

BASKETBALL AROUND THE WORLD

Beyond the NBA — International Pros, the BIG3, and SlamBall

Name: _____ Date: _____ Class: _____



Professional basketball is played on every continent — long before and far beyond the NBA Finals.

PART 1 — Key Vocabulary

Study these terms carefully. They appear throughout the reading passages and exercises below.

Term	Definition
<i>federation</i>	an organized governing body that oversees a sport within a country or region, running leagues, national teams, and competitions
<i>prospect</i>	a young or promising athlete considered likely to succeed at a higher level of competition
<i>showcase</i>	an event or platform designed to display a player's or league's talent to a wider audience

Term	Definition
<i>barnstorming</i>	the practice of touring through many towns or countries playing exhibition games, often to promote a sport or entertain crowds
<i>exhibition</i>	a game played for entertainment or promotional purposes rather than as part of official league standings
<i>trailblazer</i>	a person who is one of the first to do something, opening a path that others later follow
Term	Definition
<i>niche</i>	relating to a small, specialized market or audience rather than a mainstream one
<i>spectacle</i>	an event notable for its visual drama, novelty, and entertainment value
<i>crossover appeal</i>	the capacity of a sport, athlete, or event to attract fans beyond its traditional core audience
<i>venture</i>	a new business or organizational undertaking that involves risk, especially in creating something not previously tried
<i>legacy</i>	the lasting impact or influence that a person, team, or era leaves behind
<i>Most Valuable Player (MVP)</i>	the formal award given to the single best-performing player in a given game, season, or league

PART 2 — Vocabulary Practice

Match each term on the left to its correct definition on the right.

- | | |
|-----------------|--|
| 1. federation | A. an event notable for its visual drama and entertainment value |
| 2. prospect | B. touring through many towns to play exhibition games |
| 3. barnstorming | C. relating to a small, specialized audience |
| 4. niche | D. an organized governing body overseeing a sport |
| 5. spectacle | E. a young athlete likely to succeed at a higher level |
| 6. legacy | F. the lasting impact a person or era leaves behind |

Fill in the blank with the correct vocabulary word.

- Long before international stars ever reached the NBA, many were discovered as teenage _____ playing for their national youth programs.
- The EuroLeague has become basketball's leading global _____ outside North America, run independently of any single country's federation.
- In the early twentieth century, professional teams often survived through _____ tours, playing exhibition games in small towns across the country.

4. Ice Cube's basketball _____ began as a bold experiment: could retired stars fill arenas playing a completely different format of the game?
5. SlamBall's trampoline-powered dunks gave the sport enormous _____ value, even if the league itself remained a niche audience.
6. Many fans argue that the players who built these leagues from nothing deserve to be remembered as _____ of the sport.

PART 3 — Reading Passage 1: A Global Game

Basketball has never belonged to just one league. While the NBA is the sport's richest and most widely televised competition, thousands of professional players around the world never set foot on an NBA court — and many of the best never intend to. In Europe, the EuroLeague brings together the continent's top club teams from countries such as Spain, Greece, Turkey, Serbia, and Lithuania, playing a demanding season that regularly draws sold-out arenas and passionate, chanting supporters more reminiscent of European football than of American sports culture. Clubs like Real Madrid, Panathinaikos, Fenerbahçe, and Žalgiris Kaunas have histories stretching back decades, with rosters built from a mix of homegrown talent and well-traveled professionals who have chosen lucrative, stable contracts overseas instead of chasing a roster spot in North America.

The path between these worlds runs in both directions. Some future NBA stars, including Slovenia's Luka Dončić, began their professional careers playing full seasons of top-tier European basketball as teenagers, years before they were eligible for the NBA draft. Others go the opposite way: American players who don't stick in the NBA often build entire careers — and often much larger paychecks than fans assume — playing professionally in Spain, Israel, China, Australia, or the Philippines. Australia's National Basketball League (NBL) even created a "Next Stars" program specifically to sign elite American teenage prospects to professional contracts before college, positioning itself as a genuine alternative path into the sport's highest levels.

Beyond club basketball, national teams turn the sport into an entirely different kind of spectacle. Every four years, the FIBA Basketball World Cup and the Olympic basketball tournament bring together players from dozens of federations to compete for their countries, often producing shocking upsets that never happen in NBA play, where talent is spread far more evenly among thirty teams. For millions of fans outside the United States, cheering for their national team — not any NBA franchise — is the highest expression of basketball fandom, proof that the sport's biggest stage isn't always the one with the most American television cameras pointed at it.

