



SPORTING IMMIGRANTS AND THEIR EFFECT  
ON SPORT GROWTH AND POPULARITY  
IN A CULTURE: A CASE STUDY  
IN CZECH BASKETBALL

*(SPORTOVNÍ IMIGRANTI A JEJICH VLIV NA ROZVOJ SPORTU A POPULARITY VE SPOLEČNOSTI : STUDIE  
ČESKÉHO BASKETBALU)*

**An Extended Abstract of the Doctoral Dissertation**

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## INTRODUCTION

This extended abstract of the dissertation “Sporting immigrants and their effect on sport growth and popularity in a culture: A case study in Czech basketball” is focused on the results, conclusions and recommendations found in the full dissertation. The theoretical background, methodological details, and full results are contained in the complete dissertation.

In 2002, Yao Ming opened a potential market of 1.3 billion people to the NBA by becoming the first Chinese player to play in the NBA. The same year Jiří Welsh opened a potential market of 10 million people to the NBA by becoming only the second player from the Czech Republic to play in the NBA. News of Welsh’s basketball experiences filtered into the Czech Republic daily through newspaper, television, and satellite. At the time of Welsh’s departure to basketball’s most prestigious league, there were 18 foreigners playing in Czech’s highest basketball league. In 2010 there would be 45 foreigners playing Czech’s highest league and 93 other Czech’s playing outside the borders of the country. While Welsh and Ming expanded the NBA brand in their home countries through media exposure, there is very scant media coverage of the immigrant athletes playing in the Czech basketball league. Several studies have sought to show the correlation between the exportation of talent such as Ming and Welsh to the most prestigious leagues and the growth of their sports in their home culture (Goldiner, 2003; Klein, 1991a; Larmer, 2005). However, little has been done to study the correlation of immigrant athletes in receiving countries and their internationally less prestigious sporting leagues.

Basketball holds a lower position in the hierarchy of Czech sport popularity than the primary sports of football (soccer) and ice hockey, and thus only three Czechs have made it to the prestigious NBA, and a rapidly growing number play elsewhere in Europe. However the guardians of the game in Czech have chosen to rely on a second tier of immigrants to build the game of basketball at home in the Czech Republic. This second tier is composed of immigrant athletes who are not high enough quality to play in the North American NBA or the less prestigious FIBA Euro-League, yet they are talented enough to be the stars of the Czech basketball league.

During the 2009-2010 season there were 45 foreign players in the Czech men’s first division basketball league. These 45 immigrant athletes were primarily from the former Yugoslav Republics (11 players) and the USA (24 players). These 45 immigrant players represent over 25% of the total players in the Czech men’s highest basketball league. The teams at the top of the league have the most foreign players with five and the ones at the bottom have the least with one and zero. Foreign players dominate the top end of the statistics for Czech basketball. In the spring of 2005, the Czechs naturalized their first foreigner for the purpose of national team play. American Maurice Whitfield became the first black Czech to wear the national team jersey just in time for the qualification rounds of the Euro 2005 basketball tournament where he lead the team as the playmaking point guard.

## Statement of the Problem

*This study will examine the influence that immigrant athletes have on attendance and youth development in the Czech basketball league.*

This study is a **descriptive, non-experimental, longitudinal case study** in the genre of **globalization** in sport. This study examines the use of immigrant athletes to build non-primary sport popularity at the micro level (team, club, entity) and macro level (league, federation and nation).

## Research Questions

1. What is the correlation between usage of immigrant athletes on a team in Czech basketball and fan attendance?
2. What is the correlation between usage of immigrant athletes on a team in Czech basketball and the numerical growth of youth registered to play within the federation?
3. What are the demographic characteristics of those who come to play in the Czech basketball leagues? (Country of origin, age, race, playing experience.)
4. What is the extent and general nature of media coverage of the immigrant athletes playing in the Czech basketball leagues?
5. What is the extent the receiving teams in the Czech league use immigrant athletes in their marketing efforts?

## Positioning the study of Czech basketball migration

Czech basketball represents a case of a semi-periphery country receiving sporting immigrants from both other semi-periphery countries and from core countries. Basketball is a secondary sport in the Czech Republic, which is receiving sporting migrants from countries where basketball is the primary sport (for example the USA and former Yugoslav Republics) and a secondary sport (for example the neighboring countries of Poland and Slovakia).

By measuring the changes in the popularity of the sport of basketball through the indicators of fan attendance, youth participation and media coverage we are able to gain insight into the response to this form of globalization in the Czech culture.

The dominant theories used in sport migration studies closest to our own are first figurational, which examines the issue from a historical perspective, and then interactionist, which focuses on the experience of the migrant athlete or the response of the receiving culture. Those examining the phenomenon from the vantage point of core countries stealing talent from semi-periphery and periphery countries in primary sports tend to rely most on critical and conflict theory. The influence of these studies on those studying from the vantage point of the receiving country is seen in the use of these two social theories as secondary theories in their research.

Therefore, the study which we will conduct will flow primarily from a figurational perspective by nature of its length (12 years), the national-global interaction, and the examination of trends. The 12-year longitudinal study allows a historical perspective which negates the short-term effect of one indicator and helps us to understand the interplay which occurs between the economic (team budgets and player salaries), political (rule changes) and emotional (marketing and foreign/international player ratios) indicators over time. The figurational model is also in line with our study due to the national versus global tensions which emerge as we see the decrease in Czech players in the top league and the increase in foreign players. Finally, it allows us to account for the trends observed, such as political rules which allow for more foreigners and economic realities like increasing team budgets. Each of these trends flowed out of deliberate decisions from individuals and groups which had both intended and unintended results.

The secondary theory from which we will draw will be the interactionist theory. This theory is useful in understanding the response of the culture to this practical example of globalization. This theory will be used primarily in the third phase of our study, which will be a media study of the response to foreigners in Czech basketball. This phase of our study is an application of the study designed by Alan Klein of Dominican baseball (Klein, 1991). Klein's studies are well grounded in interactionist theory and try to determine the response of a culture or subculture from the bottom up. Additionally, the use of both of these theories is consistent with what has been used in the majority of the studies on receiving countries as was illustrated in the literature review of the dissertation.

## METHODOLOGY AND ORGANIZATION

This study was conducted in three phases which scale down and analyze the data from a quantitative level to a qualitative level. Information used in each phase was subsequently used in the following phase to gain a deeper understanding of the problem and proceed to proposed steps of action in relation to the problem.

Phase 1 was a quantitative treatment of the raw numerical data regarding the changes which have occurred in Czech basketball over the 12-year period. The goal of this phase was to gain an accurate picture of the hypothesized correlations which can be found between the use of foreigners to final league placement, fan attendance and youth development over time. This data was used in determining and interpreting the data obtained in the next two phases.

Phase 2 was a series of qualitative interviews with management and decision makers of the individual teams which played in the top Czech basketball league over the 12-year period. The goal of this phase was to gain an understanding of the decision process that led to the use of foreigners, the use of foreigners in marketing and youth development, and the perceived response to foreigners by fans. The data collected in this phase was used to measure the intended consequences of the use of foreigners on individual teams in Czech basketball.

Phase 3 was a qualitative study of the print media coverage of Czech basketball. The goal of this phase of research was to determine the media response to this example of globalization in the Czech Republic. By examining 5 intermittent marker years of print media using the model laid out by Alan Klein (1991a, 1991b), it was the intent of the researcher to determine the unintended consequences with regards to the acceptance, rejection or commodification of this example of globalization.

