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## Migratory motivations of American professional basketball players in Japan, Spain and Australia

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This study focuses on the overseas migratory motivation of American players in the world of professional basketball. Qualitative interviews were used to understand the experiences of eight American basketball players and the study adopts neo-classical economics as its theoretical framework. A total of six players attached importance to getting a good contract as professional players. One player emphasized the desire to experience a different culture. Another player had emigrated to continue playing basketball at a high-level and enjoy a comfortable life style. By demonstrating that many American players migrate to overseas countries because of disparities in salary between professional basketball leagues, the study provides evidence of the relevance of neo-classical economics to the motivations of professional basketball players in the international market.

**Keywords:** American basketball players; sport labour migration; globalization; migratory motivation; neo-classical economics

### Introduction

Basketball is one of the most popular sports across the world. FIBA (the International Basketball Federation) is composed of 213 national basketball federations and the global population of basketball players is estimated to be about 450 million.<sup>1</sup> The National Basketball Association (NBA) is the most famous and competitive professional basketball league in the world. For example, the 2013 NBA All-Star Game was held in Houston and broadcast by television companies in 220 countries.<sup>2</sup> Such statistics reveal the large number of spectators interested in the sport; accompanying these developments has been an increased number of global basketball migrants.

In the 1980s, there were only a few foreign-born NBA players; these included Patrick Ewing (Jamaica) and Hakeem Olajuwon (Nigeria). However, the number of foreign players has increased since the late 1990s. Indeed, Steve Nash of the Phoenix Suns (Canada) was selected as Most Valuable Player in the 2004–5 and 2005–6 seasons and Dirk Nowitzki of the Dallas Mavericks (Germany) won the MVP in the 2006–7 season. Furthermore, foreign players constituted some 20% of all players in the NBA in the 2007–8 season (Chiba, 2012) and, according to the NBA, 84 international players from 37 countries were registered as of 31 October 2012.<sup>3</sup> Conversely, 6717 American players played professional basketball overseas in the five-year period 2005–2010.<sup>4</sup> Amongst them, Allen Iverson, a former All-Star guard, signed a two-year deal to play basketball for the Turkish team Besiktas in 2010. A documentary film, *Rebounds*, focuses on the overseas experiences of two American basketball players, Tim Jones and Derrick Miller, during their season playing in Puente Alto, Chile.<sup>5</sup> The players travelled to several countries to play professional basketball and were eventually contracted to a basketball

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team in Chile. An important question that emerges, then, is: why do so many American professional players move overseas to play basketball, and how does this relate to other forms of global sport migration?

Since the 1990s, scholars have examined various aspects of the globalization of sport as it affects different countries (Chiba, Ebihara, & Morino, 2001; Donnelly, 1996; Giulianotti & Robertson, 2007; Jackson & Andrews, 1999; Maguire, 1994; Rowe, Lawrence, Miller, & McKay, 1994). Elliott and Maguire (2008a, 2008b), focusing on the motivation of players and relationships between players, coaches, agents and owners in order to explain the migration of Canadian players to the English Ice Hockey League (EIHL). They offer a typology of European hockey league rankings revealing the weakness of the EIHL compared to other European leagues. They explain the migratory motivations of Canadian players based on a theoretical framework drawn from figurational sociology. Norbert Elias, the initial proponent of figurational sociology, indicated that 'All social phenomena have to be understood as social processes' (cited in Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner, 2006, p. 148). Thus, Elliott and Maguire (2008a) sought to explain the phenomenon of the migrations of Canadian ice hockey players through evidence from players, agents and owners. In particular, they noted the value of 'informal communicative "friends-of-friends" networks and "bridgehead" contacts' (Elliott & Maguire, 2008a, p. 158) to explain player recruitment. Furthermore, Elliott and Maguire (2008b) indicate the necessity of combining findings in the area of athletic labour migration with those from the area of highly skilled labour migration more generally. The in-migration of Canadian players into the EIHL was undeniably influenced by those very 'friends-of-friends' networks and 'bridgehead' contacts. However, it is common – for example at the elite level of European soccer – for players to find out about professional jobs through agents. Thus, we need to examine more closely the processes of player recruitment according to athletic level and professional sports.

