-island-kid-a-starbury-is-reborn-in-china).

are often associated with basketball. And furthermore, individualism - or selfishness when at its worst - is often referred to as a negative quality of the sport. However, basketball and individualism are in no way intrinsic, for basketball at its essence reflects teamwork and unselfishness, in addition to the traditional Chinese values of hard work, perseverance, etc. Therefore, one would assume basketball in China would be team oriented, characteristic of its past. But many argue that American basketball is transforming the Chinese youth, with its association to Nike and consumerism, as well as videos of fantastic dunks highlighting the individual.

An example of this individualizing and Americanizing phenomenon was the "Mengniu NBA Basketball Disciple" reality TV show, co-sponsored by the NBA, China Mengniu Dairy Co., and Shandong Satellite TV.<sup>254</sup> It was a countrywide competition of young athletes who performed in drills and games, and were awarded points based on their overall, individual performances. The players with the most points moved on to subsequent rounds until they reached the finals, where a winner was ultimately determined and awarded with a trip to the USA to tryout with an NBA Developmental League team.<sup>255</sup> This three-month journey celebrated individual excellence, and was more reflective of chasing the American dream than playing for national glory.

Whether or not basketball is a driving force behind these new Chinese ways, it is certainly an arena in which change is occurring. Because values are promoted and ingrained through basketball, the same way Nike shoes have stepped off the court into mainstream Chinese culture, the NBA has more influence than simply indicated by its corporate and political partnerships. As written by Andrew Morris:

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<sup>254</sup> Normandy Madden, "NBA Creates its First Reality Show in China," *adage.com*, April 8, 2009, <http://adage.com/article/global-news/nba-creates-reality-show-china/135869/>.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*

“The cosmopolitan basketball culture to which many Chinese youth are now exposed has become much more than just a sport; it and the market forces that it brings to China have become avenues for the very creation and redefinition of personal identities.”<sup>256</sup>

### *Transnational Corporations*

In addition to the NBA, there are other notable actors in America’s basketball diplomacy with China. As has been mentioned throughout, the NBA works extensively with other individuals and organizations. Examples are corporations, which follow and sponsor the business success of the NBA. ZTE, a Chinese smartphone company, has become an official sponsor of several NBA teams. The partnership includes ZTE’s “commitment to investing in the communities” it “works” and “lives” as well as the exposure of ZTE to American consumers. Conversely, Nike is an example of an American company heavily invested in Chinese professional and youth basketball, which has impacted the sport as well as Chinese mainstream culture.

Likewise to the NBA, Nike, whose second largest market is now China, originally recognized China as the market with “2 billion feet,”<sup>257</sup> and that the key to its potential was “to change China's culture” and get them playing basketball, resultantly buying Nike shoes.<sup>258</sup> By donating equipment, opening courts, and organizing youth leagues (intentionally targeting young ages), more people had access to the game and subsequently “sales through the 1990s picked up 60% a year.”<sup>259</sup> Nike became associated with the CBA, the NBA, and elite athletes, which grew the brand and has made Nike immensely popular, even with (and

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<sup>256</sup> Andrew Morris, “‘I Believe You Can Fly’: Basketball Culture in Postsocialist China,” *Popular China: Unofficial Culture in a Globalizing Society* (2002): 9-38.

<sup>257</sup> Alan Paul, “Kobe’s Next Conquest China,” *WSJ.com*, July 19, 2009, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970204556804574258222289862830>.

<sup>258</sup> Said by Nike executives, found in Matthew Forney, “How Nike Figured Out China,” *Time*, October 17, 2004, <http://content.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,725113,00.html>.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*

because of) their steep price tag.<sup>260</sup> Nike's primary goodwill service is providing access to sports and recreation for a healthy lifestyle. Another aspect is their promotion of American culture, from their advertisements celebrating individualism and hard work, to their contribution to a consumerist culture, connecting products and consumption to personal identity.