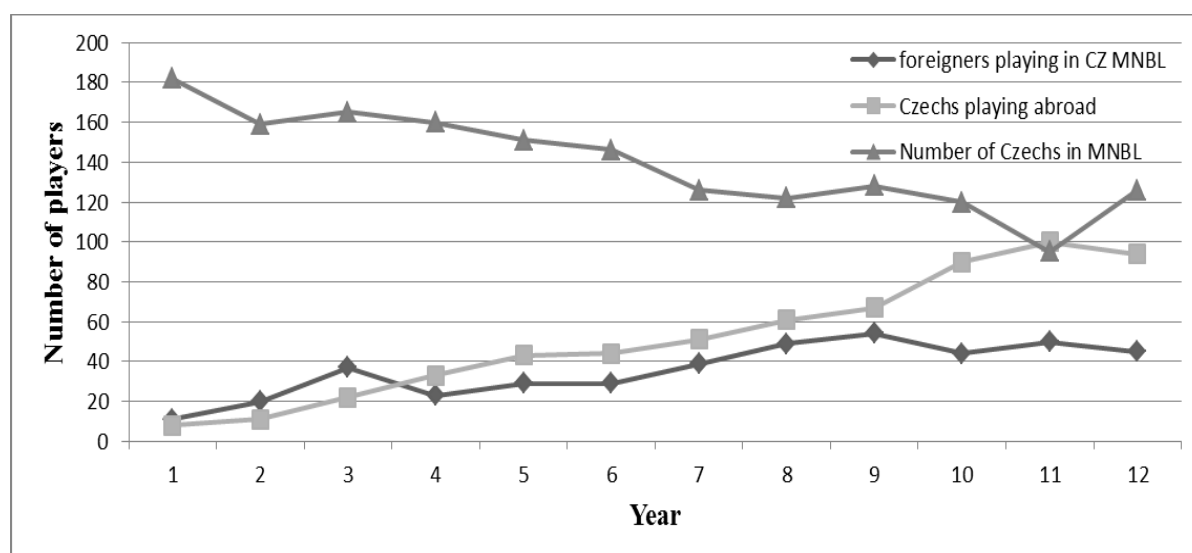
For a more complete explanation of the specific methodologies of each phase please refer to the dissertation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION SUMMARY

### Phase 1 results

We will begin with some simple tables and scatterplot graphs to illustrate quantitatively the data over the time period under study in the cultural landscape of the Czech Republic. Then we will relate these variables through two-level hierarchical correlation and covariance matrixes. Finally we will attempt to represent the indirect effects within these intended and unintended consequences through the use of several path analysis diagrams. Not all data and analysis done in the dissertation is represented in this extended abstract. Table and figure numbers have been left the same as they occurred and are referenced in the original dissertation.

**Figure 1. - Use of foreigners and Czechs playing outside Czech**



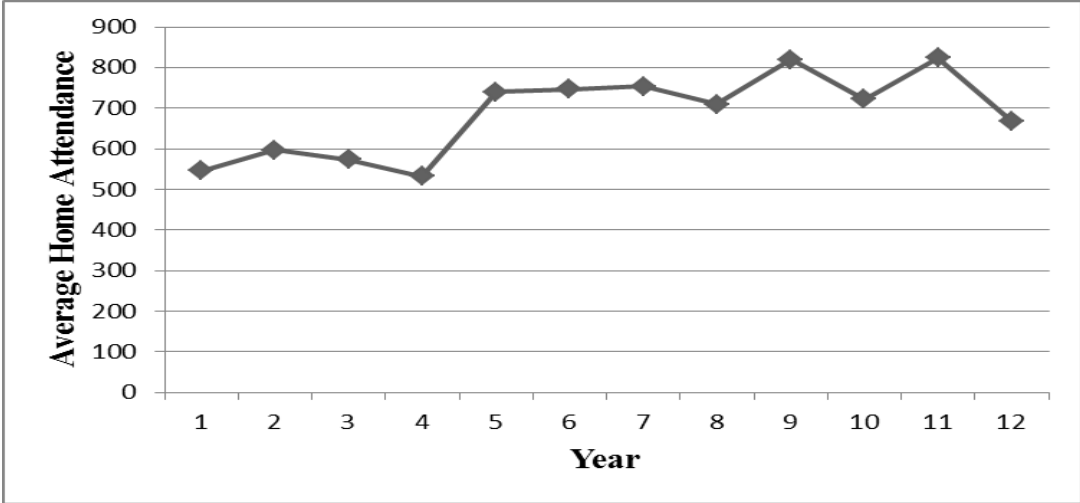
**Table 1. - Czechs playing outside Czech**

Year	Total	Austria	Belgium	Bulgaria	Cyprus	Finland	France	Germany	Hungary	Italy	Kuwait	Luxembourg	Holland	Poland	Serbia	Slovakia	Slovenia	Spain	UK	USA
98-99																				
99-00	<b>11</b>	3						2								4				2
00-01	<b>22</b>	6					1	5						1	1	4	1	1		2
01-02	<b>33</b>	6					2	6		2					1	7	1	1		7
02-03	<b>43</b>	9				1	2	11		3						12	2	1		2
03-04	<b>44</b>	10					1	11		3						12	2	1		4
04-05	<b>51</b>	12			1	1	3	15	2	3						8	2	1		3
05-06	<b>61</b>	11		1	3	1	4	18	2	3		1				12	2	1		2
06-07	<b>67</b>	10			3	3	3	15	3	3		1		1		10	4	2	4	5
07-08	<b>90</b>	12		1	6	3	2	18	4	2		1	4	1	2	14	3	4	4	9
08-09	<b>100</b>	13	2		8	2	4	19	3	5	1	2	3	2	2	12	5	2	6	9
09-10	<b>94</b>	12	1		7	2	3	18	3	3	1	2	3	2	2	11	3	12	5	4

**Table 2. - Foreigners playing in Czech**

Year	Total	Bermuda	Brazil	Canada	Congo	Croatia	England	Finland	France	Greece	Hungary	Latvia	Lithuania	Macedonia	Moldova	Poland	Russia	Serbia	Slovakia	Slovenia	USA	
98-99	<b>11</b>					3				2								1	1	0	4	
99-00	<b>20</b>					4				1								2	2	5	1	5
00-01	<b>37</b>					7				1					1		3	6	10	1	8	
01-02	<b>23</b>					2				1								2	2	7		9
02-03	<b>29</b>					4				1									4	10		10
03-04	<b>29</b>					5				1			1						2	11		9
04-05	<b>39</b>		1			5							1			3			5	13		11
05-06	<b>49</b>		1			3	1									2			13	9	2	15
06-07	<b>54</b>					6	1	1	1	1						2	1		7	13	2	19
07-08	<b>44</b>	1				3			1	1	1					1			4	8	1	23
08-09	<b>50</b>									1						4			2	10	2	26
09-10	<b>45</b>			2	1		1			1		1	3			2			1	11		22

