

Possible FIBA club world Championship?

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Club world championship presents challenges

By ED ODEVEN Staff writer (Editors Note: This article was originally in the February 29th edition of The Japan Times - Japan Times)

There's talk that FIBA, basketball's world governing body, wants to create a new club world championship.

It would be similar to FIFA's Club World Cup, the soccer tournament that is held in Japan each year, and according to recent published reports, the Japan Basketball Association has said FIBA wants to create a 14-team tournament.

The proposed annual tournament would feature the NBA champion and the top four teams in the Americas and Europe, and top two apiece from the federations in Asia, Africa and Oceania, to determine the so-called No. 1 hoop club in the world.

Working out the kinks on a schedule may be the most difficult part of the process. For instance, would this tournament be played in September or October, weeks before the NBA regular season tips off?

Ryukyu Golden Kings coach Hernando Planells, who also works as an NBA scout, offered his insight into what FIBA now faces.

"I think a club world championship is a great idea but on the NBA side there are some issues to consider," Planells said. "The NBA plays 82 games. By the time a NBA champ is crowned, that team would have probably played close to 100 games! That is by far more than any other league in the world. Fatigue would definitely play a key factor in how an NBA team would compete for this club championship.

"I don't know how excited the players and coaches would feel in playing more games after the grind of an NBA season which is difficult. Some NBA coaches and players have trouble allowing some of their athletes play in the Olympics, with Elton Brand's injury some have questioned is it too much of a toll on players bodies.

"It may be very difficult to see something like this happen from an NBA standpoint. . . . But if the money is there and the NBA gets a nice chunk of that, I'm sure they will strongly consider it."

Oita HeatDevils coach Dai Oketani also supports the concept of staging a global club championship.

The bottom line, he said, will keep the talks moving.

"Yes, I believe they will do that because the money will move astronomical figures," Oketani said. "Ha ha, I don't want to say that, but I think it will be true.

"I think that the tourney would help us to create our own basketball style," Oketani continued. "I often hear about European basketball and also American basketball, but I have never heard about Japanese basketball before."

Oketani cited a Japanese kotowaza (proverb) to illustrate his point. "Hyakubun wa ikken ni shikazu! (Seeing is believing! We need to have experience.)"

Playing quality competition is the key, Oketani noted.

"This will be the great test to estimate our abilities," he added. "Also, we can create our own basketball style, how we need to do, if we want to win against big clubs.

"For young players and coaches, this tourney will be a great showcase, too."

There remain plenty of hurdles for FIBA to cross before this tournament can become a reality. For the bj-league, now in its third season, there remains a big-time obstacle, too: becoming recognized by JBA, which would enable it to compete officially in FIBA-sanctioned events.

"Yeah, I think that the bj-league has to try to get the approval of JBA as a pro league first," Oketani said. "I know it is not easy, but I think this is the most important thing . . ."