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RESEARCH ARTICLE



A future for British–Scottish basketball: factors constraining the sport

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ABSTRACT

With the creation of the Mayor of London’s Basketball Taskforce in 2024, investment from the NBA in 2025, Glasgow hosting the 2026 Commonwealth Games 3 × 3 event, and two British professional teams from London and Manchester proposed to enter the NBA Europe League in 2027, basketball in Britain is growing. However, since the British professional basketball league’s licence termination in 2024 alongside the British Basketball Federation’s liquidation and basketballscotland’s appeal to the government to honour their funding commitments in 2025, British basketball is also currently enduring a period of difficulty and its future facing uncertainties. While such developments highlight increasing interest within the UK, the recent problems allude to deep-rooted issues existing within the British–Scottish basketball system. Through drawing on real-life insights from the British–Scottish basketball community before qualitatively analysing them through capability theory, this study outlines the key overarching factors constraining basketball’s potential whilst providing recommendations to help British–Scottish basketball build-back-better through more inclusive and sustainable growth. The findings highlight five key issues impeding British–Scottish basketball: funding, system, fragmentation, exclusivity and diversity. They also recommend six resolutions: repositioning, collaboration, opportunity, inclusivity, innovation and proactiveness. Providing the system is properly restructured, given the increasing developments and growing interest in British–Scottish basketball today, basketball in Britain can achieve its potential, becoming more mainstream and the UK an international hub for basketball. However, if the issues are left unaddressed, British–Scottish basketball will return to its former challenging ecosystem and continue to operate insecurely, creating further internal disparities between stakeholders.

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Introduction

Basketball is Britain’s second-most-popular team sport and one of the country’s fastest-growing pastimes with NBA fandom increasing by 24% since 2020 (UK Government 2025). The sport’s growing interest is further exemplified by the creation of the Mayor of

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London's Basketball Taskforce in 2024, investment from the NBA in 2025 (basketballengland 2026), Glasgow hosting the 2026 Commonwealth Games 3 × 3 event (FIBA 2025), and two British professional teams from London and Manchester proposed to enter an NBA Europe League in 2027 (Colman 2026). Resultantly, the UK Government (2025) and NBA plans to elevate domestic basketball. However, since the British professional basketball league's licence was terminated in 2024 (The Guardian 2025) and the British Basketball Federation's (BBF) liquidation in 2025 (UK Sport 2025), basketball is also currently enduring difficulties and uncertainties. Further issues from governance to commerce also exist (Bishara 2018, Buckner 2019, Swanson 2021, Faulkner 2022) with basketballscotland (2025) appealing to the Scottish Government in 2025 to honour their funding commitments with basketball's finances running low, subsequently limiting their ability to support communities and act on basketball's increasing popularity. Subsequently, a second appeal was launched in 2026 for future governments to provide sustained investments, national leadership and clearer visions to enable the sport to create meaningful opportunities (basketballscotland 2026).

Research into British–Scottish basketball remains limited (Walker 2025). Existing policy investigations into sport also exclude basketball (McLeish 2014). While the independent Mallin (2007) report explored basketball's potential in England, it revealed five issues: lacking investment; lagging participation; limited opportunities; substandard elite performances; under-supported strategic direction; and weak structure alongside disparate management. As per Jarvie (2019), these issues are widespread in Scottish sport with further problems relating to capability, capacity, equality, leadership, organisation and strategy. While insightful, Jarvie's (2019) findings do not fully reflect basketball's nuances with the BBF's insolvency and basketballscotland's struggles alluding deeper and more impactful problems within British–Scottish basketball. Within the basketball community, one key issue remains, that the term 'British' often refers to England or London, yet neither represent the entire UK (Walker 2023). Such centralised focuses cause internal disparities, marginalising communities who are underrepresented within research and practice, substantiating Gibbons and Malcolm (2017) concept of the dis-United Kingdom. This premise reflects Walker's (2025) finding that internal people and organisation's self-interest constrains British–Scottish basketball. Thus, further investigations drawing on real-life insights and exploring different contexts within Britain are required to provide more inclusive growth and support British basketball's pending reinstatement.