**Figure 2. - Fan Attendance**

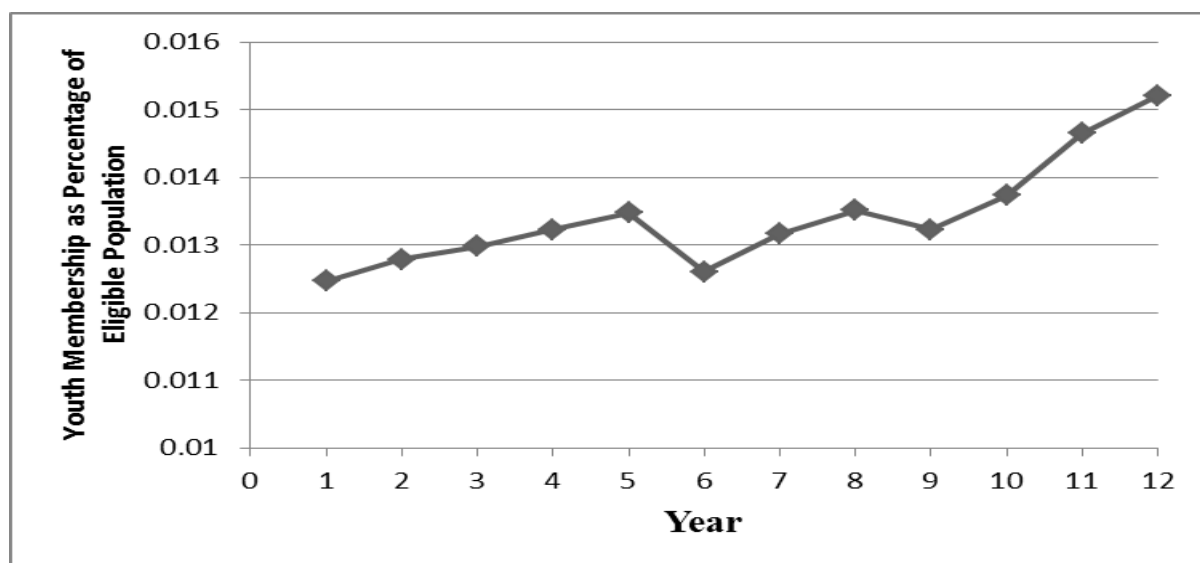


Fan attendance has consistently increased over the time period studied, just as the number of foreigners shown above. Home attendance increased by 22.3%. This percentage is much higher because relatively few fans attend basketball games (as compared to ice hockey or football). The biggest shift occurred between the seasons 2001-02 and 2002-03.

**Table 3. - Basketball Federation Membership**

Season	Total CBF membership	Youth CBF membership
1998-99	41198	25411
1999-2000	41168	25328
2000-01	40768	24967
2001-02	40553	24834
2002-03	39728	24614
2003-04	35761	22461
2004-05	35985	22900
2005-06	36032	22931
2006-07	38592	21908
2007-08	39075	22256
2008-09	40328	23325
2009-10	40788	23745

**Figure 3. - Youth CBF membership as a percentage of the eligible population**



(raw data obtained from CBF records and Český statistický úřad, 2010)

The actual numbers represent an overall loss of 1666 total members or a 6.5% decrease in youth membership. However, when one takes into account the declining birth rate and its relative effect on the actual youth population eligible to play basketball each season (youth age 5 to 19), there is a 22% increase over the 12 -year period.

*Team Level analysis*

**Table 4. - Descriptive statistics of full and budget-only reduced sample**

	All teams over all seasons (N=143)				Teams with known budget (N=35)			
	Mean	SEM	Min	Max	Mean	SEM	Min	Max
Home Attendance	685.27	25.34	171	1945	787.66	66.00	231	1945
Away Attendance	686.26	11.63	403	1180	788.20	16.80	636	1180
Foreigners	2.97	0.19	0	8	4.11	0.35	0	8
Non-EU Foreigners	1.68	0.12	0	6	2.57	0.19	0	6
Czechs	11.72	0.29	5	23	9.80	0.44	5	15
Final Place	6.46	0.29	1	12	6.34	0.58	1	12
Hockey Extraleague	0.52	0.06	0	2	0.46	0.11	0	2
Football Extraleague	0.83	0.11	0	5	0.57	0.19	0	5
Capacity	1951.57	169.56	250	9000	2610.51	463.59	490	9000
Population	286394	98517	13400	1157800	197166	54100	13400	1157800
Budget	xxx	xxx	xxx	xxx	16.69	1.61	8	50

(Crossan & Pecha, 2012)



The descriptive statistics above paint a picture all of the variables measured for all teams over the 12 -year longitudinal period measured. The first four columns represent all 18 seasons, while the last four columns represent the three seasons 2006-07, 2007-08, 2008-09 for which budget data was available. Budgets were measured in millions of Czech crowns.

The results of the multivariate multilevel model are two covariance matrixes, pooled-within teams (table 8) and scaled -between teams (table 9). For both matrices the bold entries on the diagonal are the variances. Entries below the bold variances are the covariances, and above are the respective correlations. The significant covariances are marked with asterisks.

**Table 5. - Pooled-within teams covariance-correlation matrix**

	Home Atten.	Away Atten.	Foreigners	Non-EU	Czechs	Final Place	Hockey	Football
Home Atten.	<b>55886.70</b>	0.40	0.26	0.31	-0.33	-0.43	-0.12	-0.01
Away Atten.	10302.82**	<b>11855.32</b>	0.26	0.19	-0.40	-0.19	0.08	-0.03
Foreigners	99.43**	46.61**	<b>2.61</b>	0.73	-0.54	0.01	0.01	-0.04
Non-EU	88.43**	24.43**	1.41**	<b>1.44</b>	-0.42	-0.13	-0.02	0.00
Czechs	-198.18**	-109.34**	-2.22**	-1.28**	<b>6.45</b>	0.19	-0.05	0.19
Final Place	-232.08**	-47.54**	0.04	-0.36**	1.13**	<b>5.31</b>	0.17	-0.20
Hockey	-4.86**	1.44**	0.00	0.00	-0.02	0.07	<b>0.03</b>	-0.01
Football	-1.08**	-1.17**	-0.02	0.00	0.19*	-0.18*	0.00	<b>0.16</b>

Note. Bold entries on diagonal are the variances; values in the bottom-left triangle are the covariances; upper-right triangle contains respective correlations (Crossan & Pecha, 2012)

\*\*p< 0.01; \*p< 0.05

**Table 6. - Between teams covariance-correlation matrix**

	Home Atten.	Away Atten.	Foreigners	Non-EU	Czechs	Final Place	Hockey	Football
Home Atten.	<b>77.85</b>	0.98	0.63	0.43	-0.45	-0.66	-0.04	0.05
Away Atten.	726.64**	<b>7012.15</b>	0.65	0.58	-0.56	-0.51	-0.13	-0.09
Foreigners	7.73**	74.71**	<b>1.91</b>	0.59	-0.76	-0.39	-0.27	-0.23
Non-EU	3.68**	47.06**	0.79**	<b>0.95</b>	-0.93	0.34	-0.48	-0.68
Czechs	-8.83**	-105.74**	-2.34**	-2.03**	<b>5.00</b>	-0.17	0.61	0.69
Final Place	-23.59**	-174.02**	-2.17**	1.35**	-1.53**	<b>16.65</b>	-0.25	-0.55
Hockey	-0.27**	-7.37**	-0.26	-0.33	0.95**	-0.70	<b>0.48</b>	0.86
Football	0.49**	-8.80**	-0.37**	-0.78*	1.80	-2.62**	0.69**	<b>1.35</b>

Note. Bold entries on diagonal are the variances; values in the bottom-left triangle are the covariances; upper-right triangle contains respective correlations (Crossan & Pecha, 2012)

\*\*p< 0.01; \*p< 0.05

Using path analysis of the team means allows us to more clearly state a few of these significant correlations. An improvement of one place in the final rankings was equal to 54 more fans attending home games. In our sample, adding one more foreigner to the team drew 69.5 more fans, but if the foreigner was a non-EU foreigner the number of home fans drawn increased to 84. We saw the strength of the correlation between foreigners and final place in that one more non-EU foreigner was equal to an improvement of 1.2 spots in the final rankings. For each total foreigner there was a 0.9 better placement in the final placement of the team.

