



NGO "A-LEAGUE"

THE CRISIS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL IN AMATEUR SPORTS

A Practical Case Study of Operating Under Martial Law



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DISCLAIMER:

This analytical report reflects the personal professional experience, observations, and insights of the author gained during the management of basketball projects in Ukraine. All financial examples (including participation fees, tax liabilities, and rental costs) are provided solely for illustrative purposes and to explain macroeconomic processes in grassroots sports. This document does not constitute official legal or financial advice.

For any full or partial citation of this material, an active hyperlink to the author and the official "A-League" website (<https://A-League.top>) is mandatory. Artificial intelligence technologies were partially utilized to create the illustrations in this report.

**THE CRISIS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL IN AMATEUR SPORTS:
The Economics of the Current Situation and Pathways to Transforming Basketball
Leagues in Ukraine
(Or Why Amateur Basketball is Dying in Empty Gyms and How Players Can Stop
Being Mere Consumers)**

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INTRODUCTION

Any analysis of an ecosystem, particularly a sporting one, is impossible without a profound understanding of its internal processes. Throughout my career in Ukrainian basketball, I have walked a path that allowed me to examine the sport from every conceivable angle. With the benefit of my background as a licensed player, I deeply understand the psychology of those who step onto the court driven by emotion and the desire to win. Through my work as a licensed coach with youth and adult teams alike, I observe first-hand the disparities in motivation, discipline, and the capacity to perceive the game as a holistic system. My experience as an on-court referee and table official has provided a sharp awareness of the operational cost behind every single second of game time. Furthermore, my tenure at the Basketball Federation of Ukraine, where I was responsible for the development and national scaling of 3x3 basketball, shaped my understanding of how to build novel sport products capable of engaging mass audiences and securing Olympic prospects.

Today, in my capacity as President of the Kyiv Open Basketball Championship "A-League," I deal daily with a fundamental crisis that has engulfed grassroots sport in Ukraine. The essence of this crisis lies in a profound cognitive dissonance between team expectations and the harsh financial realities of sports economics. Players demand that basketball become cheaper—ideally free—subsidized by mythical sponsors, grant

funding, or financial aid from sports federations. Organizers, on the other hand, are held hostage by the continuous rise in gym rental fees and the escalating costs of referees, medical staff, and statisticians. Transport expenses and administrative dues paid to local and national federations further inflate these costs—expenses that players on the court never physically witness. This has created a vicious circle: sponsors refuse to invest in a product that generates no added value, while players remain unwilling to produce this value, assuming that the mere act of stepping onto the court justifies external funding.

To illustrate the absurdity of this scenario, one only needs to compare two polar opposites in contemporary Ukrainian basketball. On one hand, we have youth competitions or tournaments like the "Avangard Cup" for high schoolers. From a technical and tactical standpoint, this is far from elite-level basketball. Yet, these matches are characterized by incredible dynamics, raw emotions, and packed stands filled with classmates, parents, and friends. They do not merely generate background noise; they create genuine social resonance and prompt hundreds of social media posts, thereby establishing a highly attractive environment for local partners. On the other hand is a classic matchup between two local adult men's amateur teams. On the court, mature, physically developed men compete, demonstrating a far superior understanding of the game, alongside higher aggression and frequent disputes with the referees. However, this game unfolds in the absolute silence of an empty arena. Beyond the court, there is no one except the league staff and a few lonely spectators keeping their partners company—primarily because the match serves merely as a brief transition point before subsequent joint family leisure activities. These players fail to attract spectators, do not promote the event on their personal social media accounts, and generate zero media traffic. For the outside world, this game simply does not exist. Consequently, no rational business sees any value in integrating its brand into an event where the target audience is strictly limited to the number of players on the court.



Рис. 1. Source: <https://www.facebook.com/AvangardArenaCup/photos>

SECTION 1. Historical Retrospective.

To understand how Ukrainian amateur basketball ended up in this deadlock, we must step back from emotions and analyze the historical context. The current crisis is the result of a long-term transformation of the sports industry, which can be clearly divided into three key stages, each of which has left its mark on both player mentality and organizers' capabilities.