Similar to the NBA, Nike conducted a social reality TV show in China, called *Rise*. It was an inspirational show promoting self-improvement, encouraging "players to get out on the court, make progress and break through."<sup>261</sup> It celebrated hard work, the will to overcome obstacles, and desire to achieve greatness, as well as highlighted basketball's ability to cultivate individuals and communities. The show starred NBA greats LeBron James and Kobe Bryant, who emphasized the qualities of "heart" and "never giving up." The show also premiered the Nike House of Mamba, which is the first ever, full-sized LED basketball court that projects graphics, and features player tracking technology.<sup>262</sup> Through the use of media and the influence of celebrities, Nike used basketball to advance its brand as well as promote redeeming values taught through basketball, while simultaneously spreading basketball itself. Nike is however not alone, Adidas, Reebok, and Under Armour all have a Chinese presence, along with Chinese brands - Li Ning, Anta, and Luyou – who are beginning to sponsor NBA players in the United States.

### *Celebrity Athletes*

Famous athletes have been integral to the diplomatic success of the NBA, shoe companies, and State Department Envoys. Kobe Bryant, the most famous American athlete

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<sup>260</sup> The popularity of Nike in China is augmented by its expensive prices.

<sup>261</sup> "Nike Rise Basketball Campaign is Underway in China," *Nike.com*, July 23, 2014, <http://news.Nike.com/news/Nike-rise-basketball-campaign-gets-underway-in-china>.

<sup>262</sup> Bryant's nickname is the Black Mamba.

in China, competing with the likes of Yao Ming in popularity, has been the face of the NBA and Nike for several years. If he is a legend in the United States, he is a god in China. LeBron James said, “I thought I was famous until I got here (in China) with Kobe,” whose name was chanted and cheered the loudest at the Olympic opening ceremony in Beijing, behind only President Hu Jintao and Yao Ming. When visiting China, he is met by crowds of thousands of people, up to 25,000, many in hysteria, some in tears, and some even offering gifts, Bryant says, “It’s harder for me to walk around here than in the states.”<sup>263</sup> As an entrepreneur, Bryant is the face of advertisements around China, his jersey is consistently a top seller (exceeding Yao Ming), and as already mentioned he has a state of the art basketball facility named after his brand - the Black Mamba - in Shanghai.<sup>264</sup>

In addition to his business success, Bryant also has an interest and investment in philanthropy. This certainly positively impacts his brand, but it does not diminish the significance of his work. In fact, he has been traveling to Beijing since 1997, before there was “business interest for me to gain,” according to Bryant, “It was more just hanging out with the kids and having fun. And because of that, they trust me.” The Kobe and Vanessa Bryant Foundation have worked extensively with China’s Soon Ching Ling Foundation, promoting peace and intercultural exchange. He was presented with the "Global Ambassador Award" by the Asian Society of Southern California for “his deep commitment of creating good will and understanding between the U.S. and China,”<sup>265</sup> and was praised as “a one-man

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<sup>263</sup> Mark Medina, “When Kobe Bryant Goes to China, Fans Go Nuts,” *Huffington Post*, November 12, 2013, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/10/16/kobe-bryant-china\\_n\\_4104072.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/10/16/kobe-bryant-china_n_4104072.html).

<sup>264</sup> Nike House of Mamba

<sup>265</sup> “NBA Star Kobe Bryant Honoured for Efforts in US-China Relations,” *Cultural Diplomacy News*, accessed March 30, 2015, <http://www.cd-n.org/index.php?NBA-Star-Kobe-Bryant-Honoured-for-Efforts-in-US-China-Relations>.

State Department, reaching directly to the people."<sup>266</sup> Bryant, with the Soong Ching Ling Foundation, "[raised] funds within China for education and health programmes." He is also invested in China through basketball and training coaches with a "bigger picture," he said in our interview, "I don't want coaches per se, I want teachers. I'm teaching the qualities that you can carry with you for the rest of your life," and that is done by "teaching to a detail that is acceptable to my standards," which are the highest. Bryant also invests in teaching in America, funding teachers to promote Mandarin and Chinese culture in schools. Inspired by his own multicultural upbringing, Bryant believes in the value of intercultural learning because it "broadens perspective."<sup>267</sup>

Bryant associates his success in China with his reputation for working hard, for "it (his hard work) struck a chord with the fans... It's something that inspired them," he said, and such was reiterated by a Chinese sports commentator, "Kobe's spirit matches the Chinese tradition in believing in hard work."

