

Nowitzki Effect: An Analysis of the Factors that Led to Basketball's Emergence in Germany

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Introduction

On March 19th, 2017, the University of Michigan men's basketball team met the University of Louisville in Indianapolis for a second round matchup in the NCAA tournament. The seventh-seeded Wolverines - who had been receiving a fair amount of media attention over the previous weeks after a flight they were on skidded off the runway during an attempted takeoff in high winds¹ - were coming off of a Big Ten Tournament championship and close-fought first round victory over Oklahoma State, and were set to face the two-seed Cardinals. Following a tight, back-and-forth game that saw Michigan as the victors by a 73-69 scoreline, the media spotlight turned to the stellar performance of the Wolverines' six-foot, eleven-inch sophomore forward, Moritz Wagner. Born and raised in Berlin, Germany, Wagner paced the Wolverines with a career-high twenty-six points in the contest against Louisville, and with his impressive play garnered the attention of NBA scouts. Wagner wrote an op-ed in *The Players' Tribune* - a sports-focused online journal founded by baseball player Derek Jeter featuring athletes as its authors - in which he related the team's experiences following the crash, along with his own path from Berlin to Ann Arbor, a journey beginning with his love for American sports.²

Such a love for the sporting culture of the United States (Wagner mentions filling out NCAA tournament brackets every year as a child, just as millions of Americans do every year)

¹<http://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2017/03/08/university-michigan-basketball-plane-crash/98914844/>

² Wagner, Moe. "Still Alive." *The Players' Tribune*. March 23, 2017. <https://www.theplayertribune.com/moritz-wagner-michigan-basketball-airplane/>.

would seem, on the surface, to be out of place in a country whose sporting landscape and culture is so heavily dominated by soccer. How did a boy living in a country without a long and storied basketball tradition come to realize his dream of playing the sport in the US? At least part of the answer lies in Wagner's appearance in the news a few weeks prior. As a tall, skinny forward out of Germany, who can shoot the ball well from outside the arc on top of having a variety of post moves in his repertoire, Wagner's playing style has received numerous comparisons to NBA superstar and fellow countryman Dirk Nowitzki - with whom Wagner had the opportunity to converse.³ The two Germans met prior to a Dallas Mavericks game in Detroit, relating to each other their respective experiences in basketball, and in doing so Wagner was fortunate enough to meet his childhood idol. The two players' similar styles of play are no coincidence: Wagner, just like many other young basketball players in Germany, has worked hard in molding his game to mimic that of Nowitzki, the most successful player ever to come out of his homeland. Dirk Nowitzki's influence on Moritz Wagner is clear, in the same way that it is on the rest of German basketball.

Nowitzki is celebrated in both German and American media as a figurehead for the game of basketball in his home country, lauded as the game's most important tie not just to Germany, but to Europe as a whole. To many in the United States, Nowitzki *is* the sport in a German context - though while he may be its most significant figure, he is far from the sole reason for basketball's popularity in Germany. This thesis, on top of highlighting the "Nowitzki effect" that his career in the NBA has had on the sport's following in Nowitzki's homeland, aims also to reconstruct a broader history of the game's German developments.

³ Kornacki, Steve. 2017. "Kornacki: German Countrymen Wagner, Nowitzki Share Special Moment." *Mgoblue.com*. February 20. <http://www.mgoblue.com/sports/m-baskbl/spec-rel/022017aaa.html>.

The historiography of athletics and other sports-related topics includes a wide variety of approaches toward understanding the subject matter. Many historical reconstructions, in narrowing the scopes of their intended foci, will present a developmental narrative of a specific sport, or of a specific figure within that sport, almost always a player. In this regard, my thesis views Dirk Nowitzki as having a central role in the advancement of German basketball, although there are a multitude of other factors to consider. Others may follow the history of one or multiple sports on a national, or even global level, viewing them in the context of the cultural, economic, and political environments in which they both take part and help to create.

The historiography of sport in Germany, for example, is largely concerned with narratives revolving around soccer and gymnastics as being two of the most nationally significant sports. Histories such as Annette Hofmann's *Turnen and Sport*,⁴ which connects the physical aspects of the *Turner* movement with political ideologies and identities in the early German state, or Hermann Bausinger's *Sportkultur: Sport in der heutigen Zeit*,⁵ which again emphasizes aspects of body culture in the development of the German sporting scene, dedicate much of their space toward an understanding of German national identity through the lens of sports. Providing histories that are as much political as they are cultural, these authors write about German athletics alongside an emerging and developing German state.

Unsurprisingly due to its current position as king of the German sports hierarchy, much of the historiography of German sport also focuses on the rise of soccer, and we as readers are left with no shortage of historical accounts of that sport in a German setting. Hardy Grüne offers, for example, in his 2003 book *100 Jahre Deutsche Meisterschaft: Die Geschichte des Fußballs*

⁴ Hofmann, Annette R. *Turnen and Sport*. Waxmann Verlag. 2004.

⁵ Bausinger, Hermann. *Sportkultur*. Tübingen: Attempto. 2006.

in Deutschland,⁶ a fairly complete and extensive history of soccer in Germany, celebrating the hundredth year of the crowning of a club as German champions. The chapters of Grüne's book line up, for the most part, with larger developments and milestones in the German cultural and political timeline: "Ein Volk am Ball," "Fußball unterm Hakenkreuz," "Im Schatten von Stalingrad," and "Aus Professionalisierung wird Kommerzialisierung" all cover important aspects of the history of German soccer, ones that will also be discussed as ways this thesis approaches the history of German basketball.

This history of basketball in the United States, on the other hand, is largely rooted in cultural narratives, from the game's beginnings within the muscular Christianity movement, through more recent analyses linking basketball and urban forms of culture. Yago Colás, professor at the University of Michigan and author of *Ball Don't Lie!: Myth, Genealogy, and Invention in the Cultures of Basketball*,⁷ which features in my third chapter as a foundation for the game's entrance into Germany through the channels of urban culture, dedicates much of his work toward the construction of a history of basketball centered around the understanding of race and racial identities, most visibly manifesting themselves in the on- and off-court personas of basketball's biggest stars. Colás strikes a balance in his writing between a history of basketball and a history of urban culture, creating a narrative that speaks to the importance both aspects have had on the understanding of each other.

Representing yet another type of narrative structure, Andrei Markovits and Lars Rensmann, in their book *Gaming the World: How Sports Are Reshaping Global Politics and*

⁶ Grüne, Hardy. 2003. *100 Jahre Deutsche Meisterschaft: die Geschichte des Fußballs in Deutschland*. Göttingen: Verlag Die Werkstatt.

⁷ Colás, Santiago. *Ball Don't Lie!: Myth, Genealogy, and Invention in the Cultures of Basketball*. Temple University Press. 2016.

Culture,⁸ construct an historical account of sport centered around the international and intercontinental transference of sports culture, among other things. It is from their book that the idea of the “Nowitzki effect” originates, as they attempt to explain and demonstrate the ways in which the cultural aspects of sports can diffuse across the Atlantic. In presenting a myriad of different approaches to understanding the culture associated with sports, from player-oriented case studies like those of Nowitzki and English soccer star David Beckham, to following the movement of broader trends like music and fashion, Markovits and Rensmann build the argument that, within the context of a highly globalized world, sports culture exists in an international conversation, expanding its reaches through series of global cultural interactions.

My thesis will work as a synthesis of many of these varying types of histories and historical narratives, using them in conjunction with each other to produce a history of basketball in Germany that lays out the development of the sport in a much more detailed manner than anything heretofore published. One of the challenges of creating such a historical narrative was the lack of much scholarly writing on the sport of basketball in a German context; through the original analysis of historical and contemporary media and data, and the interpretation of other secondary sources that speak to trends within German and international athletics, I have had to create my own account of basketball’s development toward its current position in the German sporting landscape.

In the first chapter of this thesis I will construct an historical narrative of the early years of the sport in Germany, a narrative based a fair amount on a timeline of events in basketball’s

⁸ Markovits, Andrei S., and Lars. Rensmann. *Gaming the World: How Sports Are Reshaping Global Politics and Culture*. 2010. xi, 345 . Princeton: Princeton University Press. <http://www.myilibrary.com?id=263942>.

history published by the *Deutscher Basketball Bund*.⁹ Much like Grüne's history of German soccer, this chapter makes connections between basketball and politically significant times throughout Germany's history. This chapter builds the foundation for my broader argument that the history of basketball in Germany is one of cultural exchange between the United States and Germany, particularly in the game's American invention in the late 19th Century and continued associative presence through the present day.

The second chapter focuses primarily on an examination of the "Nowitzki effect" proposed by Markovits and Rensmann in *Gaming the World*, confirming their assumption that increased German media coverage of Dirk Nowitzki and his Dallas Mavericks is evidence of his - along with other Germans playing in the NBA, although Nowitzki is by far the most important - centrality in the game's popularity increase in Germany. In addition to their arguments, I expand on Markovits and Rensmann's understanding of the "Nowitzki effect" to include, among other things, Nowitzki's role and portrayal as quintessentially 'German' - the authenticity of his nationality being a huge part of his appeal back home. Through analysis of German-language newspaper articles, television advertisements, and other forms of media, I will depict Nowitzki as a highly significant figure for the development of the German game.

Finally, my third chapter will focus on basketball's entry into Germany through the channels of more explicitly American cultural exchange, most notably urban culture. This chapter, drawing on Colás' understanding of the connections between basketball, race, and African American culture in the United States, will demonstrate how the game partially entered German consciousness through means other than Nowitzki's NBA career, as well as offer an

⁹ "Geschichte « Deutscher Basketball Bund." 2016. Accessed September 23. <http://www.basketball-bund.de/dbb/ueber-uns/geschichte>.

examination of some of the ways Nowitzki himself fits into these methods of discussing the sport. This chapter will also highlight the NBA's intentional push to become a globalized product and entity as a factor in the sport's German growth.

Above all else, this thesis is a narrative of basketball in Germany as a product of a history of cultural exchange between Germany and the United States. From the game's invention in 1891 to the present, the story of the sport's introduction into Germany and subsequent rise within the German athletic hierarchy revolves heavily around an international correspondence of culture, ideas, values, politics, and people with the United States; this thesis attempts to encapsulate these exchanges within one document. In approaching the sport through three different lenses - historical narrative, cultural exchange focusing on the career of Dirk Nowitzki and other German NBA players, and the export of American urban culture - this thesis aims to establish a history of the sport's increasing German presence, and the factors that helped to foster its growth.

Chapter 1: A History (and Prehistory) of Basketball in Germany

To understand the history of basketball in Germany we must first look at the game's development overseas in the United States, where the game was invented. Much of the history of basketball in Germany, as I will demonstrate throughout this chapter, features basketball as a modicum of cultural exchange between these two countries, with basketball embodying at different points in time various aspects of American culture and ideals. Although the growth of the game was slow in Germany, it existed as a spotlight on the cultural and political relationships shared between the United States and Germany during much of the 20th Century.

Basketball's Invention, and its Formative Years in the United States

Basketball is unique in its position as one of the most popular sports in the modern Western world - alongside football (its many codes including soccer, rugby union and league, American football, and Australian rules football), ice hockey, baseball, and cricket - as the chronology of its development distinguishes it from perhaps all other major sports in the West: unlike the other sports listed, basketball can point to the exact moment of its conception. Whereas most other modern sports evolved out of more primitive versions of games played less competitively, often tracing their lineages back centuries at a time, basketball is distinct amongst major modern athletic events¹⁰ in that it has a singular inventor, and that its creation is well documented.