The total correlation matrix based on the data set including the budget is presented in table 10. This matrix was calculated from the three seasons for which budgets could be obtained and is represented by 35 team entries (season 1: 12 teams, season 2: 12 teams, season 3: 11 teams).

**Table 7. - Between teams correlation matrix including budget, population, and capacity (N=35)**

	Home Atten.	Away Atten.	Foreigners	Non-EU	Czechs	Final Place	Hockey	Football	Capacity	Population	Budget
Home Atten.	1.00										
Away Atten.	-0.08	1.00									
Foreigners	0.26	0.27	1.00								
Non-EU	0.09	0.12	0.64**	1.00							
Czechs	-0.19	-0.34*	-0.72**	-0.45**	1.00						
Final Place	-0.45**	-0.43*	-0.40	-0.20	0.45**	1.00					
Hockey	0.03	-0.19	-0.19	-0.29	0.23	0.26	1.00				
Football	-0.26	-0.08	-0.12	-0.28	0.25	0.18	0.65**	1.00			
Capacity	0.43	-0.11	-0.10	-0.35*	0.10	0.00	0.38*	0.15	1.00		
Population	-0.24	-0.11	-0.12	-0.41*	0.28	0.21	0.68**	0.84**	0.38*	1.00	
Budget	0.06	0.55**	0.35*	0.32	-0.46**	-0.62**	-0.51**	-0.64**	-0.03	-0.61**	1.00

Note. \*\*p< 0.01; \*p< 0.05

(Crossan & Pecha, 2012)

Using bivariate regression analysis we were able to estimate that 1 million more Czech crowns (\$51,546, EUR 37,453) was equal to 6 more fans and a 0.26 improvement in final place, or 4 million Czech crowns (\$206,186, EUR 149,813) was equal to one final place improvement. When budget was measured against team composition numbers using regression analysis 1 million more Czech crowns equaled 0.066 more total foreigners and 0.037 more non-EU foreigners.

#### *League level analysis*

The relationship of percentage of youth in correlation with other variables is presented in table 11 below. This table uses Pearson correlations.

**Table 8. - League level correlation matrix (N=12)**

	Foreigners in MNBL	Czechs in MNBL	Czechs playing outside Czech	Average home attend.	Average hall capacity	MNBL TV appearances	Youth as % population
Foreigners in MNBL	1.00						
Czechs in MNBL	-0.86**	1.00					
Czechs playing outside CZ	0.82**	-0.92**	1.00				
Average home attendance	0.73**	-0.81**	0.70*	1.00			
Average hall capacity	0.68*	-0.72**	0.75**	0.67*	1.00		
MNBL TV appearances	0.67*	-0.83**	0.95**	0.57	0.73**	1.00	
Youth as % population	0.68*	-0.75**	0.60*	0.96**	0.52	0.45	1.00

Note. \*\*p< 0.01; \*p< 0.05

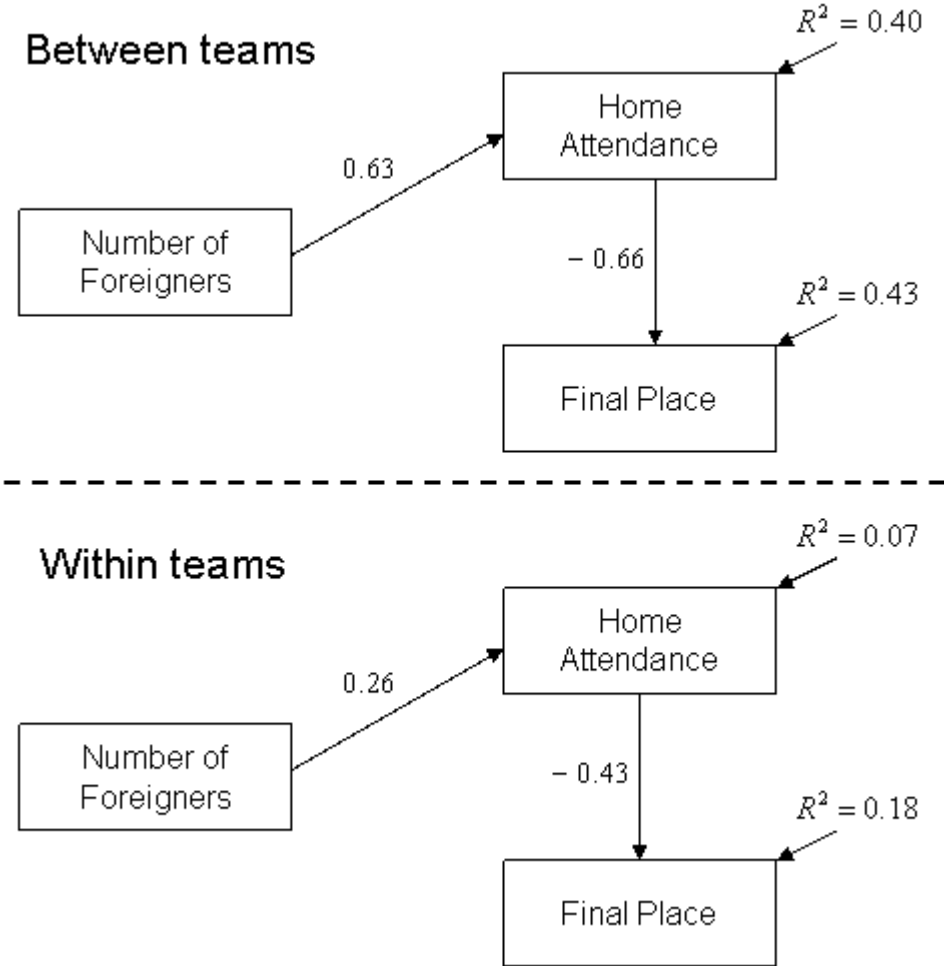
(Crossan & Pecha, 2012)

At the league level the correlations were significantly stronger than were seen previously, but this must be tempered with the low sample size of 12 seasons. The highest correlations existed between the immigrant and emigrant players. In our sample, the more Czechs left to play in other countries, the fewer Czechs remained to play in the MNBL. The more foreigners came to play in the Czech MNBL, the fewer spots there were for Czechs in the home league and the more emigrated to play in leagues outside the country. This process appeared to be somewhat strongly correlated with average home attendance, perhaps indicating that fans were positively disposed to the presence of foreign players and not negatively affected by the exodus of Czech players. As per youth membership in the CBF the correlations were similar to those seen with home attendance. Youth appeared to be drawn to playing the game with the presence of foreign players and the exodus of Czech players was also correlated with youth playing the game. The strongest correlation observed was that between home attendance and youth participation.

