

SCOUTING IN BASKETBALL VERSUS RECRUITMENT IN BUSINESS – SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

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Abstract:

In the past, basketball clubs and businesses collaborated mainly regarding sponsorships, endorsements and marketing activities. Nowadays, however, the two researched domains, are learning and adapting much more from each other. One of the common activities that nowadays plays a significant role in both areas is scouting (sports term) or recruitment (business term). That is why the aim of this paper is to provide an insight into how basketball and business organizations create and use these processes in order to obtain the right people for their teams. The results will show various similarities but also big differences between the two processes.

Keywords: *recruiting, scouting, team building, effective teams, human capital selection, basketball*

JEL classification: *M12, M19*

1. Introduction

Basketball and business have always had a relationship, be it on the side of the club owners that also own and lead businesses or on the side of partnerships, endorsements or other marketing activities. Nowadays, however, both parties are learning and adapting much more from each other. That is why, I chose to conduct a literature review by comparing the two domains in order to identify how similar or different these processes are. In basketball, in order to build a team, a scouting and selection process needs to be concluded. In business however, a recruitment process is needed in order to build a team.

Furthermore, Stang wrote, „Basketball scouting has been an important phase of the game and a reason why teams win or lose, why some teams maintain a high level of success or failure, and why some professional teams can successfully build through the draft and free agency and other can't.” (Stang, 2017). This statement underlines the importance of investing in scouting by basketball clubs, which has been the case especially in the NBA. For example, Ford once wrote, „foreign scouting budgets have doubled and tripled over the past few years trying to cut down on mistakes. Even GMs are now making the trips overseas to look at these kids themselves.” (Ford, 2002 cited in Eschker, Perez, Siegler, 2004).

Furthermore, scouting is the process that a scout undergoes in order to find the best potential players for a team. Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines a scout as „a person sent out to secure firsthand information about the style of play, tactics and strength of a rival but also that is sent out to obtain information about players by watching them in action”. On the other hand, in business, recruitment is an area of expertise for the human resources department. Firstly, before establishing a recruitment process, a planning needs to occur. Through human resource planning we can understand „the process by which managers ensure that they have the right number and kinds of capable people in the right place and at the right time.” (Robbins, Coulter, 2016). How this process is concluded is represented by the recruitment activity which „is defined as any practice or activity carried on by the organization with the primary purpose of identifying and attracting potential employees.” (Noe et al, 2016). Armstrong wrote a similar definition of recruitment through which he stated „that recruitment represents a process used to find and engage the people the organization needs.” (Armstrong, 2009) As can be seen in the definitions of the terms we can state that there already is one similarity between them. Both scouting and recruitment have the same purpose: to identify and attract potential suitable members to the team.

2. General aspects

In basketball, teams can take part, simultaneously, in two-three competitions during one season. For example, a basketball team from Europe can participate in the national championship and/or cup, and an international league which might put a strain on the roster, as the number of players that a

team can have on its roster can be a maximum of 12 (FIBA Official Basketball Rules, 2020). If a basketball team plays in all three competition, then, the risk of player injury or increased fatigue will be higher. In order to make sure that those two aspects do not happen, basketball clubs invest a lot in player's recovery. A similar situation can be found in business where a team and its members can be responsible for a variety of different projects. The risk that appears in such situations is that if there are too many projects and the number of employees is not sufficient to fulfill all the activities, then the employees might feel for example burned out. Burnout can be understood as „a global concern and work-related stress has the potential to negatively affect the individual's psychological and physical health, as well as an organization's effectiveness.” (Carod-Artal, Vázquez-Cabrera, 2013). These aspect can be solved through a better assessment (ex.: workload) of the projects activities on behalf of the managers. In this regard, companies have started to offer their employees private health insurances in their benefits packages. This leads us to one of the differences between scouting and recruitment, which is regarding negotiating the contract. For example, when negotiating their contracts, basketball players request and receive many incentives (ex.: paid flights, housing etc.) besides their salary. What the recruitment is regarding, companies do not offer many financial incentives besides salary in comparison to recruitment in basketball. All these aspects also have an influence on teambuilding, “which takes work and an understanding of both group and individual dynamics.” (Diamond, 2007).