Through focusing on Scotland, this study qualitatively analyses overarching factors constraining basketball's growth. The research incorporates perspectives from three core areas representing British–Scottish basketball's system and structure: community organisations and clubs (We Play Together/Blaze Basketball Club); national federations (basketballscotland); and professional franchises (Caledonia Gladiators). To help position Scotland within Britain's broader basketball system, information and people discussing British basketball is included. The insights gleaned are analysed through Sen's (1999) capability approach (CA), which defines development as a process expanding people, community, organisation and systems capabilities. Sen's (1999) CA was chosen due to British–Scottish basketballs' current systemic issues alongside prior research highlighting how CA effectively conceptualises, theorises and evaluates systems and sport (Brunner and Watson 2015, Svensson and Levine 2017, Rossi and Jeanes 2018, Dao and Darnell 2021, Walker 2026). Through this lens, this study incorporates Jarvie *et al.* (2026) argument

that CA helps challenge and improve systems' practices and policies. Furthermore, the research embeds Bonvin and Laruffa's (2024) rationale for centralising capability thinking within critiques of policy and social institutions due to CA's ability to render transformative change, particularly in relation to concepts of diversity, equity and leadership. Subsequently, in this investigation, CA helps contemplate basketball policies formulation and basketball as a social institution.

British–Scottish basketball was chosen because the system is currently being redeveloped (Basketballscotland., 2025b). Given the future proposals alongside ongoing constraints, the sport is at a critical turning point whereby the BBF's absence offers opportunities to reimagine and rebuild Britain–Scotland's system. However, to reconstruct British–Scottish basketball, decision-makers must learn from the sports' long-standing failures and prevailing problems because until addressed, these issues will hinder the new systems' effectiveness. Furthermore, decisions require holistic insights from diverse communities, organisations and people nationwide (Jarvie 2023). Subsequently, the insights put forward concern the limitations constraining basketball's potential and provide recommendations to help develop a more sustainable British–Scottish basketball system. Greater comprehensions of the present landscape, local communities and individual-collective systems alongside Sen (1999, 2017) CA can help British–Scottish basketball. Thus, the research enables Britain–Scotland to build back better through an improved understanding of deep-rooted issues, whilst the analysis presented might unlock future capabilities through basketball for individuals, institutions, communities and devolved nations. However, the research acknowledges that some local, national and international challenges facing Scotland, Britain and basketball are systemic, and that individual sports are restricted (Jarvie 2023, Scott and Meir 2026).

Theoretical framework

A capability approach to sport

Research applying CA to sport is growing (Svensson and Levine 2017, Rossi and Jeanes 2018, Dao and Darnell 2021, Walker 2026). Sen's (1999) framework embeds a broad-ranging normative structure evaluating policies and systems based on people's social arrangements and social cost–benefit analysis alongside policy designs and proposals regarding systemic changes (Robeyns 2006). The evaluative focus is realised functionings (what can be done) or the capability (real opportunities) (Sen 1999). Thus, CA's main proposition examines systems' development stages without solely concentrating on funding or resources, but prevailing opportunities available to help systems flourish or explain factors constraining growth (Robeyns 2006). Subsequently, CA's interdisciplinary nature and multi-dimensional focus pinpoints differences between means and ends of development, underlined by the systems' functionings and capabilities to prosper (Robeyns 2017). Thus, CA can help optimise systems through holistic development or overcoming challenges inhibiting progress such as policy or systemic constraints (Robeyns 2006). To effectively apply CA to sport, CA is embedded as a theoretical framework to heighten development ideologies and practices by exploring, explaining and promoting actions, policies and systems (Svensson and Levine 2017). As a model, CA combines theory with practice and provides insights reflecting stakeholders' efforts and

opinions (Dao and Darnell 2021). However, this necessitates comprehending broader factors such as policies directly and indirectly influencing the system to understand how all stakeholders can be supported (Sen 1999).

