

Why Ice-hockey isn't a Popular Sport in China

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Abstract: As a sport first played in 1875, ice-hockey becomes the one of the most popular sport in the Western countries, and millions of people engage in it all over the world. However, there are few numbers of people who familiar with ice-hockey or participate it in China in spite of large population. This analysis is based on four main potential reasons: the opportunities for Chinese people to participate in ice-hockey, the cost of training ice-hockey players, the number of professional ice-hockey players, and the low visibility and media exposure of ice-hockey in China. By analyzing these reasons can provide some clear solutions about the improving of China's ice-hockey international competitive level and eliminate the factors that hamper the development of ice-hockey. In this way, China's ice-hockey potential can be fully exploited since more people will likely to participate in this sport in the long term, which provide more ice-hockey talents in the future.

Keywords: Economy Analysis; Society Analysis; Ice-hockey; Sport development; Cost

1. Introduction

Even with a lot of foreign aid, the Chinese men's ice-hockey team only finished 27th in the Beijing Winter Olympics although this has been the highest world ranking for China in nearly 15 years. However, the strength of a national sport is not only determined by the performance of the athletes on the field, but most importantly by how many people can participate in it. Hence, the main issue has transferred from why the Chinese ice-hockey level is not that good to today's topic—Why ice-hockey isn't a popular sport in China. This paper analyzes the reasons for the unpopularity of ice-hockey in China from four aspects: the opportunities for Chinese people to participate in ice-hockey, the cost of training ice-hockey players, the number of professional ice-hockey players, and the low visibility and media exposure of ice-hockey in China. with a view to providing empirical references to the popularity of ice hockey in China. And this study can provide empirical references to the popularity of ice-hockey in China.

2. The opportunities for Chinese people to participate in the ice-hockey are relatively low

2.1 Distribution of ice-hockey rinks

Before 1978, there were no indoor ice rinks in China, and skating could only rely on the iced lake or river surface outside. In recent years, with the increase in the popularity of ice and snow sports, the number of skating grounds in China has gradually increased. Nevertheless, there are only 887 indoor rinks and 300 outdoor rinks in China as of the end of the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing. In addition, due to climatic differences in different regions, until now and most ice rink distribute in the north part of China, which has a temperate continental climate, rather than distributing evenly all over the country, especially in the southern part of China. The problem of uneven distribution and number of ice-hockey courts limits the opportunities for people in more regions to participate in ice-hockey.

In contrast, there were a total of 2,860 indoor ice-hockey rinks and a further 5,000 outdoor skating facilities in Canada according to the International ice-hockey Federation although Canada's population is 38.2 million less than China's. In addition, due to the suitability of Canada's climate, the problem of uneven distribution of ice-hockey courts is not serious compared to China. Figure 1 is the flow chart of the moving target tracking process.

2.2 High-level professional ice-hockey leagues and hockey games are relatively rare in China

In terms of professional ice-hockey leagues, China ice-hockey League (CIHL) still has a significant gap compared to professional

ice-hockey leagues like the NHL in the United States and Canada. but the number of professional hockey teams and the league size is small.

In terms of hockey games, there are fewer high-level ice-hockey games in China. Moreover, only professional team that can play in the high-level ice-hockey league (Kontinental Hockey league, KHL) in China is Kunlun red star. However, KHL's attention in China is not very high, and Kunlun Red Star's record in the KHL is relatively poor. In this case, not many viewers will go to watch it live. Also taking the NHL as an example, in the 2013-14 season, the league averaged 17,587 seats per game. The highest statistics were the Chicago Blackhawks, with an average audience of 22,623 per game. In contrast, Kunlun red star, although it has the largest venue in KHL, Wukesong Stadium, the box office is not optimistic. On the other hand, the ticket price in Shanghai is more expensive than that in Beijing, with a range of between 100 and 1980 yuan. The number of viewers sold in the market alone is not optimistic. Previously, due to the low attendance rate on the scene, Kunlun red star was fined by the league, and even broke the lowest attendance record of 800 attendance before KHL with 550 people in a single game. Low attendance has led to limited branding and promotion of hockey events.