3. Talent Search

When beginning a talent searching process we first need to have a clear objective. That is why, as Stang once wrote: „The simple objective in scouting is to get as much useful information as possible about a future opponent, recruit, draft prospect, or free-agent player.” (Stang, 2017) What the recruiting process in business is regarding, its primary purpose is to identify and attract potential employees. (Noe et al, 2016). Perez-Toledano et al wrote the following idea regarding the selection process in sports: „there are many factors that condition the selection of the players, from the characteristics of the sport discipline, the competitions in which they take part, the regulations of the team's reference country, the tradition or philosophy of the club, the

prior undertakings/contracts established by the club or player, to financial limitations, and the characteristics of the type of play the coach intends to develop.” (Perez-Toledano et al, 2018). On the other hand, companies and the industries in which they are active also have specific characteristics, regulations, traditions, philosophies, financial limitations and so on.

Furthermore, recruiters need to decide in advance what selection method they will use with each individual candidate if there is no established general process in the organization. (Foot et al, 2016) In addition, one of the main differences between scouting in basketball and recruitment in business is regarding how the search for talent is being documented. Marković et al wrote about a three-step scheme regarding the collection of information on athlete’s activities: manual method, video analysis and digital technology. (Marković et al, 2020) For the purpose of this paper, we will structure scouting into three main categories: 1. live/at the game scouting; 2. video scouting; 3. data gathering and analysis. The first scouting category refers to the fact that a scout goes to one or more games of the players they potentially want and watches them play. The second scouting category requires investing a lot of time in watching „game tapes” of players or teams. The third scouting category is consisted in data gathering and analysis. Regarding these three categories, during talks with different scouts, I have found out that there is another way that they gather information about a specific player. Scouters would call their contacts from various teams or different sports agents in order to ask for information about a player. On the other hand, the search for talent in business is mainly done online through various job platforms such as www.ejobs.ro, www.bestjobs.ro, www.linkedin.com/jobs/ or other similar ones. This means that recruiters nowadays have a wider search area and can reach potential candidates anywhere in the world. However, this also means that the recruitment process might take longer. More so, because of the shift in generations companies have been forced to adapt their hiring processes so that other options have appeared, such as: social recruiting which is „a practice that leverages social and professional networks, both online and offline, from both a candidate’s perspective and the hiring side, to connect to, communicate with, engage, inform, and attract future talent.” (Meister, Willyerd, 2010); Employer Branding through various sponsorships for colleges or different corporate social responsibility programs; Referrals: the best promoters of a company are

its own employees - „organizations now depend increasingly on their employees to recruit specific candidates for job openings.” (Shammot, 2014); Assessment Centers (Edenborough, 2005). Moving on, Dalton and Landry structured recruitment methods as: first hand meaning „interview, interaction at a networking event or an opportunity to observe on-the-job behavior” and second hand: „college transcripts, reference letters, and performance evaluation from another job”. Furthermore, they state, „a hiring dilemma can arise when second-hand information and first-hand experiences point to different conclusions —one candidate may look better “on paper” while another seems better “in person.”” (Dalton, Landry, 2019).

The way companies search for talent shows a big difference between scouting and recruitment: recruiters can access talent databases where candidates are free to upload their data and their resumes. However, there are some disadvantages in this regard: resumes are incomplete, not very well structured or not up to date. On the other hand, the only option scouts have is to access different databases from different sports agencies, sport agents or private companies who represent only a specific number of players and they must pay for this information. Furthermore, Skinner and Guy wrote, „Player tracking data represents a revolutionary new data source for basketball analysis, in which essentially every aspect of a player's performance is tracked and can be analyzed numerically.” (Skinner, Guy, 2015) This means that scouts can nowadays have complete information about the players they are interested in and in how they have developed over time. On the other hand, in business, some companies use big data in order to have more information when they need to decide whom to hire. However, this applies only for the internal recruitment. When searching for candidates externally, this cannot be applied because such data cannot be tracked.