Maguire (1996) suggested a typology of sporting migrants by examining the case of Canadian players in British ice hockey. He categorized them as pioneers, settlers, mercenaries, returnees and nomadic cosmopolitans. Although this typology was initially developed as a way of explaining one group of migrant athletes, it was intended to be relevant to sport more generally. However, Magee and Sudgen (2002) criticized what they considered to be the weak points of Maguire's typology and sought to improve it by focusing on the case of the English Football League. Their typology was based on data derived from interviews with 22 foreign football players in the Premier League. Magee and Sugden added the new categories of ambitionist, exile and expelled to Maguire's typology. The present study utilizes both of these typologies, taking into account their distinguishing features.

It should also be noted that there already exist studies of globalization and basketball. For example, Andrews (1997) focused on the promotional strategies of the NBA from the 1980s to the late 1990s. Furthermore, Falcous and Maguire (2005) documented the political economy of global basketball and labour migration, writing that

the NBA acts as the apex of the hierarchy of global men's basketball leagues, overwhelmingly recruiting from the US college system, but also increasingly taking talent from other donor countries. Other national organizations are the recipient of surplus players from the collegiate system, but they also suffer deskilling as a result of their best players gravitating to the NBA (Falcous & Maguire, 2005, p. 141).

What this passage makes clear is that the NBA is positioned at the centre of global basketball and that local leagues face talent underdevelopment because of American imports. But how precisely do they impact on local basketball leagues in terms of athletic level? For example, Israeli basketball has recruited American players in order to strengthen domestic

teams and Israel's national team since the 1970s (Galily & Sheard, 2002). As a result, the Israeli team finished second in the 1979 FIBA European Championship. Furthermore, Olin and Penttila (1994) report the results of three studies of foreign professional players (in basketball, ice hockey and volleyball) in Finland during the 1980s and note that '[f]rom [1972] until 1989 about 250 foreign professionals, mainly from the United States, played in the Finnish basketball leagues' (Olin & Penttila, 1994, p. 129). They also indicate that migratory motivations of foreign players have changed drastically, as follows:

... perhaps most significant of all, better earnings had become the most important motive at the end of the eighties from fifth place at the beginning of the decade, probably due to increased materialism of players and commercialization of sport (Olin & Penttila, 1994, p. 137).

In short, it seems that foreign players tended to attach considerable importance to better earnings because of the commercialization of professional sports from the late 1980s onwards.

American basketball occupies a pivotal position, revolving, as it does, around the NBA which, in recent years, has attracted elite players from around the world. This flow is known as 'in-migration'. On the other hand, American players tend to move to European and Asian leagues. This flow is known as 'out-migration' (Arbena, 1994). The present study focuses on 'out-migration' from the USA to other countries. To date, researchers have adopted various theories of international migration. Indeed, Massey et al. (1993) emphasize the importance of incorporating various theories and introduce the assumptions of neo-classical economics in the following way:

1. The international migration of workers is caused by differences in wage rates between countries.
2. The elimination of wage differentials will end the movement of labor, and migration will not occur in the absence of such differentials.
3. International flows of human capital – that is, highly skilled workers respond to differences in the rate of return to human capital, which may be different from the overall wage rate, yielding a distinct pattern of migration that may be opposite that of unskilled workers.
4. Labor markets are the primary mechanisms by which international flows of labor are induced; other kinds of markets do not have important effects on international migration.
5. The way for governments to control migration flows is to regulate or influence labor markets in sending and/or receiving countries (Massey et al., 1993, p. 434).