Capability possibilities

CA is recommended due to its flexible application to diverse environments and ability to complement existing frameworks (Dao and Smith 2019). Jarvie and Sikes (2012) first applied Sen's (1999) concepts to sport, proposing capability perspectives offer insights into sport's capacity and place in the development process. Furthermore, Silva and Howe (2012) stated that integrating capability thinking within sporting contexts is beneficial because it provides ethical guidance for sport practitioners, helping them understand individuals and groups they support. Darnell and Dao (2017) reinforce this point, believing CA leads to more politically engaged and practical methods expediting the influence and effect of sport systems through helping create more holistic policies and tailored activities to support underprivileged individuals and groups' lives. Furthermore, Svensson and Levine (2017) added that Sen's (1999) model heightens conceptual clarity of sporting practices from epistemological, methodological and theoretical perspectives. Through enhancing these foundations, CA enables more in-depth views around how institutional, legislative, systemic and policy relationships impact people's development (Svensson and Levine 2017). CA thus advances sport systems through helping connect gaps between theory and practice whilst supporting empirical evidence to substantiate claims (Jarvie *et al.* 2026). This stems from CA generating procedural and focused approaches alongside evaluations which help understand social and systemic issues before identifying resolutions (Dao and Smith 2019). Thus, CA helps examine entire systems through creating ideas of individualism, agency, breadth, conversion, collective capability, opportunity and choice with CA's main strength being pluralism (Sen 2017).

Capability limitations

While CA offers diverse possibilities, limitations remain. Robeyns (2017) provides several critiques: should capability theorists endorse capability lists; should CA use basic needs approaches and philosophical theories of needs; should we understand CA as a government-addressed theory; is CA too individualistic; does CA sufficiently document groups, institutions, norms and social structures; should CA acknowledge political economy whilst including notions of power and choice; is CA a liberal theory and can it be anything else; and can CA change welfare economics? Further queries question the complexity of CA, its vague theorisations, limited conceptions of people and agency, lack of empirical backing and evidence alongside the extent to which it differentiates between existing power dynamics within systems (Walker 2023). One key concern regards CA's translation into policy and practice (Comim *et al.* 2008). While this research cannot address all areas of weakness, it highlights how using CA grounds sport studies, providing avenues for conceptually bridging theory with practice and subsequently improving sport systems (Dao and Smith 2019). The study also showcases CA's relevancy in real-life contexts through intertwining it with empirical data (Walker 2026). Furthermore, it contends that those who reject CA fail to grasp CA's potential to enable broader insights into

sport, community, society, policy and systems alongside resultant social transformations (Jarvie *et al.* 2026).

A capability approach to basketball in Britain–Scotland

Sport has helped build Scotland's capabilities (Jarvie 2023). According to Jarvie *et al.* (2026), CA can support entire communities by telling informed stories of injustice, shaping interventions that support public causes and providing evidence whilst supporting people to take responsibility for their actions. Furthermore, capability thinking links facts and values across the macro- and micro-levels of policy and public sociology whilst ultimately emphasising the importance of 'public reasoning' and 'capability for voice' (Bonvin and Laruffa 2023, p. 42). Thus, CA puts agency and control into people and communities within British–Scottish basketball through increasing sporting choices and opportunities (Walker 2025). Furthermore, employing CA highlights institutional structures' importance, helping decision-makers: take comprehensive approaches to sport; define policies meaningful to people; consider factors influencing people's life quality; and propose action recognising changes sustainability such as redistributing pre-existing resources and funding (Jarvie *et al.* 2026). Subsequently, CA's flexibility benefits research, practice and policy through highlighting sport's value and role in catalysing change across entire systems (Jarvie *et al.* 2026) such as British–Scottish basketball. Within Scotland, CA has helped advance sporting interventions through supporting systems seeking to improve disadvantaged communities and people's lives through more holistic and person-centred approaches (Walker 2026). However, further enquires are required with people, communities' and systems' growth constrained by reduced public services, insufficient opportunities alongside systems' considering individuals and groups as objects over subjects (Brunner and Watson 2015).