Comprehension Questions

1. According to the passage, why do some professional players choose not to pursue an NBA roster spot?
-
2. What is the EuroLeague, and how is its culture described compared to American sports?
-
3. Give one example of a future NBA star who began his professional career in Europe.
-
4. What is Australia's NBL "Next Stars" program, and why was it created?

5. Why does the passage say national-team tournaments like the FIBA World Cup can be more unpredictable than the NBA?

6. In your own words, what does the passage mean by calling basketball "a global game"?

PART 4 — Reading Passage 2: Ice Cube's BIG3



Retired stars and hungry newcomers face off in the BIG3's fast, physical half-court format.

In 2017, rapper and filmmaker Ice Cube co-founded the BIG3, a professional 3-on-3 half-court basketball league built almost entirely around retired NBA veterans looking for one more competitive stage. The concept was simple but unusual: instead of full-court, five-on-five basketball, teams of three face off on a single half-court, games last only a set number of points rather than a fixed game clock, and a designated four-point line rewards long-range shooting far more aggressively than the NBA's three-point arc. The league leaned into star power from the start, recruiting former All-Stars and well-known role players — veterans whose names casual fans still recognized, even years after their NBA careers had ended.

The BIG3's format made it a genuinely different sport to watch. Without a shot clock ticking down possession after possession, and with games decided by first-to-a-target-score rather than four quarters, broadcasts felt closer to a playground pickup run raised to a professional level than to a traditional NBA telecast. Teams carried names like Trilogy, Ghost Ballers, and 3's Company rather than city identities, and several were

coached by basketball legends drawn back into the game specifically for the league. For players in their late thirties and early forties, the BIG3 offered something the NBA no longer could: a real, televised, competitive outlet, still keeping score, still building a legacy.

Skeptics questioned whether a league of players well past their athletic peak could sustain fan interest for more than a novelty season. Instead, the BIG3 secured broadcast deals with major networks, expanded its season length, and became a genuine proving ground for talent evaluation — several players have used strong BIG3 performances to earn returns to the NBA or contracts overseas. Whatever its long-term ceiling, the BIG3 proved something notable about the appetite for basketball: fans will watch great players compete at a high level long after the format, the court size, and even the players' primes have changed.

True or False

Write T for True or F for False.

1. The BIG3 plays standard five-on-five basketball on a full court. T / F
2. Ice Cube co-founded the BIG3 in 2017. T / F
3. The BIG3 uses a four-point line to reward long-range shooting. T / F
4. BIG3 games are decided by a fixed game clock rather than a target score. T / F
5. The league recruits mostly players who have never played professionally before. T / F
6. Some BIG3 players have used the league to return to the NBA or sign overseas. T / F

Comprehension Questions

1. What is different about how BIG3 games are structured compared to a standard NBA game?

2. According to the passage, why did Ice Cube's league focus on recruiting retired NBA veterans?

3. What does the passage mean by comparing BIG3 broadcasts to "a playground pickup run raised to a professional level"?

4. What is one way the BIG3 has served as more than just an entertainment product for its players?

5. Why might skeptics have doubted the BIG3 would succeed, and what happened instead?

6. What does the BIG3's success suggest about fans' relationship with players, separate from any particular league?

PART 5 — Fill in the Blank

Use the word bank to complete each sentence. Use each word only once.

federation · prospect · showcase · barnstorming · exhibition · trailblazer · niche · spectacle · crossover appeal · venture · legacy · MVP

1. Long before joining a professional roster, most international stars were scouted as a promising _____ in a national youth program.
2. SlamBall's inventors saw an opportunity to build an entirely new sports _____ from scratch, combining basketball, football, and gymnastics.
3. For many casual viewers, the sight of a player launching off a trampoline toward the rim is a genuine _____, unlike anything the NBA offers.
4. Early professional basketball survived in part on _____ tours, with teams traveling from town to town to play for gate money.
5. Analysts still debate whether leagues like the BIG3 and SlamBall will remain a _____ interest or eventually reach a mainstream audience.
6. Whatever happens next, the athletes who built these alternative leagues from nothing will be remembered as part of basketball's broader _____.

PART 6 — Reading Passage 3: SlamBall



A SlamBall player launches off an angled trampoline toward the rim during a match.

If the BIG3 reimagined basketball's format, SlamBall reimagined its physics entirely. First launched in the early 2000s and broadcast on cable networks, SlamBall took a standard basketball court and embedded four angled trampolines directly into the floor near each basket. Players sprinting toward the hoop could launch themselves several feet into the air, turning routine layups into gravity-defying, highlight-reel dunks that no traditional basketball court could ever produce. The result was a hybrid sport, often described as basketball crossed with football and gymnastics, complete with padded uniforms and permitted physical contact that would draw a foul in almost any conventional basketball league.

