

Opportunities and Challenges for CBA Chinese Players in the Absence of Foreign Players in a Closed Tournament System

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the opportunities and challenges faced by Chinese players in all first-phase games during the 2021-2022 CBA season. The results show that in games played in a closed tournament system without foreign players, Chinese players gain opportunities such as more playing time and shots since rookies and prospective rookies also have more opportunities to prove themselves. National team players can adapt to international competitions earlier; however, they also face challenges such as being prone to injuries from excessive game loads, different playing time from previous home and away games, and requirements of handling key balls and re-establishing the core of the team.

Keywords: *lack of foreign aid, Competition system, closed competition, CBA Chinese players*

1. PREFACE

Against the lingering Covid-19 epidemic across the world, China hosted the Beijing Winter Olympics in 2022, and the Chinese men's basketball team went to Japan to participate in the basketball World Cup qualifying games. The CBA League announced that for the 2021-2022 season starting on October 16, the sports league schedule would be adjusted to 38 rounds for the regular season, and 20 club teams will play by a double round-robin system. The regular season would be held in 3 phases, with 13 rounds of matches in the first phase, 15 rounds in the second phase and ten rounds in the third phase [1]. The total number of games played this season would be less than what in previous ones. Due to the recurrence of the Covid-19 cases, most of the foreign players would not be available on time, and some of them were even, unfortunately, infected on their way back to the team. The league adopted a closed competition to ensure that the matches were carried out.

As we all know, the joining of foreign players has significantly improved the overall competitive level of the league as many of them have playing experience in the NBA, and their basketball skills are much better than that of Chinese players, which can make up for a number of shortcomings in the offensive and defensive side,

improve the competitive level of Chinese players, and enhance the overall competitive strength of the team [2]. However, the dominance of foreign players in the team also affects the technical and psychological maturity of Chinese players and the sustainable development of Chinese basketball to a certain extent [3]. The over-reliance on foreign players has led to a significant reduction in playing time for Chinese players and a significant lack of experience in real-world exercise and control of the game [4]. Therefore, under the influence of factors such as closed matches in the tournament system without foreign players, players are uncomfortable with the unfamiliar environment and venues, the density of training, the duration and intensity of the game, the adjustment and recovery, the psychological pressure, etc., resulting in many players playing unstable and even far worse than last season, making the game less enjoyable. Therefore, it is important to discuss the opportunities and challenges faced by Chinese players in the absence of foreign players in the closed tournament system, and to improve the level of Chinese players.

2. SUBJECTS AND METHODS

2.1 Research Subjects

CBA Chinese basketball players

2.2 Research Methodology

2.2.1 Literature review

Reviewing basketball-related books and relevant literature on CNKI provides theoretical support for this study.

2.2.2 Video observation method

Videos of the first phase of regular season games in the 2021-2022 CBA League are watched to observe the game performance of Chinese players and to obtain information relevant to this study.

2.2.3 Comparative analysis method

Average points, shot probability, and turnovers of each team in the first phase of the 2021-2022 CBA League regular season are analyzed and compared with that of the previous season's regular season. The average points, minutes played, and turnovers of Chinese players in the first phase of the 2021-2022 CBA League regular season are compared and analyzed with that of the previous season's regular season to provide data support for this study.

3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

3.1 Registered foreign players in the first phase of this regular season

Most foreign players sit at the heart of the team with strong individual abilities, dominating the team's games [5]. From the beginning of the last season to the playoffs, there were 45 foreign players registered, while at the end of the first phase of this regular season, only seven teams had registered one foreign player each, which is a huge gap.

Table 1 tells all the seven foreign players are the main players of the team gaining points, with more shoot attempts and longer playing time, playing an important role in the game, while the playing time and the number of shots of the Chinese players in the same position are relatively reduced. The arrival of foreign players not only brings us many new basketball concepts, techniques, and tactics, but also harms the development of Chinese players. In the development of reserve talents in basketball, with the increasing number of powerful foreign players, some of them can even lead the game by themselves, which drastically reduces the opportunities for Chinese players to exercise and affects the development of domestic reserve talents [5]. Therefore, in the first phase of this season's regular season, with a common lack of foreign players, it is important to provide more playing time and shots for Chinese players, so that more Chinese players can take up the responsibility of

gaining points and have more hands-on training opportunities.