Of these propositions, three (the first, second and fifth) in particular are very useful for explaining the international movement of professional athletes. Furthermore, neo-classical economics is suitable for explaining the international migration of highly skilled workers, including professional athletes. In short, this theory explains that they move to elite leagues because of differential wage rates. Furthermore, the number of foreign players is influenced by the expansion or abolition of quota systems, as the fifth assumption indicates. This study seeks to examine the overseas migratory motivations of eight American players. This analytical approach that has been taken adopts neo-classical economics as the theoretical framework to explain the structure of player migration.

### **The historical development of the JBL, the Euroleague and the NBL**

First, however, it is necessary to introduce the elite basketball leagues to which the players have migrated. The Japanese Basketball League (JBL) was founded in 1967 as a semi-professional league. Teams were supported by Japanese corporations such as Toyota

Motor Corporation and Panasonic, which used the league to promote their brands. These corporations made no direct profit from elite basketball competitions and, in fact, subsidized the league with sums of \$US3.75–6.25 million to cover, amongst other things, players' salaries and travelling expenses.<sup>6</sup>

The JBL made plans to develop a professional league in both 1995 and 2004. However, this was not possible because of objections from certain corporate teams (Harada, 2009), some of which also ran professional soccer teams in the J League that operated with financial deficits. Consequently, they were reluctant to run professional basketball teams as well.<sup>7</sup> As a result, two teams withdrew from the JBL and, in 2005, formed the first professional basketball league in Japan – the 'bj league', which consisted of six teams during its first season. Thereafter, it continued to expand and the number of teams increased to 21 as of the 2012–3 season. Thus, there are now two elite basketball leagues in Japan.

The Euroleague was established by FIBA in 1958. This was a professional basketball league that was composed of teams from 13 European countries. FIBA managed the Euroleague until 2000 and the Union of European Leagues of Basketball (UELB) then formed Euroleague Basketball, which comprised 24 clubs from 13 European countries.<sup>8</sup> Only the top clubs in domestic leagues can participate in this league.

The NBL was established in 1979 as an amateur league in Australia. As it gained popularity in the 1980s, it developed a professional basketball league and adopted a private ownership system. At its peak, in 1984, the NBL had increased its membership to 17 teams. By 2012, the number of teams had been reduced to eight because of the withdrawal of several teams. The NBL consisted of seven Australian teams and one New Zealand team, the New Zealand Breakers, in the 2012–3 season.

### Comparing and contrasting professional basketball leagues

The JBL was composed of 12 teams in the 1997–8 season. However, the number of teams decreased to eight by 2011–12 because of a depressed Japanese economy. Two foreign players per team played on the court at the same time in the JBL until the 2007–8 season. However, the JBL regulated that only one foreign player could be on the court from the 2008–9 season. This was partly due to the fact that Japanese centres were receiving limited playing time because foreign centres had become dominant. As a result, it was argued that Japanese centres were unable to develop.

The ratio of foreign players in the JBL was 24.7% (39/158) in the 1997–8 season. Of these, almost all (38 players) came from the USA (Table 1). The proportion of foreign players decreased to 17.2% (19/110) in the 2011–2 season. However, the total number of players, as well as the total number of foreign players, decreased during that period. Thus, the percentage of foreign-born players in the 2011–2 season was 24.5% (27/110). Of those 27 foreign-born players, eight obtained Japanese nationality in order to avoid the quota system regulation. Each team could recruit only one naturalized player in the 2009–10

Table 1. Quota system and the rate of foreign players in each league.

League	Teams	Quota system	Rate of foreign players	Rate of Americans
JBL (1997–8)	12	2	24.7% (39/158)	97.4% (38/39)
JBL (2011–2)	8	1	17.2% (19/110)	68.4% (13/19)
Euro league (2008–9)	24	0	49.3%	44.6%
NBL (2009–10)	8	2	25.2% (27/107)	55.5% (15/27)

season.<sup>9</sup> It is clear that some foreign-born players obtained Japanese nationality as a direct response to the change in the quota system. With this in mind, one may say that the introduction into the JBL of the 'one foreigner on the court' rule encouraged foreign-born players to obtain Japanese nationality. These results lead to the conclusion that the introduction of the 'one foreigner on the court' rule led to a decrease in the number of foreign players in the JBL and demonstrated that neo-classical economics' fifth assumption – 'The way for governments to control migration flows is to regulate or influence labor markets in sending and/or receiving countries' (Massey et al., 1993, p. 434) – is reasonable to explain the situation in the JBL.