¹⁰ Baseball, of course, has its famous inception story in which United States Army General Abner Doubleday invented the game at his farm in Cooperstown, New York. It is widely acknowledged, however, that this story is entirely a myth, concocted and furthered by baseball executives in order to promote the

Although there are games from around the world with similar objectives to basketball - most notably variations of games played by Central American natives, in which a ball must be shot through a ring high on a wall - basketball's inception in its widely popular modern form can be singularly pinpointed to its invention in 1891 by Dr. James Naismith.

As the head physical education teacher at the YMCA in Springfield, Massachusetts, Naismith found himself struggling to keep his pupils entertained during the harsh New England winters, when their athletics schedule was confined to indoor activities due to the weather.¹¹ At the time, the Muscular Christianity movement in the United States had adopted the European (notably German, which will become an important distinction later in the chapter as well) regimen of calisthenics and gymnastics to supplement the indoor athletics season between football and baseball, but Naismith observed that his students were disinterested and disengaged with such activities. Instead, he was tasked with creating a game for them to play that would capture their interests, while being able to be played indoors, hopefully avoiding the rough-and-tumble nature of sports like football on top of that.¹² Naismith's creation, "basket ball" - later shortened to simply basketball, quickly caught on amongst his students, and from

idea that baseball was a distinctly American game, and had not been derived from the British game of "rounders". See "The 'Secret History' Of Baseball's Earliest Days." *NPR.org*. N.p., 16 Mar. 2011. Web. 30 Jan. 2017 for more information.

¹¹ "Indoor physical education in the United States was concerned chiefly with calisthenics, gymnastics, and drills prior to Doctor Naismith's invention of basketball. Athletics was considered a field distinct and separate from physical education and as such deemed unscientific by the orthodox physical educators of the time. Between the football and baseball seasons, physical educators in the United States sought to adapt the Swedish, German, and French gymnastic methods. The American boy or man, however, does not adapt himself easily or cheerfully to a formal program designed for physical development. [...] Thus, there was little sustained interest among the students in the winter physical-education program. This lack of interest was largely due to the fact that there was no indoor game, during the winter season, that combined recreation and competition. Doctor Naismith's invention was a perfect solution." - Naismith, James. *Basketball: Its Origin and Development*. Introduction by Clair Bee. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996. Print. 8

¹² *Ibid.*

there spread across the country at a rapid pace. Naismith would take the game with him as he travelled, eventually becoming the basketball coach for the University of Kansas. Within a few years of the sport's invention, it had already made its way across the Atlantic, carried along on Christian missions conducted by the YMCA. By 1896, five years after Naismith's invention of the game, it had been introduced in Germany by August Hermann, the '*Turnvater*' for the city of Braunschweig.¹³ Hermann had learned of the game from his son, Ernst, who had brought it over with him from his job as the sport director of a gymnasium in Boston, and instituted the game as "*Korbball*", a direct translation of the English name of the sport. Still in its very early form - dribbling would not be introduced into the game until the following year - basketball had already crossed the physical barrier separating the two countries.

***Turnen*: The conditions of the German athletic landscape upon the arrival of basketball**

As basketball made its way from the United States across the Atlantic Ocean, the newly-invented sport was met in Germany by a culture of athletics largely resembling the conditions in American physical education systems that Dr. Naismith found to be disagreeable to his pupils, necessitating the creation of the sport in the first place. By the beginning of the 20th Century the German sporting landscape had mostly been dominated by the gymnastics and calisthenics of the *Turner* movement for well over fifty years. With its beginnings in the modernization of the early 19th Century, the *Turner* movement swept through Germany by appealing to its participants sense of anti-aristocratic and anti-Napoleonic ideals. Consisting of "exercises for the people" (*volkstümliche Übungen*), such as running, jumping, and climbing, the movement developed as

¹³ "Geschichte « Deutscher Basketball Bund." N.p., 2013. Web. 23 Sept. 2016.

much for its political factors as for its health-related ones.¹⁴ As a political movement, the *turnen* was valuable in building all of the skills necessary in preparing young men for the rigors of a military lifestyle, and the consolidation of its membership developed along with it a strong sense of national identity.¹⁵ Throughout the 19th Century the nationalistic political morals of many Germans became even more closely associated with the *Turner* movement, as Annette Hofmann writes in her book *Turnen and Sport: Transatlantic Transfers*, culminating with the unification of the Germanic states in 1871, seen by many *Turner* members as the “fulfillment of the *Turner* movement’s dream of national unity.”¹⁶ By the end of the 19th Century, although “competitive, performance- and record-oriented sport of English origin swept through Germany on its triumphal march[,...] *Turnen* remained the leading form of physical exercise in Germany until the end of the century.”¹⁷ The English sports that Hofmann refers to consisted mainly of soccer, which had been introduced to the Germans in the 1870s by a pair of their countrymen who had picked it up abroad, one of whom was August Hermann - the same August Hermann that would also introduce basketball to his country two decades later.

The German Game’s Slow Development: Basketball’s inclusion in the Olympic Games

Throughout much of the early years of basketball in Germany, the growth of the game was marked by a particularly lethargic pace, especially in comparison to both the growth of the sport’s popularity back in the United States, as well as the surge in popularity of the English introduction of soccer. By 1898, two years after August Hermann introduced basketball to his

¹⁴ Hofmann, Annette R. *Turnen and Sport: Transatlantic Transfers*. Waxmann Verlag, 2004. Print. 12

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 13

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 16

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 17

gymnasium in Braunschweig, the first professional basketball league had already formed in the United States; Naismith's thirteen original rules for the game would not be translated into German until four years after that, in 1902.¹⁸ Although the sport did not have much of a presence in Germany during its formative years, however, Germans did maintain a fairly noteworthy impact on the sport in the United States during its first couple of decades. In 1904 basketball was included as an exhibition sport at the Olympic Games in St. Louis. A tournament was held for amateur school and club teams from around the country, in order to showcase the new sport. This Olympic tournament was won by a team from Buffalo, New York, belonging to the German department of their local YMCA. As first- and second-generation German immigrants, many speaking German themselves, this group of players, known simply as the Buffalo Germans, was one of the most dominant basketball teams during the sport's early years.¹⁹ On top of their Olympic exhibition triumph, the Germans had already been victorious in a tournament for the Pan-American Games in 1901, and would go on to win an astounding 111 games in a row from 1908 to 1911,²⁰ earning themselves a reputation across the country for being an astounding basketball team. The Germans eventually changed their name to the "Orioles" in 1915 in honor of a new team sponsor, but it is very likely that the name change away from "Germans" had largely been brought on by rising anti-German sentiment with the beginning of World War I.²¹ The Buffalo Germans remain one of only four full teams to be inducted into the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, Massachusetts.

¹⁸ "Geschichte « Deutscher Basketball Bund." N.p., 2013. Web. 23 Sept. 2016.

¹⁹ Hofmann, Annette R. "Journal of Olympic History." 11.3 (2003) Print. 19.

²⁰ Peterson, Robert. *Cages to Jump Shots: Pro Basketball's Early Years*. U of Nebraska Press, 1990. Print. 56.

²¹ Hofmann, Annette R. "Journal of Olympic History." 11.3 (2003) Print. 21.

Counter to the on-court success of those athletes with German roots during the pioneer years of basketball's rapid growth in the United States, passion for the game remained difficult to find in Germany for the first handful of decades after its introduction, and the game stayed in its place in the background of the German sporting scene. The word "Basketball" in its English form began to take precedence over the German translation *Korbball* during the 1920s, but the game was still not played with any kind of regularity.²² It was not, however, until the 1930s that the game began to exhibit any kind of real growth in Germany. Upon Berlin being awarded the 1936 Olympic Games in 1931, the International Olympic Committee decided to include basketball as a full olympic sport for this event. When Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists took control of Germany in 1933, they were not initially very enthused about including basketball in the Olympiad, due to the Nazi Party's close ideological ties to the old nationalistic *Turner* movement, as Allen Guttman notes in his extensive narrative on the history of the Olympiad, *The Olympics: A History of the Modern Games*.²³ In referencing Guttman's writing on the subject, Carson Cunningham summarizes the Nazis' disdain for basketball quite nicely: "Nazi leaders detested that modern sports originated in England, and that modern sports were essentially equalizers, insomuch as a core tenet of modern sport was that race, religion, and ideology should not matter on the field. In many respects, this aversion to modern sports made sense to Nazis, because the merit-based nature of sports works well with the values associated with open markets and democracy."²⁴ For the Nazis, sport represented the embodiment of many of their political ideologies - most important of which being the physical and mental superiority

²² "Geschichte « Deutscher Basketball Bund." N.p., 2013. Web. 23 Sept. 2016.

²³ Guttman, Allen. *The Olympics: A History of the Modern Games*. University of Illinois Press, 2002. Print. 54.

²⁴ Cunningham, Carson. *American Hoops: The History of United States Olympic Basketball from Berlin to Barcelona*. ProQuest, 2006. Print. 22-23.

of the Aryan master race - and the Berlin Olympic Games represented a fantastic stage to showcase this, with a heavy emphasis on the masculinity of the body culture the Nazis perpetuated.

Take, for example, Leni Riefenstahl's popular and groundbreaking 1938 documentary account of the Games, *Olympia*, as a strong indicator of how Hitler and the Nazis viewed these Games, and how they were heavily tied to Classical Greek notions of sport as individualistic feats of athletic spectacle.²⁵ The film begins with long panning shots of ancient Greek architectural ruins, Athenian colonnades that clearly set the stage for the Games' pre-modern beginnings. Riefenstahl then shows the viewer a number of Greek sculptures, whose chiseled marble bodies are sleek and muscles taught in athletic poses. The film's first big transition comes when an image of the famous statue of a discus thrower transforms into a shot of a real person in the same pose. What follows is a lengthy montage of athletic feats by nude men, whose bodies are similarly chiseled and sculpted like those of the Greek statues, featuring shots of them running and jumping, hurling various objects associated with track and field events - discus, shot-put, javelin. It is clear that Riefenstahl - and by extension, the Nazi Party - was emphasizing the connections between the German concept of athletics and their classical beginnings, through the narrative of the zenith of racialized physicality (the Aryan athletes displaying their talents) resembling the zenith of artistic depictions of man (the Hellenistic sculptures).

Indeed, for the Nazis the Olympic Games carried with them a performative aspect of athletics rooted deeply in pre-modern emphases on physicality, masculinity, and body culture, which the Nazis in turn utilized in their racial propaganda. It is no coincidence that Riefenstahl's

²⁵ *Olympia*. Dir. Leni Riefenstahl. *Olympia-Film*, 1938.

Olympia, in reporting on the Games, almost exclusively shows footage of these individualistic, ‘traditional’ events,²⁶ essentially omitting any newer team events from the film. As discussed above, this approach fits in with the Nazis’ distaste for modern sports, such as basketball. Eventually, however, the Nazis agreed to include basketball as part of a more modern Games format, seeing the propagandistic potential in creating a bigger spectacle than the previous Olympics, held in Los Angeles in 1932.²⁷ As was true about so many aspects of National Socialist ideologies, the 1936 Games would be a display of pre-modern ideals in a hyper-modern configuration.

Thus, in the years leading up to the Games a convoy was formed by the Germans and sent over to the United States with the goal of learning about the sport, in order to properly host it as a part of the Olympics. In 1935, the year before the Berlin Games, the sport became organized in Germany for the first time, as Hermann Niebuhr formed the first basketball team for a local sport club, TV 1848 in Bad Kreuznach.²⁸ Niebuhr would go on to serve as the president of FIBA, basketball’s international governing body, and earned the nickname of “*Vater des deutschen Basketballs*” for his role in the development of the sport in Germany. Still, by the time the Olympic Games introduced basketball to Berliners, the game remained a very young one in the German sporting scene, and it showed in both the Germans’ hosting of the event, as well as in the success of the German national team on the court itself. The basketball games were played outdoor on clay tennis courts, which went fine for the participants until they encountered foul

²⁶ Track and field events, gymnastics, swimming and diving, etc., as opposed to team sports such as basketball, soccer, and field hockey.