SlamBall's early run built a passionate, if relatively small, fan base drawn to its sheer novelty — few sports could offer viewers the spectacle of a dunk performed from ten feet in the air. But sustaining a niche sports league proved difficult, and the original broadcast run ended after only a few seasons, its trampolines and padded gear eventually fading from television schedules. For years, SlamBall existed mostly as a nostalgic memory for viewers who had caught it by chance while channel surfing, a strange and thrilling experiment rather than an ongoing part of the sports landscape.

That changed when SlamBall was revived, bringing the trampoline-powered format back with professional dunkers and athletes recruited specifically for their combination of basketball skill and aerial ability. The relaunch leaned fully into the sport's crossover appeal, marketing itself less as an alternative basketball league and more as an action-sports spectacle, closer in spirit to extreme sports broadcasts than to a traditional league season. Whether or not SlamBall ever draws NBA-sized audiences, its survival — and its eventual return — says something important about sports fandom: audiences will keep coming back for a genuinely new kind of athletic spectacle, even one built on trampolines instead of tradition.

Comprehension Questions

1. What made SlamBall physically different from a standard basketball court?

2. According to the passage, what other sports does SlamBall combine with basketball?

3. Why did the passage say sustaining a niche sports league proved difficult for SlamBall?

4. How did the SlamBall relaunch choose to market the sport differently than before?

5. What broader point about sports fandom does the passage draw from SlamBall's survival?

PART 7 — Discussion Questions

Discuss with a partner or your class. There are no wrong answers — support your view with reasoning and examples.

1. Why do you think some talented players choose to build careers overseas or in alternative leagues rather than chasing an NBA roster spot?

2. Do you think leagues like the BIG3 and SlamBall compete with the NBA, or do they serve a completely different purpose for fans?
3. What makes an international tournament like the FIBA World Cup feel different from a normal club season, according to the passage?
4. Would you rather watch a game with unpredictable, unusual rules (like the BIG3's four-point line or SlamBall's trampolines), or a traditional format? Why?
5. What risks do people take when they start a completely new sports "venture" like SlamBall or the BIG3?
6. Do you think alternative basketball leagues help or hurt the sport's overall popularity? Explain your reasoning.

PART 8 — Opinion Essay

Prompt: Professional basketball exists far beyond the NBA — in the EuroLeague, the BIG3, SlamBall, and dozens of national leagues around the world. Using evidence from the passages above, write an essay arguing whether alternative and international basketball leagues are just as valuable to the sport as the NBA itself, or whether they will always be a smaller, secondary part of the game. Write at least three paragraphs: an introduction with a clear thesis, at least one body paragraph drawing on specific details from the passages, and a conclusion that addresses at least one counterargument to your position.

Sources

FIBA.basketball, official EuroLeague and FIBA World Cup coverage · EuroLeague Basketball, official club and league history · NBL.com.au, "Next Stars" program overview · BIG3 League, official rules and team information · ESPN and ClutchPoints, BIG3 league coverage · Wikipedia, "SlamBall" and "BIG3" · Sports Illustrated, retrospective features on SlamBall's history and revival

ANSWER KEY — BASKETBALL AROUND THE WORLD

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Part 2 — Vocabulary Matching

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. D — an organized governing body overseeing a sport | 2. E — a young athlete likely to succeed at a higher level |
| 3. B — touring through many towns to play exhibition games | 4. C — relating to a small, specialized audience |
| 5. A — an event notable for its visual drama and entertainment value | 6. F — the lasting impact a person or era leaves behind |

Part 2 — Fill in the Blank

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------|
| 1. prospect | 2. showcase |
| 3. barnstorming | 4. venture |
| 5. crossover appeal | 6. trailblazer |

Part 3 — Comprehension: Reading Passage 1

- Many choose stable, lucrative contracts overseas or in top club leagues rather than competing for a limited number of NBA roster spots.
- A top-tier European club competition drawing sold-out arenas and passionate, chant-driven crowds, described as closer to European football culture than U.S. sports.
- Luka Dončić, who played full seasons of professional European basketball as a teenager before being eligible for the NBA draft.
- A program that signs elite American teenage prospects to professional contracts before college, offering an alternative path into top-level basketball.
- Because talent is more evenly distributed across many national federations, producing more shocking upsets than the NBA's thirty-team format allows.
- Basketball is played and beloved at a professional level on every continent, not centered on any single league or country.

