

Comparative Study on the Status Quo of Emergency Response Strategies of NBA and CBA During the Covid-19

Yankai Chen^{1, a}

¹Hankamer Business School, Baylor University, Waco, Texas, 76706, USA

^aEmail: yankai_chen1@baylor.edu

Abstract: The rapid development of sports has been affected to a certain extent by emergencies. Especially since the outbreak of Covid-19 in 2019, global sports events have been suspended one after another, and large-scale sports events were facing the economic threat brought by the epidemic. Based on this, both NBA and CBA leagues formulated a targeted development policy. This article will analyze the advantages and disadvantages of the emergency strategies formulated by the two major alliances to deal with emergencies, and then deeply dissect the solutions adopted by the senior management of the alliance to deal with emergencies, analyze their strategies, and give corresponding suggestions, to provide reference and thinking for the development of CBA league and other sports leagues. This paper draws conclusions through literature review, mathematical statistics, and logical analysis. (1) When emergencies occur, decisions made by large sports leagues are largely affected by external factors, such as social factors, and new media (2) The decision made by China's CBA League in response to the turning point of the epidemic crisis has far-reaching strategic significance, and the maturity of the NBA League's emergency public relations team can be used as the object of CBA high-level research and reference.

Keywords: Basketball, NBA, CBA, Epidemic, Development strategy.

1. Introduction

The mode of basketball determines the strong and close contact of the participants. Close physical contact cannot be avoided whether defense or offense. This also led to the direct impact of the new crown epidemic on the two major events of NBA and CBA. In the 2019-2020 season, the NBA and CBA chose to suspend the season for reasons such as player safety and economic protection. During the shutdown stage, the executives made various decisions, combined with consideration of various external factors such as media, fans, and ratings, and finally decided to resume the game. Although the plans of the two alliances are generally in the same direction, there are still differences in details. Combining various factors brought by the different environments of the two alliances, such as political factors, economic factors, social factors, etc., it can be found that the different policies of the two sides are distinguishable, and each has its own merits.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Overview of the union's emergency measures after the outbreak

As a sports event with strong human interaction, the broke of Covid-19 directly threatened athletes' health. Furthermore, the arena is so large that it can accommodate more than 30,000 people, which is far more than the number required for "large gatherings". As the largest basketball sports league in China, the CBA was originally planned to start after the Spring Festival in February 2020, but the outbreak of the Wuhan epidemic forced the league to be interrupted. Four months later in the same year, with the coordinated help of Nanshan Zhong's team, the CBA resumed in June. Across the ocean, the NBA got the news that Utah Jazz player Rudy

Gobert had tested positive for the coronavirus on March 11, 2020. [1] The next day, NBA league president Adam Silver decided to suspend NBA games indefinitely. In June of the same year, the NBA planned to conduct a rematch through the "bubble league" strategy.

2.1.1. The strategic theme and main achievements of NBA "bubble league"

Traditional NBA game adopts the home and guest system, which requires each team to travel back and forth with each state in the United States to participate in the game. Obviously, in the face of the new Covid-19 sweeping the world, the NBA cannot resume its schedule through traditional means. Based on this, the NBA set its sights on the ESPN Worldwide Sports Complex located in Disneyland, Florida, USA. The "Bubble League" have absorbed 22 of the 30 NBA teams and assigned them 8 regular-season games to determine rankings and then playoffs. The NBA also named the new venue "Bubble League".

When the restart plan turned out, a series of potential problems also emerged. First, the player's own life would be affected by being trapped in the "Bubble League". Second, even though the league has announced that it will take complete protective measures to protect players from infection as much as possible, many players still considered that this would not prevent the spread of the virus and chose not to go out with the team. This will directly affect the team's rotation system, especially when the playoffs are approaching, it is even more difficult for a team that is familiar with the old system to run in a new lineup. While the NBA was well prepared to deal with the difficult challenges it will face after the rematch.