²⁷ Cunningham, *American Hoops*. 22-23

²⁸ “Geschichte « Deutscher Basketball Bund.”

weather. Arthur Mollner, a member of the American basketball team, remembers playing the final match - a 19-8 victory over the Canadians - in particularly unsatisfactory conditions:

“We played on a court outside. It was a clay court. And of course, the last game was in the rain and you couldn't put the ball on the floor—it would stick—so you had to pass it. [...] Yes, it was bad, it was really bad. You knew that the people who set all this up didn't know much about basketball. They were all interested in it, but they didn't know that you would play it 13 indoors. They had seen pictures of outdoor courts here so they just made an outdoor court.²⁹”

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The German basketball team, comprised mostly of former handball players, did not fare much better than the court conditions in their first Olympic tournament, with their record finishing at 1 win and 3 losses - their only win being a 2 to 0 forfeit victory over the Spanish, who had pulled out before the tournament started due to the civil war in their home country. Despite their poor showing, the Germans were praised for the effort they put forth in learning about and hosting the event, as the official USOC report for the Games notes their enthusiasm for the game and its well attended matches; Dr. James Naismith was even invited to the awards ceremony to hand out the medals to the victorious teams. The Germans were not too critical of their performance either, as one German book commemorating the Games pointed out the room for growth that their country had in the quickly-growing sport, ending its section of basketball reportage on a hopeful note: “*Deutschland hat von diesem Turnier viel gelernt. Wir sind*

²⁹ It should be noted that in the USOC's official report from these Olympics, they note that outdoor courts were requested by FIBA, which the German organizing committee agreed to. FIBA then requested that in subsequent Olympiads the game be played on wooden courts. *The XIth Olympic Games Berlin, 1936 Official Report*. United States Olympic Committee. p.1074. (Retrieved from LA84 Foundation digital library collection)

³⁰ Mollner, Arthur. AN OLYMPIAN'S ORAL HISTORY. May 1988. (interviewed by George Hodak) Print. 13-14.

Anfänger im Basketball. In vier, in acht Jahren werden wir schon ernsthafter mitzureden haben.”

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Still on the Peripheries: Basketball returns to public attention only during politically significant instances

Despite the relative success of the sport in the 1936 Olympics, basketball did not experience much growth during the Nazi regime and wartime years. Local teams, such as Niebuhr's TV 1848, played each other and, on occasion, competed in local and regional tournaments, but these were largely uncoordinated and unofficial affairs.³² National tournaments began to be played during this time period, and clubs were declared to be national champions. This practice became stronger in 1949 when the DBB, the German Basketball Federation, was founded. Still, the game remained largely out of the minds of German sports consumers, occupying space at the front of the sporting landscape only during instances of political importance.

In 1951 an exhibition basketball game featuring the Harlem Globetrotters was played in Berlin's Olympic Stadium, in front of a crowd of 75,000 spectators - a record attendance for a basketball game that would stand until 2003. The Germans were demonstrating quite the appreciation for the sport. Put on by the US State Department, a large part of the draw was the billing of track star Jesse Owens' triumphant return back to Berlin for the game, the city in which he had embarrassed Hitler's racist ideas of a superior Aryan race by winning four gold medals in

³¹ *Die Olympischen Spiele 1936 in Berlin und Garmisch-Partenkirchen: Band 2, Die XI. Olympischen Spiele in Berlin, 1936.* Altona-Bahrenfeld: Cigaretten-Bilderdienst, 1936. Print.132-133. It should be noted that this book only dedicated two pages of coverage to basketball results, compared to four pages each for the more popular sports at the time of handball and field hockey, as well as a full six pages to the old favorite, gymnastics.

³² "Geschichte « Deutscher Basketball Bund."

1936. Fifteen years later his appearance was surely a large reason for such a high attendance for an exhibition basketball game, and he received quite a welcome upon his return. Owens was flown into the stadium by helicopter at halftime, and was showered by the German crowd with a thunderous ovation as he made his way around the stadium.³³ Upon being received in the Mayor of West Berlin's box inside the stadium, the mayor remarked that, where Hitler had refused to offer Owens his hand in congratulations of Owens' accomplishments, he would offer Owens both of his.

The reason the Globetrotters were even playing in Berlin in the first place, however, was at the behest of the US State Department, in order to combat the threat of communism in neighboring East Berlin and East Germany. Concurrently with the Globetrotters game, the East German Communist Party was hosting a youth celebration and convocation with over 2 million participants from around the world. The State Department figured having the Globetrotters play at the same time in the same city would help the Americans put on their own spectacle to rival the communists, countering Soviet charges that the United States was a racist country by putting on display a team comprised entirely of black players.³⁴ Such a practice had been attempted by the State Department in other countries before, notably a staging of a baseball game between the Brooklyn Dodgers and Cleveland Indians,³⁵ the first two Major League baseball teams to integrate, only four years prior (the National Basketball Association had only begun to allow black players in 1950, less than a year prior). The American government sought to depict these

³³ Haynes, Marques. Interview with Marques Haynes. 28 Dec. 2011. Digital audio sound recording. Part of the University of Tulsa's "Voices of Oklahoma" archive.

³⁴ Adair, Daryl. *Sport: Race, Ethnicity and Identity: Building Global Understanding*. Routledge, 2013. Print. 43.

³⁵ Thomas, Damion L. *Globetrotting: African American Athletes and Cold War Politics*. University of Illinois Press, 2012.

teams as examples of the progress of race relations in the U.S., furthering the notion that blacks could succeed in roles as athletes and entertainers. As ambassadors for the game of basketball, however, the Globetrotters were much more the latter than the former, with their games being much more entertainment spectacle than anything resembling real competition. Symbolic of racial attitudes in both countries at the time - African Americans during World War II often rallied behind fighting racism on German soil as well as back home in the U.S.³⁶ - the Globetrotters were not there to use their athletic talents to compete in and win basketball games, but rather to entertain the public, acting as clowns in a minstrel show.³⁷

German newsreel footage from a game the Globetrotters played in Munich earlier in their German tour illustrates the complex role race played in their presentation.³⁸ Played outdoors in the pouring rain, Globetrotter players hammed it up on the court, taunting the all-white opposing team with fancy dribbling and trick shots, with one player even carrying an umbrella throughout the game. The announcer in the newsreel exemplifies the status of the players as performers, referring to them as “*der Königer und Clowns der Ballkunst.*” Even the more classical-sounding music that had been playing during most of the newsreel switches to jazz at the beginning of the basketball segment, no doubt exploiting further connotations with black Americans. Although included alongside reports on other sporting events around the country - boxing, bicycle racing,

³⁶ *Ibid.* 14.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 42. From a section detailing Pulitzer Prize-winning author James Michener’s changing attitude on the Harlem Globetrotters and general race relations in the U.S. after seeing them perform one of these “minstrel shows” in person.

³⁸ *Welt im Film 323/1951*. N.p., 1951. Digitized, originally 35mm. - It should also be noted that this newsreel begins with a report on an international jamboree for the Boy Scouts, or some equivalent organization. The announcer makes sure to point out that youth of all races were present, indicating the importance of painting a picture of racial acceptance in Germany as well, something that was likely on the minds of Germans in stark contrast to the previous decades of racial thought under the Nazi regime.

horse jumping, and soccer - the game was very clearly one for entertainment and not true competition, as is also evidenced by its placement at the very end of the newsreel.

The State Department left Berlin convinced that their showing had worked very well to promote America,³⁹ satisfied by their depiction of race relations in the United States through a staged exhibition basketball game, and noting that the tour's success "attested to the power of sport to act as a cultural bridge across imposing racial, political, social, cultural, and linguistic barriers."⁴⁰ Major German newspapers such as the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* chose not to write articles covering the sporting spectacle,⁴¹ although it did receive a mention in passing from the East German-controlled *Berliner Zeitung* a few weeks later, noting that after the grandiose display Owens' remarks about peace had been brought before the House Un-American Activities Committee.⁴²

After the exhibition game in Berlin, the development of basketball in Germany was again marked by slow, albeit extant, progress. In 1966 the Basketball Bundesliga formed in Germany, three years after a similar league for soccer teams. This remains the top domestic professional basketball league in Germany, operating in a similar format to the Fußball Bundesliga, with 18 teams and yearly rounds of relegation and promotion. In 1972 Germans again found themselves in the middle of a basketball-based political battle between the Americans and the Soviets, this time contesting for the finals of the Summer Olympics in Munich. The Games, already having been marred by terrorist attacks against Israeli athletes in the Olympic Village, were to end on a dramatic and controversial note between the two Cold War powers. The Soviet team lead for the

³⁹ Adair, *Sport: Race, Ethnicity and Identity*. 43.

⁴⁰ Thomas, *Globetrotting*. 45.

⁴¹ Although the East German celebration of youth was written about the day after the Globetrotters game.

⁴² "Demokratie made in USA." *Berliner Zeitung* 29 Sept. 1951. Print. 4. (Retrieved from ZEFYS/DDR-Presse Berliner Staatsbibliothek)

vast majority of the game, but the United States took the lead with three seconds left to play. There was miscommunication between the referee and the clock operators - who were German - as the Russians tried to inbound the ball for the final play. Twice they unsuccessfully passed the ball in and the game appeared to end, only for the team from the USSR to be granted a third chance at winning the game, which was ultimately the deciding factor. The Russians were successful on their third attempt, winning the gold medal and handing the United States its first Olympic loss in basketball. The Americans protested to the IOC that the game should have already ended, but their appeal was denied. In further protest of the results, the Americans refused to accept their silver medals. This event, unlike the Berlin spectacle, did at least gain some national notoriety in German newspapers, appearing toward the end of the sports section in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* the next day.⁴³ Once again, this was an instance of basketball making the news in Germany for reasons other than the competitive merit of the game itself, namely the political tensions between the USA and USSR that Germany was caught between. German basketball would lack an identity of its own - one that wasn't directly tied to American players coming over to Germany - at the very least until the mid-1980s, when Detlef Schrempf became the first German-born player to sign with an American NBA team, being drafted by the Dallas Mavericks with the 8th overall spot in the 1985 NBA Draft. Not only was Schrempf, who had played for four years with the University of Washington after moving to the United States before his senior year of high school, the first German to be drafted into the NBA, but the first European player as well, along with fellow German Uwe Blab and Fernando Martín of Spain that same year.

⁴³ Heggen, Rolf. "Zwölf Stunden warten auf den Olympiasieg." *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 11 Sept. 1972 Print.14. (Retrieved from University of Michigan Graduate Library serials microfilm holdings).

Conclusion

For basketball's first 100 years or so, its growth in the United States and other countries around the world drastically exceeded the pace at which it developed in Germany. In part due to its arrival in Germany during unfavorable sporting conditions for any type of modern Western game, basketball remained largely in the background of the German sporting landscape during this time period, moving forward only during politically important moments. Even then, the spotlight put on the sport during these moments was only fleeting, as the attention hardly lasted past the final whistles of the games, and basketball did not experience much rapid growth until the 1990s and 2000s, coinciding with the breakthroughs of German players in the American NBA, the game's most competitive league.

Chapter Two: The Nowitzki Effect - Basketball's Dramatic Increase in Popularity Through the Success of German Players in the NBA

In stark contrast to the first ninety years of basketball's presence in Germany, from its introduction shortly after invention in the United States in 1891 until the mid- to late-1980s, the past thirty years have seen a sharp increase in the sport's popularity overseas. No longer is the sport almost exclusively an afterthought to the German people, receiving attention from the sporting world only during instances in which it was politicized, as a metaphorical battlefield on which ideas like capitalism and communism were fought. Rather, in the past few decades the sport has seen drastic changes toward its standing in the German athletics scene, earning a place in the upper echelons of the sporting landscape along the way. Spurred on largely through the success of German-born players in the NBA - such as Detlef Schrempf, Uwe Blab, and most importantly Dirk Nowitzki - interest in the game since the 1980s has risen dramatically enough to place it alongside handball and ice hockey in contention for the second most prominent sport in Germany today.