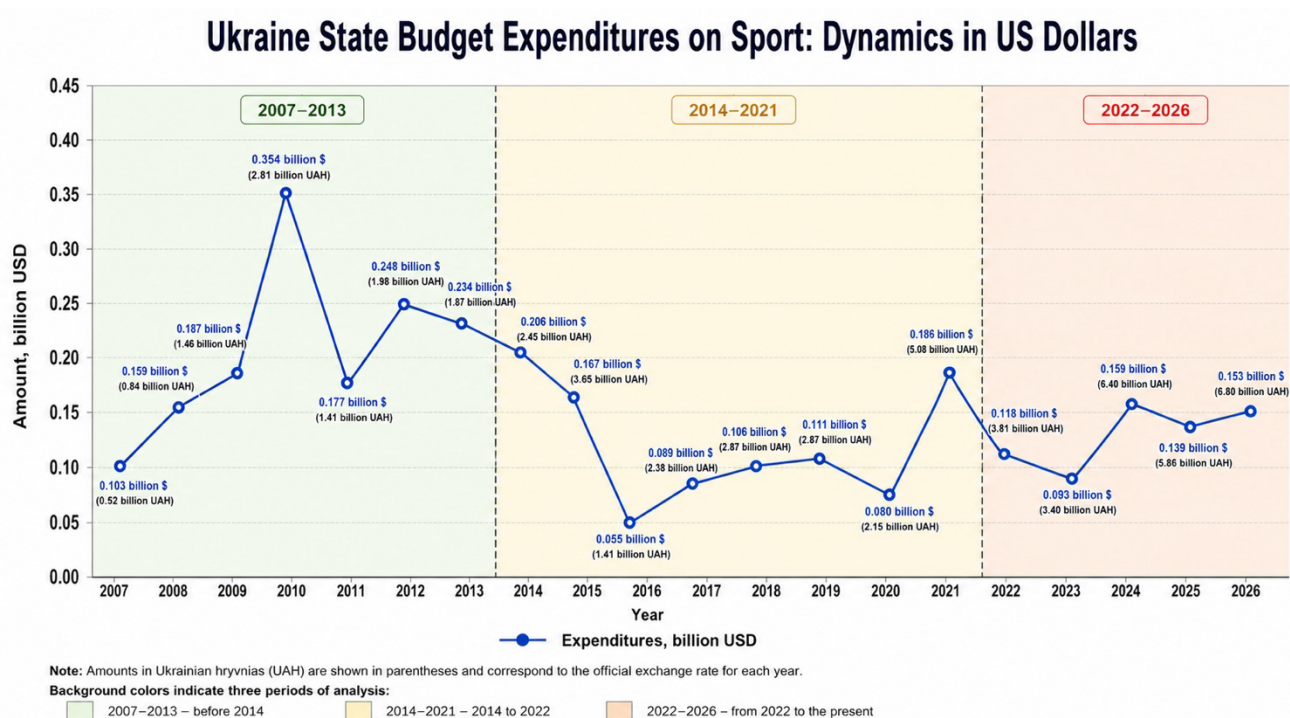
The first stage spans the period up to 2014. Ukrainian sport, and basketball in particular, existed for a long time within the paradigm of post-Soviet inertia. Although outdated, infrastructure remained relatively accessible. Many state-owned and institutional sports halls were leased for symbolic fees or through barter agreements. The economics of amateur sport were sustained by the remnants of corporate funding: enterprises, factories, banks, and even individual politicians willingly financed their own teams, viewing this as a matter of prestige or social responsibility. Local federations organized municipal and regional championships, as well as tournaments dedicated to historical regional milestones and public holidays, with free participation. During this period, players became accustomed to the financial burden of participating in competitions resting on someone else's shoulders. Organizers found it relatively easy to secure sponsorships because the market was flooded with cash that did not require a strict calculation of return on investment (ROI). This created a persistent illusion of stability and anchored the belief in the minds of basketball players that basketball should be free of charge for the participant.

The second stage began in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea and the launch of the Anti-Terrorist Operation (later the Joint Forces Operation, or JFO) in eastern Ukraine [6]. Economic shocks, currency devaluations, and the reallocation of state budgets to meet defense needs led to a sharp reduction in sports funding. Corporate teams and tournaments began to disappear rapidly as businesses optimized their expenses. It was during this period that the financial burden began to gradually shift onto the players themselves in the form of registration fees.

At the same time, the crisis in classic 5x5 basketball gave a powerful boost to the development of 3x3 basketball. Working at the Basketball Federation of Ukraine during this time, I witnessed how this street format—which required lower infrastructure costs and was far more dynamic—began to quickly gain popularity. While 3x3 basketball served as a lifeline for thousands of players, it also planted a metaphorical time bomb for classic league organizers: players got a taste of short,

intense tournaments, which subsequently made it more difficult to "sell" them a full-length, classic season.

This likely drove the rise of the short-competition format, where three to four separate tournaments were held per season, allowing teams to spend significantly less money for a chance to win medals. We must also not forget COVID-19, which declared a six-month timeout for all grassroots sports. The period of 2014–2022 became an era of pure enthusiasm, where leagues relied entirely on the dedication of individual fans of the game to stay afloat, despite the constantly rising costs of staff, municipal utilities, and rent.



Puc. 2. Source: <https://www.slovoidilo.ua/2025/04/14/infografika/ekonomika/skilky-koshtiv-rozvytok-fizkultury-ta-sportu-vytrachaye-ukrayina>

The third, most tragic, and highly complex stage began on February 24, 2022, with the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation. For Ukrainian grassroots sport, an era of existential survival emerged. A significant portion of the country's sports infrastructure was either destroyed by enemy shelling or repurposed into humanitarian hubs and civilian shelters. The remaining playable facilities became scarce, and their rental costs skyrocketed due to the necessity of running generators during blackouts, rising logistics expenses, and staff maintenance. Unprecedented challenges mounted: constant match interruptions caused by air raid alerts, which shattered both broadcast and rental schedules; the outflow of players going abroad; and the mobilization of a substantial part of the basketball community into the Armed

Forces of Ukraine. Consequently, the purchasing power of the population dropped catastrophically.

From a legal perspective, organizing amateur competitions under martial law has turned into a minefield. Today, conducting any tournament is rigidly regulated by the legal framework—most notably by the Order of the Ministry of Youth and Sports of Ukraine No. 1587 dated May 28, 2022 (with subsequent amendments)¹ and the approved "Additional Safety Measures for Organizing and Conducting Competitions in Ukraine under Martial Law"².