4. Internal versus external talent search

The topic of internal versus external talent search is something that is present in the day-to-day recruitment activities of organizations (business and basketball). Here lies a difference between scouting and recruitment that has been pointed out in talks with different coaches. In basketball, scouts or coaches do not always have the option to look inside the team when a position becomes vacant, as the roster spots are limited. That is why, in general,

basketball clubs look for new players directly on the market. More so, one way of acquiring external talent and one of the similarities that might appear between scouting and recruitment is the fact that both basketball clubs and companies invest in their future workforce through investments in youth centers with the goal to „prepare young players for senior training and competition demands.” (Trunić, 2007 cited in Trunić, Mladenovic, 2014) for basketball and different collaboration with universities for business.

In business, internal talent search can be seen as cost effective, more time efficient and can even increase employee satisfaction. External talent search is on the other side more time consuming, competition is tougher and the candidates bring with them selves fewer experience as the ones already in the company. (Hamza et al, 2021) Furthermore, one important similarity between scouting and recruitment is regarding the so-called „headhunters” or executive search firms. As a headhunter we can understand „a company or individual that provides employment recruiting services on behalf of the employer. Headhunters are hired by firms to find talent and to locate individuals who meet specific job requirements.” as described by www.investopedia.com. Furthermore, although there are talks of internal and external headhunting (Thomas, 2016) companies use this type of recruitment mainly for its external benefits as headhunting companies have a better position of knowing the markets than recruiters inside a company and they also have the ability to „influence the contemporary movement of talent.” (Faulconbridge, Beaverstock, Hall, Hewitson, 2009).

5. Scouting report versus interview form

One of the ways we can clearly see the difference between scouting and recruitment is regarding the templates that they use in order to analyze players or candidates. For example, some authors mention the fact that players will be recruited „based on a range of physical (e.g., strength, speed, coordination) and psychological (e.g., resilience, personality, leadership) qualities.” (Beauchamp et al, 2017). An example of how a scouting report for a basketball player might look like can be seen in figure 1 which was an analysis made by Kevin O’Connor for www.sbnation.com before the NBA draft of 2015. When writing such a report, „the scout’s objective for the final report should be to organize the material in such a way that it clearly presents

the pertinent information to the coaching staff and players.” (Stang, 2017). Furthermore, if scouts spend many hours researching information over just one player, the same cannot be said happens in business. For this, recruiters fill out an interview form. A good and quite complete example of how an interview form might look like is provided by www.smartsheet.com and can be seen in figure 2.

As we can see in both figures, some areas that contain general information about a candidate are similar. However, scouting has the advantage of also presenting candidates physical data and statistics. In order to have a complete analysis, both forms contain strengths and weaknesses of the candidates. This can be seen visually in figure 1 and in the analysis scale „Poor-Fair-Good-Excellent” in figure 2. They also contain a summary / comment section where the scout / recruiter can write a short personal analysis of the person they are observing. One similarity between the forms, which isn’t quite visible, is regarding the availability date of a candidate. In business, candidates are always asked from which date they would be available for hire. In Basketball however, transfer periods are clearly established and they do not need to be included in the report because the interested parties already know them. Another similarity is regarding the position for which a candidate has applied or has been scouted for which can be seen in both forms. Also, another aspect in which the two reports are similar is regarding the potential decision: in the scouting form we can see that the scouted player can become “a franchise player” in contrast to the interview form where we can see if the interviewers recommend the candidate for hire or not. More so, a very important difference between the two reports is the fact that in the interview form, recruiters note the expected salary of a candidate. This isn’t the case with the scouting report. Lastly, one of the main differentiations between the two forms is the fact that the brief interview form is based more on a short-term evaluation of the candidate. The scouting form however is based on a middle to long-term observation of a player. Finally, we can state that these types of form were created in order to help coaches, team leaders or managers to take the decisions regarding whom to hire much more easily.

