

Examining offense timing among the top four teams, in the 2022 men's Eurobasket tournament

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Abstract

The timing of offensive maneuvers in basketball plays a crucial role in shaping game outcomes. Equally critical is the manner in which offenses are executed and by whom. This study aimed to analyze the offensive strategies, employed by the top four teams in the men's Eurobasket 2022 tournament (Spain, France, Germany, and Poland), as well as those of their opponents, in order to identify any differences in timing and execution. Thirty-one games were recorded, the 24-second shot clock was divided into four parts, and 12 different ways of attacking were observed for each team. The positions of the players executing these offenses were also recorded. For the statistical analysis, the independence of values was assessed using the non-parametric χ^2 (chi-square) distribution in the PSPP 1.6.0 statistical package. The reliability of the observations was determined using the statistical index kappa (k) (Cohen, 1960). The results revealed statistically significant differences in Spanish team's offensive tactics, whose dominant strategy was pick and roll, (31.5%) while the other teams used one on one attacks, (30.2%) out of their total attacks. There were also significant differences in the timing of attacks. The Spanish team made longer attacks (19" to 24") in 26.6% of their total attacks, while the corresponding percentage of the other teams was 20.6%. Furthermore, a significant difference was found in the attacks executed by Spain's big men, with 22.3% of their attacks, while in the other teams the percentage was 16.8%. The results of this study may give coaches important information regarding offensive strategy in basketball games and players can use this knowledge to increase their performance.

Key Words: time of execution, way of execution, position of players, Spanish national basketball team

Introduction

The primary purpose of this study is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the EuroBasket 2022 tournament and to shed light on the strategies of the participated teams. The study aims to generate insights into the factors that contribute to success in high-level basketball competitions. In addition, the aim of this study is to conduct an overall analysis of the tournament, focusing specifically on the performance and characteristics of the four top teams (Spain, France, Germany and Poland). An additional aim is to compare the four top teams with the rest of the teams and to examine various aspects of the games, including the timing of attacks, shooting percentage and offensive strategies. Coaches and players need to be aware of the current trends in order to improve their decision making and tactical understanding as well as their practice (Courel-Ibanez et al., 2018).

Basketball performance has been analyzed in different areas of sport science (Izzo R. et al. 2023) such as physical condition (Stojanovic et al. 2012, Delextrat et al. 2018), injury prevention (Taylor et al. 2015, Riva et al. 2016), the evaluation of the anthropometric parameters and their relation with performance prediction and players selection (Garcia et al. 2018, Cui et al. 2019, Pérez-Toledano et al. 2019) as well as technical and tactical analysis (Garcia et al. 2013, Mandić et al. 2019, Zarić et al. 2020).

An important factor in tactical analysis in basketball is the process of making strategic decisions to determine when and how to initiate an offensive play. Coaches and players evaluate aspects such as the state of the game, the defensive approach of the opposing team, the advantages of individual players and the remaining time. These assessments inform decisions about tempo control, including whether to adopt a fast up-tempo approach or a control style of play. The available time and the desired outcome, guide teams' choices in terms of speeding up the pace, slowing down play or implementing specific offensive strategies (Sampaio et al., 2015)

Attack time affects the pace and tempo of the game, allowing teams to determine their preferred style of play. The chosen pace depends on factors such as the roster of the team, the coach's philosophy, the advantages of the opposing team and the used playing strategies. Effective control of attack time allows teams to dictate the tempo of the game, create favorable scoring opportunities and exploit defensive weaknesses (Erčulj & Štrumbelj, 2015). Efficiency in attack time is closely related to a team's scoring potential. Fast offenses, accurate passing and effective spacing, allow teams to exploit offensive advantages and create high-percentage scoring opportunities. The ability to increase score per possession is related to the effectiveness of the attack time.

Gaining an understanding of attack time and managing it effectively contributes to a team's overall performance, scoring potential and competitive advantage on the basketball court. (Sarlis & Tjortjis, 2020).