Basketball in Scotland

Since 2012, when basketballscotland and basketballengland signed a contract with FIBA to get Team GB into the London 2012 Olympics, Scottish basketball has fallen under British basketball's remit and BBF's governance (Parker 2012). Today, basketballscotland is an umbrella organisation of British basketball with around 330,000 people playing at least once annually (Walker 2023). Today, the game remains popular among 11–15-year-olds, men under 23 and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities (Faulkner 2022).

Despite growing popularity, Swanson (2021) believes basketball's growth stagnated for seven reasons: officials promote basketball as a tall person's sport; the weather blocks outdoor accessibility; steep competition for hall hire with other indoor sports; schools have basic basketball facilities and were not constructed for basketball; netball is favoured among women within Commonwealth countries; geographical, contextual and cultural components; alongside basketball's internationalisation was not incorporated during British colonisation. Whereas Buckner (2019), Bishara (2018) and Faulkner (2022) also flagged: national sporting culture; football's absorption of youth talent; basketball's non-existence within elite private schools; few domestic basketballer's competing internationally and professionally overseas; insufficient professional and youth financial backing; no secured long-term television contracts; politics; minimal exposure to high-level live

action; talent retention; reduced presence of elite athletes; poor infrastructure; alongside bad management.

As the national governing body, basketballscotland oversee amateur, community, grassroots basketball nationwide, assuming three main responsibilities: challenging, supporting and working with athletes, clubs, coaches, officials, partners alongside volunteers; delivering basketball programmes and education; and securing investment (basketballscotland 2020). Working with people and organisations nationwide, basketballscotland aims to ensure basketball environments are: well run; good places to play; inclusive; developing people; making differences to people's lives; supporting player potential; and engaged in communities (basketballscotland 2022b). Basketballscotland's motivations desire social impact outcomes with internal beliefs and values surrounding four principles: equality (open-ended access to basketball); inspiration (basketball can inspire change); people-focused (people drive positive change); and teamwork (collaboration achieves more results) (basketballscotland 2022b).

Founded in 1998, Caledonia Gladiators, previously known as Caledonia Pride and Glasgow Rocks, remain Scotland's only professional franchise. Based in East Kilbride, they compete in Britain–Scotland's highest level of competition; the Super Basketball League (Walker 2023). Since inception, community work has been embedded in Rocks-Gladiators-Prides' purpose and mission, balancing on-court results with off-court outcomes (MacDonald 2014). The onus entails building a culture reflecting what Caledonia represents: Scotland and the people of Scotland (Young 2023). With all profits organisationally reinvested, Gladiators seek to make the franchise more inclusive through using the power of community collaboration to create transformation basketball opportunities for everyone.

We Play Together (WPT) is a social enterprise located in Edinburgh that operates Blaze Basketball Club, a community sport team. Formed in 1961 as Boroughmuir, the club is a former Scottish-British champions and has competed internationally. Transforming the club's developmental capabilities in 2011, Blaze partnered with basketballscotland and Castle Rock Edinvar Housing Association, helping procure a £1-per-year twenty-five-year lease from Edinburgh Council for The Craggs Community Centre (Walker 2023). Seeking to proliferate Blaze's meaning, Blaze alongside The Craggs united in 2022 to form WPT; a brand seeking greater community inclusivity (WPT 2022). Today, WPT uses basketball and The Craggs Centre to provide people a sense of community belonging through on-court success and off-court development, delivering basketball to 1,150 people annually (Blaze 2021).

Materials and methods

Design

The design, methodology and overall study answer the British basketball communities' calls for academic support (Hoopsfix 2025), particularly investigations helping address systemic issues. Interpretivist-qualitative methodology underpinned this analysis, selected as it supports sport-based studies via facilitating in-depth interpretations and holistic insights whilst developing multi-faceted knowledge specific to the research context (Gratton and Jones 2014). Akin to Jarvie and Ahrens (2019), the investigation's

theoretical and social grounding is developed via collecting perspectives from people connected to British–Scottish basketball and analysing them through CA. Given Scottish basketball's community basis and social nature, an interpretive-qualitative approach helps increase possibilities for influencing policy, practices and systemic change.