In order to find the path analysis diagram with the best fit many hypotheses were tested until the best fit was found. According to the rules of structural equation modeling, the number of non-redundant elements of the covariance matrix must not exceed the number of observations. Furthermore, this is a necessary, but not sufficient condition; the suggestions on adequate sample size related to the number of free parameters are much higher (Kaplan, 2008). Thus within and between teams, we were limited to models which tested four or fewer parameters. We present a limited model with three variables, number of foreigners, home attendance and final place, which exhibit an acceptable fit both within and between teams. The model fits excellently between teams (RMSEA=0.00, SRMR=0.01), and marginally within teams (RMSEA=0.11, SRMR=0.05). The direct path between number of foreigners and final place is not included because in both cases, within and between, it was not significantly different from 0. Rather, this relation is indirectly mediated by home

attendance. The magnitude of the indirect effect is a product of the two standardized path coefficients, 0.63 and -0.66, between teams, equaling -0.42 and is significant. At the within team levels the magnitude of the indirect effect is -0.11 and is also significant. The significance of these results was obtained using Lisrel software (Joreskog, 1997).

**Figure 4. - Two-level path model with standardized estimates**



Note:

Fit indexes for the between-team level (N=18): Chi-square=0.05, df=1, RMSEA=0.00, SRMR=0.01

Fit indexes for the within-team level (N=143): Chi-square=2.77, df=1, RMSEA=0.11, SRMR=0.05

(Crossan & Pecha, 2012)

**Phase 1 Discussion summary**

The quantitative statistics and models presented are meant to test the theories surfaced in previous qualitative studies. The quantitative results are not meant to replace or supersede the qualitative results of other studies, and also must be observed within the cultural context of Czech sport where basketball is a secondary sport.

The points below summarize the primary findings of the quantitative phase of our research:

1. There was a positive correlation between the use of immigrant athletes on Czech basketball teams and fan attendance at home games.
  - a. This correlation was stronger between teams (0.63) than within teams (0.26) on a year-to-year basis, and was quantified using path analysis (1 foreigner = 69.5 more fans, 1 non-EU foreigner = 84 more fans).
2. When calculated as a percentage of the available population of youth, the sport of basketball grew 22% from 1998 to 2010.
  - a. There was a strong positive correlation between the use of immigrant athletes on Czech basketball teams and the number of youth registered to play basketball in Czech (0.68).
  - b. There was also a corresponding high correlation between the number of youth registered to play basketball and home attendance at basketball games (0.96).
3. The use of foreigners in Czech basketball had a negative correlation to the number of Czechs remaining in the highest Czech basketball league at all levels measured (within teams -0.54, between teams -0.76, and at the league level -0.86).
  - a. At the league level the correlation between the number of foreigners who played in Czech and the number of Czechs who chose to play outside Czech was also high (0.82).
4. The role of economics was also a significant factor in the use of foreigners.
  - a. The correlation between budget and final place was positive (-0.62) and quantified as one place costing 4 million Kc.
    - i. The correlation between the use of foreigners and final place was significant at the between-team level (-0.39), and strengthened (-0.42) through the mediating relationship to home attendance using path analysis.
  - b. The correlation between budget and the presence of ice hockey (-0.51) or football (-0.64) teams in a city, as well as to population (-0.61) illustrated that cities without these primary sports and with smaller populations had higher budgets to spend on better players.

## Phase 2

Phase two was composed of two sets of interviews with marketing analysis done on both occasions. There were eight respondents to the first set of interviews in the fall of 2006. These interviews were composed of open-ended questions in order to test results found by other authors and test the hypotheses. The second set of interviews were done in the fall of 2011 with 14 of the 18 teams which competed during the 12-year period studied. The second set of interview questions were composed of scaled questions based on the findings from phase one to measure intended and

unintended results. The second half of the second set of interviews was composed of open -ended questions in order to gain understanding of the decision makers' perspectives on the use of foreigners in general, their motivations surrounding the use of foreign players, their intentional use of foreign players in developing Czech players, their perception of fan response to foreign players and the corresponding marketing they chose, or did not chose to do with foreign players in response to this perception. For Phase two we have only included the discussion summary; for complete results from phase two please refer to the full dissertation.

### *Scaled questions*

If we summarize the perspective of decision makers based on the scaled questions we can say:

1. Teams have accepted the use of foreign players and view it positively (question 1).
2. Teams think that foreign players have a positive effect on the development of young players (question 6), but take the spots of young Czech players (question 7).
  - a. They do not see foreign players as attracting players to play on their own teams (question 3), but think perhaps the foreign players draw young players to the sport of basketball (question 4).
  - b. Therefore, they think there should be several rule changes:
    - i. Decreasing the overall number of foreigners from the current 8 (question 10a).
    - ii. Increasing or keeping the number of non-EU players the same at 3 (question 10b).
    - iii. A new rule should be in place mandating the use of Czech players (question 11).
3. Overwhelmingly they view foreign players as less expensive than Czech players.

### *Open questions*

Several shifts were apparent over time between the two sets of interviews.

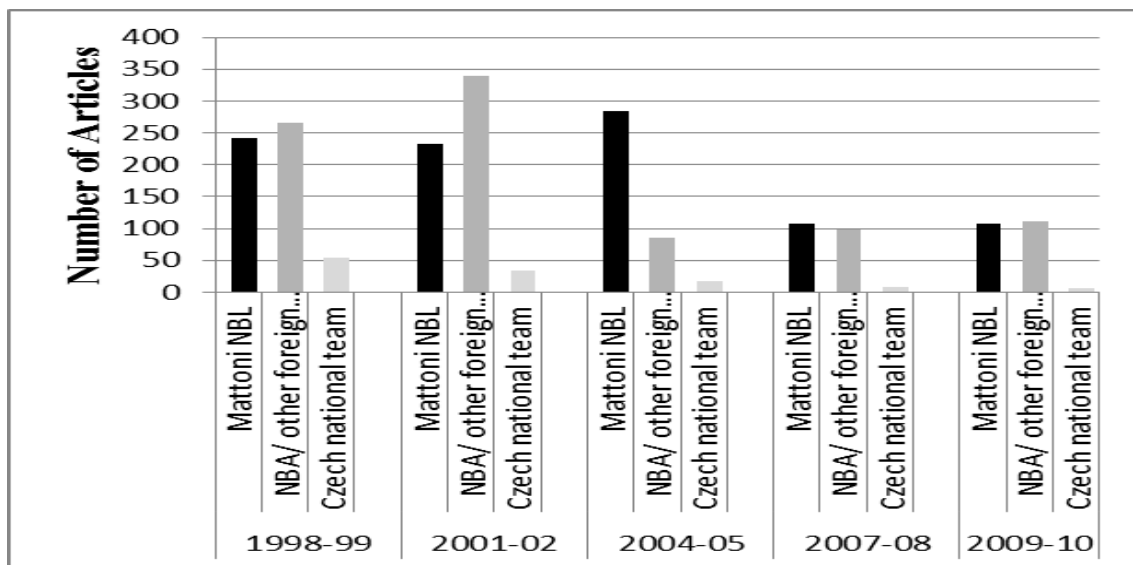
- Motivation for using foreigners shifted from competitive advantage and development to remaining competitive and lack of supply of quality Czech players.
- There was a shift in the type of players teams were looking for:
  - The demographics of the foreign players preferred shifted from players from the former Yugoslav Republics, to American players.
  - There was a corresponding shift of preference from white to black foreign players.
  - Also there was a shift of preference from cheaper, less experienced players (those just out of the American university system), to more experienced players (those with Euroleague experience).

- Teams began to value character and professionalism along with the skills of a player, as compared to just valuing the skill of the player.
- There was a shift in perspective on the use of foreign players in developing young players.
- There was a shift from viewing foreigners as expensive to less expensive than quality Czech players.
- There was a significant shift in the effort to use foreign players in team marketing efforts from almost non-existent, to the accepted norm.