The pace of play, which is closely related to attack time, can have a significant impact on the outcomes of the games. The teams that play at a faster pace and initiate quick attacks tend to score more points and are more likely to win games (Balciunas et al. 2006). Fast-paced attacks are more difficult for the defenders and lead to more scoring opportunities and increased offensive efficiency. In addition, fastbreak situations are critical points at which the attack time becomes particularly important. When a team gains possession of the ball, their ability for a fast transition from defense to offense, can surprise opponents, so the team can score easily (Tsamourtzis & Karipidis, 2005).

The 24-second timer plays a key role in determining the time of attack and its relation to the results of the game. Studies have shown that teams that effectively manage attack time and effectively utilize their offensive possessions are more likely to win games (Gómez et al., 2016). This includes making quick decisions, executing phases effectively, and avoiding turnovers.

Research has shown that the teams which execute their attacks efficiently, focusing on high percentage shots and avoiding poor attempts, tend to have a better offensive performance and win more games (Castillo et al. 2020). Proper management of attack time allows teams to create better scoring opportunities and maximize their offensive performance.

It is important to note that research findings may vary depending on the specific league and team characteristics. Factors such as the team roster, coaching strategies, opponent defensive skills, and game situations can influence the relationship between attack time and game outcomes.

Strategic decision-making is a critical aspect in basketball games and understanding the timing and execution of the attack provides valuable information to coaches and teams. By analyzing the optimal timing of attacks, the effectiveness of offensive plays, and the execution of specific tactics, teams can develop game plans that maximize scoring opportunities and exploit opponents' weaknesses (Scanlan & Dalbo, 2019).

According to a research on Euroleague games, it was found that pick and roll efficiency could predict the team's final classification. The most effective pick n roll was the one that was shot after two passes from the pick n roll action (Marmarinos et al., 2016). In the same league, it was found that the most efficient ends of the ball possession are the 2-point field goals on the fast break (78.2%), cuts (64.8%), pick and roll (P&R) screener (61.5%), and transition and offensive rebound (57.4%) situations (Matulaitis & Bietkis, 2021). Another research pinpointed that all types of pick n roll showed high efficiency in elite games and were particularly important during the final minutes of the game (Vaquera et al., 2016). Similarly, a study in Italian Serie A basketball championship showed that pick and roll was the most used play because it was creating the greater difficulty on defense, especially when it created a "mismatch" condition (Izzo et al. 2023).

Through a systematic analysis of when teams attack and execute their plays, researches can identify patterns and strategies associated with higher accuracy rates, better shots selection, and improved scoring efficiency. Research on attack timing and attack execution plays a key role in the development and training of players. Coaches and trainers can use the knowledge gained from analyzing successful offensive strategies to design drills and practices that enhance players' decision-making, execution skills, and understanding of timing (Sampaio et al., 2015). In addition, through studying the approaches of successful teams, others coaches can learn from their strategies and incorporate them into their own game (Scanlan & Dalbo, 2019). This knowledge is useful to improve offensive performance and increase the likelihood of winning games.

The analysis of attack execution allows an in-depth analysis of the performance of both teams and individual players. Researchers can examine statistics related to attack time, such as fast-breaks points, points per possession, and the distribution of scoring throughout the game (Castillo et al., 2020). Finally, it is worth noting that well-organized attacks that result in successful scoring phases can boost the team's morale, create changes in game flow and discourage opponents (Scanlan & Dalbo, 2019).

Materials & methods

Sample

The sample in this study consists of the men's basketball teams that participated in the Eurobasket 2022 tournament. Specifically, the focus is on the first four teams: Spain, France, Germany and Poland and their opponents in the analyzed games. The total of the recorded games was 31.

In order to establish the reliability of the researcher's observations, two other observers watched one game of each of the four teams. Therefore, each one of them watched four games, and they recorded the data, which were compared with those of the researcher.

So as to conduct the analysis, the attacks of nine games for each of the four top teams were analyzed. In addition, in these games, the attacks of the opposing teams were also analyzed. The 24-second attacks were divided into four time intervals of 0"-6" (fastbreak), 7"-12" (secondary fastbreak or offensive transition play), 13"-18", and 19"-24" with the aim of observing whether the teams chose to perform fast or slow attacks.