Participants

440 sources informed the findings. Results represent input from basketballscotland, Gladiators and WPT alongside twenty-seven community basketball organisations nationwide. Findings also include perspectives from British basketball personnel such as former BBF directors, non-basketball bodies connected to Commonwealth Scotland, Glasgow Life and SportScotland alongside educational and health-wellbeing institutions. Results reflect opinions from people aged 10–87 with 0–75 years' experience of coaching, governing, observing, managing, participating, volunteering and working in community, education-based, grassroots, international, professional and recreational sport across different countries including the UK and USA. Findings thus merge perspectives from coaches, club owners, chairmen, government representatives, officials, parents, participants, partner organisations, practitioners, senior basketball personnel, trustees and volunteers across the British–Scottish basketball community. Additional participant information is not provided due to people expressing concerns of identifiability, wishing to remain anonymous over fears of experiencing ramifications for sharing their views. Furthermore, Scottish basketball also caters to vulnerable groups (children/disabled/elderly), whose voices likewise informed results. Subsequently, where references to specific perspectives are given, labels reflecting the person's role are provided such as coach or trustee.

Data collection

Data collection followed and compliments Walker (2025) who used interviews alongside publicly available sources to research sport settings through CA. It was undertaken over two years (June 2021–2023), completed online because of the contemporary coronavirus pandemic and government restrictions limiting research opportunities. Data collection employed sequentially ordered qualitative methods (Mukhopadhyay and De Silva 2008). Data saturation was reached following the final interview with data and searches revealing consistent themes and no new materials.

The first method consulted documents and reports (Bowen 2009) to develop contextual understanding and foundations for conceptualising information extracted from other methods. All sources were accessible online, comprising government reports, newspaper articles, entities media releases and organisational reviews. Documents were located through searching keywords, 'basketball' and 'Scotland', collectively on Google before separately adding 'basketballscotland', 'Blaze', 'Boroughmuir', 'Caledonia Gladiators', 'Caledonia Pride', 'Glasgow Rocks' and 'We Play Together'. With searches returning 1348 materials, all sources were screened prior to selection for bias and relevancy through reading each one before being included or excluded. Through this process, 292 documents and reports resultantly informed the findings.

The second method utilised audio-visuals (Billups 2019). Sources entail online interviews, podcasts and webinars, located through following the same search process as documents; albeit audio-visuals found on audio platforms Actify, Apple Podcasts, Listen Notes, Spotify and YouTube alongside organisations social media and websites. Similarly, to documents, sources were publicly available and evaluated through the same process before transcription via Microsoft 365's automatic transcription software. With searches returning 487 sources, 142 audio-visuals were incorporated. After the transcripts were completed, documents were checked for accuracy via replaying the source whilst reading the information and making amendments where necessary.

The final method conducted semi-structured interviews (Gratton and Jones 2014) with six personnel. Three interviewees were employed in basketball full-time, two voluntarily involved part-time and one was retired; albeit maintained a vested interest following a full-time career. Undertaken via Microsoft Teams to support transcription, interviews lasted between 50 and 90 minutes. Interviews were chosen via purposive sampling (Neuman 2014), recruited through emailing each person to enquire about partaking. No eligibility criteria were required for interviewees to help establish insights reflective of diverse people and groups' experiences. With data from audio-visuals and documents previously collated, this helped devise open-ended interview questions relating to the basketball system, governance, structure and opportunities alongside the main limitations constraining British–Scottish basketball. Additional interviews were not undertaken as only six volunteered from the twenty invited in which one person withdrew prior to undertaking the interview. Among those who declined, two did not respond, four stated no availability and six offered no explanation.

Data analysis

Data was analysed through reflective thematic analysis. The process followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps: familiarisation, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes before writing up the findings. To undertake reflective thematic analysis, one round of open coding was completed with codes developed through naming recurring themes across the data such as funding and system failures. Employing reflective thematic analysis helped pinpoint the final themes before linking them to CA through commonalities such as Scottish basketball's lack of diversity linking to Sen's (1999) belief that effective systems require diversity. To provide quality assurance, Smith and McGannon's (2017) guidance for developing rigour in qualitative research was followed. Subsequently, to support information's consistency and credibility, triangulation was used via comparing primary and secondary information. Whereas member checking entailed cross-validating data by contrasting different people's viewpoints to ensure information was congruent before sharing results with participants to confirm results' accuracy. With some participants reluctant to discuss the systems' limitations, while discrepancies such as inconsistent contextual information was removed, some incongruous data reflecting personal opinions were included to help mitigate bias, superficial results and pinpoint key problems.