Likewise to Bryant, Stephon Marbury, former NBA All-Star and current Chinese superstar, also champions hard work. Marbury, from Brooklyn, New York, had initial success in the NBA but never met the lofty expectations imposed on him by the media, leaving the NBA at a low point in his career and in a state of emotional depression. Marbury moved to China and began playing in the CBA in 2009, and has since won three CBA championships. Since then, he has acquired national popularity, labeled a "hero," with Beijing erecting a bronze statue of Marbury as well as creating a postage stamp in his name, and is considered an honorary Beijing citizen. These accolades come with much surprise, as he was never a well-known name in America beyond NBA fans. Similar to Bryant, the

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<sup>266</sup> "Kobe Bryant for Global Ambassador," *USAsians*, accessed March 24, 2015, <http://www.cd-n.org/index.php?NBA-Star-Kobe-Bryant-Honoured-for-Efforts-in-US-China-Relations>.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*

Chinese people have an appreciation for Marbury's perseverance plus his investment and immersion into Chinese society. Marbury was the star of a play called *I am Marbury*, inspired by his life, with tickets priced at about \$150.<sup>268</sup> The play championed, through the character of Marbury, "hard work" (repeatedly mentioned), "be a good team member and love your teammates," "keep trying," "believe in yourself," and so on, as well as addressing "Sino-US relations."<sup>269</sup> <sup>270</sup> Even though the values preached by Marbury, Bryant, and the Nike Rise TV show are Chinese values, and therefore not a particular source of American influence, these athletes' incredible popularity have a positive impact on the Chinese people as representatives of America. For some athletes with preeminent fame, like Kobe Bryant, also influence American diplomacy directly.

### ***Basketball's Diplomatic Influences on China***

Like the NBA champion San Antonio Spurs, basketball diplomacy is successful because it is played by a team. Coming from many angles and mutually reinforcing each other, state and non-state actors spread the soft power of American basketball. The original actor was the U.S. State Department, which was later joined by the NBA who picked up the torch and brought it to new heights. Nike and other corporations tagged along with the NBA's success, as well prominent athletes, like Kobe Bryant, who pursue their own entrepreneurial and philanthropic enterprises, as well as partner with the NBA and corporations for mutual benefit. Together, these actors, as well as lesser ones not mentioned, influence Chinese people, business, and politics.

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<sup>268</sup> "A Starbury is Reborn," *Vice Sports*.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>270</sup> Ben Sin, "Stephon Marbury gets his own theatrical play in China," *SI.com*, August 19, 2014, <http://www.si.com/extra-mustard/2014/08/19/stephon-marbury-china-play>.



Alone, the spread of basketball impacts Chinese people because it promotes (American) values and a favorable image of America, which are reinforced by visiting NBA figures in camps, clinics, and now reality television shows. Corporate practices (such as the NBA's relationship with the CBA), corporate partnerships with the government, and the spread of Chinese transnational corporations into America - and vice versa - all contribute to Sino-American relations. America's history of basketball diplomacy is the richest, deepest, and most consequential in China, and is primed for even greater significance considering the NBA's projected growth and the importance of Sino-American relations.