Some 70% of foreign players in both Japanese leagues came from the USA. This result was the consequence of an intimate relationship between Japanese and American basketball, the former having been influenced by American basketball in terms of strategy, tactics, fashion and coaching style. For example, three head coaches of the eight teams in the JBL during the 2012–13 season were from the USA.<sup>10</sup> Thus, it is not surprising that American players make up almost all of the foreign basketball contingent in the Japanese leagues.

However, the percentage of foreign players in the Euroleague was 49.3% in 2008–9, and in the NBL it was 25.2% in 2009–10 (Table 1). Americans accounted for 44.6% of the foreign players in the Euroleague and 55.5% of those in the NBL. As the Euroleague is a transnational league, there is no quota system and it is difficult to regulate the number of foreign players because of different quota systems operating in each league. European basketball leagues have a domestic rule relating to foreign players such that four players from Europe and two foreign players can register at the same time. On the other hand, the NBL has decreed that only two foreign players can register and play at the same time. Thus, the number of foreign players is proportional to that of the number of teams except for the 1983 and 1984 seasons (Figure 1), when the NBL increased the quota from two to three. As a result, the number of foreign players increased considerably (Figure 1). This result also corresponds with assumption number five of neo-classical economics.

Some other factors are worthy of mention. Australia is a multicultural country and has many immigrants from all over the world. Thus, there are many foreign basketball players,

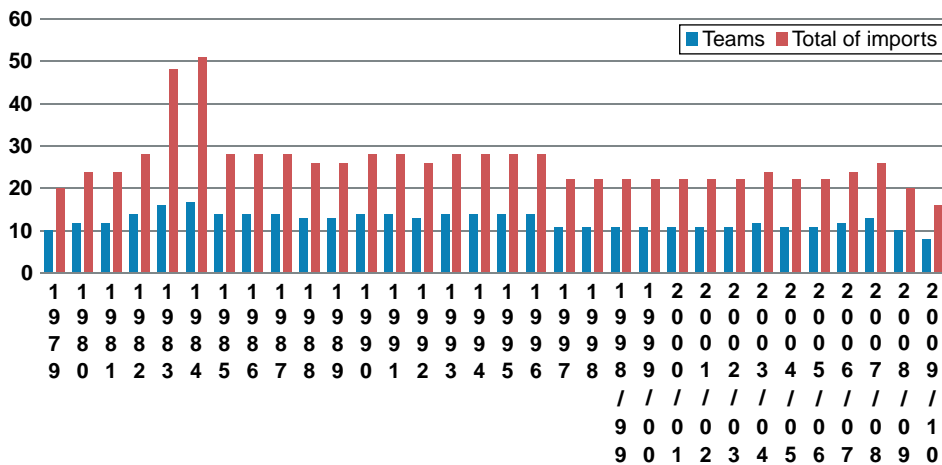


Figure 1. Number of teams and imports in the NBL (1979–2010).



including Americans. European professional athletes are inclined to transfer to other European countries because of the Bosman ruling.<sup>11</sup> In addition, athletic standards in Europe are relatively high and there are many high-level players in European countries. Taking such factors into account, one begins to understand why American players' contribution to the NBL and Euroleague is relatively lower than that to the Japanese leagues.

### **Migratory motivations of Americans basketball players**

This study used qualitative interviewing to understand the experiences of eight American basketball players<sup>12</sup> (Table 2). The interviews with each player were conducted in English, lasting about one hour each, between March 2009 and March 2011 in Japan, Spain and Australia. Pseudonyms are used to protect the privacy of participants (Table 2). Three of the players can be categorized as European Americans and five as African-American (Table 2). The interviews consisted of questions about migratory motivation, life history, overseas experience as basketball players, the quota system in their respective leagues, salary and so on.

