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The NBA Travels to India

Akash Jain discusses how the NBA has introduced basketball to India.

by Kyle Stack / [@KyleStack](#)

At approximately this time last year, I had the opportunity to [interview Amadou Gallo Fall](#), who runs the NBA Africa office in Johannesburg, South Africa, about the League's commitment to spreading the popularity of basketball through the continent. I've wished to develop a series of interviews in which I interview the folks who run NBA offices throughout the world, which I continue here by speaking with Akash Jain, the Senior Director of Business Development and Partnerships for NBA India.

There isn't an official NBA office established in India – the full-time staff concerned with building the sport's popularity there is located in the League's New York City office. Yet the way the game has been embraced there is quite evident. Jain noted that participation in basketball leagues operated by NBA India increased 25-30 percent this year, with up to 600 teams participating in various leagues and tournaments.



The League's efforts to popularize basketball in a country obsessed with cricket have gone quite well for the League having had a presence there for just three years. The Jr. NBA/Jr. WNBA program supported by Basketball Federation of India (BFI), HP, Spalding and local television network Ten Sports is led by its Skills Challenge, which this year was introduced to 100 schools in five cities – Bangalore, Chennai, Mumbai, Delhi and Pune.

The NBA announced in December 2010 that it reached new multi-year partnerships with Taj Television and Multi Screen Media (MSM) for broadcasts of live games, prime-time game replays and original NBA programming. Two regular-season games per week were televised on Ten Sports each Thursday and Saturday with replays of each game in prime time. Thirty-six episodes of a half-hour weekly reality program called Real NBA that gave a behind-the-scenes look at the league's biggest stories aired on Ten Sports and on some of Zee Network's leading regional channels in local dialects. Other original programming such as NBA Action and NBA in 30 debuted on PIX, an English movie channel owned by MSM.

Karan Madhok, who works in communications for BFI and who [writes for this site](#) and for the NBA India website, said the NBA's strategy in India has worked. "The best thing that the NBA has done has been to not follow any rules or any preset formulas," Madhok said through email. "The NBA indulged itself in the grassroots in India and has tried to instill a culture from bottom-up, instead of top-down."

I spoke at length with Jain about other efforts the NBA has made to introduce basketball to a country of 1.15 billion people.

SLAM: What's been the response so far to the Playoffs, now that folks there can watch live games?

Akash Jain: The response has been great. This season, we have a record number of games being broadcast

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in India through the partnerships that we have with Ten Sports and Sony. We had six games per week during the first and second rounds of the Playoffs. Then all of both Conference Finals and the Finals. So, it's a great way to engage our fans by providing them more and more content.

SLAM: Has the time difference between India and the US proven to be a hindrance for Indians to watch live games?

AJ: I think it provides an opportunity for us. The number of eyeballs are growing now. The time difference has provided us with an opportunity to work with our partners to do more replays [of games]. For example, with Ten Sports we have two games per week that are replayed in prime time. It's an interesting way for us to try to increase the number of eyeballs watching our games.

SLAM: There's an impressive amount of original programming on television. What's been the response to those programs?

AJ: Again, fantastic response. Over the last couple of years we've continued to hear from our fans that they want more behind-the-scenes content. And more ways to engage and follow their favorite players and teams. This provides us a way to give them a glimpse behind the scenes and get more familiar with the lifestyle and day-to-day activities of our players and our teams. So, it's a great start and we're actually in discussions with all of our partners in trying to develop more localized, original programming.

SLAM: In terms of basketball clinics and basketball leagues that exist in the country?

AJ: A variety of stuff to really showcase the sport, showcase the lifestyle, fun side of the NBA. And to make sure we're marrying it with localized content here to really give it an Indian voice.

SLAM: Is India a TV-watching culture?

AJ: Yeah, the last, I would say five to 10 years have been pretty amazing in terms of the explosion in media platforms in India. I think the figures are now getting close to about 150 million television homes. A lot of those have in the hundreds of channels. So, television is an important platform to engage consumers. Along with that, digital platforms are becoming extremely important – I think it's over 800 million mobile subscribers, as well, in the country. So, it's a significant opportunity to distribute content.

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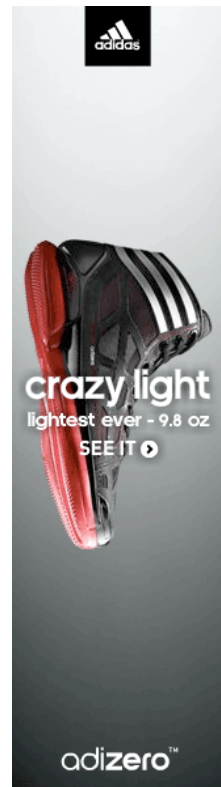
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Jer Boi Posted: May,24 at 3:11 pm

kinda wanna go to India just to play in a tourney. would be awesomeee for me, being Indian.

Jeremy Bauman Posted: May,24 at 4:49 pm

Great insight here..

what Posted: May,24 at 9:16 pm

Great write-up. My folks are from Tamil Nadu (one of the states you mentioned) and it's good to see that they are doing so much to grow basketball in India. After cricket it's pretty much wide open as to the "second" sport in India since even soccer is not universally popular everywhere, so there's no reason basketball can't go for that #2 spot.

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