

# **Evolution of the men's Olympic basketball tournaments using a geographical perspective**

## **Evoluția turneelor olimpice de baschet masculin din perspectivă geografică**

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### **Abstract**

The article refers to the evolution of Men's Olympic Basketball Tournaments, trying to present and analyze these tournaments by associating the information related to the study of basketball with mapping representation.

In the first part, the authors refer to a number of papers approaching the research of sports as a result of the common study of specialists in physical education and sports, and geography. The main events that determined the inclusion of men's basketball in the Olympic Games program are also presented. The gradual evolution of Men's Olympic Basketball Tournaments, the participation of national teams, the medals obtained are presented and analyzed by mapping using different ways of graphical representation.

**Keywords:** geography, Olympic Games, men's basketball.

### **Rezumat**

Lucrarea se referă la evoluția turneelor olimpice de baschet masculin, încercând să prezinte și să analizeze aceste turnee prin asocierea datelor care se referă la datele studiate cu reprezentarea cartografică.

În prima parte, autorii se referă la o seamă de lucrări care abordează cercetarea sportului ca rezultat al studiului comun al specialiștilor din domeniul educației fizice și sportului și al geografiei. De asemenea, sunt prezentate principalele evenimente care au condus la includerea baschetului masculin în programul Jocurilor Olimpice. Evoluția în timp a turneelor olimpice de baschet masculin, participarea echipelor naționale, medaliile obținute de către acestea sunt prezentate și analizate prin asocierea hărții cu diferite modalități de reprezentare grafică.

**Cuvinte cheie:** geografie, Jocurile Olimpice, baschet masculin.

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## **Introduction**

Basketball is a team sports game which, over the one hundred years of its existence, has gained the status of universality, being practiced in almost all countries. In 2013, there were 214 national federations affiliated to the International Basketball Federation (FIBA) (6). The official international competitions of the national teams, the ones reserved for club teams and also, domestic championship matches have a high audience among viewers from all over the world, being broadcast to hundreds of millions of basketball fans. Being one of the sports that enjoy a wide popularity and holding an important place in the national systems of physical education and sports in many countries, basketball is an interesting subject of study for specialists from various fields of science.

As sport has developed over time, it has been studied by its specialists, but also by researchers from other fields

of science: psychologists, doctors, sociologists, computer scientists, etc. In Romania, there are also specialists who work and contribute through their activities and results to a better knowledge of sport activity in general, as well as of some sports disciplines (Epuran, 2005). Thus, Romanian sports literature includes a number of studies from the perspective of disciplines such as geography (Mihăilă & Ulmeanu, 1938; Bogdan, 2009; Maroti & Ilieș, 1995; Sandor, 2005), which contributes through its specific means to a better knowledge of various aspects of the sports phenomenon.

By approaching sports from a geographical perspective, we aimed to identify the relationships between the spatial variations of the distribution, structure, dynamics and geographic framework of men's Olympic basketball. In analyzing the data, the association of maps with charts by columns, the frequency polygon, statistical topography, point and symbol combinations, etc. enables the presentation,

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analysis and understanding of the studied phenomenon from a different angle compared to the perspective of those who study sports only from the physical education and sports specialist's point of view. We consider that our article is an interesting one, and will be well received and appreciated by those who are interested in this phenomenon.

**Pre-Olympic basketball**

In Saint Louis, in 1904, less than 14 years after its invention by Dr. James Naismith, basketball featured among demonstrative sports during the Summer Olympics, officially known as the Games of the III Olympiad (Wallechinsky, 1996).

After World War I, when sports faced a great development by an increase in the number of sports practitioners, by the enrichment of the competitive system with the organization of continental and global competitions (Antal, 1974), the issue of extending the number of Olympic sports was increasingly raised. The basketball representatives acted to form a leading international body, able to support the efforts for the recognition of this sport by the International Olympic Committee and its inclusion in the Olympic Games program. In this process, the most important steps were the International Olympic Committee session in Paris in 1924, when basketball became a voluntary sport (\*\*\*, 1998 c), and the International Olympic Committee session in Berlin in 1930, when the Committee decided that along with polo, water polo, field hockey and handball, basketball was among the team sports games that the Organizing Committee could include in the Olympic Games program (\*\*\*, 1998a).

The establishment of the International Basketball Federation on 18 June 1932, the renunciation of the tutelary mandate over basketball by the International Handball Federation, and the investment of the International Basketball Federation as the supreme authority of this sport on 28 February 1935 (Ströher, 1998) were other important moments in the pre-Olympic history of basketball.

Although some members of the International Olympic Committee were against the process of including team sports among Olympic disciplines, the agreement between William Jones, the International Basketball Federation General Secretary, and Karl Diem, the President of the Olympic Games Organizing Committee, in Berlin in 1936, was approved by the International Olympic Committee session on 28 February 1935 and thus, basketball was officially included in the Olympic Games program. (Ströher, 1998).

William Jones, Léon Bouffard, Marcel Baril and other leaders of the International Basketball Federation, in collaboration with Olympic organizers, carried out extensive and laborious work during the pre-Olympic period such as: development of general rules, their experimental application during the University International Tournament in Turin, organization of the first European Basketball Championship in 1935 in Geneva, providing technical support for the homologation of the Olimpiastadion Berlin sports facilities, tournament scheduling and basketball coach training.