The participants had played for American university teams in NCAA Division 1. After graduating from university, James and Smith played for European clubs for several years. After that, they signed with Japanese corporate teams. George and Robert signed with NBA teams initially but subsequently moved to European teams. John, Tom and David signed with Australian clubs after their graduation from university. Thomas played for NBL teams during a 16-year career and became part of the management staff in the NBL after his retirement. Almost all the players had looked for overseas teams through agents. However, John and Smith removed their agents on account of their dishonesty.

The investigative approach that was taken first helped to explain the circumstances of American professional basketball players. Specifically, neo-classical economic theory was used to theorize the data and thereby to explain the international migration of highly skilled workers. Professional athletes are a one category of highly skilled workers and earn relatively high salaries compared to those of ordinary workers. However, as their period of employment is relatively short, they tend to earn and save as much money as possible for the future while they are active professional players. Many professional players have to retire from their sport while still in their 30s and prepare for a second career after retirement. Thus, it is not unusual for players to sign a contract abroad if they cannot find a good contract in their home country.

The USA is a competitive market in which there are many high-level basketball players. There were 5199 male basketball players in the 2010–11 NCAA Division 1 (NCAA, 2011). However, the 30 NBA teams need only 450 professional players and the remaining elite American players tend to look for professional jobs in overseas countries through agents. Furthermore, they have been increasingly likely to choose overseas transfers because of the effects of globalization and the commercialization of sports.

Of course, there are some minor leagues, such as the NBA Development League, Continental Basketball Association (CBA) and American Basketball Association<sup>13</sup> (ABA), in the USA. However, these serve principally as sources of talent for NBA teams. Thus, salaries in these minor leagues are relatively low compared to those in European and Asian leagues. For example, John states that his salary per month was \$US12,500 in the JBL, \$US8,333 in the French league, \$US2667 in the NBL and only \$US1125 in the ABA. It is immediately obvious that there are big wage differentials between Japanese/European leagues and American minor leagues.

Table 2. Personal attributes of American basketball players.<sup>i</sup>

Name	Age	Ethnicity	Position	Agent	League	Overseas Experience	Overseas year
John James	26	European American	Center	absence	JBL	Australia ⇒ France ⇒ Japan	2005 ~ present
George Smith	26	African American	Center	presence	JBL	Bosnia ⇒ Israel ⇒ France ⇒ Japan	1996 ~ present
Tom Smith	35	African American	F/C	presence	JBL	Poland ⇒ Japan	1998 ~ present
Tom David	29	African American	Center	absence	JBL	Italy ⇒ NBADL ⇒ Ukraine ⇒ Cyprus ⇒ Turkey ⇒ Japan	2010–2011
Thomas Robert	23	African American	Guard	presence	NBL	Australia ⇒ Belarus ⇒ Russia	2009–2010
	28	European American	Forward	presence	NBL	Australia	2005 ~ present
	52	European American	Center	absence	NBL	Belgium ⇒ Australia	1980–1996
	27	African American	Guard	presence	EL, Spanish league	Spain ⇒ France	2008–2009

<sup>i</sup> Age of interviewees shows that as of this interview in the table.



Of the players interviewed, six attached importance to getting good contracts as professional players (Table 3). For example, James stated:

Basketball for me is a business. Basically to me it is all about the money for real.

To date, James has played professional basketball in four different countries. He seems willing to go anywhere if a team offers him a good contract. Furthermore, he attaches considerable importance to making money for his future.

In the professional world, you try to make the most money you can make. ... If you play good, the better jobs you get, you move up, and you make more money and more money and more money. A basketball career is very short compared to a lifetime. So [with] one injury, [a] basketball career is finished. So you want to make sure you can try to make the most money you can every year so that you could save and save and then once your career is finished, then you do something else.