3.2 Comparison and analysis of each team's average point, shoot hit rate and miss in this season with that of the last season

Offensive ability refers to the offensive ability of players on the court in the basketball game to shoot for points with the purposeful use of their individual skills and overall tactics, which can be divided into individual offensive ability and team offensive ability [6]. The strength of the offensive ability can be reflected by factors such as points and the way to gain the point, hit rate, rebounding, assist and miss, individual attack, and team cooperation [6]. In the following, the average point, shooting hit rate and average miss data of each team in this season's first phase of the regular season are selected and analyzed compared to that in the last season.

3.2.1 Analysis of each team's average score compared with that in the last season

The average score is the most intuitive index to evaluate a team's offensive ability, and fast-paced offense for high scores has become the mainstream in modern basketball [7]. Table 2 shows that in the closed game situation of the tournament system with a lack of foreign players (except for the teams of Shanghai, Shenzhen, and Shanxi). All teams had different degrees of decrease in average score, especially the teams of Qingdao, Guangdong, Fujian, Suzhou, Jiutai and Shandong, with over 10 points less than that in the last season. These six teams adopted all-Chinese lineups in the 13 rounds of the first season, so the team's scores dropped sharply in the absence of foreign players. Zhejiang's two teams were relatively better, with Zhejiang Chouzhou and Zhejiang Guangxia scoring 4.5 and 3.6 points less, respectively, also with a full Chinese lineup. Hence, it can be inferred that these two teams from Zhejiang province were less affected by the tournament system and closed games without foreign players. By contrast, the Shanghai team, Shenzhen team and Shanxi team gained more scores compared to the last season, with the Shanghai team being the best, gaining 7.3 more points per game. That success can be explained by three reasons. First, its foreign player Franklin gain an average point of 19.4, consisting of 8.6 rebounds and 11.3 assists to help the team. Secondly, the employment of Zhelin Wang and Junwei Ren, two former core players in the Fujian team and Shanxi team, respectively. Thirdly, the introduction of Chunjiang Li, the coach who had led the Guangdong team to win the championship many times. These three points greatly improved the overall strength of the Shanghai team and realized better offensive ability than other teams. Therefore, in terms of average points, most teams were affected to varying degrees; even the defending champion Guangdong team, overall

performance was much affected.

3.2.2 Analysis of each team's average shoot hit rate compared with that in the last season

Table 2 shows that the teams of Shanghai, Shenzhen, Zhejiang Chouzhou, Zhejiang Guangxia, Guangzhou, and Beikong witnessed an improved average shoot hit rate compared with that in the last season, among which the teams of Shanghai, Shenzhen, Guangzhou, and Beikong had one foreign player each, enjoying stronger offensive ability and certain advantages when playing against other teams. Though the teams of Zhejiang Chouzhou and Zhejiang Guangxia had no foreign players, the competition venue was set in Zhejiang province, so the tournament system and closed settings were advantages for them. The rest of the teams had different degrees of decrease in the average shoot hit rate, indicating that most of the teams' shoot hit rates were affected.

3.2.3 Analysis of each team's average miss compared to that in the last season

The lost possession of the ball in the control of a player due to improper individual actions is referred to as a miss of that player or the team [8]. Table 2 shows that all teams had more misses than in the last season, excluding five teams of Shanxi, Guangzhou, Shandong, Xinjiang and Nanjing, whose average number of misses per game was reduced or could be maintained. This shows that the closed game of the tournament system had a greater impact on the Chinese players' performance. The average miss of the Beikong team was 5.6 times more than that in the last season, and if the opponent successfully took those misses to carry out a counterattack, then its average scores lost could be as more as at least 11.2 points. This was one of the reasons why there were more misses in the first phase of this season's regular season, which was an opportunity for Chinese players to be encouraged and a challenge to get rid of the dependence on foreign players to improve their skills.