Factors constraining British–Scottish Basketball

Funding

Scottish basketball's eminent limitation is funding. Despite professional basketball not receiving public funding, in 2021, to combat financial losses during Covid-19, Rocks (2021) were given a one-off £300,000 bailout from SportScotland to prevent liquidation, highlighting Scottish basketball's operational insecurity. Whereas grassroots pathways are supported via a £280,000 stipend (£120,000 from the Lottery Fund and £160,000 supplied by the Scottish Government) from SportScotland which basketballs-cotland utilise for domestic programming (SportScotland 2008, 2016). This total is less than 1.71% of SportScotland's annual investment budget which is split between fifty-four national sports (SportScotland 2020). Alongside reduced funding, further challenges emerge through funding stipulations. For example, Dundee Madsons Community Basketball Club received £16,000 from SportScotland (2019a) in return for doubling club membership, trebling female participation while transitioning 20% from school activities into regular attendees from 2019 to 2023. As one former Rocks owner stated on a podcast:

From the First Minister through to various different Ministers of Sport . . . none of them are interested. They talk about being interested in a sport like basketball but all they're interested in is football, rugby, and posh sports that you need fancy equipment. The amount of funding that goes to sports like rowing, yachting, and bobsledding, sports that nobody is playing. There's not any that comes to basketball . . . The government couldn't be less interested in it. So, my message would be for the government to step up and help us make basketball, which is a very cool sport for boys and girls, make it viable for them. (Smith and McDonald 2020)

Imbalances within sporting investments currently exist, prioritising individual over team sports with basketball receiving £102 in funding per adult participant since 2009, less than half of netball's £205 (UK Parliament 2018). While systems can survive without extensively utilising markets, that does not preclude public regulation, social support or statecraft's role because these groups can enrich people, communities and society's lives rather than generating unfreedoms (Sen 1999). Social influences, mainly state actions, determining individual freedoms, nature and reach, require documentation because support unlocks social arrangements and possibilities which helps secure and expand individuals alongside groups' capabilities (Sen 1999). Funding also safeguards exchanges, liberties, tolerances and transactions necessary to prevent underdevelopment through facility and resource provisions which form and employ capabilities (Sen 1999).

Without just attention and support, social arrangements' impact can infringe upon people's freedom to survive (Sen 1999). Capabilities are determined by hierarchies' economical, institutional, political and social arrangements (Sen 1999) which entails adequate facilities and resources to play basketball. Another social responsibility implies policies should be geared towards providing widespread participatory opportunities concerning people's social viability dependencies (Sen 1999). Yet, as discussed by one former club owner on a podcast, the problem entails funding objectives:

The measurement they use for a sport in Scotland is how many people are paying to play a sport on a monthly basis. There are round about 7,000 people that are paying to play

basketball ... That's more than those who are doing athletics, cycling or rowing. It's quite high participation numbers ... On a pro rata basis, there's more people playing basketball in Scotland than there is in the rest of the UK ... Yet you don't get a penny for kids that are playing basketball in the street ... it's all about medals and ... winning but there has to be something in between that and with all due respect we're never going to compete for a medal or a bronze medal at the Olympic Games ... It doesn't feel right to me ... it's a class thing ... it's messed up, the funding. (Jenkins and Russell 2018)

While development relies on institutional forms, rules and regulations, it also depends on effective practice (Sen 1999). Both states and society have extensive supporting roles in safeguarding and strengthening individual alongside collective capabilities (Sen 2017). Development can be enhanced through public policies and provisions alongside society's effective use of participatory capabilities (Sen 1999). Basketball must target the latter, influencing decision-makers' choices through substantiating basketball's broader value to Scotland. For every £1 invested in basketball, the measured social return is £4 (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Basketball 2014). This focus suffices funders' qualms because unlocking freedoms has positive impacts for the nation's social economies and societal welfare (Sen 1999). Thus, with sport on average offering £3.91 in return for every £1 invested (SportEngland 2020), given the development and community-building aspects of basketball, the sport warrants increased funds, arguably more than those whose social return and participatory rates are lower.