According to these official requirements, matches cannot be held without a designated protective facility or simplest shelter located within a maximum distance of 500 meters from the venue. The organizer is legally obligated to establish approved evacuation routes, and under the most recent amendments to the regulations, even the number of spectators allowed in the venue is strictly capped by the capacity of that specific shelter. In cases of non-compliance or negligence during an air raid alert, any incident on the court carries direct criminal liability for the organizer under Article 270 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine ("Violation of Fire or Technogenic Safety Requirements Established by Law") and Article 367 of the CCU ("Official Negligence")³.

When teams demand that the organizer find a "cheap gym" to reduce their entry fees, they often fail to grasp the fundamental principles of sports infrastructure management. Today, "legal" and "cheap" are antonyms. If we are referring to a state or municipal sports facility (such as a university or school gym), then according to the Law of Ukraine "On the Rental of State and Municipal Property," officially leasing it is possible exclusively through the "Prozorro.Sale" electronic auction system⁴. This public procurement procedure requires an official expert valuation, payment of guarantee fees, property insurance, and strict document management, all of which naturally shape the corresponding market price.

If players instead suggest "coming to an informal agreement" directly with the gym management for cash without a contract, they expose the entire League to a mortal risk. First, this constitutes a direct violation of financial and tax legislation. Second, without a legally binding lease agreement, the team has absolutely no guarantees: the owner of a private or municipal gym can cancel matches, double the rent, or evict the league onto the street at any moment in the middle of the season. Therefore, a stable, safe, and legally compliant championship inherently cannot be cheap. Participant safety, the legal integrity of the lease, and the guarantee that the

¹ <https://mms.gov.ua/npas/pro-deyaki-pitannya-provedennya-vseukrayinskih-sportivnih-zahodiv-v-umovah-voyennogo-stanu>

² <https://mms.gov.ua/news/minmolodsport-rozrobilo-poriadok-uzgodzhennia-ta-provedennia-sportyvnykh-zmahan-z-hliadachamy>

³ <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2341-14#Text>

⁴ <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/157-20#Text>

season will be played to its end have become the main components of "invisible" expenses that consumer-minded players simply refuse to notice.

Under these conditions, organizing any amateur tournament is a true managerial feat. Yet, paradoxically, the war itself should have become the catalyst that forces players to fundamentally rethink their attitude toward the organization of competitions. The old model, where the player merely acts as a passive consumer of a service, is dead. Modern realities dictate harsh conditions: if we want to preserve basketball in Kyiv and Ukraine, every team and every player must become a co-creator of the product. To continue to demand that the organizer "find a sponsor" while creating absolutely no media coverage is, in a war economy, not just naive, but a blatant misunderstanding of basic macroeconomic processes.

SECTION 2. The Anatomy of the "Vicious Circle": Why the Economic Model of Classic Amateur Sports Needs a Reset

To definitively dispel the illusions regarding the possibility of "free" amateur basketball in contemporary Ukrainian realities, we must dissect the cost structure of any given tournament. When team captains or individual players express dissatisfaction with the level of entry fees, they most often fall victim to cognitive bias, evaluating the tournament solely through the prism of the two hours they spend on the court. In reality, organizing high-quality competitions is a complex, continuous operational process, the economics of which currently operate on the edge of profitability.

Let us look at the mathematics of this process openly, from the organizer's perspective. The modern amateur player is exceptionally demanding. They do not want to play in a cold school gym with slippery floors and wooden backboards. They expect professional hardwood, modern locker rooms, an electronic scoreboard, high-quality lighting, qualified officiating (preferably by FBU-licensed referees to avoid conflicts), the presence of a medical professional, real-time detailed statistics, and professional photography and video highlights after the match. Each of these requirements carries a rigid market price. Renting high-quality sports infrastructure in Kyiv, especially considering the facilities' overhead costs for autonomous power and heating, is a massive budget item. The remuneration of qualified personnel—from referees to statisticians—cannot be conducted on a volunteer basis; it is systematic work that demands professionalism.

Given this, the team entry fee is not league profit. In most cases, it is merely a fund covering basic operational costs. This is where the key conflict arises: players believe that the difference should be covered by an abstract "title sponsor" that the league supposedly failed to secure. However, as noted in the introduction, a sponsor does not need the mere fact of your play. Modern business, especially under martial law, meticulously calculates every hryvnia of investment. Companies seek a specific value proposition: access to a loyal target audience, opportunities for B2B (business-to-business) networking, quality content for their social media, and the implementation of corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs.

As a lawyer, I see a fundamental mistake made by 95% of amateur teams every day in their attempts to secure funding. They fail to understand the basic principles of Ukrainian tax and civil law.

Consider this situation: a team captain approaches the director of a successful LLC (Limited Liability Company) and asks for 50,000 UAH for jerseys and entry fees. Even if the director agrees, a logical question arises: where should this money be transferred? To the captain's personal bank card? For an enterprise, this is a legal nonsense. According to Clause 168.1.1 of the Tax Code of Ukraine (TCU)⁵, a legal entity in such a case acts as a tax agent and is obligated to withhold taxes from this amount before payment. Under Clause 164.2.20 of the TCU, such funds are classified as "other taxable income." From this sum, 18% Personal Income Tax (PIT) must be paid (Article 167 of the TCU) along with a Military Tax (currently 1.5%, though recent legislative initiatives propose significant increases to this rate). In other words, nearly one-fifth of the sponsorship funds would have to be surrendered to the state simply due to improper legal structuring.