Players who chose to participate in the "Bubble League" got various benefits provided by the NBA league, such as free admission to top Disney hotels and privileges like early access to Disney movies. Considering the recreational life of

the players, the league provided players with a private golf course as a measure to protect the players' safety and as a reward for the players' compliance and not leaving the "Bubble League". When players were in public areas, they were required to strictly abide by signed safety protocols, such as maintaining distance between personnel and requirements for wearing masks. In addition, the league offered an "enhanced insurance plan" for players who were willing to take a high risk of injury and infection.[2]

This series of measures and regulations brought a satisfactory result to the league - 3 months of match, 172 games, and 0 infection. After a 100-day match, the NBA saved nearly 1.5 billion in economic losses with a construction cost of \$ 180 million. Compared with the 4-month lockdown period, the league lost 1 billion.

2.1.2. The benefits brought by the adoption of the "competition system" for the CBA rematch

On January 24, 2020, CBA's official Weibo announced the suspension of CBA and explained the reasons for the suspension to fans. In addition, the official also stated that the season was not over, and the rematch date was to be determined. This also paved the way for the rematch more than four months later. When the CBA decided to rematch after 20 days, the CBA subtly exerted the power of the basketball association and encouraged Yao Ming to write a letter to the players participating in the rematch. This letter used the title "CBA to resume with all efforts" to explain the operation model of the rematch to players, fans, coaching staff, and all CBA staff. The players were told they needed to train, play, and live in a closed environment. At the same time, the players would be provided with leisure and entertainment activities in the Qingdao and Dongguan competition areas to ensure their physical and mental health. CBA hoped to remind the public and players through such agitation that the rematch did not mean the end of the epidemic, and the hidden dangers had not yet been eliminated and should not be taken lightly.[3]

CBA executives made such a strategy generally accompanied by the country's opening-up policy. As the first professional league in China to restart, the prevention and control of the epidemic is the top priority of CBA. In the epidemic prevention and control section, CBA has received support and advice from the top domestic epidemic prevention team Zhong Nanshan's team. [3] Coupled with the cooperation and support of the government, CBA achieved the goal of putting player safety first in the rematch stage. Every player entering the arena is required to undergo nucleic acid testing three times a day and submit a health report. For staff, CBA required different personnel to only move in areas of corresponding different colors to ensure safe social distance.

This series of measures has paved the way for the CBA rematch, but there are still insufficient considerations. Even when players are encouraged to play in an unknown environment, they are still unfamiliar with the form. Especially after more than 4 months without professional training and exercise, the physical function may change. Furthermore, the start of the rematch is inseparable from the support of funds. [2] Although in the prevention and control of the epidemic, the government team and the CDC can support the necessary medical resources, in terms of player salaries, ticket revenue, and sponsor relationships that require substantial financial support, the CBA is facing great challenges.

2.2. Overview of The League's Emergency Strategies for Problems After the Rematch

As mentioned above, after the restart of the NBA league, it had the problem of the team's ranking in the regular season. Some teams played several fewer games than others because of the schedule, which would label the entire tournament as "injustice". To solve the problem of the schedule, the NBA temporarily added the play-off system, requiring the teams ranked 7-10 in the regular season to play 3 additional crucial games to determine the playoff quota. When the CBA was faced with a lack of funds and could not support the rhythm of the rematch plan, the top management decided to take the lead in reducing salaries to encourage lower-level staff to reduce their salaries in a friendly manner, thereby freeing up space for funds.

2.2.1. The impact of the NBA "play-off" format on the restart stage

Before the epidemic, the NBA was already facing several challenges. And among the problems, declining ratings was the last thing NBA commissioner Adam Silver wants to see. The Lakers vs. Heat finals in the "Bubble League" in 2020 set a record for the lowest ratings in history. And this phenomenon is not only due to the problem of top management. The sudden decline of American stars, the decline in the quality of the game, and the random change in the game system are all reasons for the decline in ratings. [4]

Regarding the "play-off" attitude, many NBA players have objections, believing that this format is unfair to some teams, and the Lakers star LeBron James is one of the most representative. The immediate reason for his idea was that the Lakers were sixth in the Western Conference at the time, and they could fall out of the top six at any time, losing direct entry to the playoffs. Even so, this small move made by the league is still in the experimental stage, and even the top officials themselves do not know that such a competition system can last for a few years, which has brought them a lot of rewards.