Phase 3

Figure 7 below summarizes the coverage of basketball during five marker seasons in these two daily newspapers Mlada Fronta Dnes and Sport.

**Figure 5. - Print media coverage**



Next we will analyze the type of coverage which was most common among articles mentioning the foreign players. If we measure the percentage of articles mentioning foreigners against the total articles about the MNBL we find 17% (1998-99 with 11 foreigners), 51% (2001-02 with 23 foreigners), 19% (2004-05 with 39 foreigners), 56% (2007-08 with 44 foreigners), and 45% (2009-10 with 45 foreigners). The following table illustrates the most common coverage of foreign players from the categories examined.

**Table 9. - Articles reporting foreigners and their reporting classifications**

Year	Total foreigners	Total MNBL articles	Total articles mentioning foreigners	Performance noted	Nationality noted	Name or nationality in headline	Performance noted by coach or spokesman	Quoted	Compared with Czech player(s)	Criticized	Salary or contract mentioned	Leaving or arriving to team	Receiving honor or award	Story about /mention personal life	Impact on fan attendance mentioned
98-99	<b>11</b>	242	41	54	30	7	21	0	3	9	4	6	0	2	0
01-02	<b>23</b>	232	118	107	50	19	42	13	10	13	14	22	22	11	4
04-05	<b>39</b>	284	54	29	31	7	23	4	8	13	1	6	2	8	7
07-08	<b>44</b>	107	60	44	22	6	17	22	2	3	1	11	6	7	0
09-10	<b>45</b>	107	48	35	18	8	11	16	11	9	7	6	3	6	5

It is immediately evident that the total number of articles about the MNBL dropped sometime between the 2004-05 season and the 2007-08 season covered. The Nymburk team won the league the last seven years of our total 12-year study, meaning their first league championship was the 2003-04 season. By the fourth season of our media study (2007-08), their dominance was assured. As evidenced in phase one above, they were consistently purchasing the most foreigners, and as evidenced by their budget, were purchasing the best Czech players. Thus the number of total articles about the MNBL decreased as the competitive balance of the league disappeared. This is evidenced by one of the first articles of the 2001-02 season, which states that the experts agreed the league was balanced. The reason cited was that more teams had foreigners in the key position of point guard, and there were at the beginning of this season no more than two foreigners on any one team.

The percentage of articles about foreign players is relatively high given that foreigners represented 6%, 13%, 24%, 27% and 26% of all the players in the consecutive seasons, but is more easily understood when compared to the league statistics for these seasons. The table below represents the percentage of foreigners in the top 10 in scoring, rebounding and assists for each of the 5 years studied.

**Table 10. – Foreigner percentage of top 10 statistics**

	Scoring	Rebounds	Assists
1998-99	20%	40%	20%
2001-02	40%	50%	30%
2004-05	60%	70%	60%
2007-08	90%	90%	70%
2009-10	80%	80%	70%



The articles in the Czech print media covering the secondary sport of basketball predominantly represented passive acceptance or commodification of the use of foreigners in Czech basketball as a form of sport globalization. The points below summarize the dominant findings from our examination of five marker seasons:

1. Almost equal coverage of the NBA (where only one or no Czech was playing) and the Czech Mattoni NBL.
2. Reporting on foreign players was dominantly tied to performance.
  - a. Foreign players dominated individual statistics.
  - b. Foreign players dominated the rosters of the most visible teams.
3. Star players who had longevity in the Czech league were most celebrated.
  - a. They were most often covered by personal interest stories.
  - b. Their retention was received as league success.
4. Personal profile stories differed based on cultural proximity.
  - a. Slovak and Croatian stars success on and off the court was taken as Czech success, and stories about them contained no reflection of cultural distance.
  - b. Non-EU or American profile stories consistently contained a hint of cultural rejection.

While the conclusions of our review of print media differ from Klein's, the patterns of observations are similar. Klein found almost equal coverage of the Dominicans who played in the American Major Leagues as he found to those remaining at home (1991a). The difference lies in that Klein's sample had several hundred players playing in the foreign star league, while Czech had only one playing in the NBA, for only a portion of the time period studied. However, both studies find that the dominant theme in coverage of the home player in the foreign league is the celebration of the nationality of the player(s) covered. Klein, whose study represents a primary sport, celebrates the cultural superiority of the Dominican player, while Czech media celebrates its lone star from a secondary sport and his acceptance among the elite. So while Klein observes this as cultural rejection, we observe it as cultural commodification.

Klein observed that the better a player was the more reporting focused on their performance, and the worse a player was the more the reporting focused on personal interest (1991a). Our results found the opposite to be true. The better a player was the more they were reported on and the more likely they were to have personal interest stories written about them. The lower-performing foreigners were largely not reported on beyond a mention of future hope upon their arrival in the first few years of our study. Further, Klein's personal interest stories were stronger in their slant toward reporting the cultural offenses committed by the foreign player, while our observations were that these offenses

were mentioned only occasionally in an underhanded way. Thus again, where Klein observed cultural rejection, we observed passive cultural acceptance and commodification.

## DISCUSSION

Based on the theories outlined in Chapter 1 of the dissertation, and the three phases of research, we will now attempt to summarize fandom in Czech basketball. Specifically, we are trying to understand the effect of the growth in number of foreign players in the highest Czech league on fan attendance and youth participation. Over the 12 -year period which this study covers the number of foreigners in the top Czech basketball league increased from 11 players to a high of 54 players out of an average of 200 players in the league. The number of foreigners increased from approximately 5% of the players to 25%. It was hypothesized that such a large shift in player demographics would have a concurrent effect on the popularity of the sport of basketball in the Czech Republic, specifically with regards to fan attendance at games and youth participation. This hypothesis was accurate in that the number of foreigners was highly correlated to the growth in both fan attendance and official youth participation.

Fan attendance increased from a league-wide home game attendance average of 547 to 824. This represented almost a 50% increase in fan attendance. Finally, while the number of youth registered with the Czech basketball federation decreased from 25,411 to 23,745 (6.5% decrease), when considered as a percentage of the available population there was actually a 22% increase. Other data of interest include the decrease in print media coverage from 242 articles about the MNBL in the newspapers *Mladá Fronta Dnes* and *Sport* in the 1998 season, to only 107 in the 2009-10 season. However, television coverage of the league increased from no games on Czech TV during the regular season in the first year of the study to 58 games in the final year of the study. And lastly, the capacity of the arenas where the league played its games increased significantly from an average of 1509 seats to an average of 2610 seats.

The overall popularity of Czech basketball increased compared to other secondary sports in the Czech Republic to a limited level with the increased use of foreign players. This statement is remarkable as the Czech Republic is largely a closed, homogeneous culture with a low percentage of immigration, and so acceptance of immigrants would not be expected (Gartner, 1989; Hofstede, 2001; Smith, Trompenaars, & Dugan, 1995; Westerbeek, 1999). Thus we would suggest there is a limit to this acceptance which has not yet been met in the fandom of Czech basketball. Meaning that as foreign players who are predominantly black come into the Czech league the affect will be positive on popularity only as long as the Czech players or at least white European players remain the visible, dominant majority on the court. It is expected that the current ratio of 25% foreigners is approaching this cultural limit of acceptance. This limit in cultural acceptance on fandom was reflected in our media review. Those star players most accepted were the dominant foreigners who stayed for multiple

years in the MNBL. However, there was consistent attention drawn to the remaining cultural distance between them and average Czech culture.

