

WHEN GIANTS GET TOGETHER

Matthew Glendinning considers the growth and development of the FIBA World Championships, assessing the marketing and media operations and looking at the economic and social impact on host nation Turkey.

FOR TWO WEEKS in August and September, 24 national teams will take part in the FIBA World Championships hosted by Turkey, a country where the sport rivals soccer for attention and mindshare among its passionate fans.

The tournament has helped reinforce basketball's standing as a truly universal sport since 1950, but as we await the 16th edition even FIBA, basketball's world governing body, admits it has yet to fully realise its commercial potential.

FIBA's broadcast rights were sold by the now-defunct ISL until 2001, and only in the last eight years, with a strong in-house team, has there been a co-ordinated strategy for the sale of its broadcast and marketing rights.

The result is a far healthier product and commercial proposition than ever before. According to FIBA, the most recent cycle of World Championship, Continental Championships and Olympic competitions has seen an unprecedented growth in both the quality and awareness of international basketball.

This year, says FIBA commercial director Matthew Osmon, the World Championships will be taken live or as highlights in 180 countries - comparable to the FIFA World Cup - and will be viewed by an accumulated audience of around one billion, up on the 800 million people which FIBA says watched the 2006 edition in Japan.

"We are experiencing strong growth in TV audiences and we are seeing a more than steady growth in our income," Osmon tells *SportBusiness International*. "We have done extensive research relating to awareness - and interest in our major competitions is now very strong. In some markets like Spain, the World Championships are the must-see event ahead of the Olympic Games and NBA finals."

It's no idle boast. Although basketball was once again one of the most-viewed and most-popular sports at the 2008 Beijing Olympics - producing an epic final where USA regained the gold medal against the current FIBA World Champions Spain - this year's World Championships has the potential to surpass even the Olympic showcase in terms of eyeballs and drama.

"We view the World Championships and the Olympic Games as the equivalent of having a [FIFA] World Cup every two years," says Osmon. "From a sporting point of view, FIBA is responsible for both events but, of course, the Olympics are marketed by the IOC."

"It's fair to say that the World Championship is now the biggest event for FIBA and there's something of a gap opening up between the EuroBasket and the World Championship. In America, Africa and Asia, in particular, it's the World Championship above anything else."

The extra value of the World Championship, he adds, stems from its competitive format: "The Olympic tournament is a 12-team event, compared to 24 teams at the World Championships, which may go up to 32 teams...and it's easier to win the Olympics because there is [a mandatory selection of] minimum one team from every continent plus the host nation. This means there are fewer close games than the World Championship, where there are twice as many teams and all the best teams are there. Ten or 12 teams have a realistic chance to win a medal."

FIBA, however, has plenty more inventory to offer than its 'World Cup' event - a factor which influences the rights sales process for the World Championships. "We work in four-year cycles, the last one being from 2007 through 2010," Osmon explains. "In the odd years we have the Continental Championships, like the Euros and Asias, and in the even years, the Olympic Games and the World Championships. It's great for our sport to have a World Champion every two years and with the biennial Continental Championships, there's an international competition every year."

This strong international calendar is reflected in the way the World Championship rights are packaged up. Typically, FIBA bundles rights to the two Continental Championships with the World Championships.

The last rights cycle available for broadcast partners, for example, was for 2009-2011 and as Osmon explains: "In a typical broadcast deal we secure a dedicated international broadcaster in

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every territory which is best for the sport in that country. In Italy, for example, it's RAI; we don't want to split the continental and world rights with another channel in Italy because we want people to know which is the basketball channel. The internet [via FIBATV.com] plays a fast-growing role in filling the gaps, but TV is still king."

Marketing

The quality and reach of all FIBA Championships together with the positive image of basketball and the attractive demographic of the fans is attracting more and better marketing partners.

The model is familiar. "It's similar to the Football World Cup," says Osmon. "The FIBA Global Partners are for all our events and then there are specific World Championship Partners, who are mostly secured by the Local Organising Committee and one or two by us as well."

According to Osmon, FIBA has achieved more than a two per cent increase in marketing revenue since the last World Championships in Japan: "We sold out our international programme one year ago, which helps the LOC because we can release some major categories for local sale, Mercedes, for example, because we completed our sales without a car category sponsor."

The LOC, he says, signed up its sponsors "a little closer to the event", but now has some of the

biggest local brands on board, including mobile operator Turkcell and Turkish Airlines.

Local Organisers

It has been a long road to the Championship for the Turkish organisers, who won the right to host the event in 2005 having seen off France and a joint bid from the Balkan countries on the FIBA shortlist.

The country is not without big event experience: it hosted the 2001 and 2005 Men's and Women's EuroBasket. But the World Championships required a different order of investment - about \$100 million in total from both the LOC and FIBA.

"This will be the biggest sporting event ever hosted by Turkey if the number of participants, spectators, broadcasting countries and venues, its financial extent and popularity of the sport are taken into consideration," says Turgay Demirel, President of the Turkey Basketball Federation.

"The World Championships is a massive event for any country. We had to upgrade and build new facilities and make sure that the logistics and the communication between the four host cities ran smoothly."

Turkey's expectation is of 200,000-plus ticketed spectators at the tournament and as many as one billion worldwide TV viewers and

online visitors. This is a realistic ambition given the stature, but also the worldwide promotion of the event, which marked a significant departure from previous campaigns.

The promotional campaign was the result of collaboration between the 2010 LOC, FIBA and Los Angeles-based design and entertainment company Iconisus, which took a year to produce a campaign that features giants of the international game towering above some of Turkey's most famous landmarks, led by a gargantuan Kobe Bryant dribbling above the Bosphorus (see main picture on page 57).

Rolled out in 14 languages across the world in newspapers, magazines, on billboards and on television screens in the lead up to the World Championships, the campaign has been a major hit. "In the past we've left the LOC to do their own local promotions, but this year, we have had a coordinated campaign," says Osmon. "We picked the US agency based on a joint brief with the LOC and feel that FIBA is, at last, doing what it should be doing in terms of promoting the event. Anticipation is building across TV, sponsorship, corporate hospitality, social media, and internationally, we know that the fans are really excited; everything is at least two levels up from where we were four years ago."

Legacy

If FIBA paints a compelling picture of a tournament in the ascendant, what benefits will hosting the Championships bring to the host nation? "Every time we host a major championship we see a significant increase in membership and fan base for our sport," says TBF's Turgay Demirel.

"This is crucial for the further development of our sport. The support from our commercial partners and our fans grows stronger and more loyal when they see that we are successful and when they attend games with great sports performances and a great atmosphere."

Demirel explains that hosting major sports events is also an important part of the Turkish government's strategy: "Sport is important in Turkey and we can use the event to get more of our children to play sports and start a healthy lifestyle. At the same time major sports event give us the opportunity to show our beautiful country to the world."

"We are very focused on ensuring that each event we host leaves a lasting legacy for our sport and our country in terms of facilities and sports development."

"We are an ambitious nation with a lot of experience in organising events, great facilities and we always make sure that our guests feel welcome and enjoy themselves. I think you can expect Turkey to host many more major sports events like one of the major football competitions and ultimately the Summer Olympic Games."