One should not forget about financial monitoring. Under the Law of Ukraine No. 361-IX "On Prevention and Counteraction to Legalization (Laundering) of Proceeds from Crime..."⁶, the systematic receipt of funds onto a personal card from players and sponsors without economic justification is a direct risk marker. Banks have the legal right to block such accounts until the source of funds is clarified.

Most amateur teams in Ukraine legally do not exist—they are merely groups of physical persons. They are not registered as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) or sports clubs with non-profit status (code 0032). Consequently, serious business has no legal tool to provide them with funding. A business requires either an official "Contract for the Provision of Advertising Services" (to legally expense the funds as marketing costs) or a charitable donation agreement with a non-profit organization.

⁵ <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2755-17#n3850>

⁶ <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/361-20#Text>

Sports funding within the Ukrainian legal framework is clearly regulated. If a business wishes to provide funds to a team as a charitable donation, then according to Article 51-1 of the Law of Ukraine "On Physical Culture and Sports"⁷, such patronage assistance must be provided exclusively on the basis of a written contract between the patron and the beneficiary (which cannot simply be a group of physical persons). If we are referring to commercial sponsorship (money in exchange for placing a logo on a uniform), these relations are regulated by the Law of Ukraine "On Advertising"⁸, which also requires an official contract for advertising services. As long as a team fails to legalize its status, fails to establish governing bodies, and fails to open an official IBAN bank account, no corporation with "white" budgets will work with them. Basketball players must realize: before asking for money, you must create a legal entity capable of accepting these funds legally and without tax losses.

When we in the "A-League" leadership analyzed this issue while preparing for the new season, which traditionally starts in late September, we reached a radical conclusion: selling sponsors "a logo on a banner" is no longer viable. We are transforming the league into a communication platform. Our goal is to attract teams for the new season that understand they are partners, not just clients. We are creating an ecosystem where an "A-League" sponsor receives not just advertising space, but active engagement with a community of successful men playing basketball. At the same time, we tell potential partners frankly: an investment in our championship is an investment in the physical and mental health of the nation, and support for a community that works, pays taxes, and donates to the Armed Forces. For companies aiming to be socially responsible this autumn, integration into such a living sports organism is far more effective than standard outdoor advertising.

However, the paradigm shift must also happen at the team level. An ideal example of how an amateur basketball structure should function is the philosophy we established when creating our amateur team, the "Hooligans." We rejected the format of "just getting together to run around on weekends." The "Hooligans" are a micro-club, a family of like-minded people who share common values both on and off the court. We build our own identity, work on team spirit, and create an internal culture that makes us interesting to ourselves and the outside world. This is a conscious approach where players invest time and resources into their collective, understanding that this level of self-organization is what will attract partners in the future. Indeed, this is why the doors of the "Hooligans" are always open to new adult players who are tired of

⁷ <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3808-12#top>

⁸ <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/270/96-%D0%B2%D1%80>

systemic basketball and are looking for a real sports family ready for a serious approach to amateur sports.



Рис. 3. Source: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100083667005749>

SECTION 3. International Experience: Between American Social Capital and European Club Solidarity

To find a way out of our local crisis, it is worthwhile to turn to international experience, where amateur sport has long learned to be self-sufficient. It is essential to understand that neither the American nor the European model can be simply copied and transplanted onto Ukrainian soil without adaptation; however, their underlying principles are key to solving our problems.

In the United States, amateur basketball is rooted in the concepts of "community" and "entertainment." The phenomenon of Pro-Am (Professional-Amateur) leagues, such as the world-renowned Drew League in Los Angeles⁹, demonstrates that even in socially complex, historically disadvantaged neighborhoods, it is possible to build a commercially successful sports product without any state subsidies.

The Drew League was founded in the 1970s in the high-crime area of South Central Los Angeles as a social project—a "Safe Haven" designed to keep youth off the streets. But the secret to its economic success lies in the fact that this tournament does not sell basketball merely as a

dry statistical result. It sells identity and pride in one's neighborhood. Players step onto the court not as anonymous consumers of services, but as representatives of their neighborhoods, streets, or local businesses. They generate a vibrant media buzz and emotional tension that attracts spectators. When hundreds of neighbors attend local amateur matches, local businesses line up to become sponsors, provide uniforms, and cover the team's organizational costs.

The European model is fundamentally different, yet it is equally successful in solving the problem of financing. In Western European countries (Germany, France, Scandinavian countries), the "voluntary sports club" system dominates (e.g., Sportvereine in Germany). Independent amateur teams that gather only on weekends to play in a league practically do not exist there.

Instead, there are fully functional clubs that maintain a powerful vertical structure: from children aged 5–6 to veteran teams. Research on the European sport model confirms that the financial and infrastructural stability of such organizations rests on two pillars: annual membership fees and municipal subsidies [2]. Each club member pays a regular membership fee, which forms the core budget. Furthermore, holding the status of a socially significant organization with youth sections grants the club the right to negotiate with municipalities for the use of communal sports facilities—either free of charge or at symbolic rates (subsidized infrastructure). Once



Puc. 4. Source:
https://www.instagram.com/p/DLShnMRuuVk/?img_index=1

⁹ <https://drewleague.com/>

the budget is secured and a facility is obtained, the club independently enters its various age-group teams into local championships¹⁰.