2.3 Lack of professional coaches and development programs

The development of ice-hockey requires professional coaching staff and youth development programs to develop the skills and interests of young players. However, due to the relatively small size of ice-hockey in China, the lack of adequate professional coaches and development programs has limited the development of the sport at the grassroots level.

3. The financial cost of training ice-hockey players

3.1 The equipment costs

One single ice-hockey player needs lots of equipment from top to the bottom. It's most obvious that ice-hockey equipment is costly and it contain few important pieces that to be considered and the price will be listed both intermediate and elite level.

3.2 Tuition

Also, the most important part is the tuition. Each ice-hockey player needs a good coach to teach you and help you to improve your skill. The total tuition for the ice-hockey lessons is approximate \$1200 to \$10,000.

In a nutshell, the total cost is about \$6000 to \$7000 depending on the costs of your local hockey club and organization.

3.3 Comparison between the cost of training ice-hockey players and the average annual income of household in China

According to the previous text, the training cost of ice-hockey players reaches \$6000 to \$7000. However, the national average income reached about 106,800 yuan in 2021, (\$15,752) which is only the total cost of training an intermediate level ice-hockey player. Therefore, it's impossible to let children to participate in ice-hockey for a mediocre family.

4. The number of registered professional ice-hockey players

There are only about 1,261 male players, 1761 female players and 10,365 junior players in the mainland of China although it has the highest population in the world

On the contrary, Canada is famous for the ice-hockey, and it had the long history of ice-hockey and NHL is originated in Canada. According to the data, there are about 63,000 male players and 89,009 female players. The number of Junior players is over 361,600.

Finland has the highest ranking in ice-hockey until now although the population is much lower than China and Canada. It has 25,085 male players and 6,145 female players also almost 35,500 junior players among the country. In a nutshell, a country's hockey level is also dependent on the number of registered athletes. As a result, the number of Chinese ice-hockey players is much lower than those two countries which is also appropriate evidence to prove that people's ice-hockey participation rate is not qualified to compare with Canada and Finland.

5. Low visibility and media exposure

5.1 Limited broadcasting of games

Ice-hockey has relatively few broadcasts in China, and NHL games in particular have less television and online streaming coverage in China than globally recognized leagues such as the NBA and English Premier League soccer. This has resulted in limited visibility of ice-hockey games among Chinese audiences and a lack of opportunities for people to watch top-level games, which reduces their interest in the sport.

5.2 Lack of Media Coverage

Compared to more popular sports such as soccer and basketball, ice-hockey receives less media coverage. Sports media in China usually focus more on domestic sports and have relatively limited coverage of ice-hockey. This makes ice-hockey lack the opportunity to attract attention in the media, limiting its popularity.

5.3 Lack of local star players

Having local hockey stars can motivate more Chinese youth to participate in the sport. However, the relatively weak performance of Chinese ice-hockey teams in international competitions has led to a low level of interest in the sport in China, which means that ice-hockey is unable to attract large-scale attention and fan support through social media, and that the role modeling and motivational effects of local star players are weak .

Due to the relatively low visibility of ice-hockey in China, many families and schools may not actively support their children's participation in the sport, which limits the growth of ice-hockey in China.

6. Conclusion

In general, a series of measures are needed to increase the popularity of ice-hockey in China, including increased investment in infrastructure, the introduction of international-level coaches and mentors to provide professional training and guidance, increased participation in international games, increased media exposure and promotion, and the development of more local ice-hockey stars. If these four aspects of problems can be solved, ice-hockey will have a great potential for development in China. Further, Chinese ice-hockey can become more competitive in worldwide. In addition, the development of ice-hockey in China can not only can provide a new recreational activity to masses but also stimulate the China's economy and bring some social benefits.

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