## Chapter 8 - Conclusion: Manifest Destiny?<sup>271</sup>

Today, international politics are less defined by the interplay of state governments and their political borders. As international affairs move beyond the realm of states - further existing between and across different countries - transnational, multinational, and supranational actors, both private and governmental, are increasingly more involved in shaping the international system. This also demands states to evolve their foreign policy strategies to better adapt to a more complex political world. Joseph Nye, in *Soft Power: The Means To Success In World Politics*, argues that in addition to “coercion,” states should pursue “attraction” as an effective component of “smart power,” the integration of hard power and soft power. Sports are one such source of soft power due to their globally ubiquitous popularity and their attractiveness to foreign governments and individuals, which is an argument by Jackson and Haigh, “In order to respond to novel social, political, cultural and economic pressures, states are increasingly turning to sport as a foreign-policy instrument; and they cannot ignore the corresponding influence that global sport has on their core interests.”<sup>272</sup>

An example is soccer, which is a source of nationalism for many countries as well as a common language between them, and carries cultural, political, and economic influences along with it. Because of soccer’s vast and deep presence around the world, FIFA, the

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<sup>271</sup> In respect to the NBA’s growth, Adam Silver said, “We’re not there yet. I know that as much growth as we’ve seen, we have a long way to go before we can sustain four franchises in Europe... On the other hand, I believe it’s our manifest destiny to expand,” cited by Owen Gibson, “NBA commissioner Adam Silver wants to launch four European franchises,” January 15, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/sport/2015/jan/15/nba-commissioner-adam-silver-european-franchises>.

<sup>272</sup> Stephen Haigh and Steven Jackson, “Between and beyond politics: Sport and foreign policy in a globalizing world,” in ed. S. Jackson and S. Haigh, *Sports and Foreign Policy in a Globalizing World*, (London: Routledge, 2009): 4.

international governing body of soccer, is recognized as a powerful institution, impacting communities and profiting from the global popularity of the game.

If soccer is considered *the world's game*, then basketball should be called *America's game*, for it was invented in America, historically dominated by America, and the premier brand of basketball is from America. Even though more people around the world play soccer, a single country does not *own* soccer like the United States *owns* basketball. Soccer is responsible for extensive cultural interconnectivity between countries, but those connections are more reflective of a web than the infinite number of spokes emanating from the United States through basketball.

The projection of American influence through basketball began in 1893 through the influence of the Y.M.C.A. Because of its involvement, basketball was created in the light of Protestant values and rapidly spread because of its worldwide organization. Missionaries taught the game and directed organized competition to promote peace and regional cooperation. Its immediate dissemination spread Protestant values, ingrained basketball and these values into local cultures, and predisposed them to future American influence, particularly through basketball. This was initially inspired by the desire to do goodwill, which continues to inspire today, but was soon overtaken by Americanism and the United State's desire to gain prestige through its basketball excellence.

After World War I, American private actors with the support of the State Department, and missions conducted by the State Department itself, were aimed at improving America's image abroad through basketball. Coaching missions, athletic exchanges, friendly exhibitions, and international competition were all forums for basketball diplomacy. It became a cultural tool to help fight the ideological war with Communism and the Soviets.

Today, basketball diplomacy occurs mostly through corporations and individuals pursuing profit, sometimes with the State Department's direct guidance encouraging missions in countries of political and economic interest. As evidenced in China, basketball diplomacy provides American actors and values (cultural, economic, and political) exemplary access to Chinese society: including their people, corporations, and government, influencing their culture, corporate practices, and governmental policies.

Despite the distinct eras, certain themes cut across the entire history of basketball diplomacy. Two that have already been mentioned include the consistent presence of goodwill, prestige, and capitalism; and secondly, they were spread by the United States government, NGO's, American corporations, and prominent basketball players and coaches. The remaining themes are detailed in the following paragraphs.

Due to basketball's particular attractiveness among youths, they are targeted by the NBA, corporations, and the U.S. government, and thus are major recipients of basketball diplomacy. Basketball, additionally, has always carried values reflective of American society that become engrained into communities through playing and teaching the game. The actors also used basketball to help support *development* and share knowledge abroad, specific to basketball and in general. Also, by emphasizing teamwork and creating human connections outside of politics, basketball has been a terrific tool to promote peace.

