THE NBA IN INDIA



India is no longer just an international audience

For the NBA, India represents something different from a conventional international broadcast market.

The league has spent roughly 15 years building an ecosystem around basketball in the country rather than simply selling television rights. The NBA opened its Mumbai office in 2011, launched the Jr. NBA programme with Reliance Foundation in 2013, established NBA Academy India in 2017 and eventually brought NBA teams to India for the first time in 2019.

The strategy has moved from introducing the NBA to Indian audiences » developing Indian players » building local fandom » creating commercial partnerships » creating physical fan experiences.

Today, India is being treated less as a place where NBA games are consumed and more as a market in which NBA culture can be built.





Why India?

India offers the NBA an unusual combination of scale, demographics and digital behaviour.

The country had a population of approximately **1.46 billion in 2025**, with 26% of the population aged 10-24 and 68% between 15 and 64

The digital opportunity is equally significant.

By the end of 2025, India had approximately 1.03 billion internet users and 500 million social media user identities. Instagram alone had an estimated 481 million users in the country.

For a league whose global growth is increasingly driven by short-form video, social media, players as personalities and lifestyle content, this creates a particularly attractive environment.



The NBA's India strategy was built before the market was fully ready

One of the most interesting aspects of the NBA's approach is that it began investing in the ecosystem well before the league had a major live-event presence in India.

The NBA's Mumbai office opened in 2011. Two years later, the league partnered with Reliance Foundation to launch the Jr. NBA programme, using schools and physical education programmes to introduce basketball to children.

By 2019, the programme had reached more than **10 million youth across 13,000 schools and trained more than 13,000 physical education instructors.** The programme has since expanded further, with the NBA currently reporting more than **14 million youth reached and 15,000 PE instructors across 35 cities.**

This is significant because the NBA was not simply looking for existing basketball fans. It was attempting to create future participants and fans simultaneously.



Homegrown Indian NBA stars



SATNAM SINGH

Became the first Indian-born player drafted by an NBA team when the Dallas Mavericks selected him in the second round of the 2015 NBA Draft.

Princepal Singh

Became the first NBA Academy India graduate to sign a professional contract in 2020, joining the NBA G League. In 2021, he became the first graduate of the academy to feature in an NBA Summer League game and went on to win the 2021 NBA Summer League title with the Sacramento Kings, becoming the first Indian to be part of a championship roster at any level of the NBA.

These milestones matter because an Indian player reaching the NBA would create something that broadcasts and marketing campaigns cannot manufacture: A personal connection between the Indian audience and the league.





The NBA has built an audience, not just viewership

The NBA's audience growth provides evidence that the investment is beginning to translate into consumption.

The 2022-23 season became the NBA's most-watched season ever in India, crossing 100 million unique viewers across linear, digital and social platforms.

The same season saw:

- **12x growth in digital game viewership versus 2021-22**
- **50% growth in overall linear and digital watch time**
- **53% of viewers aged 30 or younger**
- **45% of viewers female**
- **33 million viewers reached through Hindi commentary**
- **3.8M+ followers across localized NBA social channels**
- **1.3B video views on localized social channels**
- **968M engagements on localized social channels**

This is particularly important because it shows that India's opportunity is not limited to a small hardcore basketball community.













Localisation is becoming a growth strategy

The NBA's approach has increasingly moved beyond simply adding Hindi commentary.

The league has invested in Indian stories, Indian creators, Indian celebrities, regional languages and locally produced formats.

In 2023, the NBA partnered with NEWJ to create and distribute localized short-form content across Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, X and YouTube in 13 languages: Assamese, Bengali, English, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Marathi, Odia, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu and Malayalam.

This is a significant strategic shift. Instead of expecting Indian fans to consume an American sports product exactly as it is presented in the U.S., the NBA is increasingly adapting the way the product is communicated to Indian audiences.

The 2022-23 season saw locally produced content such as This is Basketball, All The Way Up, The NBA India Weekly Show and The Real Talk. Together, 10 locally produced content series generated 182 million views.

Bollywood actor Ranveer Singh was appointed NBA Brand Ambassador for India in 2021 and has subsequently appeared in NBA India content and events.

The Challenge: India is a Basketball opportunity, not yet a Basketball country.

The opportunity is significant, but the NBA faces an obvious structural challenge.

India remains overwhelmingly dominated by cricket. India's sports industry reached approximately **₹16,633 crore in 2024**, but cricket accounted for around **85% of the market,** illustrating the scale of competition for consumer attention and commercial investment.

At the same time, the competition for audience attention is expanding. Sports such as **kabaddi, football, hockey and volleyball** have developed professional leagues and increasingly sophisticated commercial ecosystems, giving fans more opportunities to engage with sports beyond cricket.

Basketball therefore remains a relatively niche sport in India, competing for attention not only with cricket but also with a growing multi-sport landscape. The challenge for the NBA is even greater as other sports have strengthened their presence through professional leagues and increased commercial investment.





Key Takeaways

- The NBA's India strategy is more than a media play. The league has spent roughly 15 years building a full basketball ecosystem covering grassroots participation, player development, content, partnerships and fan experiences.
- **India's scale and youth make it a long-term market rather than a short-term audience opportunity. With 1.46 billion people and 26% of the population aged 10-24, the potential audience has a long runway for growth.**
- Digital has validated the opportunity. The NBA crossed 100 million unique viewers in India during 2022-23, while its localized social channels generated 1.3 billion video views.
- **Localization is becoming central to the strategy. The move into 13-language content shows the NBA is adapting its storytelling to India's fragmented linguistic and cultural landscape.**
- The biggest opportunity remains participation and talent. The NBA has built a substantial audience; the next stage is converting that audience into players, communities and eventually an Indian superstar.
- **India is therefore a long-term bet. The NBA does not need basketball to become India's No. 1 sport for the market to become commercially significant. It needs to establish the NBA as a culturally relevant global sports brand with a uniquely Indian connection.**