Furthermore, the positions of the players involved in the attempts were recorded according to the following positions: guard, forward and center.

Data collection procedure

In order to conduct this research, all the games of the four top teams in the EuroBasket 2022 tournament (Spain, France, Germany and Poland) were analyzed. The videos were downloaded from FIBA's official YouTube channel, where full games footage was available for analysis. The analysis focused on the following variables: time, the way of attack, the player executing the attempt and the result of the attempt (whether it led to a successful attempt or not). The focus was on identifying any differences in attacks between the four top and the rest of the teams

Classification of attack methods

The following elements were examined: how Spain and all the rest of the teams were attacking, the time in which the teams attacked and the players who were the main attackers. The methods of attack were divided into 12 categories; these represent different strategies or approaches that basketball teams use when executing attacks in a game. 1: Fast breaks, 2: low post, 3: isolation, 4: pick and roll, 5: pick and pop, 6: high post low post cooperation (high-low), 7: off-ball screen, 8: drive and kick, 9: extra pass, 10: offensive rebound, 11: hand off and 12: backdoor plays. These classifications provided a systematic way of categorizing the different offensive tactics used by the basketball teams in the study. Each offensive method represents a distinct strategy or style of play that teams use during their ball possessions. By classifying methods of attack, researchers can analyze and compare the frequency and effectiveness of each strategy used by teams. This allows for a deeper understanding of the offensive approaches used by the four top teams (Spain, France, Germany and Poland) at EuroBasket 2022 and their differences in execution.

Statistical Analysis

For the statistical analysis of the observed and recorded data, the statistical program PSPP 1.6.0 was used. The decisions of both the two observers and the researcher himself were used to investigate the reliability of the observations (Van der Mars, 1989c). The kappa (k) statistic (Cohen, 1960), which zeroes out the calculation of agreement due to chance, was used. The agreement between the two observers and the researcher himself was tested. Frequency analysis (Frequencies) was performed to derive percentage ratios between the champion team of Spain and the rest of the teams. For selected pairs an independence test of values was applied using Crosstabs and the non-parametric χ^2 (chi square) test. For all cases, the significance level was set as $p < 0.05$.

Results

Preliminary Results

After comparing the agreement of the observations of the three (the two observers and the researcher) with each other (Interobserver agreement), and the agreement of each of them with themselves (Intraobserver agreement), the following values for the kappa (k) index were found.

Table 1: Coefficients of agreement of the researcher with himself and with the other two observers

	Observer 1	Observer 2	Researcher
Observer 1	0,763	0,756	0,734
Observer 2	0,756	0,795	0,744
Researcher	0,734	0,744	0,792

Concerning the results, it appears that the agreement has ranged to significant levels as Landis & Koch (1977) and Cicchetti (1994), suggesting that a value of 0.60 for the k statistic is sufficient for reliable conclusions. Kappa (k) values ranged from 0.734 to 0.795 with a mean value of 0.764, thus indicating a high degree of agreement between researchers.

Frequencies analysis

Frequencies analysis was used to derive percentage differences in attack time between the champion team of Spain and the rest of the teams.

Chart 1: The ways in which all the teams, apart from Spain, attacked in the EuroBasket 2022 Tournament.