3.3 Analysis of the average point, playing time and misses of Chinese players compared with that in the last season's regular season

In the first 13 rounds of this season's regular season, three foreign players and 17 Chinese players were ranking in the top 20 in terms of average playing time. Their average playing time was above 34 minutes, with the highest one coming to Mason, the Guangzhou team's foreign player, averaging 40 minutes on the court, followed by Hanlin Tao's 39 minutes. The table below compares the average point, playing time and misses of the top 20 Chinese players with that in the last season's regular season.

3.3.1 Analysis of Chinese players' average points compared with that in the last season's regular season

In the intense basketball game, the advantage of playing time per game means opportunities of getting more points than other players, but not every player can translate opportunities into points [9]. Table 3 shows that 13 out of the 17 Chinese players with over 34-minute average playing time experienced increased points to different degrees, excluding Linjian Chen, Yuxing Jiang, Xireljiang, and Hailong Jiao. The best example was Abdu Shalamu, the Xinjiang team's captain. Despite a major injury, he still contributed 24.2 points per game, averaging 16.9 more points than in the last season's regular season, carrying the banner of the team. Many people say that Abdu Shalamu, no matter what level of competition, whether to win or lose, must fight until the last second and would never give up any opportunity to turn defeat into victory, and his desire and pursuit of victory is what every Chinese player must learn. The next one is the Beijing team's Ziming Fan, who increased his average point from 9.0 in the last to 18.6 this season, thanks to his newly mid-range shooting shown this season. His performance in the first 13 rounds showed that he could both play inside-out and shoot steadily from outside, and handle the ball more flexibly than before, which is a great contribution to the team. The fact that most Chinese players gained higher average points shows that they need other team members to share the burden of gaining points in the first stage of this season than in the last season, increasing the stress load of Chinese players to a certain extent.

3.3.2 Analysis of the average playing time of Chinese players compared with that in the last season's regular season

If a player has a lot of playing time, it means that this player is irreplaceable in the team as the main force of the team, and his absence would likely result in the victory of that the other team. There are two possible reasons why the coach grants so much playing time to the player. First, as the game is getting fierce and the score is very close, both sides put the best lineup on the court, and the score would not yet be known until the last moment; the other one is that the game is still in doubt, the team that is trailing still has a chance to catch up or even overtake the score. When the leading side rotates some of the players, the other side would keep its strongest lineup to make a comeback. Otherwise, when the score gap is large enough, or the game is basically out of doubt, both sides would rotate their substitute players for hands-on experience.

Table 3 shows that except for Yuxing Jiang and Zhelijiang Xi, the remaining 15 players all had more playing time than that in the last season's regular season, with Abdu Shalamu, Zhaobao Ge, Jianghuai Li and

Ziming Fan enjoying 13-14 minutes more playing time. This indicates that for the sake of the team's performance, Chinese players must increase the playing time to stabilize the game's situation. For the above four players, average playing time in the last season was controlled within two periods, and they rotated more with the foreign players of the same positions. But in this season, their playing time was suddenly extended to three periods, and even the whole game when they are relied on to win it. For some players whose average playing time was increased accordingly, they had more opportunities to perform this season than in the last season, but if they don't grasp it well and perform poorly on the court, players in the same position will likely perform better and stand out in the team competition. The players who basically did not enter the court in the last season also got corresponding playing time this season due to the lack of foreign players and the compact schedule of the tournament system. Some young players made a stunning debut, with double-digit points, and were able to grasp the opportunity, so they will be reused by the coach next time. By contrast, some others were so nervous and missed repeatedly that they let the coach down.