Andrei Markovits and Lars Rensmann take note of this change as part of their book *Gaming the World: How Sports are Reshaping Global Politics and Culture*,⁴⁴ which examines the spread and transfer of sporting culture across the world during the increasingly globalized past three decades. Within their context of the transatlantic transfer of athletics and the culture that surrounds them, they discuss various ways in which certain sports and sports leagues have become globalized, gaining popularity outside of the countries in which they are normally

⁴⁴ Markovits, Andrei S., and Lars. Rensmann. *Gaming the World: How Sports Are Reshaping Global Politics and Culture*. xi, 345 . Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.

played. One of the ways that this can happen, the authors argue, is for a ‘local’ player to achieve success in an overseas league.⁴⁵ Markovits and Rensmann take particular care to note the successes of European basketball players in the NBA beginning in the 1980s as having a large effect on the popularity of the sport in their home countries. According to Markovits and Rensmann, the NBA careers of stars like Tony Parker, Dražen Petrović, and the Gasol brothers had great impacts on the status of basketball in their respective homelands of France, Croatia, and Spain. Having a ‘local’ player in the top professional league of the game gives people back home someone to follow, someone fans can latch onto and identify with because of their shared national identity. “This would not have been possible had they succeeded in domestic leagues, which do not have the status of the NBA as being the game’s global pinnacle,”⁴⁶ the authors write, speaking to the impact these players had on the game back home.

However, the most significant example of a transformation in a sport’s popularity being facilitated through the success of a player overseas, according to Markovits and Rensmann, is the growth the sport of basketball has exhibited in Germany since the beginning of Dirk Nowitzki’s career in the NBA in the early 2000s - significant enough for them to recognize this phenomenon as the “Nowitzki effect.”⁴⁷ Of those NBA players Markovits and Rensmann mention, Nowitzki is by far the most skilled and most successful. Standing at seven feet tall, Nowitzki possesses the ball-handling and shooting abilities of a much shorter player, which he has effectively used to stretch defenses in the NBA for a decade and a half. His thirteen All Star Game selections and numerous other individual awards - most notably the Most Valuable Player award he received after the 2007 NBA season, the first European and non-North American to win the award - have

⁴⁵ Markovits and Rensmann, *Gaming the World* (2010). p. 147

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 149

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 150

earned him the reputation as not just the best foreign-born NBA player, but one of the best players the game has seen in general. On March 7th, 2017 Nowitzki recorded his 30,000th career NBA point, becoming the sixth player ever to accomplish that feat, and placing him alongside some of basketball's legendary figures in Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Karl Malone, Kobe Bryant, Michael Jordan, and Wilt Chamberlain. His massive on-court success has seen Nowitzki, a sure lock to be inducted into the basketball Hall of Fame upon his retirement from the game, become a superstar in the United States and one of the most well-liked and well-respected players in the NBA.

This NBA success, Markovits and Rensmann point out, has translated into widespread popularity in Germany as well, where Nowitzki enjoys celebrity athlete status usually reserved for soccer players and tennis champs, such as Franz Beckenbauer, Michael Ballack, Boris Becker, and Steffi Graf. Calling him a “true crossover star”,⁴⁸ the authors present the case that, because of Nowitzki's career in the NBA, he has become a cultural figure in his homeland while playing a sport with which it is not traditionally associated. Due to the celebrity status Nowitzki has fostered, the sport of basketball itself has received much more attention in Germany. “Nowitzki's immense achievement has been the erasing of basketball's deficit in Germany's sports space. He helped in making the game a much-followed sport on the big-event levels of the NBA, the World Championships, the European Championships, and the Olympics,” write Markovits and Rensmann of Nowitzki's effect on the game in Germany.⁴⁹

In presenting their argument that Nowitzki has made a large impact on basketball's popularity in his home country, Markovits and Rensmann largely base their claims in the

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 150

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 149

increasing amount of media coverage Nowitzki and his Dallas Mavericks receive from the German media. The “Nowitzki effect,” as Markovits and Rensmann perceive it, is visible in the genuine interest much of the German public shows in following the results of their ‘local’ player and his team. Of particular significance to the authors as evidence of the sport’s elevated status amongst German athletics is the “major coverage” Nowitzki and the Mavericks received from German newspapers during their trip to the NBA Finals in 2006, which the authors note carved a substantial amount of attention from sports pages that would otherwise have been dominated by the World Cup, which was being held in Germany at the same time. After leading his Dallas Mavericks to the NBA Championship in 2011, the German press awarded him the *Sportler des Jahres*, and Nowitzki also received the *Silbernes Lorbeerblatt*, the highest honor in German sports.⁵⁰

Indeed, in doing my own research on Nowitzki’s impact on the game of basketball in Germany, I too noticed a dramatic increase in major newspaper coverage of the NBA, as well as the German players within it, during the course of his career. Using the LexisNexis Academic archives, an aggregate of published journalistic and scholarly articles, a search for various terms related to the sport returned vastly different amounts of information when the search was narrowed down to different time periods throughout Dirk’s career. For example, in June of 2002 - very early in Nowitzki’s career, and the year in which he earned his first All Star game invitation - there were two articles published in the Sunday editions of *Die Welt* containing the word “basketball.” In June of 2006, the same month in which Nowitzki was playing in his first trip to the NBA Finals, there were eight articles in *Die Welt*’s Sunday editions written about

⁵⁰ These accolades were bestowed upon Nowitzki after the publication of Markovits and Rensmann’s book - they very likely would have been worthy of inclusion had they occurred beforehand.

basketball; by June of 2011, when Nowitzki won his first - and to this date only - NBA Championship, *Die Welt am Sonntag* printed twelve articles over the course of the month. Similar searches of different keywords and across different databases yield similar results: throughout Nowitzki's career there has been an increase in the amount of German media attention the sport of basketball has received, with most of that attention relating to Nowitzki himself. After leading his Dallas Mavericks to the NBA Championship in 2011, the German press awarded him the *Sportler des Jahres*, and Nowitzki also received the *Silbernes Lorbeerblatt*, the highest honor in German sports.

Emphasizing the Growth of *German* Basketball: Potential shortcomings in Markovits and Rensmann's presentation of the "Nowitzki effect"

Although Markovits and Rensmann accurately note that the game of basketball has seen a remarkable increase in its status within the broader context of German sport since the beginning of Dirk Nowitzki's career in the NBA, some of their methods don't entirely support this claim. The authors present the reader with a fascinating explanation for the transfer of a sports culture via the superstar status of a local athlete in a foreign league, but their arguments do not appear to go into quite enough depth in certain regards and on certain topics. The overall sentiment that the authors convey is highly indicative of the elevation of the sport on a cultural level, and in general they adequately depict the surge in popularity that has ridden on the coattails of Nowitzki's NBA success, but there is a bit more to his stardom in Germany than the authors portray within their narrative.

Perhaps the most important omission from Markovits and Rensmann's cursory assessment of the effects Nowitzki's success has had on the German perception of basketball is that it fails to truly account for the measurement of the game outside of Nowitzki. By focusing on the German media's coverage of basketball in the context of Nowitzki and the Mavericks' success, the authors may be missing some key aspects in the growth of basketball: namely that a not insignificant amount of Nowitzki's status in his homeland has been fostered by his successful leadership of the German national basketball team, separate from his career in the NBA. Markovits and Rensmann only hint at this factor in passing, noting only briefly that German media coverage of Nowitzki intensifies whenever he is playing for the national team.⁵¹ While it is certainly important to note that Nowitzki's NBA career is really what has afforded him his high social standing, it is also important to point out that his international success has further endeared him to the German people, something that Markovits and Rensmann do not explicitly do.

For much of their history, the German national basketball team was very rarely competitive either on the world or European stage, failing to ever win an Olympic medal or European championship prior to reunification in 1990. German teams did experience some moderate success in the 1980s, although they found it difficult to compete as FIBA regulations made it tough for foreign players to return home from their NBA teams for international tournaments.⁵² The German national team won a surprise gold medal - their only gold medal in international competition to date - at the 1993 EuroBasket championships, led by Chris Welp,

⁵¹ Markovits and Rensmann, *Gaming the World*. p. 148

⁵² FIBA, using the same amateur status standards as the IOC, prohibited professional players from participating in international tournaments at the time. This policy was reversed in 1990, allowing not only for the inclusion of German NBA players on the *Basketballnationalmannschaft*, but also paved the way for the United States' iconic 'Dream Team' at the 1992 Summer Olympics in Barcelona.

who had returned from the NBA to play for Bayer Leverkusen. Outside of that tournament, however, the national team rarely experienced success before Dirk Nowitzki.

With Nowitzki playing for the national team, however, the Germans experienced much more success on the international level of play. In the 2001 edition of the EuroBasket championships Nowitzki paced the field, leading the tournament in scoring and the Germans to a fourth place finish.⁵³ The next year Nowitzki built on his success with the national team, leading them to a bronze medal at the 2002 FIBA World Championships held in the United States, only the second international medal the team had ever won. Nowitzki again led all players in scoring average, and was named the MVP of the tournament. In 2005 he again was responsible for a solid showing by the national team at the EuroBasket tournament, leading them to a silver medal and winning tournament MVP in the process. The team was named by the German media as the Sports Team of the Year for their strong showing.⁵⁴ Although this was the peak success of the German national basketball team during Nowitzki's career, he has continually returned home in order to play for his country in international tournaments throughout his time in the NBA.

In only discussing Nowitzki's success in the NBA in any kind of detail, Markovits and Rensmann understate a key aspect of the "Nowitzki effect": Dirk Nowitzki's continued success on the German national team heightens to an even greater extent his status as a 'local boy.' The authors of *Gaming the World* make it clear in their chapter that the local element to a superstar playing in a foreign league is really what helps to transfer the excitement for the player across a cultural divide, but they stop just short of including this facet of Nowitzki's appeal and importance to his fellow Germans. Surely it is his NBA career that has helped make winning a

⁵³The team lost in the semifinals to Turkey on a buzzer-beating shot. The fact that a fourth place finish was a disappointment represented a marked improvement in expectations over previous years.

⁵⁴ <http://www.sportler-des-jahres.de/index.php/wahl/ergebnisse>

medal with the German national basketball team mean a fair amount in the first place, but ultimately it is something that helps to grow the sport in Germany outside of the context of the NBA. Participating and succeeding with the national team is an important part in explaining the “Nowitzki effect” because it cements the integral nature of Nowitzki as a *German* basketball player, and demonstrates growth in the popularity of *German* basketball.