The most important feature of the European model is the continuity of generations and the integrity of its culture. Adult amateurs are part of the same structure as the children. They attend matches to support the youth, and children look up to the adults. This creates a massive social base. Local European sponsors invest in a club not for the sake of television ratings, but because they know their brand logo will be seen weekly by thousands of club members, their parents, relatives, and friends residing in the same community.

Moreover, this club approach is part of a much broader official framework—"The European Sport Model." According to European Commission documents (notably the 2007 White Paper on Sport and the 2022 profile study), European sport functions as a single pyramid, with grassroots and amateur sport at its base and elite sport at the summit¹¹.

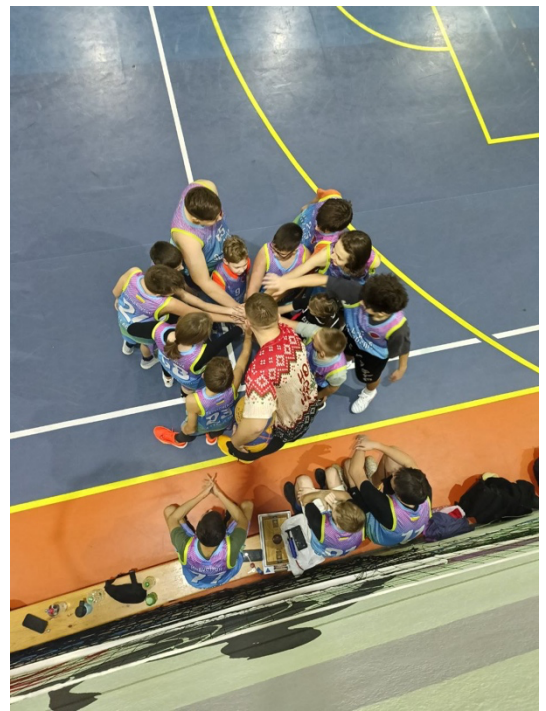
Contrary to Ukrainian realities, where amateur leagues often exist in complete isolation from professional basketball (as disconnected "commercial islands"), the European model demands solidarity and interdependence. This implies that revenues from professional sport should support the development of youth, amateur levels, and infrastructure. In turn, amateur grassroots sport serves as the foundation that generates fans and nurtures talent.

Another critical pillar of the European model is volunteering. The European Commission officially recognizes that the role of volunteers is vital for the organization of sport at all levels. However, volunteering should not be spontaneous: structures must be in place where people are trained, stimulated, and integrated into management processes. In Ukraine, we often witness the devaluation of volunteer labor by amateur players themselves, who perceive organizers and referees strictly as hired staff.

¹⁰ https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Christoph-Breuer/publication/282641670_A_Cross-National_Comparative_Perspective_on_Sport_Clubs_in_Europe/links/5614cd8508ae983c1b40caa1/A-Cross-National-Comparative-Perspective-on-Sport-Clubs-in-Europe.pdf

¹¹ <https://sport.ec.europa.eu/sport-in-the-eu/the-european-sport-model>

This European approach to cultivating a proper sports mentality from an early age is precisely what we have laid as the foundation for our youth basketball academy. We recognize that the mindset of modern adult amateurs, who think exclusively in terms of consumerism, was shaped in their childhood, during an era when sports were disconnected from real-life realities and economic principles. In our academy, we strive to develop more than just players capable of passing the ball or scoring layups. We are molding individuals who understand team ethics, respect the labor of organizers, referees, and coaches, and realize they are part of a grand basketball



culture. Furthermore, our first graduates have already obtained their licenses as table officials, basketball referees, and even coaches. Today, we are actively recruiting new students—boys and girls ready to join our academy to embark on the correct path of Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD)¹². It is these children who, in 10–15 years, will become the new generation of players, fans, and, potentially, sports managers who will lead Ukrainian basketball out of its deep conceptual crisis.

The creation of an open system (with transparent movement between leagues based on sporting merit), the integration of youth academies, and the respect for volunteer labor are the European principles we are embedding today into the foundation of the "A-League" championship. This is not merely a tournament; it is an effort to build a proper basketball pyramid at the local level.

Understanding these international models leads us to one simple conclusion: Ukrainian amateur sports are stuck in a transitional zone. We have abandoned the Soviet system of state-funded sports, yet we have failed to build either the American commercial entertainment model or the European model of club solidarity. However, the emergence of new, revolutionary formats on the market proves that change is not only possible—it is inevitable.

¹² https://www.academia.edu/91541315/Long_Term_Athlete_Development

SECTION 4. The Phenomenon of Media Leagues and the 3x3 Format: How Sports Entertainment Conquered Classic Sport

A tectonic shift in the global and domestic amateur sports landscape, which ultimately exposed the systemic challenges of classic basketball, has been the emergence of so-called "Media Leagues"—first in football, and subsequently in basketball. This phenomenon ignited with particular intensity in 2025, forcing many traditional sports administrators and players to rethink the very essence of sports entertainment. However, to grasp the nature of this development, one must look back at the origins of the 3x3 format's popularization.