The foreign players raised the skill level of the league, along with the speed and attractiveness of the game. Because the fan base fell into the categories of passionate partisans and aficionados, this increased skill level was recognized and valued. Because the foreign players who came were better players than the Czech players, the level of the league rose not only at home, but within Europe. This was exemplified by the reality that the top two teams in the Czech league played in European leagues as well, which was not the case at the beginning of the 12 -year study. These two teams had the most foreigners on their rosters, the highest home game attendance and each year advanced further in the respective European leagues where they played. Playing and succeeding in Europe-wide leagues is a clear signifier to fans and potential fans that the level of basketball is improving in the Czech Republic. This clear signifier of league improvement increased fan attendance and youth interest in the game, in spite of decreased print media coverage.

The use of foreign players was very visible on teams, not only because they were most often black, but also because these players dominated playing time, individual statistics, and consequently print media coverage. This difference in color and culture from Czechs would go against role model and fandom theories mentioned in chapter II of the dissertation, in that the heroes of the Czech game were different from the fans and youth. As stated above the research seems to indicate that role models are most often similar in demographics to those who take them on. The same has been shown to be true of the most popular athletes with regards to fandom. Our media analysis showed commodification at play in this variable in that while black American stars were accepted, when Slovaks or Croatians appeared as stars, not only was their success in the league brought to light, but their success beyond the league was highlighted.

What is interesting to note from the quantitative data and interviews obtained here, is that the attendance numbers went up in the smaller cities when more foreigners were used, but only for the first year. It is thus hypothesized that after the first year, the interest from fans in someone or something different, tapered off back to the previous home attendance numbers. This was reflected in the low within-team correlation between number of foreigners and home attendance. However, when we look closer at the data, home attendance did not taper off when the level of team play rose significantly and then remained at the higher level in consequent years. This is partially reflected in our path analysis diagram from phase one of the results. It also tapered off less in cities where the star foreigner stayed for more than one year. However, the staying of star foreigners for more than one year on teams which performed outside the top three in the league was very, very rare (only 6 occurrences in 12 years), even with two teams who said it was part of their marketing strategy. This lack of retention of star foreigners outside of top teams represents a lack of understanding of fandom on the side of the owners and team management. Mullin, Hardy, and Sutton suggest that consumers

are constantly filtering and interpreting cues about sport products relative to their self-image, and thus there must be a convergence of the core sport product (the extraleague team and its star players) and the consumer (the fan and/or the potential youth participant) (2007). So while the use of foreign players is attractive to passionate partisans and aficionados, and teams are learning to make an effort to increase their effect through marketing and exposure to their youth teams, there is still much more to be done to improve the popularity of the sport of basketball outside the realm of passionate partisans and aficionados. As well, the trend toward blackness is probably approaching the limit for such a homogeneous culture.

## CONCLUSION

The NBA has sped up the globalization of the world through sport by disseminating the values of the powerful core country of the USA out to the rest of the world through the media. They have actively pursued the best players from around the world, brought them into their league and used those players to consequently open the media portals to millions of people across wider and wider cultural spaces. This phenomenon has been well researched in sport globalization literature, and was even exemplified in our phase 3 research where we saw equal print media coverage of the NBA and the MNBL. There was equal print media coverage of one Czech playing in the primary sport of a core country, and an average of 140 Czechs playing at the highest level of a secondary sport in a semi-periphery country.

To date the research in sport migration has been dominated by research from the perspective of primary sports and core countries. The NBA, or English Premier League Football, are shown to “de-skill” the periphery and semi-periphery countries, when the best players from around the world leave their homes to go play in these top leagues in pursuit of greater financial gain, better training and competition conditions, greater opportunity for sport development, and fame. At the beginning of our study, we found only eight Czechs playing outside their homeland, and by year twelve this number had grown to 94. At first we observed these players playing primarily in border countries of Germany, Austria and Poland, but over time increasing numbers of Czech players were found in core countries where basketball was a primary sport such as Spain and Italy. However, whether or not this represents the de-skilling of Czech basketball remains to be seen, as we observed a strong correlation between the number of Czechs choosing to play outside Czech, and the number of youth choosing to take up the sport of basketball.

Both of these trends in sport migration, the domination of core countries, and the de-skilling of semi-periphery and periphery countries were already well researched and outside the goals of our research, however they rose to the surface in our research as well.

We set out to study the use of immigrant athletes to build a non-primary sport in a semi-periphery country and its effect on sport growth in that country. Specifically, we measured the

correlation between the use of foreigners and the effect on attendance and youth development. As a secondary sport in the Czech Republic, the reliance on foreigners has increased exponentially over the 12 years studied from 11 in 1998 to 45 in 2010. Consistent with other research this was highly correlated to a decrease in reliance on home-grown, Czech talent. There were fewer Czechs playing in the MNBL and more playing outside the borders of the country. However, in contrast to most other sport migration research, we found a corresponding increase in fans attending MNBL basketball games and increase in the number of youth choosing to play basketball. So we can tentatively say based on our results that the use of foreigners has increased the popularity of the secondary sport of basketball in Czech.

The foreigners coming to play basketball in Czech predominantly came from countries where basketball is the primary sport. In other words, the bridges coming into the secondary sport of basketball in Czech come from core and other semi-periphery countries which have an over-supply of skilled basketball labor. These foreign players were initially more expensive than the Czechs whose playing spots they were taking, but their higher quality made their higher cost a good investment for MNBL teams. Those who brought foreigners in first gained a competitive advantage over the competition. As in any industry, in order to keep the competition fair, and protect the power of the local labor force (Czech basketball players) the Czech Basketball Federation placed quotas and rules on the use of foreign players. These rules were adjusted six times during the 12 years of our study. There was pressure not only from the local market to make and adjust these rules, but also from the global market, in the form of EU laws and FIBA rules. Eventually, virtually all teams were forced to use foreign players in order to remain competitive. The few teams which chose not to use foreign players in our 12 -year study quickly fell down to a lower league. As the quota on foreign players got higher, not only did the number of Czechs able to play in the MNBL decrease, but the demand for higher quality Czechs to fill fewer spots increased. High demand and low supply resulted in foreigners becoming cheaper than Czech players, and increased dominance by teams with higher budgets. Hence the top team in the league won seven of the last 12 years we studied, used the most foreigners, had the highest quality Czech players (reflected in their statistical dominance among Czech players), and the highest budget. Therefore, the overproduction of skilled labor by a core country has pushed the market for Czech players to an unsustainable level. While the Czech basketball labor market has not yet shown itself to be unsustainable at the current levels, the concurrent examples which most closely model the Czech situation, England and Israel, have shown this to be the result of such a model (Falcous & Maguire, 2005; Galily & Bernstein, 2008; Galily & Sheard, 2002).

The immigrants coming to play basketball in Czech were not only found to be coming from countries where basketball is the primary sport, but are increasingly black. This trend in sport and cultural development has also been highly researched. These black players are sought after by teams because they have skills which are not found in Czech and other European players, and because they

are attractive to fans. Our research revealed that while there was resistance to this cultural distance in the early years of our study, it decreased over time. Initial resistance came from fans and media, and was evident in the unwillingness of teams to use foreigners, specially black ones, in their marketing efforts. By the end of our study we find fans more attracted to the black athlete than white foreigners, and obtaining black stars even as part of the marketing strategy of teams. There remains occasional recognition of this cultural distance in the print media, but it is very commodified due to the years of dominant performance of black, foreign athletes on teams and across the league, and the media coverage of the NBA. This area of the acceptance of stars and role models who are culturally distant from the population is speculated to be largely due to the fact that basketball is a secondary sport as compared to a primary sport in the Czech Republic.