To the same effect, German participation - rather than just consumption - in basketball on a national level has seen a steep increase coinciding with the entrance of Germans into the NBA. Membership in the Deutscher Basketball Bund (DBB), the country’s governing body for the sport of basketball from youth levels to international play, has seen its membership drastically increase in the past few decades, more than doubling from 46,000 members to over 96,000 in the decade between 1974 and 1983, then doubling again to over 200,000 members by the year 1996⁵⁵ - the same year Schrempf reached the NBA Finals against Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls. Membership in the DBB would peak in 1998 at just shy of 208,000, before declining slightly and holding steady at around 195,000 members, where it remains today. This membership-count puts basketball ahead of ice hockey, with its 25,000 members in 2016, and behind handball, whose 2016 membership totaled over 750,000.^{56,57} Handball, while still well ahead of basketball in terms of registered participants, has seen its membership decline much more quickly over the past decade, falling from almost 850,000 in 2009 to where it is today -

⁵⁵ *Entwicklung der Mitgliedzahlen im DBB*. Deutscher Basketball Bund, 2016. Web. Retrieved from <http://www.basketball-bund.de/dbb/ueber-uns/mitgliederentwicklung>

⁵⁶ *BESTANDSERHEBUNG 2016*. Deutscher Olympischer Sportbund (DOSB), 2016. Web. Retrieved from <https://www.dosb.de/de/service/download-center/dosb-organisation/bestandserhebung/>

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

over a ten percent percent drop (during the same timeline, basketball saw a two-and-a-half percent growth).⁵⁸

The growth of domestic German basketball leagues themselves is another indicator of the overall strength of the sport that the authors do not discuss in their explanation of the “Nowitzki effect,” although it too exists relatively independent of the NBA. The Basketball Bundesliga (BBL), has steadily grown into one of the largest European basketball leagues in terms of revenue, ranking second behind only the Spanish Liga ACB⁵⁹. The BBL’s television deals with networks Sport1 and DAZN are similar to deals that the Handball Bundesliga (HBL) has in place, allowing for both leagues to have all of their games shown on either free or paid television, or streamed online. The BBL has exhibited steady attendance growth over the past decade,⁶⁰ with its current average of 4,400 fans per game being just a touch lower than the HBL’s 4,800 spectator average.^{61, 62} The Deutsche Eishockey Liga (DEL), the nation’s premier professional hockey league, sits a bit higher than the other two competitors for second place with an average of just under 6,200 fans attending each match.⁶³ Each of the three leagues enjoy comparable followings on social media as well, with the HBL being slightly more popular than

⁵⁸ One of the downsides to using membership statistics is that they may not accurately depict how frequently a sport is actually played, but rather how frequently it is played in an official capacity. One of the distinct characteristics is its reputation for being played in informal settings - on playgrounds and pickup courts that won’t show up in official statistics, and consist of a larger portion than for ice hockey or handball.

⁵⁹ “German BBL Moving Quickly towards Ambitious 2020 Goal.” *heinnews*. 23 Jan. 2012. Web. 18 Dec. 2016.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ “easyCredit - Zuschauer-Statistiken.” easyCredit BBL. Web. 13 Mar. 2017.
<http://www.easycrredit-bbl.de/de/statistiken/zuschauer/zuschauer-statistiken/>

⁶² “DKB Handball Bundesliga - Zuschauer.” DKB Handball Bundesliga. Web. 13 Mar. 2017.
<http://www.dkb-handball-bundesliga.de/de/dkb-hbl/statistiken/saisonen/statistiken/saison-16-17/saisonstatistik/zuschauer/>

⁶³ “Statistik | DEL | Telekom Eishockey.” Telekom Eishockey. Web. 13 Mar. 2017.
<https://www.telekomeishockey.de/del/statistik/haupttrunde-2016-1>

the other two.⁶⁴ With its slightly higher attendance figures, the DEL brings in the most revenue - €107.4 Million - of the three domestic German sports leagues competing for second place in the hierarchy below soccer, according to a financial review of the three leagues and the 3.

Bundesliga (soccer's third tier) conducted in 2015 by international accounting firm Deloitte.⁶⁵ Whether or not it is the second most popular league, the growth of the BBL demonstrates a strength of the sport in Germany that is not reliant on the NBA.

On a similar note, in Markovits and Rensmann's brief background on Nowitzki's rise into the NBA, they include that he bypassed the German BBL, going directly from his hometown club of DJK Würzburg directly into the NBA. In fact, during Nowitzki's last season with DJK Würzburg in 1998, they did compete in the top level of the Bundesliga, and Nowitzki was awarded the Basketball Bundesliga's MVP award that year, even though he didn't play the full season.⁶⁶ Although he did not spend a large amount of time in the German leagues in comparison to his NBA career, it is still highly important to note that he spent his formative years there. Markovits and Rensmann note that Nowitzki bypassed the top German league *en route* to playing in the NBA, which aside from not exactly being the case, is also perhaps less important than him bypassing the American collegiate system as well, the route through which all of his

⁶⁴ As of March 12, 2017 the HBL official Facebook page had 249,812 "likes." The BBL page had 198,282 "likes," and the DEL page only 129,325. It should also be noted that the NBA's official German page, NBA-Deutschland, had over 275,000 likes on the same date.

⁶⁵ "Profisportligen mit neuen Rekorden." *Deloitte Deutschland*, 2015. Web. 11 Mar. 2017. According to the same report, the BBL brought in €97.8 Million, and the HBL a very similar €96.1 Million the same year, with each league's revenues increasing over a five year span. To put into context how far these leagues are behind soccer in terms of popularity amongst the German people, however, one must consider that Deloitte's review found that the 3. Bundesliga brought in more money than all of them - €142.9 Million, down from over €175 Million the year before.

⁶⁶ Nowitzki was drafted into the NBA prior to the beginning of the 1998-99 Bundesliga season after leading his team to promotion into the first division the previous year. He played a large part of the next Bundesliga season, however, because the NBA season was shortened due to a players strike. Nowitzki left for the NBA after 26 games.

German NBA predecessors had gone. Nowitzki considered going to college and playing basketball in the United States, but ultimately decided against it out of worries that American coaches would try to change his game due to his size, trying to make him a post-up player instead of the versatile face-up type that has granted him so much success in the NBA.⁶⁷ Instead, Nowitzki transitioned directly from the Basketball Bundesliga into the NBA, in a way retaining much more of his German-ness in the process. He represented what German basketball had to offer to the NBA, rather than being molded by the American game. If there is one place that *Gaming the World* could extend its reach to further their argument, it is in building up Nowitzki's identity as a German - both in his national team allegiance and style of play, and in his relationship with German fans as well.

A Brief Media Analysis: How the German media portray Nowitzki as one of their own

To better understand this incredibly important local aspect of the effect Dirk Nowitzki has had on the increase in basketball's popularity in Germany, we also have to understand Nowitzki's role as a German off the court as well. One of the ways in which we can better comprehend the scope of Nowitzki's presence as a celebrity figure is to examine not just how often he appears in the media in his home country, but by really analyzing *how* he is portrayed. In Nowitzki's case this can be a somewhat difficult task, as he spends less time in the spotlight than many of the other professional athletes of his sport and skillset, with his only major endorsement being a shoe

⁶⁷ Nowitzki, from an interview with a local Dallas-area radio station (KESN) in February of 2014: "I ended up deciding, 'Hey, let me try the NBA, and if it doesn't work, I can always come back to Europe and play at a high level for a long, long time. I was a little worried about in college, since I was a seven-footer, that they might just put me in the weight room and lift weights for years straight, not even see the court, and make me strong, make me a back-to-the-basket player."

deal with the sporting goods manufacturer Nike.⁶⁸ In the United States, Nowitzki has occasionally appeared in commercials promoting Nike equipment as well as numerous (and often particularly comical) advertisement spots for Dallas Mavericks social media campaigns, but these American advertisements are often directly related to his status as a top athlete or popular player for a local team. However, Nowitzki has also appeared in an advertising campaign for the multinational bank ING in his home country. These advertisement spots offer a glimpse into the cultural permeation of Nowitzki in Germany, not through their quantity, but rather through how Nowitzki is depicted within the advertisements.

All of the commercials are pushing ING-Diba's "DiBaDu" ad campaign, selling the German public on the German branch of the Dutch bank, so of course none of the advertisements have anything to do with banking. The most interesting part of the television spots, however, is the way in which they introduce Nowitzki to the viewer: essentially, they do not do so in any direct manner. One such commercial features Nowitzki returning to what is supposed to be his hometown butcher shop, walking through the door to the wide-eyed looks of old friends who have not seen him in years.⁶⁹ "Hallo!" Nowitzki calls out, as he enters the shop, to which the butcher simply exclaims "Dirk!" The ladies working in the shop also greet him warmly, expressing how long it has been since they last saw him. One of the ladies offers Nowitzki a piece of meat, and asks him "Was hamma früher immer g'sagt?", to which Nowitzki replies "Damit du groß und stark wirst," as they all share a hearty laugh over the veracity of the woman's predictions. This commercial is noteworthy because it presents Dirk Nowitzki not as a

⁶⁸ Nowitzki has a shoe deal and stars in occasional commercials for Nike, but other than that does not have nearly the same media presence as the LeBron Jameses and Kevin Durants of the League.

⁶⁹ These commercials can be found simply by googling "Nowitzki german commercial." This commercial can be viewed on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_lfQWgPFzO0

superstar celebrity, but as a down-to-Earth, regular German guy. He isn't introduced to the public as an NBA player; viewers are just expected to know who he is, and he is known to them simply as "Dirk" - a kind of monomial familiarity only reserved for the most well-known celebrity figures. It is also important to note the use of the word "du" in referring to Nowitzki, a utilization of the second-person familiar pronoun that hints at the close relationship between the citizens of his hometown and the basketball-playing "Dirk."

The other ads in the series run similarly, including one featuring him tossing small pebbles into a glass while waiting in a hotel lobby, hinting at his basketball prowess without explicitly stating it, and him being approached for an autograph by an admiring young fan, then being asked to sign his name more clearly so that the boy can read it better.^{70, 71} In another, longer television spot, Nowitzki spends the day at the beach.⁷² Again, just as in the butcher shop spot, Nowitzki is removed from any basketball-related context for his fame; he is simply "Dirk". It would be one thing to note Nowitzki's fame through commercials in which his status as an athlete is being featured, of which there are plenty, but commercials such as ING's show a relationship with the German public that few other athletes - not to mention ones that play overseas - have. These advertisements represent a societal permeation similar to someone like Michael Jordan in the United States, who can star in advertisements for products like Hanes undershirts, in which he is removed from basketball contexts and accorded no introduction - viewers are simply expected to know who he is. There is no semblance of any depiction of Nowitzki as conceited or self-centered in the advertisements, however - the spots themselves don't hint at his superstar status. Rather, all of the commercials serve to humanize Dirk, to

⁷⁰ As seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GKglanYW4iM>

⁷¹ As seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=95lPer-HmR0>

⁷² As seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5fJtV20-lvA>

portray him as just a normal guy doing stereotypically German things. The commercial on the beach accentuates these characteristics of Nowitzki to quite a large extent, as he is sheepishly forced to rebuild a young girl's sand castle after accidentally knocking it over. He is truly brought down to size, so to speak, both in terms of abnormally tall physical being and of his celebrity status. These "DiBaDu" advertisements illustrate the extent to which Nowitzki is recognizable in his homeland, even though he makes his living elsewhere, and as a basketball player at that - something that likely would have been unthinkable before the growth of the sport in Germany over the last few decades.

The Persona of the Humble German: Building a German brand of basketball, and a possible "Nowitzki effect" on Detlef Schrempf

Dirk Nowitzki's down-to-Earth personality and tendency to come across as a humble guy that shine through in his "DiBaDu" commercial spots are indicative of his general depiction in both the German and American media, and are a large part of the reason that Nowitzki is a fan-favorite. For as much on-court success as Nowitzki has had in his career, he certainly eschews the "look at me" *prima donna* role that seems to be so prevalent amongst NBA superstars.⁷³ Nowitzki's demeanor is, in fact, very similar to that of the first German player in the NBA - Detlef Schrempf. Another tall German player with a stellar outside shot, Schrempf too had large amounts of success in the NBA - not nearly on the level of Nowitzki's, assuredly, but still a noteworthy career nonetheless. Schrempf was elected to three NBA All Star teams during

⁷³ This is not to say that Nowitzki is not an incredibly marketable player, but rather chooses to shy away from many self-centered marketing opportunities. In an email to Bloomberg Sports, who were running a story on the subject of his unwillingness to market himself at the same level as other NBA superstars, Nowitzki clarified his lack of a pursuit of self-branding: "I always wanted to be a basketball player. Nothing more, nothing less." Further information on this topic was found in the Bloomberg News segment found here - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SUpl6pXrHZo>

the 1990s, was twice named the NBA Sixth Man of the Year, and led his team to the 1996 NBA Finals, in which he and the Seattle SuperSonics lost to Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls. Schrempf was never a superstar in the sense that Nowitzki is, either in the United States or in their home country, but he was still a good enough player to be known by anyone paying attention to the NBA at the time.