**Men's Olympic Basketball Tournament attendance**

Since the early years, the international basketball forum leaders have understood that the strength of such an organization, its prestige and recognition depend on

the number of National Federations that compose it. From the earliest years of the International Basketball Federation, its leaders have campaigned to increase the number of affiliated members. In the first four years, the number of affiliated members increased from eight (at the Constitution Congress in Geneva, Switzerland, 1932) to twenty-nine (at the first Olympic basketball tournament, the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin) (2). Since then, the number of affiliated federations has consistently increased to 214 today (53 in Africa, 52 in Europe, 44 in America, 44 in Asia and 21 in Australia-Oceania) (4) (Fig. 1).

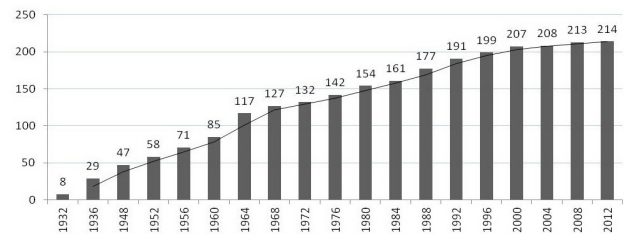


Fig. 1 – International Basketball Federation members 1932-2014 (4).

The number of national teams participating in the Olympic tournaments provides information on the extent of a sport, its popularity and international recognition, the value achieved by this sport discipline over time, etc.

In the evolution of the Men's Olympic Basketball Tournaments, the number of participating teams and the play format have undergone several changes. If in the period 1936-1952 the number of teams was not regulated, between 1952-1972 it was set to sixteen, based on qualification criteria, and starting with Montreal 1976 the number of teams participating in Men's Olympic Basketball Tournaments was reduced to twelve (the host country, the world champion, two teams qualified from the Confederations Championships of Europe and America, respectively - the continents with the most developed basketball and the best results in the Olympics, the geographical regions of Africa, Asia and Australia-Oceania one team each, and the top three teams from qualifying tournaments (\*\*\*, 1998 b) (Fig. 2).

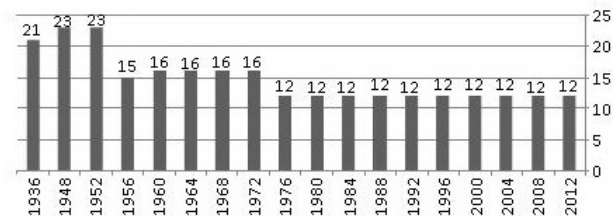


Fig. 2 – Number of participating teams by tournament (5).

An analysis of participation in the Men's Olympic Basketball Tournaments reveals that the eighteen editions of the Olympic Games were attended by fifty-five national teams: USA had seventeen participations, Brazil fourteen participations, Russia (including USSR and CIS) and Australia thirteen participations. In addition, four countries had ten to twelve participations, eight national teams had

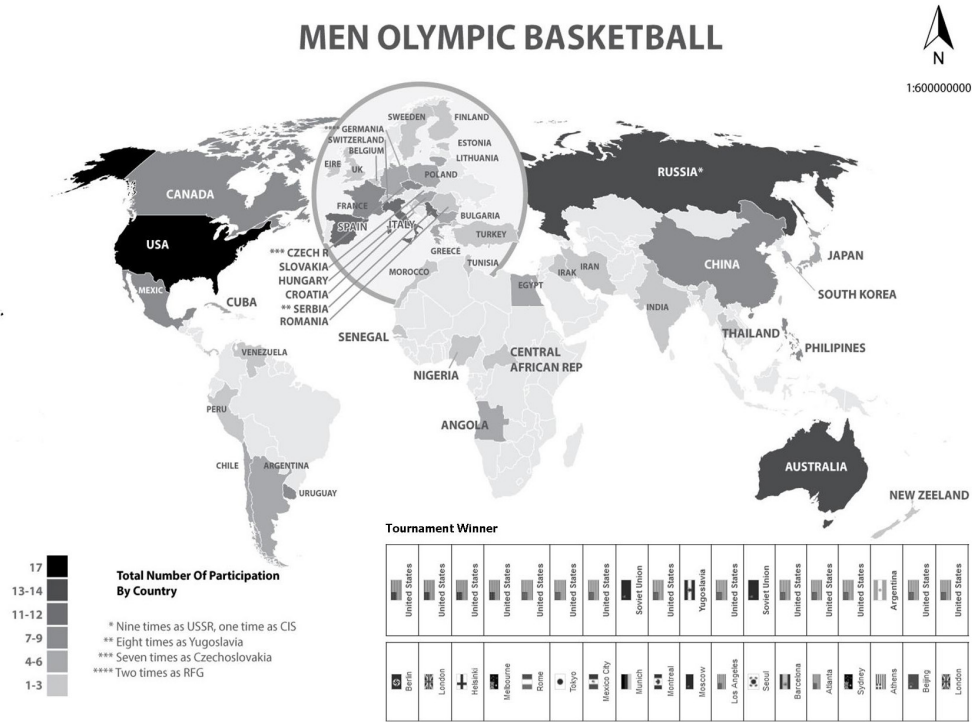


Fig. 3 – National team participation in Men’s Olympic Basketball Tournaments (5).

seven to nine participations, twelve countries had four to six participations, and twenty-seven countries had one to three participations (5). The teams participating in Olympic Basketball Tournaments and their origin were influenced by the decisions of the International Olympic Committee sessions regarding the number of teams admitted to a tournament and the inclusion of continental championships among the Olympic Qualifying Tournaments, as well as by changes in the world map (\*\*\*, 2007) (Fig. 3).