As foreigners have increased in the Czech league, they have come to dominate the statistics of the MNBL. As they have dominated the statistics, they have become the focus of the print media attention on the sport of basketball. This, along with the decrease in competitive balance in the top Czech league, has led to a rapid reduction in the number of articles reporting on the MNBL. The coverage of foreigners in the MNBL favors those foreigners who are culturally closer to the Czech culture, whether by nature of their tenure in the league, or similarity of national culture. Further, the print media has adjusted to the globalization of the sport of Czech basketball, which is evidenced by a reduction in the mentioning of the nationality of the foreign players, a reduction in the reporting of new foreign players entering the league, and by generalizing the success of those foreign stars as success for Czech.

Finally, though the marketing done by Czech basketball teams remains in its infancy, and targets only those already in relationship with the sport, teams are beginning to use the foreigners to commercialize their product. Over time we saw a big shift in the use of foreign players in the marketing of teams. This is evidence of the globalization of the sport and the culture on several levels. That a secondary sport is using and relying more on marketing represents a shift and the influence of globalization in the sport. Teams see their sport and their players as a product to be marketed. That they are willing to market the cultural difference of their product in order to set themselves apart shows the effect of globalization on the receiving culture that has occurred over time.

The use of immigrants in the secondary sport of basketball in the semi-periphery country of the Czech Republic has increased the popularity of the sport using the measures of fan attendance and youth registered to play basketball. As a form of globalization the use of immigrant athletes has globalized the sport and the culture surrounding the sport, bringing them more into conformity with the core countries the majority of the sporting immigrants are coming from. These sporting immigrants have also played a role in the socialization of the youth who view them as role models, whether as fellow players or as fans, again socializing them with the values from the core country of the immigrants. Using a figurational mixed methods model we have seen the intended and unintended

effects of politics, in the form of rule changes, economics, in the form of supply and demand shifts, and social processes. While we conclude that the use of immigrant athletes has increased the popularity of the sport of basketball over the 12 years studied, we conclude with a word of caution that more is not better. A further increase in the use of immigrant athletes in the sport of basketball is likely to damage the growing popularity of the sport by increasing economic imbalance, decreasing competitive balance, decreasing media interest, and increasing cultural distance to an unacceptable level for the receiving Czech culture.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### MNBL teams

The increased use of foreign players alone does not draw more fans within a given city. When foreign players raise the level of team performance for multiple seasons, then increases in home attendance are sustained. Additionally, the number of youth choosing to play the game of basketball is on the rise when measured against the available population of youth (to age 19). These youth are more likely to attend basketball games when foreign stars are playing. These youth appear to view foreign basketball players as role models and desire to interact with them. Therefore:

- Teams should strive to sign at least one of their foreign players to a multiple -year contract.
- Use foreign players in the team's marketing efforts (which increases in effectiveness if they have multiple -year contracts).
- Make sure the team is taking their foreign players into schools and children's homes. Those teams which are doing this often have the largest development programs.
- Use foreign players in the team's youth recruiting efforts ("*nabor*" in Czech) and to help run youth practices with regularity. Put these activities into the contracts of the foreign players as part of their job.
- Choose players of character. The foreign player is more likely to be noticed in the host team city, interact with fans after games, and be looked up to as a role model. Therefore, take the time to find out about the player's character and professionalism, not just his level of skill and experience.

### CBF

Average home attendance and the number of youth playing basketball are both rising and show a positive correlation to the use of foreigners. (The actual number of youth registered to play has decreased by 6.5%; however, when the actual number of kids playing is taken as a percentage of the number of youth available to play in the population, then there is a 22% increase over the 12 years studied.) Team decision makers consistently expressed that they are using more foreign players not only to remain competitive, but also because Czech players are not available to play. Additionally,

team decision makers consistently expressed that foreign players are less expensive than Czech players. Statistically, there was a high correlation between the number of foreigners coming to play in the MNBL and the number of Czechs choosing to play outside of Czech. This statistical measure must be interpreted alongside the knowledge that there is also a positive statistical correlation between the number of foreigners playing in the MNBL, the number of Czechs choosing to play outside Czech, and the number of youth choosing to play basketball. Finally, the print media coverage of the MNBL has reduced by 50% as the competitive balance has been lost in the MNBL. And the Czech print media coverage of the MNBL is equal to the print media coverage of the NBA and top European leagues. Therefore:

- Rule changes
  - There is consensus among MNBL teams that the total number of foreigners should be lowered and there should be no delineation between non-EU and EU players. We would recommend making these changes.
  - Half of MNBL teams interviewed were in favor of a rule mandating the use of Czech players, particularly players under 19 or 20. However, such a rule would both decrease the level of competition in the MNBL, and inflate the price of young Czech players. This price imbalance would be counter-productive to the overall retention of Czech players, and has been ineffective in the leagues which have employed it to date (Germany, Poland and Israel).
- Competitive balance
  - Efforts need to be made to increase competitive balance in the MNBL. There needs to be political, legislative, and practical support of other teams trying to reach the level of success in European competitions which Nymburk has achieved. A league dominated by one team loses attractiveness for fans and media. At the same time the success of Nymburk and its consequent media attention is positive for the league and helps keep some of the best Czech players in the MNBL. It is in the overall best interests of the league to help other teams achieve this level.
  - Print media and TV coverage will increase if there is a sense of competitive balance in the league. Both of these factors affect fan attendance and youth choosing to play the sport of basketball. Therefore league competition structure needs to be considered in such a way as to show maximum parity. League TV contracts need to be negotiated in such a way as to display not just the best team, but a high level of parity in the league.



## Future Research

This study was intentionally focused on a non-primary, or secondary sport, and intentionally included a quantitative element, as both of these have been under-researched in sport migration studies. To add value to the current study and the body of research that examines sport migration, complimentary research needs to be done which aids in cultural understanding within the semi-periphery Czech context, and which illuminates the differences between primary and secondary sport. Therefore:

- A survey of fan response to sporting immigrants in the order of that done by Falcous and Maguire (2005), would add comparative value on a qualitative level, thus making the quantitative research contained herein more generalizable.
- The multi-level quantitative model created in this research can be easily duplicated in other longitudinal sport contexts, thus providing a quantifiable comparison of globalization response to the phenomenon of sport migration.
  - This could be carried out on other non-primary sports across cultures to compare cultural response.
  - This could be carried out on primary sports within the Czech culture to compare cultural response in more valued cultural space.
- The media analysis portion of this study was conducted using print media because there was so much more of it to evaluate compared to broadcast media in the secondary sport of basketball from the beginning of the 12 years studied. However, in the ensuing 12 years, the broadcast media coverage of both the MNBL and other basketball leagues (NBA, Euroleague and EuroCup) has rapidly increased in the Czech media landscape. At the same time that the broadcast coverage has increased, the number of channels on which basketball can be watched or followed has expanded exponentially. Thus the effect of this expansion and the nature of the coverage of both foreigners in the Czech league and Czechs playing outside the Czech Republic could be measured and perhaps correlated with the number of youth choosing to play the sport of basketball.

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