Similarly to Nowitzki, Schrempf too was praised for his humility and his work ethic in become the best basketball player he could be, traits that won them over with fans and were often associated with their German upbringings. The German media in particular have ran with portrayals of both Nowitzki and Schrempf as standing out from their American counterparts both on and off the court, perhaps in an attempt to establish or distinguish a particularly German brand of basketball. The aforementioned characteristics exhibited by the two German NBA players are often stereotypically associated with traditional German values, such as a preference for efficiency over flashiness, function over form, and teamwork over individualism. An article written by Maik Großekathöfer in *Der Spiegel* toward the end of Schrempf's NBA career summarizes these sentiments, depicting Schrempf as a rather cantankerous old man in a league full of "young guns."⁷⁴ In the article, Schrempf goes on to bemoan the fact that the NBA had become a collection of superstars rather than teams, with larger-than-life personalities who cared more about drugs, and women, and looking cool than they did about winning. While the Kobe Bryants of the NBA were out making hip hop music videos, Detlef Schrempf was organizing golf tournaments and charity drives for disadvantaged children.

⁷⁴ Großekathöfer, Maik. "Opa auf der Love-Parade." *Der Spiegel*, May 22, 2000

An opinion piece with similar sentiments, written by Peter Schelling and titled “Nowitzki besiegt den Ghetto-Basketball: Kampf der Systeme” was published on *Die Welt*’s website for the 2011 NBA Finals, in which Nowitzki’s Dallas Mavericks faced off against LeBron James, Dwyane Wade, and the Miami Heat.⁷⁵ The *Welt* article attempts to deliver the same message of the German player as a good, humble teammate, and argues the case that the European style of basketball, which favors solid fundamentals and teamwork over individualistic ‘hero-ball’, is better than the “Ghetto-ball” style of play that is more representative of the American game. Unfortunately this article is very racially tone-deaf, attacking black NBA players by associating their style of dress with gang membership, but the author clearly sees the existence of a German basketball identity (at the very least a European identity) both on and off the court, something that did not exist before the emergence of Schrempf and Nowitzki into the NBA.⁷⁶

If we recognize that Nowitzki and Schrempf exhibit many of the same characteristics, and were both highly successful players - with the caveat, of course, that Nowitzki’s skill far surpasses that of Schrempf’s - why was Detlef Schrempf never as big of a deal in his home country as Nowitzki; why doesn’t he enjoy some of the star status that Nowitzki does? A significant portion of the explanation lies in Nowitzki’s close relationship with his German fanbase that was detailed earlier in this chapter, or rather Schrempf’s lack of a similar

⁷⁵ Schelling, Peter. “Nowitzki besiegt den Ghetto-Basketball: Kampf der Systeme - WELT.” *DIE WELT*. June 14, 2011. <https://www.welt.de/sport/article13427797/Nowitzki-besiegt-den-Ghetto-Basketball.html>.

⁷⁶ Such underlying racism is perhaps reminiscent of the role the Harlem Globetrotters early in basketball’s development in Germany. It should also be noted that the next up-and-coming German basketball star in the NBA, Dennis Schröder of the Atlanta Hawks, is black, and is largely portrayed by the media as not fitting the same personality stereotypes as Nowitzki and Schrempf. He is largely considered a selfish player and immature, and would almost certainly be written off by the author of this article as falling into the category of “Ghetto-ball”. This may suggest that a German basketball identity is inherently tied to race, an aspect of the game that I will cover in the third chapter.

relationship.⁷⁷ Whereas Nowitzki played his youth basketball in Germany, rising up through the ranks of the BBL before heading straight to the NBA, Schrempf had already played in the United States for five years before entering the NBA. Nowitzki returns home relatively frequently to play in international tournaments and visit family, speaking his Bavarian dialect of German when he does; Schrempf's family lives in the United States, and he is almost entirely Americanized, speaking nearly accent-free English.

It is to be understood, however, that the largest reason for Schrempf's lack of star status in Germany is that he was never really that big of a celebrity in the United States, at the very least in comparison with Nowitzki. Nowitzki has become the face of the Mavericks' social marketing department's efforts, appearing in numerous video advertisements for the team parodying culturally relevant and familiar icons, such as viral videos, other ad campaigns, and even president Donald Trump. After winning the NBA Championship in 2011, Nielsen and E-Poll declared Nowitzki to be the most marketable basketball player in the world, according to their "N-Score", which measures the "appeal, awareness and endorsement potential" of athletes in order to determine the extent of their marketability.⁷⁸ At the time, Nowitzki was rated even higher than such American cultural icons as New England Patriots' quarterback Tom Brady, citing his appeal as a positively influential NBA star. With success comes recognition, naturally, but it is clear that basketball fans are drawn to Nowitzki for more than just his on-court

⁷⁷ This is another area that Markovits and Rensmann do not address in their book, in attempting to explain why Schrempf did not have much impact on the German game. The authors chalk almost all of it up to Nowitzki benefitting from advances in technology and an increasingly globalized world, which is certainly the largest factor in the equation. But I believe it does not entirely explain why Schrempf's status in Germany isn't higher than it currently is, especially in light of the attention Nowitzki has brought to the game.

⁷⁸ FOX Sports "Dirk Don't Need Your Stinkin' Money." *FOX Sports*. July 8, 2011.

<http://www.foxsports.com/nba/story/dirk-nowitzki-strengthens-nba-global-icon-status-by-not-accepting-endorsements-070811>.

performance: Nowitzki is endeared to fans in Dallas just as much for winning the 2011 NBA Championship as they do for his rendition (admittedly a butchering, really) of Queen's "We Are The Champions" at the parade celebrating the victory.

Schrempf's biggest cultural impact in the United States, on the other hand, is perhaps for his guest appearances on the NBC comedy series *Parks and Recreation*, in which his relative obscurity - minor, B-list celebrity status at best - is lampooned as the butt of a joke when it is revealed he will be the surprise guest of honor at a town telethon event, a letdown from such proposed celebrities as Kanye West and Rihanna.⁷⁹ As a joke or not, however, it is not really debatable that knowledge of Detlef Schrempf in the US is vastly dwarfed by that of Nowitzki, restricted largely to avid NBA fans who were alive for the duration of his career, which ended over fifteen years ago. In terms of social media presence, Dirk Nowitzki's two-and-a-half million twitter followers drastically dwarfs Detlef Schrempf, who comes in just shy of fourteen thousand. By any measure, Schrempf's name does not carry anywhere near the same weight for Americans as does Dirk Nowitzki's.

This difference in the levels of popularity between the two players translates to their impact within their homeland as well. A 2003 market research poll conducted by TNS Sport revealed that Dirk Nowitzki was the most well-known basketball player amongst Germans, with roughly thirty-six percent of those responding saying they had heard of him.⁸⁰ The only other player who rivaled Nowitzki's popularity amongst Germans was Michael Jordan - certainly the sport's most visible and well-branded player of all time. However, less than two percent of those

⁷⁹ "Telethon." *Parks and Recreation*, created by Greg Daniels and Michael Schur, performance by Detlef Schrempf, season 2, episode 22, Deedle-Dee Productions and Universal Media Studios, 2010. Schrempf would make guest appearances as himself in two more episodes during the show's following season.

⁸⁰ "Marktforschung ; TNS Sport untersucht Bekanntheit von Basketballspielern; Nur Nowitzki überspringt die Oldies." *HORIZONT* (2003): 1. Retrieved from LexisNexis academic archive search.

responding said they were aware of who Detlef Schrempf was, a number over twenty times smaller than the number for Nowitzki. Even then, the fact that this poll took place in 2003 - very early on in Nowitzki's career and only a year or two after the end of Schrempf's - leads one to believe that the gap between the two would be even further apart today. Germans were well aware of Nowitzki from the beginning of his NBA career, much more so than they were of Schrempf following the respective height of his playing days overseas.

What this scenario sets up, however, is a visible "Nowitzki effect" not only on German basketball, but indirectly on Detlef Schrempf himself as being a part thereof. As Dirk has emerged as a superstar in the NBA, the two players have been linked by the country of their birth, and the media - both German and American - has latched onto roles for each player that closely connect them. From the onset of Nowitzki's career in the NBA - coinciding, as it did, with the end of Schrempf's - both German and American sportswriters have been comparing the two, envisioning a mentor-like role for the older veteran Schrempf toward the younger rookie Nowitzki. During the first half or so of Nowitzki's NBA career Schrempf was seen as a measuring stick, someone who represented the best that German basketball had to offer up to that point. Indeed, American journalists had been referring to Schrempf as the "best German import since the Volkswagen" for some time before Nowitzki's introduction to the NBA.⁸¹ Comparisons were drawn immediately upon Nowitzki's entrance into the NBA, as his first career game as a professional was against Detlef Schrempf and the Seattle SuperSonics. After the game, Nowitzki noted that Schrempf came up to him and gave him his phone number, offering any help for

⁸¹Liwocha, Stefan. "Vom Wunderkind Zum Anführer; Der Basketballprofi Dirk Nowitzki Ist Der Superstar in Der NBA." *Stuttgarter Zeitung* (2004-12-11): SPORT; 41. Retrieved from LexisNexis academic archive search.

which the younger German might need.⁸² However, it would not take long for the skill of Nowitzki on the court to surpass the expectations Schrempf had laid out for Nowitzki, something those closest to Nowitzki had expected even before his NBA career began. Nowitzki's longtime coach, trainer, and mentor, Holger Geschwindner took this idea of Schrempf being the standard for German basketball players and ran with it, declaring in an interview that "the Americans take Schrempf to be the best German invention since the Volkswagen. With Dirk they get to know the Porsche."⁸³

While it's true that the two Germans are undeniably linked in the eyes of the media, again it must be clarified that this is another relationship they share founded on inequality. Nowitzki, as I have detailed earlier on in this chapter, has become a veritable superstar in his own right, to a large extent outgrowing the comparisons made between him and Schrempf that marked the media's coverage of the beginning of his career. Both German and American analysis of Nowitzki as both a player and an icon have long since surpassed the mentor-mentee relationship, as Nowitzki has evolved into his own entity and identity, no longer thought about in relation to the best German of all-time, but instead as one of the best players of all-time - he is no longer described as being a "zweite Schrempf",⁸⁴ but rather as the first-and-only Nowitzki.

Schrempf, however, remains tied to Nowitzki in a way that is still much more obvious than its inverse. It is possible, in other words, to think and to write about Nowitzki without mentioning Schrempf; it is much harder for sportswriters to find a reason these days to write

⁸² Eckhoff, Andreas. "Amerika Schwärmt vom 'German Wunderkind.'" *Welt am Sonntag* (1999-02-07): n. pag. Retrieved from LexisNexis academic archive search.