While working at the Basketball Federation of Ukraine (FBU) and overseeing the national development of 3x3 basketball, I observed how this street format gradually captured audience attention. The primary advantage of 3x3 was its inherent dynamism: the game lasts only 10 minutes of clock time (or until 21 points), the shot clock is limited to 12 seconds, music plays continuously, and the stands are positioned immediately adjacent to the court. This created a dense, uninterrupted flow of emotions, perfectly suited to the "snackable" content consumption patterns of the modern spectator. We transformed streets, public squares, and shopping malls into arenas, captivating passersby with the sheer energy of the game. This experience proved a key thesis: sport is marketable only when it becomes accessible, understandable to a mass audience, and capable of generating immediate emotional impact.

Media Leagues have taken this concept to the absolute extreme, creating a product based exclusively on the laws of the entertainment industry. What we observed were packed arenas with paid ticket entries, high-quality live broadcasts with professional commentators, seamless brand integrations, and—most surprisingly for classic amateurs—free or nearly free participation for teams. At first glance, this seemed like the dream scenario. "Do the same for us in the classic championship!" amateur leagues demanded. Yet, this demand hides a fundamental error and a failure to understand how the sports entertainment industry actually functions.

A Media League is not basketball in its classic, academic sense. It is theater on a sports court, structurally closer to professional wrestling (WWE) or Gerard Piqué's Kings League¹³. Organizers of such leagues consciously break traditional rules for the sake of pacing. They implement a 3x3 format on a full-sized court, creating vast open spaces for fast breaks. They lower the rims below the standard 3.05 meters to ensure every player can consistently and spectacularly dunk, as these moments provide the most viral "highlight reel" content for social media. Players are equipped with

¹³ <https://kingsleague.pro/>

microphones, allowing the audience to hear every word, argument, or "trash talk" in real-time. Additionally, bonus scoring zones are introduced, doubling or tripling points in the final minutes to maximize late-game drama.



Рис. 5. Source: <https://usport.com.ua/sport-uk/basketbol/2026/04/06/king-media-basket-top-match-king-crew-ta-og-chetverta-peremoga-hollywood-i-novi-shou-momenty/>

Most importantly, recruitment for such projects is not based on one's ability to set a proper screen or play disciplined positional defense. They recruit content creators. Media League players are often bloggers, influencers, entertainers, or former professionals with massive followings on TikTok and Instagram. They do not step onto the court simply to play; they perform as actors and traffic generators. Their participation is often free precisely because they bring a massive audience to the league, which the organizers subsequently monetize through sponsors.

When a classic amateur player observes this financial success, they draw a fundamentally flawed conclusion. They assume that sponsorship money appeared simply because someone "looked for it well." The amateur refuses to accept the bitter truth: classic 5x5 basketball, with its 24-second shot clocks, complex positional play, frequent stoppages, fouls, and—frankly speaking—low shooting percentages (which is normal for amateurs), is overtly boring for the neutral mass spectator. And what is boring to a spectator and fails to capture views is an entirely dead asset for a sponsor.

If teams are unwilling to transform their performance into a viable media product, they have no moral or economic right to demand the status and treatment of media-space stars.

The emergence of these media-led show tournaments has highlighted another critical problem in the modern Ukrainian sports market: a lack of civilized B2B communication and a profound disrespect for the institutional history of Ukrainian basketball.

Most classic amateur leagues (including the "A-League") were built over many years. These are officially registered trademarks (TMs) in Ukraine, representing a legitimate history that spans back to the late 2000s, when enthusiasts, using their own funds, kept basketball afloat through every economic crisis. Conversely, new media projects often appear as carbon copies or franchises of formats borrowed from neighboring markets (specifically, from the aggressor state's market, where such basketball media league formats are frequently financed by betting companies).

When the professional basketball community poses entirely logical questions regarding the origin of these formats, the transparency of their funding, or the legitimacy of their intellectual property rights in Ukraine, the organizers of such shows frequently demonstrate an utter inability to engage in adequate crisis communication. Instead of providing reasoned arguments, they resort to aggression, personal attacks, and the devaluation of the work done by those who have developed the sport for decades.

However, the most alarming symptom is the use of manipulative PR technologies. When organizers of commercial show tournaments are confronted with uncomfortable business questions (for example, regarding the similarities between their product and Russian analogues), they often hide behind the participation of military personnel in their projects. This is a highly unethical tactic. Using the status of the Armed Forces of Ukraine as a "shield" to protect one's own incompetence in marketing or communications is a crossing of red lines in sports management.

This phenomenon highlights the divergence between long-term sports development and short-term hype. One can pour massive budgets into lighting, sound, and celebrity invitations, but if this is not underpinned by respect for market peers, the legal integrity of the product, and basic business communication culture, such a project remains nothing more than a flashy soap bubble. Sponsors who value their reputation (Brand Safety) today evaluate not only the number of views on TikTok but also how adequately the organizers are capable of conducting a public dialogue.

SECTION 5. The Psychology of Consumerism: Why Successful Professionals Refuse to Act as Business Subjects

We now approach the most sensitive, yet critical, point of our analysis. Why do amateur teams stubbornly resist adapting to new conditions? To answer this, we must deconstruct the socio-psychological profile of the average team in the Kyiv Open Basketball Championship.

Who are the individuals stepping onto the court on a Sunday evening? They are not teenagers or students living on an allowance. They are predominantly men aged 25 to 45. Among them are successful IT specialists, sales directors, marketing experts, lawyers, and private entrepreneurs. In their daily professional lives, they navigate complex business challenges: drafting strategies, negotiating million-hryvnia deals, optimizing tax structures, and leading large teams. These are individuals with high intellectual capacity and a clear understanding of how financial systems function.