The sharp decline in ratings has prompted the league to continue to innovate in the game system. In the 2020-2021 season "play-off", due to the ranking of the Western Conference, two fronts of the league faced off against each other--LeBron James and Stephen Curry. dialogue. As a result, the ratings have picked up to a great extent. After this "play-off", the league has made it clearer how much the NBA, as a business league, relies on star power.

As an emerging competition system, the "play-off" broke through many controversies, gained benefits for the NBA league, and contributed to the improvement of the overall environment and atmosphere of the entire league. Although this is a temporary and not a fully-fledged strategy, it can be called a successful restructuring overall.

2.2.2. CBA executives took the lead in reducing salary and contributed to the rematch

Due to the outbreak, the cooperation between the CBA and many sponsors cannot proceed as usual, which puts the league under great economic pressure. The tight financial space has led to the cancellation of many peripheral activities, and it has also brought pressure on the salaries of coaches and players of various teams. In the rematch stage, all players were facing the trend of salary reduction, which is a helpless move to maintain the normal operation of the club during the special period.

Although CBA is in the shutdown stage, all clubs need to

pay their necessary operating expenses, including staff salaries, player salaries, venue rental, and maintenance costs. The team's income can only be supported by ticket revenue and sponsors, so the club faces a necessary choice door. Some teams want to end the season early because of their low rankings to relieve the pressure on the team's salary space. Some teams must take pay cuts to maintain normal operations. [3]

With the introduction of the Chinese basketball salary reduction guidance, CBA company executives began to take the lead in reducing salaries, and for clubs, players were driven to reduce salaries. They also lost the opportunity to receive bonuses. Many players' contracts include incentive clauses to encourage players to earn extra wages through performance on the court, but they have also lost those incentives due to the CBA shutdown. Some players chose to change careers or quit, which also led to a major change in the lineup of many clubs. When the rematch stage is approaching, such a situation has an extremely negative impact on the team and players. It not only disrupts the players' lives but also brings oppression to the players' psychology. [3]

3. Methods

3.1. Sports Leagues' Decisions Highly Depend On the Environment

During the suspension period, both NBA and CBA were experiencing a suffering period from the huge deficit. What NBA did better than CBA was that NBA had been finding remedies through innovation, while CBA mainly shut down projects to reduce losses as possible. However, that doesn't mean CBA doesn't want exploration. In China, the sports atmosphere is not as good as that in the USA. Although the Chinese government already formulated the plan for "Generating a Sports Powerhouse", the enthusiasm of the public for sports still needs time to accumulate.

The NBA experienced a systematic crisis early, which were mainly formed through uncontrollable factors like political, economic, social, and environmental external events. For example, as early as the 1980s, violence, drugs, and racial discrimination flooded the entire league. Players were influenced by conservative negative news, and the overall social image of the league was severely damaged. [5]

After experiencing plenty of cases, the NBA does have a greater management team than CBA in Emergency PR. When league executives saw the plummeting ratings, they immediately came up with thoughts like adding additional divisions and changing the format. However, as the USA is a highly democratic country, every decision of the executives of the league must be highly bound to public feedback to apply. For example, NBA tried to change the format to a mode encouraging players to offense more regularly. They consider it an efficient way to improve the ratio. However, what surprised them was such a method led to the flood of players' behavior of making fouls, which in the opposite, decreased audiences' viewing experience. Hence, they later summarized the previous failure experience, then came up with the idea of adding a few topical games— "Play-off".

Still, such a decision elicited a lot of debates, plus some new challenges emerged like the coming electoral assembly. At that time, the country was dealing with a high trend of racial revolution, "BLM". NBA, as one of the biggest publicity organizations in broadcast, must be involved. The "BLM" incident, which caused an uproar in American society,

had a profound impact on the NBA. Considering that the ratio of black players to white players in the NBA in 2020 is 81.1% to 17.9%, the league has to make a statement about this large group. The NBA has approved 29 different phrases that will allow players to wear jerseys with those phrases during the restart phase. Such an ad hoc decision satisfied the urgent needs of many players to express their ethnic identity. In this way, NBA successfully built an intimate relationship with the players, which is the necessity for a good executive to behave.