⁸³ "Die Amerikaner halten Schrempf für die beste deutsche Erfindung seit dem Volkswagen. Mit Dirk lernen sie den Porsche kennen." *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Musiol, David. "Der 'zweite Schrempf' verweigert den Aufstieg." *Welt am Sonntag* (1997-10-19). Retrieved from LexisNexis academic archive search.

about Schrempf without referencing Nowitzki. In another set of searches done on LexisNexis' academic search engine, under the parameters of all German-language newspaper articles written in the past ten years, the number of articles written about Nowitzki that didn't contain the words "Detlef Schrempf" was too high for the search to display all of them, so it only displayed the first 1,000. Under the same parameters, the search returned only 352 such newspaper articles written about Schrempf during this time period - an unsurprisingly smaller amount, given the differing levels of success on the court, coupled with Nowitzki's still-active career. What was surprising, however, was that the number of articles written in the past decade about Schrempf that did not contain the word "Nowitzki" dropped to only 118 results - meaning that almost two-thirds of the articles written about Detlef Schrempf in the last decade have connected him with Dirk Nowitzki. The same phenomenon holds true when restricted to a more recent limit of two years, in accounting for potential missing spaces in the archives the searches return: German articles containing the phrase "Detlef Schrempf" return 57 results; searches for "Detlef Schrempf" without "Nowitzki" only populate 28 results - about half this time. I think, then, that this phenomenon is fairly strong evidence to support the claim that, ignoring the "Nowitzki effect" as it pertains to the growth of German basketball in general, there is also a profound "Nowitzki effect" on the legacy of Detlef Schrempf's career. When viewed through the lens of Nowitzki's success, Detlef Schrempf has gained much more notoriety in his home country than just through his own successes.

Chapter Three: Hip Hop's Part in Creating Basketball Culture in Germany

Even though the roles of Dirk Nowitzki and Detlef Schrempf - as German players achieving immense success in the NBA, the pinnacle of the world's basketball competition - cannot be overstated in establishing a strong basketball scene in Germany, so too is it important to note the other channels through which basketball made its way into German society. Many of these channels were tied to the period of greatly increased globalization that followed the end of the Cold War era. Acting as the physical and ideological border between East and West after the end of World War II, Germany was right at the center of tensions between capitalism and communism for much of the latter half of the 20th Century. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, along with the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union and many of its allied states in the early 1990s, signaled a triumph of Western democracy and capitalism, and opened the door for the further spread of American culture into Europe. With the looming Soviet presence gone, and aided by advances in communication technology such as the internet and cable television, the transatlantic transfer of cultural ideas and materials could flow more freely than it ever had before.

A large portion of the rise in the NBA's overseas popularity, not just in Germany but in other countries across the globe, came as a concerted effort on the league's part to appeal to a more international audience. Following a period of bad press and diminishing profits in the 1970s and 1980s, newly appointed NBA commissioner David Stern turned his attention to the

growth of the game on a global level. One of the ways in which Stern planned to do this was through the use of television: games were to be marketed as “TV spectacles” to viewers all over the world.⁸⁵ Stern sought to fix some of the league’s financial woes not just through an increase in American viewership, but through negotiating broadcast rights contracts to have NBA games appear on the television sets of fans in numerous other countries as well. It is in this context that the excitement surrounding the 1992 American “Dream Team” was able to reach such a large international audience, and the league further capitalized on its efforts in globalization. The 1992 Summer Olympics were the first occasion that NBA players were allowed to participate in the games. The United States’ team featured a roster filled entirely with NBA stars such as Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson, and Larry Bird, and breezed through their competition en route to a gold medal. This team was publicized as much for their on-court results as for their individual personalities, introducing much of the world to the NBA and basketball in general. The “Dream Team” quickly became a global sensation, drawing interest from viewers and fans around the world. The fact that NBA players could receive global attention simply for showing up to the Olympics, as Frank Lechner details in his book *Globalization: The Making of World Society*, is evidence of the the growth of the game internationally.⁸⁶

In the aftermath of the “Dream Team’s” success in the early ‘90s, the NBA’s worldwide revenue on merchandise sold during the 1992-93 season surpassed \$2 billion, an astounding five hundred percent increase from the roughly \$310 million they pulled in only five years prior,⁸⁷ and the impact that the NBA’s popularity had on German fans was noted by North American

⁸⁵ Lechner, Frank J. *Globalization: The Making of World Society*. John Wiley & Sons. 2009 p.49

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Wenzel, Steffen. *Streetball: Ein jugendkulturelles Phänomen aus sozialwissenschaftlicher Perspektive*. Springer-Verlag. 2013. p. 84

journalists even as early as the mid-1990s.⁸⁸ In Germany, this “basketball boom”, coupled with the success of the German national team at the European Basketball Championships in 1993, manifested itself in the airing of NBA games on the private broadcasting channel DSF.⁸⁹ On Tuesday through Thursday evenings this channel aired their *NBA Insider* program, providing highlights from that week’s NBA action, and late on Sunday nights DSF showed a full-length NBA game, along with the live broadcast of the NBA Finals. By 1997 the Sunday night games, which began at 11:15 PM, were averaging about 200,000 viewers per contest.⁹⁰ Clearly the NBA’s negotiation of international broadcasting rights helped introduce the game to German fans, a relationship the NBA has continued to foster: twice - in 2006 and 2010, in Cologne and Berlin respectively - the NBA has staged preseason games in Germany as part of their Global Games promotion, neither time featuring Nowitzki or the Mavericks.

Outside the direct marketing efforts of the NBA, however, Markovits and Rensmann argue in their book, *Gaming the World*, that the spread of basketball into Europe since the Americans won the gold medal in the sport at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics has also been tied to the export of and European interest in American hip hop and urban culture.⁹¹ The authors explain that music culture has translated more easily into European social centers than has the physical culture of American sports, and that hip hop’s close affiliation with basketball created inroads for the sport into European cities that players like Nowitzki could build upon by succeeding in the United States. Indeed, the sport has flowed into urban centers in Germany - cities like Berlin and

⁸⁸ Freeman, Alan. “NBA Drives Growth of Hoops in Germany BASKETBALL / TV, Merchandise and U.S. Link Account for Game Soaring in Popularity. World Series The Games They Play around the World Part 1 of 7.” *The Globe and Mail (Canada)*. December 23, 1996. SPORTS; Pg. C12.

⁸⁹ Wenzel, *Streetball*. p. 85

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 85

⁹¹ Markovits and Rensmann, *Gaming the World*. p. 150

Hamburg - as a critical aspect of hip hop music and its surrounding culture, in which it features heavily.

Basketball and hip hop music have become intertwined, overlapping in such a way that the two cultures seem almost synonymous with each other at times. Beginning in the 1990s, and coinciding with the mainstream commercial success of rap music and other forms of hip hop culture, a new batch of stars was entering the NBA, noted for the flashy ‘playground’ style they brought to their games. Young players like Allen Iverson, Kobe Bryant, and Kevin Garnett represented an influx of youth and urban culture into the league - an aspect we saw discussed by Detlef Schrempf as being detrimental in the previous chapter.⁹² As this new generation of US basketball players experienced financial success in the NBA,⁹³ they helped to forge strong ties between basketball and hip hop music that are not visible in any other combination of sport and music genre. In bringing American urban culture to bear onto basketball culture, these stars acted not only as highly visible consumers of hip hop music and street culture, but also as its producers and frequent lyrical content.

Players such as Shaquille O’Neal, Kobe Bryant, and other NBA stars of the ‘90s and 2000s frequently made, often highly publicized, forays into rap and hip hop music, and it is in this context that many were introduced to the German public: as part of a broader hip hop, urban American culture. O’Neal in particular, who himself spent a small part of his childhood living on American military bases in Germany, is well known for his short-lived rap career in addition to his main occupation as a basketball player, and represents, along with Dirk Nowitzki, an

⁹² Grosskathöfer, Maik. “Opa auf der Love-Parade.” *Der Spiegel*, May 22, 2000.

⁹³ Markovits and Rensmann, in discussing the spread of hip hop culture in basketball, note that many of the trends associated with an urbanization of the sport - baggy shorts, black socks and shoes - saw their beginnings in the amateur collegiate version of the game, with the University of Michigan’s “Fab Five” basketball squads of the early 1990s.

important introduction of the sport to the German public. In 2001 O’Neal appeared alongside Nowitzki on the German television network ZDF for an interview in front of a live audience, in which he declared through his translator that the young Nowitzki would eventually become better than Larry Bird, much to the delight of the German crowd.⁹⁴ O’Neal’s rap career must have found its way to Germany as well, entwined in the global movement of American hip hop culture across the Atlantic.

In the early 2000s a family from Freiburg moved next door to me, including their son of a similar age as myself. During the process of our own cultural exchange, he showed me a CD he owned featuring a compilation of English- and German-language rap songs - including a song by Shaquille O’Neal, featuring German artist DJ Tomekk, in which O’Neal raps in both English and German, even going so far as to declare himself to be known amongst Germans as the “Dirk Nowitzki of rap.”⁹⁵ Admittedly, in looking back on it, the song is rather terrible - up there among the worst rap songs I’ve heard, to be quite frank - and Shaq’s German skills resemble more a poorly translated butchering of the language than a cultural embrace. Except for this CD, the German part of O’Neal’s rap career has evidently been largely lost to history; a Google search of the song returns no information on it other than the YouTube video of the song itself.⁹⁶ Still, the connection it represents between American hip hop and basketball culture, on the one hand, and basketball and rap in a German context, on the other, was strong enough for me to notice at the time, and has stuck with me ever since.

⁹⁴ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=28XO56DVum4>

⁹⁵ The song is titled “How You Like That (Ja Ja Ja)”. It can be viewed on YouTube here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EBEo2S96cYM>

⁹⁶ I actually did find out that it featured as the intro music to the program *Inside NBA* on DSF, which is relatively significant. I’d like to find more about this aspect, but preliminary searches don’t yield much.

With Markovits and Rensmann, I contend that, through the exportation of hip hop culture, various aspects of basketball culture have become commonplace in Germany. One of these aspects is the marketing of basketball shoes and other apparel in association with rap and hip hop performers. It is common to see these performers wearing basketball jerseys, and hats with NBA team logos on them, but perhaps the strongest link between basketball and hip hop lies in the obsession many fans of both entities have over their footwear. Basketball shoes have developed into their own sub-genre within the greater context of all things hip hop: “sneaker culture” represents the most visible and profitably link between sport and music, and no shoe in particular more so than Nike’s “Air Jordans.” A staple piece of the uniform for both basketball players and hip hop artists alike, these shoes are just as critical a piece of equipment on-court as they are on-stage. Named for Michael Jordan, widely considered to be the best basketball player ever to live, the shoes - along with the rest of the “Jordan” brand - may have made Jordan just as well known as his in-game performances.

As the urban culture flowed out of the United States in the 1990s, and subsequently the burgeoning shoe subculture with it, the NBA and its partner shoe manufacturers sought to cash in on these trends. The influx of hip hop culture into European markets presented companies like Nike - and perhaps more importantly for our discussion, major German shoe-maker Adidas - with an opportunity to capitalize on the developing basketball scenes. Riding on the coattails of urban hip hop culture, these companies had new places to sell shoes and other aspects of basketball culture.

As part of an advertising campaign, Adidas in particular sponsored a “streetball” movement in Germany, featuring a more informal version of the sport of basketball than is

represented by the NBA, usually played 3-on-3 at playgrounds and parks instead of gymnasiums and sport halls. Streetball games, resembling the pick-up games played in city-centers across America, allow for the showmanship and individualistic style of play that became associated with the entrance of the aforementioned group of superstars into the NBA during the 1990s and early 2000s, and that is such an integral part of urban basketball culture. Throughout the early and mid-1990s Adidas invested heavily in promoting this brand of basketball in Germany, including running a streetball tournament series. The company hoped to develop more than just the sport, but the whole urban lifestyle that went along with it, exchanging their dull, conservative image for a more youthful and trendy appearance.⁹⁷ Their PR campaign was a success, and streetball craze swept through Germany and much of the rest of Europe, only dying down once Adidas pulled funding for it after meeting sales quotas. Introduction of basketball into the European continent had been largely about selling the culture accompanying it, within the broader context of hip hop culture. The campaign was highly successful for Adidas: in 2006 the company signed a deal to become the NBA's official jersey and apparel provider, a position it held until 2015, when it was announced that Nike would replace them in that role.