John also recognized that a basketball career is very short and special. Thus, he too sought to earn and save money to prepare for his future. He regarded professional basketball as a business and stated that he had to make more money and take care of his family at home. John also indicated that American players who cannot sign with NBA teams can earn higher salaries abroad than if they were to play in minor leagues such as the NBA Development League and CBA in the USA. These are honest comments that explain the motivation of many American players who move to Japan because they cannot sign with NBA teams. The study regards John and James as mercenaries, in the typology of sports migrants. Smith also indicated the importance of a safe salary in the context of a Japanese company:

Because it is a lot more professional than teams in Europe and I can just focus on playing basketball. I do not have to worry about am I going to get paid, am I going to get all my money. I can just mainly focus on basketball and that is the only thing.

Some American players were concerned that European clubs do not pay a salary if players are injured or do not perform well. On the other hand, Japanese corporate teams pay salaries regardless of injury or poor performance. Thus, many players choose to play basketball for Japanese corporations because of the good contract terms available. New Zealand rugby players who play for Japanese corporate teams have indicated similar reasons for doing so (Chiba & Jackson, 2006). However, Smith attaches importance to

Table 3. Reasons to play professional basketball at overseas countries.

Name	League	Migratory reasons
John	JBL	To make good money because of taking care of his family
James	JBL	To make good money because basketball is business
George	JBL	① Strong offer from the Japanese team, ② To make good money because of taking care of his family
Smith	JBL	To get a good contract To experience a difference culture
Tom	NBL	To play professional basketball at abroad because he could not have a professional job in the USA
David	NBL	To experience different culture rather than getting good contract
Thomas	NBL	① To continue playing basketball, ② To live in English-speaking country, and ③ To live in warm climate
Robert	EL, Spanish league	① To play professional basketball in high competition of European League, ② To get good contract

experiencing a different culture as well as getting a good contract. In addition, two players emphasized the importance of playing professional basketball in a high level league. For example, discussing the most important reasons to work in Spain, Robert commented as follows:

I think the Spanish League is a very tough league to play and it is good to play in. It is a lot of good competition. A lot of good players have come from here. So I think it is an opportunity to play in a tough conference and probably one of the tough conferences in Europe.

Robert sought to play high-level basketball in Europe and chose his team after considering several offers. However, his ultimate dream is still to play for an NBA team. Indeed, it was with this ambition in mind that he chose to play in the high-level Spanish League. Six players mentioned financial reasons as the most important migratory motivation. However, David expressed the importance of experiencing a different culture rather than simply getting a good contract:

I think for me it was just experiencing the culture. As far as basketball is concerned, you can make a lot more money in other places. But you also have to worry about things like, some of the teams are a lot more cutthroat [regarding dismissal]. You really have to be worried about getting cut. And the standard of living is not as good. There are payment issues. I mean, it is also a factor and in Australia, generally speaking, it is just the cultural experience that I was excited about.

David chose to experience a different culture and to enjoy a comfortable lifestyle in Australia rather than getting better money in the more competitive European leagues. He also worried about payment issues in Europe. Furthermore, he now has residency in Australia and is trying to obtain Australian citizenship. According to the typology, he can be regarded as a 'nomadic cosmopolitan'. In time, however, he may become a 'settler'.

From what has been said above, it can be concluded that many American players migrate to certain overseas countries because of salary disparities. This finding provides evidence of the relevance of neo-classical economics in describing and explaining the motivations of professional basketball players in the international market. Of course, there are some players that attach importance to experiencing a different culture and high level competition. However, we see that six American participants in this study stated a financial reason for migrating.

### **The naturalization of an American player in Australia**

One of the participants, Thomas is a former basketball player and now part of the NBL's management staff. He played for 16 years from the beginning of the NBL, married an Australian woman and obtained permanent residency and nationality in Australia. This section of the study describes his motivation and naturalization into Australia in order to understand the case of the 'settler' in the typology of sports migrants.