Yet, a striking metamorphosis occurs: as soon as this successful top manager or senior developer laces up their basketball sneakers and enters the gym, their business intelligence seems to deactivate. They instantly revert to the mindset of a demanding consumer. The typical stance of such a team is: "We have chipped in our monthly fee. For this money, you, the organizers, are obliged to provide the best gym at a time convenient for us, secure FBU-level referees, professional statistics, photography, and—please—find us a sponsor to cover half our expenses so that it is cheaper for us. We will just show up, play for an hour, and go about our business."

This is classic, crystallized consumerism. These adult men consciously refuse to grasp that the tournament organizer is not their service staff, but a partner who is already bearing the lion's share of operational burdens—ranging from securing gym rentals during wartime and rescheduling games due to air raid alerts to managing logistics and administration.

Let us pose several uncomfortable questions to such a hypothetical team:

Why can a team comprised of employees from a major IT company not prepare a high-quality presentation and pitch their own HR department to become their title sponsor? After all, a corporate basketball team is an ideal tool for team-building, enhancing employee loyalty, and promoting the company's HR brand in the labor market.

Why do these lawyers or entrepreneurs not engage the companies of their friends or clients as team partners, offering them logo placement on uniforms and mentions across social media?

Why can a team of 15 affluent men not contribute an additional 200 UAH each to hire a capable marketing student who would manage their team's Instagram, write engaging posts, produce humorous TikTok content from practices, and create the exact social capital that could eventually be monetized?

The answer is simple: it is a combination of inertia and the remnants of a post-Soviet mentality, which views sport as something separate from the economy—a sphere where "someone else" is always obligated to provide funding. Amateurs demand that the league organizer magically sell their faceless, unknown collective (which often lacks even a basic social media presence) to a multinational corporation or a major national brand. It is absurd.



Рис. 6. Source: AI-generated image

To break this vicious circle, players must undergo a mental shift from a B2C model (where they are merely consumers of the "gym rental + referees" service) to a B2B (Business-to-Business) model. Each team must view itself as a micro-organization—a small business. A team should have its own manager, a media plan, and clear responsibility for securing funding.

It is with this philosophy of open partnership that we at the "A-League" are approaching the start of the new season in late September. Our championship is a platform for those ready to evolve. As organizers, we commit to creating an impeccable sports and media infrastructure: high-quality arenas, professional broadcasts, analytics, and media support. We are seeking title partners for the League as a whole, and we will secure them because we are creating a high-quality product. However, we are

candid with the teams: your local success and your financial relief are your own zones of responsibility.

For the new "A-League" season, we welcome collectives whose captains understand that to make participation more affordable for their players, they should not bargain with the League over every penny of the entry fee, but rather invest that energy into creating presentations and seeking sponsors for their own teams. As the League's management, we are prepared to provide maximum support to such teams: sharing statistics for their sponsors, integrating their partners into our broadcasts, and providing consultations on how to properly "package" their basketball collective for the business world. We are looking for partners on the court, not just consumers.

SECTION 6. Exit from the Crisis: A Step-by-Step Strategy for Monetizing Amateur Basketball

We have thoroughly analyzed the historical premises, the rigorous mathematics of basketball economics, and the psychological barriers hindering the development of grassroots sports. Now, it is time to provide a concrete, actionable answer to the question: "What must be done?" This strategy, which we have already begun implementing within the Kyiv Open Championship "A-League," requires synchronized actions at three levels: the individual player, the team, and the league itself. These steps form the foundation of the educational programs and online courses for a new generation of sports managers that we are preparing to launch.

Level 1: The Player as a Media Unit and Micro-Influencer

Any change begins with every basketball player realizing their new role. The era of "just playing" is over. Today, every player on the court is a micro-media entity. In network sociology and digital marketing, the concept of "micro-influencers"—individuals with a relatively small but highly loyal audience (ranging from 500 to 2,000 followers)—is well-established. If a team consists of 15 players, and each has an average of 700 followers on social media (colleagues, relatives, university peers), the team's combined organic reach exceeds 10,000 people. This is an audience comparable to the circulation of a regional glossy magazine.

The task of every player is to activate this capital. In practice, this means mandatory reposting of match announcements to personal pages. It means publishing "stories" from the locker room. It means tagging the league's or the team's sponsors. It means inviting friends and colleagues to the stands, even if the game is held on a

Monday or Tuesday evening. If a player refuses to do this, citing "no desire to maintain social media" or embarrassment about their amateur status, they must clearly understand: they are personally depriving their team of the opportunity to secure funding, and thus, voluntarily agreeing to pay high entry fees out of their own pockets.

Level 2: The Team as a B2B Business Entity

The transformation of individual players must consolidate at the team level. As I noted in the example of our team, the "Hooligans," the collective must cease to be just a "group of interest" and become a micro-club. Every team requires a clear distribution of roles. A captain responsible for tactics on the court should not be the sole individual carrying the administrative burden. A team needs a manager—an individual (perhaps an injured player, an enthusiastic student, or one of the successful sales managers on the roster) who takes responsibility for business processes.

