



EDITORS' NOTE In February of 1984, David Stern became the NBA's fourth Commissioner. Before that, he served as the league's outside counsel from 1966 to 1978; as inside general counsel from 1978 to 1980; and as Executive Vice President of Business and Legal Affairs from 1980 to 1984. Stern is the Chair Emeritus of the Trustees of Columbia University and serves or has served on the boards of Beth Israel Medical Center, the Rutgers University Foundation, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission, the Thurgood Marshall College Fund, The Paley Center for Media, Jazz at Lincoln Center, and the Global Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria. He is also a member of the Council on Foreign Relations. Stern is a graduate of Rutgers University and Columbia Law School.

COMPANY BRIEF The NBA (www.nba.com) is a global sports and media business that features three professional sports leagues: the National Basketball Association, the Women's National Basketball Association, and the NBA Development League. Games and programming reach 215 countries and territories in 47 languages. NBA.com averages more than 42 million page views per day, with more than 50 percent of the site's visitors coming from outside of North America. The NBA is the number one professional sports league on social media with more than 300 million fans and followers globally across all league, team, and player platforms.

Are you happy with how this past season played out and where is the NBA today?

We actually had one of our best seasons. Our ratings remained strong while all other programming on the networks declined. Our attendance was robust, our sponsors stayed with us, and our merchandise sales were strong. There was something that transfixed our fans on the quality of the basketball and the stardom of our players that

Making an Impact

An Interview with David J. Stern, Commissioner, National Basketball Association

enabled them to forgive us for missing the number of games we did.

Do you see strong growth overseas?

We have several business lines, including television, digital, sponsorship, merchandising, and events, as well as non-business lines like public relations, communications, and NBA Cares in different countries. This past summer, we dispatched the Basketball Without Borders program to Africa, Japan, and Russia. We were at the Olympics this year with an NBA-dominated team representing the U.S. among 57 current and former NBA players who competed while 38 current and former WNBA players represented their countries. We're being televised in 215 countries and territories in 47 languages.

We think all of those business and non-business lines are going to grow. Once again, during the preseason, we're going to be playing international exhibitions in Mexico, Turkey, Germany, Italy, Spain, and China. We'll also be playing regular-season games in Europe again and their success probably will move us to consider adding more international regular-season games.

More of our games will be televised not only over the air and on cable and satellite but also digitally through programs like League Pass Broadband, which allows people to get our games on their computers, laptops, and smartphones.

Eventually, there will be NBA branded leagues in Asia; our Development League will probably expand into South America; and our main league will likely expand into Europe. But nothing is happening tomorrow.

How important has the Development League been?

It has evolved into and become exactly what we wanted – our teams feel comfortable assigning their players to the Development League; and gives players confidence, coaching, a sense of community, and minutes. More than 25 percent of our players in the NBA have D-League experience.

In addition, because of the continued visibility of the D-League, if you're a player and you just got cut, you can go to Europe for the bigger bucks or if you think you might get called up in the event of an injury, you stay in the U.S. More players are staying in the U.S. and getting another shot at the NBA.

We're now at the point where well over half of our D-League teams are either owned by an NBA team or have their basketball operations run by an NBA team because our teams are beginning to understand the basketball aspect of all of this.



David J. Stern (left) The U.S. Olympic basketball team (above) 57 current and former NBA players and 38 current and former WNBA players participated in the London Olympics. The U.S. Team had 12 current NBA players on its roster. 25 current and former NBA players won medals (12 from US, 5 from Russia, 8 from Spain)

On the business side, to say we are in 16 markets where we can bring in a taste of the NBA and well-priced first-class family basketball is a very important growth factor for our sport and league.

How important is corporate citizenship to the NBA's culture?

We decided to group it all under what we're calling NBA Cares. We do that because there is a fundamental belief throughout our organization and our teams that we have an obligation to be leaders in social responsibility. In some ways, the government agencies don't do the same job they used to do. So sports has an opportunity to lead by calling attention to certain issues, whether we're building houses or working hard to develop places where kids can learn and play.

Lately, the emphasis on health and the extreme costs of ill health have caused us to focus more on NBA Fit.

Basketball Without Borders is a program where we travel to international markets and bring in players from around the continent on which we're conducting the activity; teenage basketball players sleep in airports so they can come in and get a clinic experience, and they get in many cases a UNICEF-sponsored activity focusing on healthy living and lifestyles.

Along the way, the coaches, scouts, and sponsors who join us get to see basketball develop; we have players in the NBA who have come through the Basketball Without Borders program, which is a hoot.

And the more we do, the more we have governments on a global basis trying to engage with us because the obesity and diabetes epidemic on a global scale is frightening and all sports have an opportunity to focus on activity and health.

Of all of your accomplishments, is there anything you're most proud of?

When I got involved with the league, it was common wisdom that America would not support a league that was predominantly African American – it was a biased view of the world and the NBA. The reality is that America is a better country than that; people realized drug addiction was a societal problem and not an NBA problem, and the entertainment value of our sport was yet to be unleashed.

What is also important is the impact on the entire educational process and discussion of AIDS in this country once Magic Johnson revealed that he is HIV positive – it went from something that made you an outcast to something that elicited compassion. ●