Part 4 — True or False

1. F 2. T 3. T 4. F 5. F 6. T

Part 4 — Comprehension: Reading Passage 2 (BIG3)

- Games are played 3-on-3 on a half court, decided by reaching a target score rather than a fixed game clock, and include a four-point line.
- To draw fan interest through name recognition and give respected veterans a real, competitive, televised stage after their NBA careers ended.

3. It means the games feel informal, high-scoring, and free-flowing like a pickup game, but are still organized and broadcast at a professional level.
4. Several players have used strong BIG3 performances to earn returns to the NBA or contracts with overseas leagues.
5. Skeptics doubted a league of past-their-prime players could hold interest; instead, the BIG3 secured major broadcast deals and expanded its season.
6. It shows fans will keep watching players they admire compete at a high level, regardless of league prestige, format, or the players' current age.

Part 5 — Fill in the Blank

- | | |
|--------------|-----------------|
| 1. prospect | 2. venture |
| 3. spectacle | 4. barnstorming |
| 5. niche | 6. legacy |

Part 6 — Comprehension: Reading Passage 3 (SlamBall)

1. Four angled trampolines were embedded in the floor near each basket, letting players launch several feet into the air toward the rim.
2. The passage describes it as a hybrid of basketball, football, and gymnastics.
3. A relatively small, niche fan base made it hard to sustain the league, and the original broadcast run ended after only a few seasons.
4. It marketed itself more as an action-sports spectacle than a traditional basketball league, closer in spirit to extreme sports broadcasts.
5. Audiences will keep returning for a genuinely new kind of athletic spectacle, even one built on an unconventional format like trampolines.

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STUDENT ANSWER SHEET

Basketball Around the World — Beyond the NBA

Name: _____ Date: _____ Class: _____

Record all answers below. For Parts 7 and 8, use the space on your main worksheet.

PART 2A — Vocabulary Matching (write the letter)

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 4. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 5. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 6. _____ |

PART 2B — Fill in the Blank

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 4. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 5. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 6. _____ |

PART 3 — Comprehension: Passage 1

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 4. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 5. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 6. _____ |

PART 4 — True or False

- | | | |
|----------|----------|----------|
| 1. T / F | 2. T / F | 3. T / F |
| 4. T / F | 5. T / F | 6. T / F |

PART 4 — Comprehension: Passage 2 (BIG3)

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 4. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 5. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 6. _____ |

PART 5 — Fill in the Blank

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 4. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 5. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 6. _____ |

PART 6 — Comprehension: Passage 3 (SlamBall)

1. _____

4. _____

2. _____

5. _____

3. _____

Parts 7 and 8 — use the space provided in the main worksheet · 18K English · 18kenglish.com

ANSWER SHEET — ANSWER KEY

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PART 2A — Matching

1. D 2. E 3. B 4. C 5. A 6. F

PART 2B — Fill in the Blank

1. prospect 2. showcase 3. barnstorming 4. venture 5. crossover appeal 6. trailblazer

PART 3 — Comprehension: Passage 1

1. Stable, lucrative overseas contracts vs. limited NBA spots. 2. EuroLeague — top European club competition with passionate, football-like crowds. 3. Luka Dončić. 4. NBL's "Next Stars" — signs elite U.S. teens pro contracts before college. 5. Talent is spread more evenly among federations than the NBA's 30 teams. 6. Basketball thrives professionally on every continent, not one league.

PART 4 — True or False

1. F 2. T 3. T 4. F 5. F 6. T

PART 4 — Comprehension: Passage 2 (BIG3)

1. 3-on-3 half-court, target-score games, four-point line. 2. To draw fans via name recognition and give veterans a real competitive stage. 3. Feels like an elevated pickup game, run at a pro level. 4. Some players used it to return to the NBA or sign overseas. 5. Skeptics doubted it; instead it landed broadcast deals and expanded. 6. Fans follow players they admire regardless of league or age.

PART 5 — Fill in the Blank

1. prospect 2. venture 3. spectacle 4. barnstorming 5. niche 6. legacy

PART 6 — Comprehension: Passage 3 (SlamBall)

1. Four angled trampolines embedded near each basket. 2. Basketball, football, and gymnastics. 3. Niche audience made the league hard to sustain long-term. 4. Relaunched itself as an action-sports spectacle rather than a traditional league. 5. Audiences return for a genuinely new kind of athletic spectacle, tradition or not.

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