3.3.3 Analysis of Chinese players' average miss compared with that in the last season's regular season

The number of misses reflects the level of tactics of a player or a team and the ability to use techniques and tactics in a fierce game [8]. A player is one of the important indicators to evaluate his personal level in the game. Table 3 shows that only 3 out of the 17 players had a decrease in an average miss, while the remaining 14 had an increase, which might be caused by the increase in average playing time and physical exertion, or maybe by the lack of concentration in the game. The average miss of Weize Jiang and Fan Zhang increased 1.6 times and 1.7 times, respectively, which may seem small but can be fatal under the fierce situation of the game, and may give the opponent 3.2-5.1 points for a counterattack. At the peak of the game, every point is crucial. If one miss leads to losing the game, it will affect the player's playing time in the following games.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusion

4.1.1 Opportunities for Chinese players

4.1.1.1 Chinese players have more playing time

In the absence of foreign players, main Chinese players can get more playing time as rotated players become main players, rookie players and those who did

not get playing time in the last season get corresponding playing time accordingly.

4.1.1.2 Chinese players have more shot opportunities

In the absence of foreign players, for the rare teams with one foreign player, most of the points are mainly taken by Chinese players, and for the rest of the teams, all points must be taken by Chinese players, which greatly increases the opportunities for Chinese players to hold the ball and take shots, including the ability to handle key shots, which can be well exercised.

4.1.1.3 Chinese rookies and prospective rookies have opportunities to prove their worth

Many players are waiting for such an opportunity throughout their careers, and can go from long-time backup to be one in the lineup if they seize it.

4.1.1.4 National players must adapt to international tournaments in advance

At this stage of the tournament, there are morning, afternoon, and evening game times, different from the previous home and away games, which were basically in the evening. Chinese players' stable performance at different times lies undoubtedly in an early adaptation to the international competition.

4.1.2 Challenges for Chinese players

4.1.2.1 Excessive exercise load increases the risk of injury

Many Chinese players have too much playing time, and the original game load is increased or even doubled at once, which makes them prone to fatigue and increased risk of injury.

4.1.2.2 Game time is different from the previous home and away games

When playing at 11-12 am, which should have been lunch break, most Chinese players don't show their normal performance, so playing always is the thing our Chinese players need to work hard.

4.1.2.3 Getting more opportunities to handle key shots

Chinese players taking more shots will reduce their efficiency when they do not have matching physical strength, which will test the stability of Chinese players' performance in critical periods of the game.

4.1.2.4 Re-establishing the team's core

In the absence of foreign players, many Chinese players must act as the core of the team's offense, and the

whole team system change to a certain extent. The one who can adapt to the change earlier will be crucial to gaining points.

4.2 Suggestions

First, teams can learn to allocate main players to two lineups to have a good rotation during the game, increase the rest time of main players, and ensure that the team can still maintain a considerable level of fitness by the fourth period or the decisive period.

Secondly, given the lack of venues for team training during the tournament, pre-game training for players is very important, and new training venues can be used.

Third, without an audience on the spot, most players are less likely to reach a state of excitement in the game. In the low-risk area of the tournament, the audience on the spot can be allowed appropriately, which can also increase the income of the league, and meet the fans' desire for live games.

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Table 1 Average contribution of registered foreign players in the first phase of this regular season

Player	Team	Score	Number of games	Pointe	Shoot attempt	Hit%	Rebound	Assist	Steal	Playing time
Fylde	Shanxi	9-4	12	24.0	20.2	43.8%	7.2	11.1	2.8	35
Mason	Guangzhou	10-3	8	21.4	17.9	44.1%	5.1	8.0	1.5	40
Booker	Shenzhen	11-2	13	21.1	16.9	46.4%	4.1	8.2	1.8	33
Trotter	Ningbo	1-12	5	20.2	16.6	49.4%	7.4	5.2	5.6	31
Vogel	Liaoning	12-1	6	20.0	11.8	54.9%	2.3	2.7	2.7	25
Franklin	Shanghai	10-3	13	19.4	14.2	42.7%	8.6	11.3	1.5	34
Haas	Beikong	7-6	11	13	8.0	60.2%	10.7	1.5	0.4	26.3

Table 2 Comparison of team data in this regular season with that in the last season