Thomas signed with a Belgian club after graduation from his American university. However, he was isolated from Belgian society because of language difficulties. Leaving Belgium, he moved to Australia in 1980 to play basketball for \$AU1000 a year.<sup>14</sup> Despite having been an amateur league initially (from 1980 to 1985), the NBL as described above, became a professional league during the 1986 season. According to Thomas, the average salary paid to foreign players between 1986 and 2010 was/is \$AU 80,000. When asked about his most important reason for coming to Australia, Thomas responded:

I think it was, first, the chance to keep playing basketball at a higher level. That was the most important thing. Money was not important, obviously for \$1000 money was not important.

Being able to play, being able to be in an English-speaking country, that was important. The climate was very important because from Iowa, lots of snow, I wanted to get away from the snow. We never have snow here. So that was somewhat important. It has become more important the longer I live here. Those three things. Really, the basketball was number one and the lifestyle.

To summarize, therefore, Thomas's migratory motivation were: (1) continuing to play basketball at a higher level, (2) living in an English-speaking country, and (3) living in a warm climate. Although Thomas was born in the state of Iowa, he did not enjoy the cold winters of his birthplace. It would appear that he migrated to play basketball in Australia more for lifestyle reasons than for money.

Thomas has now lived in Australia for three decades. In short, he has lived in Australia longer than in the USA. In addition, he has two passports – American and Australian. So how has his sense of national identity changed as a consequence of living for so long in Australia? When asked about his dual nationality, he commented:

I think of myself as an Australian. It is interesting because I made the choice to become an Australian. I was born an American but I chose to become an Australian. So to me that means a little bit more than being an American because I made the decision I want to live here, I want to be a citizen here. I think a lot of the players, a lot of the American players that come here, they are becoming Australian citizens as well.

Thomas' national identity has dramatically changed from American to Australian during three decades. It is clear that he was able to adapt to Australian society in large part because of his ability to speak English. Interestingly, other American players have also settled in Australia after their retirement and can be described as 'settlers' according to Maguire's typology. Other American players have returned to the USA after playing in the NBL for a few years and are, therefore, classified as 'returners'.

Why did Thomas seek Australian nationality? When asked about his reasons, he commented:

Two reasons. One it would help prolong my career because with only two imports, two players, me being an Australian, then I could keep playing and get two more imports. So there was that decision to make. By the time I became an Australian, I knew I was going to stay here. I had already got married. I knew I was going to stay in Australia for a long time. So rather than just staying as a permanent resident, I decided to become naturalized. The fact that then our team could then get two more Americans. That was part of the decision as well. I also knew that I could play as an Australian longer than I could play as an American because by the time I got naturalized in 1987 there were a lot of really good Americans coming here, a lot better than I was. So if I have had stayed as an American citizen, I would have played maybe another one or 2 years and that would have been it. So by becoming naturalized, becoming an Australian, I could play for another 10 years.

Thomas was excluded from the quota system after obtaining Australian nationality. As a result, he could prolong his playing career by more than 10 years. Some foreign players live in the host country for more than 5 years and then consider naturalization. There are similar situations in Japan in sports such as soccer, basketball, rugby and sumo. However, Thomas became part of the management staff in the NBL after his retirement. This is a rare case for a retired American player: most tend to become coaches of Australian teams after their retirement.

## Conclusion

Of the participants in this study, six attached importance to getting good contracts as professional players. One player made a point of mentioning the importance of experiencing a different culture. Another player migrated in order to continue playing

basketball at a high-level of competition and to enjoy a comfortable lifestyle. It is clear from this that many American players emigrate because of disparities in salaries from one professional basketball league to another. This provides evidence of the relevance of neo-classical economics to understanding the motivations of professional basketball players in the international market.