Of course, in viewing basketball's diffusion into German society through the lens of a greater exportation of urban youth culture, we are implicitly acknowledging a heavy tie that still exists between basketball and perceptions of race. Representations of urban hip hop culture in the United States are predominantly linked to trends in black communities, and carry with them connotations of race that other genres of music do not, *per se*. The sport's close relationship with inner-city hip hop culture is an exhibition of its still present racial constructs. In a way, the

⁹⁷ Fuchs, Christian. "Streetball in Deutschland: Aus dem Ghetto auf den Rathausplatz." *SPIEGEL ONLINE*. July 23, 2012. <http://www.spiegel.de/einestages/streetball-in-deutschland-a-947656.html>.

sport's close connection to US African American culture reinforces the understanding of German basketball that has been built up through previous chapters in this thesis: if we recall, for example, the newsreel footage of the Harlem Globetrotters from the 1950s, the accompanying background music for the basketball clip switches to jazz in time for the segment on the Globetrotters. Just as with the more modern hip hop culture, there is a strong connection between black players showing up their opponents on the court and a highly urbanized, "black" style of music - jazz. We still see this racialized notion of the American basketball superstar in articles like the one where Detlef Schrempf bemoans the individualized and 'selfish' play of many of the league's "young guns", and the one in which the author congratulates Nowitzki on his efforts to defeat what the author refers to as "Ghetto-ball." As German basketball continues to develop into its own entity, it is clear that race still plays a very large role in shaping that identity, surely helped along by the cultural channels through which the game flows.

Yago Colás dedicates a significant part of his book, *Ball Don't Lie!: Myth, Genealogy, and Invention in the Cultures of Basketball*, to building a connection between African American urban culture and its influence on basketball in America.⁹⁸ Spanning across several chapters, Colás details the racial interplay that has been at the center of the sport for decades, culminating in the emergence of the 'hip hop generation' in the NBA over the past 25 years. Colás notes that these racial dynamics caused considerable tensions that the league has had to carefully traverse, at times both embracing the subversive undercurrents that its younger players represent, while being careful not to alienate their older, more conservative, and largely white viewership. "On the one hand, the league mobilized 'stereotypical understandings of black spaces, experiences,

⁹⁸ Colás, Santiago. *Ball Don't Lie!: Myth, Genealogy, and Invention in the Cultures of Basketball*. Temple University Press. 2016.

and aesthetics' as marketing devices to stimulate consumer demand for the NBA and related products," he writes, speaking to the young generation of stars like Allen Iverson, who embodied inner-city aspects of the game. "On the other hand, the NBA did not hesitate to capitalize on sensational media portrayals of frequently minor on- and off-court 'crises' to justify publicly disciplining and controlling its players."⁹⁹ The scope of Colás' book far exceeds that of my own arguments on basketball in Germany, suffice it to say, though, that according to Colás there exists in the American public perception a clear distinction between white and black in the sport, a distinction which has played an important role in the trajectory of the league at home and abroad.

Tying in many of the aspects already discussed in this chapter, Colás devotes a chapter of his own work to highlighting the "myth of the right way" to play the game, in which the traditional, 'white' values of the game (hard work, fundamentals, good defense, teamwork and unselfish play) are perceived to be under threat due to the introduction of the 'hip hop generation's' batch of stars.¹⁰⁰ Players whose skillsets exhibit certain flair and showmanship that have foundations in the playground courts of America's urban centers are often regarded as being narcissistic and selfish, the antithesis of playing the game 'the right way.' Just as white American critics decry the star-oriented style of play that the 'hip hop generation' represents, so too is the author from the *Welt* article referenced in the previous chapter of my thesis - rejoicing in the triumph of the right (white) way that Nowitzki plays over the individualistic 'urban' style of play.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* Chapter 7: The Myth of Blackness

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* Chapter 8: The Myth of the Right Way

In reality, I argue that Nowitzki represents an interesting combination of different elements of both the ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ ways of playing the game. On the court he largely does not fit the mold of the stars of the ‘hip hop generation.’ Although tall and a good shooter, Nowitzki is not particularly known for his athleticism, and rarely shows off with any high-flying dunks or dizzying ball-handling maneuvers, opting instead for a more team-oriented approach to the game. On the other hand, the defensive components of Dirk’s game are not his strong suit, as one would expect from someone who plays the game the ‘right’ way, and he adds a fair amount of his own flair to the game, known for his signature shot, a difficult fade-away jumper off of one foot. Off the court, Nowitzki does not appear to exhibit the same ‘street cred’, so to speak, as many of his peers - he does have a line of Nike basketball shoes - not, interestingly enough, a line of shoes with German company Adidas - but they are nowhere near as popular as those bearing the name of Michael Jordan or LeBron James. In his commercials for ING he is not presented as being particularly cool or hip, but rather as approachable and down-to-Earth.¹⁰¹ He is shown in the middle-class butchershop or on a beach - as opposed to, say, a barbershop - interacting with those older and younger than him, but rarely with his peers.¹⁰² He is not being offered up as a physical specimen in order to sell shoes, and no attempts are made to urbanize him - rather, he is most importantly characterized as authentically German. Nowitzki embodies largely different values through his on- and off-court persona than the NBA stars of the ‘hip hop

¹⁰¹ It should be noted that there is a commercial for ING featuring Nowitzki dunking a basketball from far away, much like Michael Jordan’s famous gravity-defying leaps, but this commercial is not part of the same “DiBaDu” campaign as the others. It can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NIXRrPYPZ7Q>

¹⁰² Andrews, David L., and Michael L. Silk. “Basketball’s Ghetto-centric Logic.” *American Behavioral Scientist* 53 (11). 2010. p. 1633. - Andrews and Silk relate to the reader a conversation from a series of advertisements for Nike set in a barbershop, a traditionally black urban space, and featuring a handful of black NBA stars.

generation' do, and represents a different channel for basketball's entrance into the German sporting scene. Indeed, many German fans were introduced to the game through its urban contexts, just as they were through Nowitzki.¹⁰³

Even then, clear indicators of the American game's racial influences can be seen on Nowitzki throughout his NBA career. An article written for the Mavericks' team section of the sports news website *SB Nation*, "Mavs Moneyball", notes that over the course of his time with the Mavericks, the speech patterns of his majority-black teammates have found their way into Nowitzki's vernacular, as informal interviews are often filled with "bruhs" and other markers of stereotypically African-American dialects. As mentioned before, Nowitzki does have his own line of Nike brand basketball shoes, an important aspect of black basketball culture, and has even found his way into the lyrics of rap and hip hop music, such as Shaq's song discussed earlier in this chapter, or in popular rap group Migos' track named after Nowitzki himself, featuring a chorus that repeats the lines "It's nothing but getting money niggas with me/Nothing but getting money niggas with me/Sipping on Texas, Dirk Nowitzki/Sipping on Texas, Dirk Nowitzki."¹⁰⁴ Additionally, Nowitzki again drew attention in the basketball community for his 2012 marriage to Jessica Olsson, a woman of Swedish and Kenyan descent, for which he received praise from many other black players in the league in marrying a black woman.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Including Dennis Schröder, who got his start in basketball through skateboarding and other street culture while growing up in Braunschweig.
<https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nba/hawks/2015/11/01/dennis-schroder-atlanta-hawks-germany/72484552/>

¹⁰⁴ Migos & The Rich Kid, ft. Young Dolph. "Dirk Nowitzki." Zaytoven, 2015. CD.

¹⁰⁵ Spears, Marc J. "The Color of Love: Dirk Nowitzki Opens up on His Interracial Marriage." *The Undefeated*. January 9, 2017.

<https://theundefeated.com/features/the-color-of-love-dirk-nowitzki-opens-up-on-his-interracial-marriage/>.

Although not necessarily the channel through which Nowitzki was introduced to basketball, nor the channel through which the current stereotypes of German basketball players are formed, the urban culture that basketball is tied to played an important role in establishing a German basketball scene, making the language of the sport understandable enough overseas so that NBA stars to attract a global following. If we are to understand that Dirk Nowitzki, as the figurehead of the German game, has allowed for the sport of basketball to gain a solid footing, we must also acknowledge that the development of the game in terms of its urban appeal allowed for the potential to have a German basketball superstar in the first place. While Nowitzki is certainly the one who took the sport to the next level in his home country, he could not have done so unless the groundwork was laid by an exodus of American hip hop culture in the wake of the ending of the Cold War, and the period of globalization that followed.

Conclusion: The next Dirk Nowitzki?

As Nowitzki reaches the end of his NBA career - with the Dallas Mavericks failing to qualify for the playoffs in early April of 2017, Nowitzki completed his nineteenth season in the league - questions begin to arise about the future of the game in Germany. With Nowitzki no longer playing in the NBA, nor for the German national basketball team (from which Nowitzki retired in 2016), will the sport still see the continued growth that has come about in Germany due to interest in his accomplishments? Do German sports fans need a German superstar in the NBA to sustain their interest in basketball as a sport? As such a crucial figure in building both a national and international perception of the game in a German context, what exactly does German basketball look like post-Nowitzki?

There are a handful of German players already in the NBA or just about to enter it, including the University of Michigan's own Moritz Wagner, although none of these players represent either the on-court success of Nowitzki, nor his off-court cultural permeation. Perhaps the best candidate for the next German superstar is Dennis Schröder, although - as has been discussed already - he does not fit the mold that Nowitzki has created for the stereotypical German, or even European for that matter, player. Just twenty-three years old and already in his third NBA season with the Atlanta Hawks, Schröder perhaps best represents the future of German basketball. This past season Schröder led the Hawks in assists, with over six per game, and was second on the team in scoring, averaging 17.9 points per game on the year, only 0.2 shy of the team's leading scorer. Consensus amongst those who follow the league closely is that

Schröder is poised to become one of the game's brightest young stars, provided he continues to work hard on improving his skills - something he has been criticized for in the past.

As a guard - as opposed to Nowitzki and Schrempf, who were both forwards - Schröder represents a much different type of basketball player than the models previously imported into the NBA from Germany. Schröder's play style is much more similar to the Allen Iversons and Kobe Bryants of the 'hip hop generation' than to the stiffer, less athletic games of Nowitzki and Schrempf, and Schröder plays with a creativity - and some would say selfishness - that is not always associated with the German version of the sport. As a black player, Schröder's race is likely an obstacle he will have to overcome if he is to achieve the same level of national recognition in Germany that Nowitzki garners, as an outcome of factors discussed in the first and third chapters of this thesis.

Regardless of his race, however, throughout Schröder's young NBA career he is already being depicted by both the German and American media in ways that are similar to the depictions of Nowitzki at the beginning of his career. Just as Detlef Schrempf was portrayed as a mentor for Nowitzki upon Nowitzki's entrance into the NBA, so too is Nowitzki being portrayed as a guiding veteran influence for Schröder to draw upon as he makes his name in the sport's top league.¹⁰⁶ If Schröder does indeed carry on Schrempf and Nowitzki's lineage as a highly successful German in the NBA, he will be doing so as new brand of German basketball player, one conceived primarily through German interpretations of a distinctly urban American style of play. Such a dynamic is fitting after all for a German player, as I have demonstrated throughout

¹⁰⁶ Lütticke, Florian. "Der Rookie Und Der Superstar; NBA Dirk Nowitzki Trifft Mit Dallas Zum Auftakt Auf Neuling Dennis Schröder Mit Atlanta." *Allgemeine Zeitung (Germany)*, October 30, 2013. SPORT.

this thesis: perhaps Schröder will become the best representation yet of basketball's history in Germany as an exchange of cultures with the United States.

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