In addition, media, and to a lesser extent merchandise, have been crucial components. Within a year of its invention, the rules of basketball were spread around the world by the Y.M.C.A.'s newspaper, *The Triangle*, in addition to the *New York Times*. One hundred years later, the NBA became a leader disseminating live games and footage to international television markets, achieving groundbreaking success. Now, the NBA is leading the way in

digital media, which is providing the most immersive and widely available access to the NBA ever.

Lastly, the evolution from an isolationist country relying on “muscular Christianity” to leaning on military power and “muscular Americanism” is evident by the government’s changed interest in basketball diplomacy. The government used basketball diplomacy to portray an image to rest of the world, one that was strong and athletically successful as well as just and equal to all races. Today, the era of globalized capitalism has created an elite class of premier athletes serving as America’s basketball diplomats, a narrow slice of American society, unlike the amateur teams in past decades, and symbolic of America’s growing specialization, superstardom, and inequality.

### *Around the World*

The NBA’s insemination into China is considered an enormous success and is expected to only grow more fruitful. In addition to the reasons previously mentioned, basketball has thrived in China because it is the ideal urban sport. Firstly, basketball is cheap. All one needs are shoes, a hoop (which are publicly available at parks), and a ball (which are also at the park brought by others); in many communities, an aspiring athlete can play without needing to buy anything. Secondly, basketball is compatible in urban spaces compared to a sport requiring extensive grass fields. The game is also versatile; ten is the number of people for a regulation game, but play is possible with as few as two, and everything in between. Lastly, basketball has become highly consumable and associated with popular culture: celebrity athletes, fashion (such as Jordan shoes), hip-hop, and its association with America are attractions to many youths around the world.

This raises the question of basketball's future growth around the world. Considering more than half the world's population now lives in urban settings since 2007, which will grow to 66% in as soon as 2050, basketball will likely proliferate as urbanization grows.<sup>273</sup> Developing countries with large, dense cities of growing consumerist, young populations are ideal settings for basketball.

The NBA is already targeting India, Brazil, the Philippines, and Indonesia. As they did in China, the NBA has taken over the business operations of Brazil's professional league and is involved with India's government physical education program, and is seeking further opportunities. Kobe Bryant has expanded his international presence to Brazil, India, and the Philippines (among a few others). An Indian billionaire has bought the Sacramento Kings and signed the first Indian national in NBA history, aggressively bringing basketball to India. In the Philippines, Neal Meyer said they "are *huge* basketball fans," which is, evidenced by some unbelievable statistics:

"99 percent of the population is aware of the NBA."

"75 percent consider themselves to be NBA fans (eclipsing the Olympic Games at 58 percent and domestic basketball at 48 percent)."

"During the NBA Season, 62 percent of the population watch the NBA games on TV at least once a month and about 40 percent of the population watch the NBA on TV at least once a week."

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<sup>273</sup> "World Urbanization Trends 2014: Key Facts," *World Urbanization Prospects* (United Nations, 2014): 1, <http://esa.un.org/unpd/wup/Highlights/WUP2014-Highlights.pdf>.

“33 percent intend to buy NBA branded items within the next year (44 percent among men).”<sup>274</sup>

The NBA along with current and former players frequent these hot spots through camps, clinics, investments, and sponsorships. However, in addition to the NBA’s focus on these highly populated countries, they are also continuing to grow and spread elsewhere around the world such as Europe, Africa, Australia, and the Middle East.<sup>275 276</sup> The spread of basketball - particularly American basketball - seems imminent, but what does this mean for U.S. basketball diplomacy?

### *The Future of American Basketball Diplomacy*

The spread of basketball diplomacy has always been characterized by goodwill, prestige, and capitalism, and through its history, its ultimate identity has transitioned in that order. As capitalism only grows and increasingly characterizes American society, let alone the rest of the world, should we expect the same to occur with basketball diplomacy? Will future basketball diplomacy become more driven by capitalism? The current trends in basketball say yes.