Regarding the number of national team participations by continents, the distribution shows that Europe has the largest share, 41.73%, followed by North America, 18.42%, Asia, 13.90%, South America, 13.15%, Australia-Oceania, 7.14%, and Africa, 5.64%.

Europe accounted for the largest proportion of national teams from a continent, 58.33%, at the Olympic Games in Moscow 1980. No team from the geographical area of Australia-Oceania participated in the Olympic Basketball Tournaments in Berlin 1936, London 1948, Helsinki 1952, Rome 1960 and Mexico City 1968. No team from Africa participated in the Olympic Basketball Tournaments in Melbourne 1956, Rome 1960 and Tokyo 1964 (1) (Fig. 4).

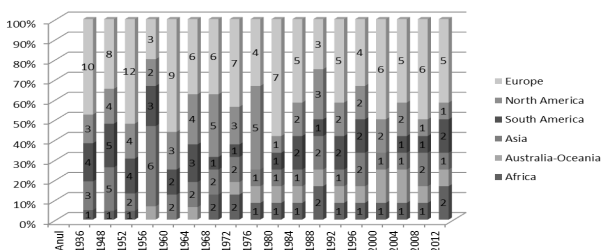


Fig. 4 – Men’s Olympic Basketball Tournament attendance by continents (5).

The most important criterion for determining the value of a basketball team participating in the Olympics is the number of medals. In the Men’s Olympic Basketball Tournaments, fifty-four medals were awarded to representatives from fourteen countries, accounting for 23.63% of the total number of participants. Of all fifty-four medals awarded, seventeen, 31.48%, were won by the United States. The Olympic medal ranking also includes Russia (USSR and CIS), Serbia (Yugoslavia), Argentina, Spain, France, Italy, Croatia, Canada, Brazil, Lithuania, Uruguay, Cuba and Mexico (3). 50% of the medals were awarded to seven European national teams, 37.07% to four North American national teams, 12.17% to three South American national teams. The geographical areas of Australia-Oceania and Africa won no medals in the Men’s Olympic Basketball Tournaments (Fig. 5).

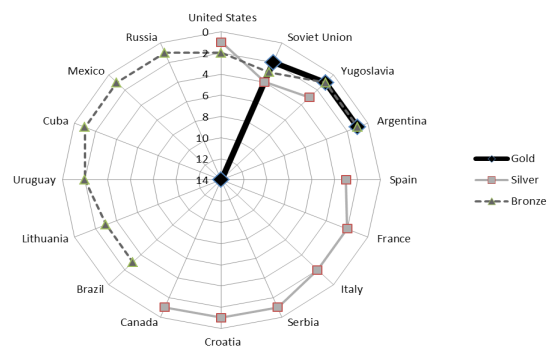


Fig. 5 – Men’s Olympic Basketball Tournament medal distribution (3)

## Conclusions

1. Basketball is after football, water polo, polo, hockey, rugby and handball the seventh team sports game included in the Olympic Games program.

2. The basketball leaders' joined efforts and personal relationships with the personalities of international sports led to the renunciation of the tutelary mandate over basketball by the International Handball Federation and to the recognition of the International Basketball Federation as the supreme basketball authority. In this way, the International Olympic Committee session in Oslo, on 28 February 1935, decided the official inclusion of basketball in the program of the Olympic Games in Berlin, 1936.

3. The eighteen Men's Olympic Basketball Tournaments were attended by fifty-five national teams. USA had the highest number of participations, seventeen, followed by Brazil, with fourteen participations, and Russia (including USSR and CIS) and Australia, with thirteen participations each.

4. The distribution by continents shows that Europe has the largest share, 41.73%, followed by North America, 18.42%, Asia, 13.90%, South America, 13.15%, Australia-Oceania, 7.14%, and Africa, 5.64%.

5. Of the total number of fifty-four medals awarded, the United States won seventeen, 31.48%. The Olympic medal ranking also includes Russia (USSR and CIS), Serbia (Yugoslavia), Argentina, Spain, France, Italy, Croatia, Canada, Brazil, Lithuania, Uruguay, Cuba and Mexico.

6. An analysis of medal distribution by continents shows that 50% of the medals were awarded to seven European national teams, 37.07% to four North American national teams, and 12.17% to three South American national teams. The geographical areas of Australia-Oceania and Africa won no medals in the Men's Olympic Basketball Tournaments.

## Conflicts of interest

Nothing to declare.

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