Figure 1: Karl-Anthony Towns scouting report for the NBA draft of 2015

KARL-ANTHONY TOWNS			UK	
		POSITION CENTER COLLEGE KENTUCKY CLASS FRESHMAN HEIGHT 6' 10.25" WEIGHT 250 AGE 19.6		
PLAYER RANKINGS OVERALL RANKING #1 DRAFT PROJECTION TOP 2 POTENTIAL ROLE FRANCHISE PLAYER		STATISTICS POINTS 10.3 REBS 6.7 1.1 ASSISTS 2.3 0.5 1.4 PER FT% MINUTES 56.6 81.3 21.1		MEASUREMENTS WINGSPAN 7' 3.25" STANDING REACH 9' 1" STANDING VERT 29" MAX VERTICAL 36.5" MAX VERT REACH 12' 1.5" LEAVE QUALITY 10.66 sec SHUTTLE/RUN N/A 3-4 DRIVE 3.36 sec
PLAYER NOTES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ EXCELLENT DRAFT PICKING - WILL COMBINATION OF TOWNS, A LOW-WINGSPAN INTERIOR, AND HIGH STEP-LEAPING ABILITY. ➤ MAJORLY FRANK - WOULD DO, FOR SET FORWARDS, WOULD BE ABLE TO REBOUND GREAT FOR THE POSITION FOR TOWNS. ➤ WILL BE TOWNS' FEAR ENEMY - CAN BE, ON BENCH, HAS LITTLE TO WORRY ABOUT AS HE IS A MORE SKILLFUL PLAYER. ➤ ALLEGORIC - NOT ABOUT GET DOWN ON FLOOR OFFENSIVE THE FLOOR. ➤ REBOUNDING - WILL BE AN OBSTACLE FOR THE OTHER BIGS. ➤ REBOUNDING - WILL BE AN OBSTACLE FOR THE OTHER BIGS. ➤ PROFESSIONAL - WOULD BE EXCELLENT FOR THE POSITION. ➤ WILL BE TOWNS' FEAR ENEMY - CAN BE, ON BENCH, HAS LITTLE TO WORRY ABOUT AS HE IS A MORE SKILLFUL PLAYER. ➤ EXCELLENT DRAFT PICKING - WILL COMBINATION OF TOWNS, A LOW-WINGSPAN INTERIOR, AND HIGH STEP-LEAPING ABILITY. ➤ MAJORLY FRANK - WOULD DO, FOR SET FORWARDS, WOULD BE ABLE TO REBOUND GREAT FOR THE POSITION FOR TOWNS. ➤ WILL BE TOWNS' FEAR ENEMY - CAN BE, ON BENCH, HAS LITTLE TO WORRY ABOUT AS HE IS A MORE SKILLFUL PLAYER. ➤ ALLEGORIC - NOT ABOUT GET DOWN ON FLOOR OFFENSIVE THE FLOOR. ➤ REBOUNDING - WILL BE AN OBSTACLE FOR THE OTHER BIGS. ➤ REBOUNDING - WILL BE AN OBSTACLE FOR THE OTHER BIGS. ➤ PROFESSIONAL - WOULD BE EXCELLENT FOR THE POSITION. 		ADVANCED STATS PER BPM WS 31.4 17.3 6.4 REB% BLK% STL% 18.5 11.5 1.4 APG% TSS USAGE 57.0 62.7 23.7		
SUMMARY <p>Karl-Anthony Towns has All-Star potential and even has an outside chance of developing into a franchise player due to his massive physical attributes, unique combination of skills, and correctable weaknesses. He is versatile and can be moved into different situations, teams can use him exclusively on the post, like a center of the past, or stretch him like many modern power forwards. That's what sets him apart from the other top big men.</p> <p>Towns has elite tool for the game and a high basketball IQ. On offense he can beat you with the pass if you double him and defensively he is only a few years away from becoming a dominant shot blocker. Towns would be in contention for the top draft pick in almost any class, not just this one.</p>				