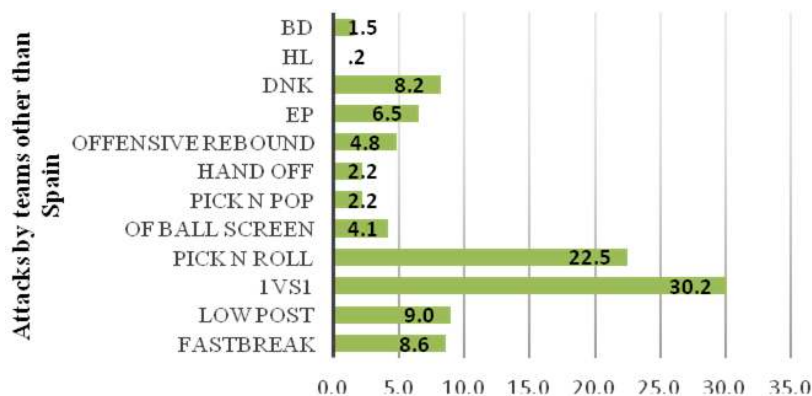
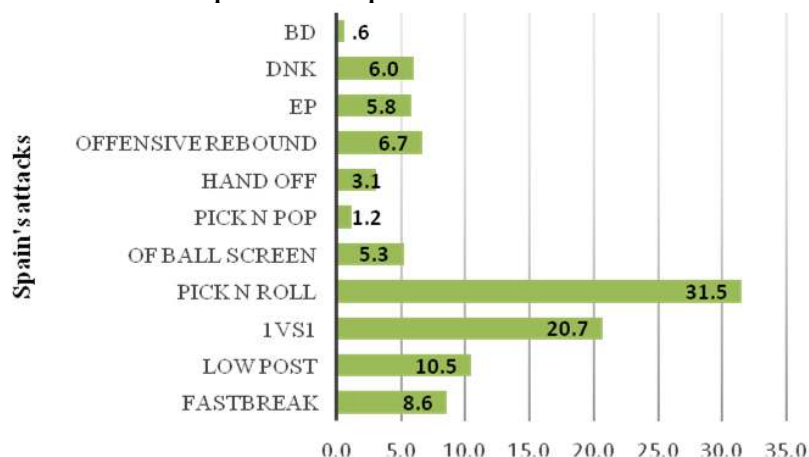


Chart 2: The ways in which the champion team of Spain attacked in the EuroBasket 2022 Tournament.

Non-parametric χ^2 (chi square) test

In order to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between two selected pairs, independence tests of values were applied - Crosstabs, χ^2 (chi square) test.

Analysis of when the attacks occurred between Spanish team and the rest teams.

The results found that there is a statistically significant difference between team of Spain and the other teams $\chi^2(3) = 14.130$, $p = 0.003$. The Spanish team made attacks in the time 19" to 24" (at the end of their attack) in 26.6% of their total attacks, while the corresponding percentage of the other teams was 20.6%. On the contrary, in the time 7"-12" (offensive transition or secondary fastbreak), the other teams carried out 33.7 % of their attacks, while team of Spain corresponding figure was 28.9 %. In the other two time periods, namely from 0" - 6" and 13" - 18" there were no significant differences in percentages between Spanish team and the other teams.

Analysis of when the attacks occurred between four top teams and the rest.

A statistically significant difference was found, $\chi^2(3) = 18.593$, $p = 0$. The biggest difference was observed at the end of time 19" - 24" attacks, where the four top teams made attacks at 23.5%, while the rest of them had 18.7% respectively. In addition, the remaining teams made attacks in time 0 - 6" at a rate of 12.4% and in time 7" - 12" at a rate of 34.7%, while the corresponding rates of the first four teams were 10.3% and 31.7%.

Analysis of how teams attack

In order to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference in the attempts in terms of free throws, two-points and three-points between Spanish team and the rest of the teams, an independence test of the values was performed χ^2 (chi square) distribution. All the attempts made by both the Spanish and the other teams were reviewed, whether they were, free throws – two points or three points attempts, and whether they were successful or missed. The results showed that there was no statistically significant difference between Spanish team and all the other teams $\chi^2(7) = 10.175$, $p = 0.179$. Although there was no statistically significant difference, the Spanish team scored more points through two point shots than the other teams (29.4% against 26.5%). It is also noteworthy that the Spanish attempts that ended in a turnover accounted for 10.2% of all attempts, while the other teams' percentage of turnovers was lower, namely 7.9%.

Analysis of the position for the attacking players between Spanish team and the rest teams

The results showed that there is a statistically significant difference between the Spanish team and the rest of the teams, $\chi^2(2) = 12.911$, $p = 0.002$. Spain's centers performed 22.3% of the team's attacks, while the rest of the teams' centers performed 16.8% of the attacks. In all teams, guards made the most attempts with a percentage of 45.7% in the Spanish team and 47.5% in the rest of the teams, followed by forwards with 32% in the Spanish team and 35.7% in the rest of the teams.