The percentage of foreign players in the JBL in the 2011–2 season was 17.2%. Of those, Americans comprised more than 68.4% of the total. The proportion of foreign players in the Euroleague in 2008–9 was 49.3%; in the NBL in 2009–10, it was 25.2%. Americans constituted 44.6% of foreign players in Euroleague and 55.5% in the NBL.

Japanese corporate basketball and rugby teams pay more than \$US125,000 per year to foreign players. This Japanese salary is much better than that offered in the U.S. minor leagues. European clubs also pay high salaries, but they do not pay these if players are injured or do not perform well. However, American players are guaranteed a 1-year salary from Japanese corporations even if they are injured or do not perform well. Thus, many American players who do not make it to NBA tend to migrate to countries in Europe, Asia and Oceania. These player migrations are examples of ‘out-migration’, from the centre of the professional basketball economy to the periphery (Chiba, 2012). While Japan is an industrially developed nation, it is a ‘developing nation’ in terms of sports such as basketball and rugby. American players can earn and save money for the future at a relatively low level of competition in Japan. Judging from the above, it can be concluded that Japanese corporate leagues attract ‘mercenaries’ from the USA.

To date, most researchers have focused on ‘in-migration’ from the periphery to the core. In particular, there are many studies that examine soccer player migration in Europe (Lanfranchi & Taylor, 2001; Stead & Maguire, 2000). Stead and Maguire (2000, p. 44) indicated that ‘nearly all the Nordic/Scandinavian players rated the development of soccer skills and knowledge as an important migration objective’. It can be argued, however, that the migratory motivations of professional sport players depend on their personal circumstances and it is these that will decide if they commit to ‘in-migration’ or ‘out-migration’.

In conclusion, this study suggests that one possible explanation for basketball players ‘out-migration’ may be explained by reference to neo-classical economics. In future, we need to examine more fully, and with quantitative as well as qualitative data, sports labour migration in relation to both ‘in-migration’ and ‘out-migration’.

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### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The number of affiliated countries and basketball players are shown in official homepage of FIBA (<http://www.fiba.com>).
- <sup>2</sup> See the homepage of NBA (<http://www.nba.com/cavaliers/releases/all-star-ballot-121113>).
- <sup>3</sup> See the homepage of NBA (<http://www.nba.com/2012/news/10/30/international-players-on-opening-night-rosters/index.html>).
- <sup>4</sup> See the homepage of USBASKET By Sports I.T.: <http://www.usbasket.com/>
- <sup>5</sup> See the homepage of you tube (<http://www.youtube.com>), and please retrieve the word of ‘rebounds’.
- <sup>6</sup> *Nihon Keizai Shinbun*, 2 August, the evening edition, 2010.
- <sup>7</sup> *Asahi Shinbun*, 17 February 2011.

- <sup>8</sup> 13 countries are Spain, Italy, Greece, Israel, Germany, Turkey, Poland, Russia, Croatia, France, Lithuania, Serbia and Slovenia.
- <sup>9</sup> See the official homepage of the JBL (<http://www.jbl.or.jp/topics/?p=1423>).
- <sup>10</sup> In the case of bj league, of 12 teams, four American head coaches work for each team in the 2008–9 season.
- <sup>11</sup> The Bosman ruling is a judicial decision that the European Court of Justice gave in 1995. Jean-Marc Bosman, a Belgian soccer player, compensated the Belgian Football Association and Union of European Football Associations for damage that he could not sign with a French soccer team because of compensation about player transfer. After his victory in the legal suit, the quota system and compensation for transferred players were abolished in professional football leagues within the European Union nations. Consequently, overseas player transfers became active after the ruling.
- <sup>12</sup> Age of interviewees shows that as of this interview in the table.
- <sup>13</sup> The original ABA was founded in 1967. It merged with NBA in 1976. However, current ABA was founded in 1999 as a semi-professional basketball league. This league has no affiliation with original ABA.
- <sup>14</sup> NBL was not professional, but amateur basketball league in the beginning of the 1980s. Thus, players were paid for only \$AU1000 per a year.

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