Source: <https://www.sbnation.com/2015/5/20/8624123/karl-towns-scouting-report-nba-draft-2015>

Figure 2: Brief Interview Form

CANDIDATE NAME	CONDUCTED BY				
INTERVIEW DATE	INTERVIEW START TIME	INTERVIEW END TIME			
POSITION TITLE	POSITION DEPT				
DESCRIPTION OF POSITION BEING FILLED					
DATE AVAILABLE	SALARY REQUESTED				
Describe your experience directly related to the position - accomplishments, strengths, improvements					
Describe your experience indirectly related to the position - how does this experience make you a good candidate?					
How do you make decisions when prioritizing tasks? Tell us about an experience where time management was a factor, and how you dealt with a tight or fluctuating project timeline.					
Do you have experience working alone or as part of a team? How have others been affected by your work?					
Describe an instance of overcoming a problem and what was learned from this experience.					
Are you familiar and comfortable with the resource requirements? Please assess your skill level and describe the most complex work previously completed with these tools.					
Are there any restrictions to your working availability?					
Why do you believe you are the best candidate for this position? And how does this position fit with your long-term goals?					
WORK EXPERIENCE	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCELLENT	COMMENTS
SKILLSET					
PROFESSIONALISM					
ATTITUDE					
EDUCATION					
ENTHUSIASM					
COMMENTS Provide any additional comments to support your assessment and recommendation.					
RECOMMEND FOR HIRE NOT A MATCH DECISION NOT YET MADE					
INTERVIEWER NAME	TITLE	SIGNATURE	DATE		

Source: <https://www.smartsheet.com/interview-templates>

6. Team Structure

For a better understanding of how scouting and recruitment processes work, an analysis of the team's structure is needed. For example, basketball players are categorized in five positions: Point Guard, Shooting Guard, Small Forward, Power Forward and Center as described on the NBA website. This means, that scouts know exactly for what positions they need to search and also helps them in narrowing down their search. More so, scouts work closely together with coaches in order to better understand what characteristics the players should have. On the other hand, in business, the roles in a team are in general not so fixed. However, similarly as in basketball, recruiters work closely together with team leaders or managers in order to find out exactly what type of candidate they should be looking for and for what specific position in the team (ex.: junior, middle, senior, expert etc.). Furthermore, a structure is also needed in the scouting / recruitment department. For example, in the NBA and other high-level professional basketball clubs the scouting department is organized into six divisions (Stang, 2017): 1. Advanced scouting; 2. Scouting for professional players and prospective free agents; 3. International player scouting; 4. College scouting; 5. Analytics scouting. Similarly, in talks with human resources managers I have found that the human resources department, organizes the activity of its recruiting team also depending on the way the company is structured: project based, manufacturing or services; or the number of employees in a company. This shows that although scouting and recruitment are similar in how they conduct their communication with the coaching staff / managers the structure of their teams is different.

7. Conclusions

Building a team is a long and intense process that requires a lot of work. Furthermore, when starting to build a team, scouting in basketball and recruitment in business are the channels through which that can be done. The information presented in this article shows that although the two analyzed topics come from very different areas, they are not so different from each other after all. That is why the aim of this paper was to provide an insight into

how basketball and business organizations create and use these processes in order to obtain the right people for their teams. The results show many aspects that basketball teams and business organization can learn from one another in order to optimize their scouting or recruitment process. The question that arises now is in what other ways can the activities of basketball clubs and companies be compared and what more can they learn from one another.

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