Analysis of the position for the attacking players between four top teams and the rest of the teams.

Similarly, after comparing the four top teams with all the other teams, a statistically significant difference was found $\chi^2(2) = 11.873$, $p = 0.003$, regarding the position of the players who made the attacks. The four top teams executed more attacks than all others by their centers with a percentage of 19.3% against 15.3% respectively. On the other hand, the other teams had higher percentages of attacks by their guards and forwards with percentages of 48.1% and 36.6% compared to the four top teams' respective 46.6% and 34.1%.

Discussion

The attacks of Europe's national teams were studied to determine which trends dominate in modern basketball. By investigating the differences in timing and execution of these teams, a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the game and strategic decision making in basketball can be achieved.

The findings of this research provide valuable information for coaches, players and teams so that they can improve their offensive strategies. The identification of the effective offensive strategies, the preferred timing and the player positions used by successful teams provides a framework for optimizing performance and game planning. This knowledge allows teams to adjust their offensive approach, and make tactical decisions.

In NBA, the most efficient possessions are the transition and early offense situations, in an attempt to get as many as possible points and to maximize offensive output (Christmann et al., 2018). Transition and early offense were also reported to be the most efficient ways of scoring by other studies (Matulaitis & Bietkis, 2021). A research between the NBA and the Euroleague basketball teams, showed that American basketball was superior in fast breaks by 20.2% and 15.1%, respectively (Milanović et al., 2014; Selmanović et al., 2015). The findings of this study showed that champion team of Spain adopted an offensive approach that differed from the other teams, with a tendency to focus on long-lasting attacks, while the other teams emphasized on fast tempo play. Team of Spain's offensive strength relied primarily on effective two point shots rather than three point attempts. Although the analysis showed that a higher percentage of Spanish team attempts ended in turnovers compared to the other teams, finally Spanish team won the championship.

Also, Spanish team excelled in pick n' roll situations, having the highest percentage among all teams and demonstrated a more restrained approach in one-on-one situations on the perimeter, while the other teams relied on this strategy more often. A study between European and NBA basketball, related to offensive style of play, found that European basketball had significantly more finishing actions of pick and roll and post up, whereas in the NBA one-on-one face to the basket occurred significantly more often (Jorgensen et al, 2021)

Findings show that Spanish team used their tall players more effectively in their offensive strategies compared to the other teams, as Spain's centers were more involved in the team's attacks.

Conclusions

Pick n' roll attack remains a powerful weapon for the coach in modern basketball, after dominating the attacking plays of the European champion. Pick n roll and isolation (one versus one) were the most prevalent plays at the highest level in Europe, which shows that coaches - at a high level - need to put more emphasis in their training in these two game situations for their attack strategy.

The fact that rules are changing and basketball is getting faster does not mean that patience in the offense is not rewarded. Instead, the four top teams exhibited patience in their games and made attack at the end of time, more than the rest of the teams. The intention of the champion team to manifest long-lasting attacks and use its centers more than the other teams, may also indicate its dominance in the ball movement, as its guards did not monopolize the attacks but passed the ball more than the other teams.

The findings and analysis presented in the research contribute to the field of basketball analysis. The research provides valuable insights into the offensive tactical strategies in the EuroBasket 2022 tournament. The analysis of attack time and attack execution allows in-depth analysis of the performance of both teams and players. Researchers can examine statistics related to attack time, such as fastbreak points, points per possession, and the distribution of scoring throughout the game (Castillo et al., 2020). Coaches and analysts can use this information to understand effective offensive strategies and adjust their game plans accordingly. Aspiring players and teams can use this knowledge to increase their performance.

Such an analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of the European champion team's dynamics and strengths of the attack. The team of Spain, being patient in their attack, with an emphasis on two-point attempts and making more use of their tall men, won the championship. Of course, the research only concerns the offensive part and an extension of the analysis could as well focus on defensive strategies and their effectiveness in different game situations. That is, it is also crucial to investigate defensive strategies and the impact of defensive tactics on offensive outcomes.

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