Team	This season score	Last season score	Score gap	This season Hit rate%	Last season hit rate%	Hit rate gap	This season miss	Last season miss	Miss gap
Shanghai	112.4	105.1	7.3	48.4	46.3	2.1	17.1	15.5	1.6
Shenzhen	108.0	105.1	2.9	49.0	47.6	1.4	15.5	14.2	1.3
Liaoning	107.7	111.7	-4	48.1	49.3	-1.2	15.8	13.6	2.2
Shanxi	106.6	98.7	7.9	45.9	46.2	-0.3	12.9	16.4	-3.5
Zhejiang Chouzhou	105.4	109.9	-4.5	46.4	44.8	1.6	16.8	13.8	3

Zhejiang	105.2	108.8	-3.6	50.0	48.7	1.3	16.9	15.3	1.6
Guangxia									
Guangdong	101.6	119.4	-17.8	48.3	51.0	-2.7	18.2	16.5	1.7
Guangzhou	101.3	102.3	-1	49.2	47.4	1.8	13.8	15.6	-1.8
Shandong	98.0	108.2	-10.2	46.9	47.2	-0.3	16.1	16.1	0
Beijian	96.2	100.7	-4.5	49.1	45.4	3.7	19.7	14.1	5.6
Xinjiang	95.8	105.6	-9.8	45.2	48.6	-3.4	15.8	16.2	-0.4
Tianjin	93.4	100.6	-7.2	40.3	44.7	-4.4	18.1	17.4	0.7
Jiutai	93.3	104.0	-10.7	46.2	47.1	-0.9	15.3	12.3	3.0
Sichuan	92.4	101.2	-8.8	43.9	46.8	-2.9	20.5	17.0	3.5
Nanjing	91.2	96.9	-5.7	42.6	44.7	-2.1	16.4	18.5	-2.1
Beijing	90.1	97.9	-7.8	45.2	45.7	-0.5	16.4	14.5	1.9
Qingdao	90.0	109.3	-19.3	42.8	47.5	-4.7	17.9	15.2	2.7
Fujian	89.5	106.3	-16.8	42.2	47.3	-5.1	19.5	14.4	5.1
Suzhou	82.9	96.1	-13.2	43.0	44.2	-1.2	18.6	18.1	0.5

Table 3 Player data comparison

Player	Team	This season Point	Last season point	Point gap	This season appearance	Last season appearance	Appearance gap	This season miss	Last season miss	Miss gap
Hanlin Tao	Shandong	22.5	15.0	7.5	39	31	8	2.1	1.7	0.4
Jiang Weize	Jiutai	14.9	13.7	1.2	38	30	8	2.9	1.3	1.6
Fan Zhang	Beikong	20.5	15.1	5.1	38	32	6	3.0	1.3	1.7
Jinming Cui	Jiutai	15.2	11.2	4	38	34	4	2.2	1.7	0.5
Yingjun Chen	Guangzhou	20.8	13.5	7.3	37	35	2	3.0	2.5	0.5
Linjian Chen	Fujian	15.2	18.6	-3.4	37	37	0	2.8	2.3	0.5
Abdu Yuxing	Xinjiang	24.2	7.3	16.9	37	24	13	2.4	1.1	1.3
Jiang Shiyan	Jiutai	15.2	15.4	-0.2	36	37	-1	2.2	1.8	0.4
Gao	Shandong.	16.0	12.4	3.6	36	32	4	3.3	2.5	0.8
Shuai Yuan	Shanxi	16.4	14.7	1.7	36	35	1	1.7	1.4	0.3
Xi relijiang	Nanjing	15.5	16.6	-1.1	36	39	-3	2.2	3.4	-1.2
Mingzhen Zhu	Guangzhou	13.1	9.6	3.5	35	33	2	1.1	1.4	-0.3
Yichao Huang	Fujian	14.2	11.2	3	35	32	3	1.8	0.9	0.9
Hailong Jiao	Shandong.	7.2	8.5	-1.3	34	27	7	0.6	1.3	-0.7
Zhaobao Ge	Shanxi	19.1	9.9	9.2	34	20	14	1.5	1.3	0.2
Jianghuai Li	Fujian	11.1	4.1	7	34	20	14	1.7	1.2	0.5
Ziming Fan	Beijing	18.6	9.0	9.6	34	21	13	1.9	1.0	0.9