Advertisements and sponsorships are becoming more integrated with the basketball experience. Each and every basketball mission and competition is now *brought to you by* and *partnered with the official* shoe, drink, insurance, and so on of the NBA. Through basketball, the NBA and State Department each target countries based on economic opportunities. And

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<sup>274</sup> The 2008 Sponsorship Intelligence Research Survey accessed in “The Philippines is the NBA’s Next Frontier,” *Uproxx*, accessed April 2, 2014, <http://uproxx.com/dimemag/2009/09/the-philippines-is-the-nbas-next-frontier/>.

<sup>275</sup> Investment groups from Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Qatar were engaged in separate talks to purchase the Detroit Pistons, as seen in “Three Middle Eastern investors in discussions to buy NBA team Detroit Pistons,” *DubaiBeat*, accessed March 16, 2014, [http://www.dubaibeat.com/2010/12/15/three\\_middle\\_eastern\\_investors.php](http://www.dubaibeat.com/2010/12/15/three_middle_eastern_investors.php).

<sup>276</sup> Qatar is also bidding to host the basketball World Cup as reported in “Qatar bids for basketball World Cup,” *ESPN.go.com*, December 11, 2014, [http://espn.go.com/olympics/basketball/story/\\_/id/12014742/qatar-6-bidders-host-2019-2023-basketball-world-cup](http://espn.go.com/olympics/basketball/story/_/id/12014742/qatar-6-bidders-host-2019-2023-basketball-world-cup).

the Olympics, traditionally founded on amateurism, is now “capitalism on steroids.”<sup>277</sup> Yet big money in basketball is only beginning.

The 2016-2017 NBA season is their start of a new NBA TV contract with Turner Broadcasting System, Inc. and The Walt Disney Company for reportedly twenty-four billion dollars over nine years, three times as much as the current contract annually.<sup>278</sup> In addition to its digital partnerships abroad, the NBA, the teams, and the players will profit immensely and the brand will only continue to grow and become more international, strengthening basketball diplomacy in the short and medium runs. However, basketball and basketball diplomacy for the United States could fundamentally change in the long run due to the rise of China and its role in the global economy.

### *Consuming vs. Playing*

The same way basketball is exciting to play, it is also captivating and entertaining to watch. And with the proliferation of the NBA on TV and across the Internet around the world, more people will be watching the game. This certainly can help popularize basketball and encourage people to play, but that is not automatic. For example in Southeast Asia, soccer has become highly watched and consumed, but not played. European soccer - especially the English Premier League - is to Southeast Asia as the NBA is to China and the Philippines, delivered through promotional tours, “web sites and merchandising in Asian languages,” and broadcasts of “European Champions League, La Liga, Serie A, the Bundesliga, and the Premiership, live, recorded, full length, and highlights.”<sup>279</sup> A

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<sup>277</sup> Dave Zirin, *Game Over: How Politics Has Turned the Sports World Upside Down* (New York: The New Press, 2013).

<sup>278</sup> Matt Moore, “NBA set to announce new television deal worth \$24 billion,” *CBSSports.com*, October 5, 2014, <http://www.cbssports.com/nba/eye-on-basketball/24739554/report-nba-set-to-announce-new-television-deal-worth-24-billion>.

<sup>279</sup> David Goldblatt. *The Ball is Round* (New York: Penguin Group, 2006), 1204.



consequence is that Southeast Asian soccer fans consume and support the European leagues, not their local ones. They have a choice between watching the world's best or their low-quality, corrupt, domestic league, and they choose the former.

Local leagues struggle and fail to develop, which hurts the development of youth soccer because there is no “pipeline” to train and inspire kids to play, which Neal Meyer mentioned was a point of focus for the NBA. Therefore these soccer fans are only consuming and watching, not playing, which is also linked to “new cultures of consumption (in the Asia-Pacific region), especially brands, [that are] linked to a form of ‘aspirational’ class performance in which fan identification is seen to link consumers to middle-class status and values.”<sup>280</sup> This phenomenon is also evident with the NBA in China and the Philippines, but unlike soccer, basketball is being played, and local leagues are developing positively.