Moreover, the teams participating in the play-offs can use this chance to have more ticket revenue. Ticket revenue has always been the main source of income for teams, especially top teams. Nowadays, the ticket revenue of a final can be as high as nearly 100 million dollars. Especially for those teams that are sitting on the star of the game, in the play-offs, they got a chance to breathe in the environment of heavy financial pressure.

To CBA, the strict emphasis on epidemic prevention in China has led CBA to close a series of promotional activities. But the top manager did not do nothing, instead kept looking for opportunities in the cracks. In addition, in terms of economy, CBA attached close relationships with the interests of fans, media cooperation, and sponsorship. Although the game was played in an empty stadium and lost a part of the audience, CBA was still eager to cooperate with the three official copyright partners in the Internet field—Tencent, Youku, and Migu to restore the fans' enthusiasm and ratings lost during the lockout. With the support of our partner Migu's 5G technology, fans got a real-time viewing experience from multiple angles. When negotiating with sponsors, CBA paid close attention to CCTV5.[3] Executives hope to gain benefits for sponsor partners by increasing brand exposure. The main means included promoting the brand value by placing the sponsor's mascot or derivative product with the logo in the auditorium.

3.2. CBA Attained Far-Reaching Success in Strategies During Epidemic

The fact was that 3 games of the CBA Finals received more than 25.3 million unique visitors and more than 100 million views. That was due to the 2.0 Business New Era Plan released by CBA in 2019, it announced that CBA will develop from 8 aspects, including intellectual property rights, competition content, star rights, stadium exposure, alliance promotion, club cooperation, public welfare activities, and customer customization.

At the same time, due to the event of Daryl Morey, NBA lost the largest fan group in the world—China, which generally let CBA attract part of them. Hence in the 2019-2020 season, the ratio of CBA shown by the CCTV5 database almost doubled. It is glad to see the league brand increasing, belonging with more new blood, including athletes and fans joining such a big family.

However, without special innovation, CBA doesn't keep such a trend consistently. This year when CCTV5 replayed the NBA playoffs, even the attention to the CBA Finals was plummeting. The game's highest viewing rate was only 1.73% and the attention of the entire live broadcast was only 0.36%. Besides the reason the game quality decreased compared to previous years, CBA executives should consider why so many fans chose to watch NBA when it becomes available.

In long term, what CBA needs to learn from NBA is to create "personality". The executive should imitate NBA managers' mode to let the league show its value. Although we

can see CBA's brand value is increasing these years, CBA still needs to establish a sense of belonging for its fans to ensure that it can have a fixed and loyal fan group.

4. Conclusion

Under great pressure brought by Covid-19, both NBA and CBA overcame several difficulties to attain extraordinary achievements. Affected by external factors, they came up with different solutions and thoughts to show management teams' wisdom. We can see that CBA has been growing over the years. Following the step of the NBA, the CBA's competition system has become more complete, the content of the league has become more specific, and the team has become more cohesive. In the long run, the CBA can build more possibilities by leveraging the power of the Basketball Association, to furtherly develop as a more sophisticated and mature league.

References

- [1] Xiaohe Li. (2022) Study on the spreading strategy of sports event lockout crisis under the epidemic situation of new coronary pneumonia—taking CBA league as an example. Wuhan Sports University Master's Thesis, 13-23.
- [2] Wu, Jared and Sidell, Matt (2020) Bubble or Trouble? Restarting professional sports while weighing the risks for athletes. *Research and Innovation Villag*, 1: 4. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.bryant.edu/riv/vol1/iss1/4>.
- [3] Bo Peng, Xing Wang, Jiji Long, Xiaoman Ma. (2021) Study on the current situation and dilemma faced by CBA under the Covid-19 epidemic. *Journal of Southwest China Normal University*, 46: 1-4.
- [4] Yan Liu. (2021) The darkest year—NBA epidemic memo. *NBA special*, 6.
- [5] Wenjuan Li (2011) The Study on Crisis Communication of NBA during David Stern Time. Beijing Sports University Master's Thesis, 17.