

I did an interview with Mike Freeman of Sportsline that he [posted today](#).

I've taken the liberty of repeating it here, and adding some additional thoughts below it. Thanks Mike.

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### **Going international — and paying for it**

You are about to read some of the smartest analysis from any NBA player, coach or official about why it seems the Americans, when it comes to international basketball play, couldn't beat a foreign team composed of three French Poodles and two third-graders if their lives depended on it.

This is why we stink in international hoops, why we finish in third place despite having delicious NBA stars on the roster, or at least how Dallas owner Mark Cuban sees it. And he's right. He's so right that by the time you are done reading this you will be nodding your head in agreement.

"I can make it easy for you," Cuban said when I asked him to give me 10 steps to make America's international basketball experience more successful — and less like having a left testicle being hit with a ballpeen hammer. "Either we change all levels of basketball in the USA to play by international rules, or we get them to play by U.S. basketball rules.

"I would be willing to bet that if you brought back all the same teams in the final eight and played under NBA rules," Cuban said, "with an NBA ball on an NBA-sized court, we would torch them. The different rules require different skill sets. It's that simple.

"If one set of rules isn't natural to you, you will struggle to adapt," Cuban continued in his e-mail. "We hear it all the time about international players having to adapt to the NBA game. Here the rules are geared towards entertainment, which is a good thing. But if we changed to international rules, we would have a completely different set of stars and teams would be constructed and coached completely differently."

The international teams put more emphasis on pure shooting, for example. They don't care as much about slam dunks. They want to make outside shots, not highlight shows.

Don't stop reading. Cuban is just getting warmed up.

"And as far as wondering why the USA can't dominate the Olympics like the original Dream Teams, there is an easy answer," he said. "We plugged in our NBA stars to play against international teams that had been comprised of non-professionals forever. While at the same time the Soviet Union imploded, so the one team that also was filled with professionals didn't exist any longer."

"Of course the U.S. teams were going to kill any and every team," Cuban continued. "It was our stars against their amateurs. Well, 15 years later, they have had plenty of time to integrate their professionals into their teams. Their national teams not only start playing together much younger, they play together every summer and their players go pro younger. So they have professional players who are now playing together every summer, year after year, for well-funded national teams. On top of that, the top Euro (teams) play against each other. They get friendlies that are competitive. The U.S. team played against creampuffs a couple times before the tournament."

That makes so much sense my head hurts.

Cuban is not trying to diss the Dream Team, but what he says is true. That team did not play a series of pro teams. They played scrubs. It was like the Dallas Cowboys taking on a state college.

Then Cuban says something that at first I don't agree with, but then, after reading what he says, his argument sways me.

"All that said, I personally think that the NBA, from a business perspective, is stupid for letting our players play at all," Cuban explains. "We absorb all the risk and we have gained little if anything from it. Well, that's not completely true. (The) last six to 10 years of international competition have led media to call our players selfish, without basic basketball skills, ugly Americans and worse. This year's team was far better behaved and that's great. But we put ourselves in a no-win, everything-to-lose situation (just ask Memphis). That's not good business. Ever."

When I tell Cuban that — to borrow a lame phrase being used about another topic altogether — refusing to play, instead of fixing the problems, would be cutting and running, he responds: "It's just a financial decision. The Olympics is nothing but a big business. It's not a platform for national pride. They are a competitor for advertising and TV dollars. Lending them our best players is a dumb business decision. It has nothing to do with winning or losing."

The Americans have everything to lose while international clubs have everything to gain. Keeping our NBA players out of it and reengineering the international team to play a more international style might be the best thing to do.

As usual, Cuban makes too much sense.

I also wanted to add a quick thought that is in response to some of the comments.

The ultimate test, whether of American or foreign players of their commitment to playing for their national teams is whether they would waive their guarantees for any injuries suffered during international competitions. If its country before money. Great. Go for it.

The next point is that if we want NBA players to be better international as well as NBA players, then why do we restrict our ability to work with them over the summer? Even if a player wants to come to Dallas and train and work with our coaches, we aren't allowed to make it happen. Commissioner Stern said it best (although I'm paraphrasing, I couldn't find a direct link) when he said that it didn't make sense that student athletes had more access to shoe companies than their coaches. Well the same thing applies to NBA players. Our players can play in Pro Am Leagues. They can do whatever they want with their shoe company and the promotions and games they put together, but we can't work with them on their skillsets. Skills that would improve our ability to compete internationally, and would make the NBA better. Hopefully the commish can work with the NBA Players union, or better yet, the Players Union will encourage their membership to allow

skills based training over the summer.

And finally, let me go back to the business side of the equation. I personally don't think the NBA gains returns equal to a money market fund from the money we spend internationally.

Do we sell product. Absolutely. Do we sell TV rights. Absolutely. Do we gain an international profile ? Absolutely. That said, my business bias is to win the battles we are in first, then take on new battles.

How about we focus on doing a better job in the battle for eyeballs in the US first ? How about we create so much demand for our game that over the air TV perceives it as a must have TIVO buster product like the NFL ? Or Iceskating in the Olympics ?

All that money we spend to promote ourselves internationally can be far better spent to promote our game domestically. Let's make the NBA a close, not distant second to the NFL. The USA is the most prolific TV market in the world. Increasing our ratings and attendance here from better marketing will pay us far , far more returns than anything we could ever possibly do internationally.