The proliferation of people playing basketball versus merely consuming is critical to the strength of basketball diplomacy. Playing creates intercultural relationships, it bonds dissimilar people, ingrains values into people and societies, and promotes peace. Without playing, basketball is simply a consumable good and is limited to the diplomatic effect of an American movie. To connect different cultures and spread values (in comparison to merely watching the game), Kobe Bryant said that playing “is *the* value” of basketball, “actually *doing* it,” otherwise “it’s just entertainment” and “doesn’t teach you shit.”<sup>281</sup> On the court is where the redeemable qualities of basketball are practiced. Efforts to encourage play by Bryant, the NBA, and the like are valuable to the spread of basketball and foundational to the power of basketball diplomacy.

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<sup>280</sup> David Rowe and Callum Gilmour, “Sport, Media, and Consumption in Asia: A Merchandised Milieu,” in *American Behavioral Scientist* 53 no. 10, (June 2010): 1532-3.

<sup>281</sup> Kobe Bryant, interviewed by author, April 10, 2015.

### *The Prospect of Basketball Made in China*

The growing play of basketball around the world, and evidence of basketball's global character, is evidenced in an amazing video clip of dozens of young Chinese children six-years old, each dribbling two basketballs, exhibiting incredible skills within a structured, choreographed performance.<sup>282</sup> This uniquely Chinese display, unlike anything I have ever seen in America, prompts the question of how different countries will change basketball, particularly China. Will China take over basketball through its athletically ambitious government and practice-minded culture? Another famous video is of a seven-year-old displaying amazing, professional-level ball handling skills, reminiscent of American, hoop prodigies found on YouTube aspiring for future NBA success.<sup>283</sup> On one hand, China's determination towards athletic success and evidence from the examples above suggest China could be the next basketball superpower of the world, like the Soviet Union decades ago, disrupting America's monopoly of basketball soft power. Considering its ballooning popularity and the helping hand of U.S. actors in its development, Chinese basketball success seems inevitable.

But on the other hand, these videos show another end. The performance in the former video is played to the tunes of Western pop-music, and in the latter, the child is dribbling Nike basketballs and wearing a Chicago Bulls jersey, which symbolizes the internalization of uniquely American basketball and the success of its basketball diplomacy. This could either mean an increased interest in American basketball and further receptiveness to America's

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<sup>282</sup> "Amazing!! Fancy dribbling by a group of 6-year old Chinese kids," YouTube video, posted by Rarvan EUW, April 22, 2015, accessed May 1, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EtFPfKLeJII>.

<sup>283</sup> "Baby B-ball Toddler shows off basketball skills," in "Is this the next global basketball superstar?" *DailyMail.com*, April 1, 2015, accessed May 1, 2015, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/peoplesdaily/article-3021656/Meet-five-year-old-Chinese-boy-insane-basketball-dribbling-skills-won-millions-fans.html>.

basketball diplomacy, or China could challenge the U.S., using basketball as a symbol of cultural superiority, reminiscent of the U.S.S.R. during the Cold War.

Assuming China continues its progress in basketball and growth as a Great Power, it's possible that the U.S. would lose its relative basketball power as they lose their global hegemony. However, if such a transition does occur, because China (and other countries) has been influenced by and attracted to American values (cultural, economic, and political) due to the success of American basketball diplomacy, the rise of China and the subsequent proliferation of Chinese culture and values will be more similar and coexistent with those of the United States.

### *Recommendations*

There is limited literature on the relationship of sports and diplomacy, particularly in regards to non-state actors, which is a point of contention among academics in the field. Further research on this topic would elevate the conversation, especially quantitative research that could evaluate the effectiveness of non-state actors in American diplomacy. It would also be useful to measure the diplomatic impact that these basketball diplomacy examples have on foreign peoples. Are there positive results? Do certain countries respond better? Are certain actors more effective? Lastly, as Chinese basketball improves, its rise into basketball diplomacy should be monitored and studied, especially how it interplays with American basketball diplomacy.

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