The first step for any ambitious collective is legal formalization. Establishing a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) with a sports focus is an absolutely free procedure today, which can be initiated even through the Ministry of Justice or a local Administrative Service Center (CNAP)¹⁴. Obtaining non-profit status grants the right to legally collect membership fees into a club bank account (without taxing them as personal income) and to sign official contracts with sponsors. A team that approaches a partner with a prepared Pitch Deck and an official bank account automatically appears two heads taller in the eyes of business than those asking to "just send it to a Monobank card".

The second step is the internal transformation of the team. Researcher Michael Jeffrey aptly calls amateur sport a "social glue"¹⁵. Analyzing successful sports clubs, he identified key elements that create a true sense of community. These include shared interests off the court, fairness in internal decision-making, the provision of leadership opportunities to different players, and, most importantly, the creation of "social spaces" where players interact after the game.

If your team disperses to their homes within 5 minutes of the final buzzer, you are not a community; you are merely "ball renters." Teams that build an internal culture (frequently gathering for coffee, discussing matches, maintaining shared traditions) demonstrate higher retention rates, attract volunteers more easily, and act as a magnet for local sponsors.

What must a manager of such a team do? Firstly, create a high-quality Pitch Deck for the team. This presentation should contain not just a list of achievements, but audience analytics: who plays on the team, where they work, what the total reach of

¹⁴ <https://diia.gov.ua/services/reiestratsiia-hromadskoi-orhanizatsii-na-pidstavi-modelnoho-statutu>

¹⁵ <https://www.plusscommunities.com/blog/community-building-through-team-sports>

their social media is, and what values they embody. Secondly, develop sponsorship packages. You can sell more than just a logo on a jersey; you can sell the right to joint practices, integration into team videos, corporate merchandise, and team-building sessions based on basketball training. Thirdly, initiate purposeful partner outreach, starting with the HR departments of the companies where the players themselves work. When you approach a business saying, "We are not asking for charity; we are offering a platform for your HR brand and a loyal audience," the business attitude toward amateurs changes radically.



Puc. 7. Source: AI-generated image

Level 3: The League as a Communication Platform

Finally, it is time to redefine the role of tournament organizers. A modern league can no longer simply be a "provider of gyms and referees." The league must evolve into a digital infrastructure and a B2B platform. We are currently finalizing this architecture for the "A-League" ahead of the new season, which begins in late September.

What are we doing as organizers? We are creating a media product that teams can leverage for their own sales efforts. We provide high-quality broadcasts, professional photography, highlight reels, and detailed electronic statistics for every match. We are creators of content. When a team approaches a potential sponsor, they no longer need to apologize for playing in an obscure basement. Instead, they show the high-quality product of the "A-League" and demonstrate: "Your logo will appear on this broadcast and within these official reports generated by the league." As organizers, we

are fully committed to facilitating the commercialization of our teams, because their success is synonymous with the financial stability of our championship.

Furthermore, we are establishing a network of partnerships from within the league itself. If a player on one team owns a business (for example, a chain of coffee shops), they can become a league partner or offer exclusive discounts to other championship participants. In this way, capital begins to circulate within the basketball ecosystem, creating genuine added value, just as it does in successful European club structures.

CONCLUSIONS. The Future of Basketball: Time to Choose Our Path

Ukrainian grassroots basketball is currently at a bifurcation point—a crossroads of two paths. War, economic instability, and generational shifts have dismantled old models of existence. To continue playing by the old rules, complaining about high entry fees, and waiting for benevolent patrons to appear, is a path to nowhere—a path toward marginalization and the gradual death of the classic 5x5 format against the backdrop of flashy, yet artificial, Media Leagues.

However, this crisis harbors colossal potential for those ready to adapt. Basketball is more than just a game. It is a tool for character building, community development, and the creation of social capital.

We invite those who share this philosophy to join us in building a new basketball reality in Ukraine.

For Teams and Companies: The new "A-League" season traditionally starts earlier than any other amateur league in the capital—in late September. We welcome collectives ready to become true partners, and businesses that understand the value of integrating into a vibrant, active community. This is your opportunity to be not just a sponsor, but a core part of an evolving ecosystem.

For Adult Players: If you are looking for more than just a place to run around on weekends—if you seek a team with its own culture, corporate spirit, and a systematic approach—the family of our micro-club, the "Hooligans," is always open to new members.

For Parents and Students: A culture of respect for the sport, an understanding of its internal structure, and a professional attitude toward development (LTAD) are fostered from an early age. Our basketball academy continues to enroll new students.

We do not just teach children to shoot a ball into a hoop; we are raising the new generation that, in 10 to 15 years, will change the face of Ukrainian sports.

Amateur basketball in Kyiv must not die in empty gyms. It can and must become a powerful social phenomenon. We already possess everything necessary: the players, the infrastructure, and the technology. There is only one thing left to change—our mindset. And we have already started this process.

Join us. The game is just beginning.



HOW TO JOIN OR BECOME A PARTNER?

The "A-League" Open Championship is an officially registered trademark (TM) and a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) with non-profit status. We operate exclusively within the legal framework, maintain official bank accounts, and are prepared to sign transparent partnership agreements or contracts for the provision of advertising services (B2B).

For Teams: Registration for the new season is open. The document package and the Regulations are available upon request.

For Adult Players: Open tryouts for the "Hooligans" micro-club are ongoing.

For Parents: Enrollment for children in our basketball academy (utilizing the LTAD approach) is currently open.

For Businesses and Sponsors: We are prepared to send our Sponsorship Deck and discuss the integration of your brand into our ecosystem.

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