By focusing on areas illustrating significance towards public policy creations such as women and girls, these systems' responsibilities include implementing policies emerging from social values and public priorities (Sen 1999). Such practices already exist in Scottish basketball with nationwide female-only sessions currently active (SportScotland 2019b). However, Scottish basketball must go further, highlighting public policy's basic or neglected issues like inequality or poverty through typifying basketball's social performance via expanding people and communities' freedoms (Sen 1999). For example, through strategic partnerships and proactive programming, Blaze are actively targeting mental health through basketball, highlighting the social issues' extent and basketball's role within the development process (Blaze 2021). Improving freedoms can help improve national economics over time through having a more advanced society which expedites communities and countries' growth (Sen 1999); hence why basketball in Scotland is an advantageous investment.

System

Scottish basketball's system is problematic, and needs restructured. As one former international-professional player/coach outlined on a podcast, there is no clear, defined or sustainable pathway or structure. Rather, the system is inconsistent and constantly changing:

For me, it's not a great system right now ... but I think the more we kind of fumble around with our system, we're not sure what we're doing with it, the more it's going to alienate players; it's going to alienate parents. (Woods 2020)

As one senior British–Scottish basketball representative highlighted on a podcast, the systems failed to see people as humans but commodities whereby holistic approaches

embedding greater developmental emphasis need to be integrated more broadly (Circe 2020). Within CA, every individual, community, capability and factor impinging or influencing opportunities to act or perform (Sen 1999) in or through basketball matters. CA enables basketball to speak to all participants as people alongside the operational system (Sen 2017). Thus, a lack of direction is evident within Scottish basketball (Woods 2020). As stated by one senior Scottish basketball coach in an online interview:

It depends on leadership. If the right leaders are in there and [they are] the right driving forces, then the sky's the limit ... I'm really optimistic for the future because more people are getting involved and more people are taking it seriously. (Mason 2020)

Despite the optimism, amateur/community teams are currently driving Scottish basketball. For example, Blaze transitioned from a win-first to person-first environment, introducing their Fit Minds programme in 2017 to support members mental health through basketball (Blaze 2021). Basketballscotland and Gladiators follow suit but fail to replicate such strategies. While funding remains problematic, financial conservatism's threat surrounds utilising public resources for unclear social purposes when they could be more optimally invested to maximise outcomes (Sen 1999). The resolution necessitates not lambasting financial conservatism but advocating greater social innovation and entrepreneurship through 'more pragmatic and open-minded scrutiny of rival claims to social funds' (Sen 1999, p. 145). Sen (1999) proposes redirecting public investments whereby in basketball's case may be internally from performance to social impact. One British-Scottish basketball personnel outlined the rationale on a podcast:

I believe that sometimes we are very short sighted in the basketball community. We judge success through accolades within the sport. We're not looking at the kid who didn't aspire to be anything, now he's got an education and going on to become a social worker or a mentor within society. All those little things for me are the real strength of the basketball community. I think that should be at the forefront of a lot more than just the player who's made it to the highest level because in reality ... you are only going to have one percent ... What about the other ninety nine percent? I think the message is clear that it's a great tool to learn that if you work hard, you can achieve certain things, teamwork, all these kinds of soft skills you can learn from it ... I think more people should have belief. (Marriot and Lasker 2021)

Scottish basketball's systems' shortcomings link to failures within holistic evaluative policies around social impact. While some capabilities are hard to measure, to effectively improve systems, pragmatic approaches towards analysing and interpreting data for practical evaluation and policy analysis are best (Sen 1999). Within Scottish basketball, the problem remains that only Blaze conduct extensive, ongoing evaluations of programming; this needs to become more systemically embedded to help evidence basketball's social value (Blaze 2021). Reflecting Sen's (1999, p. 81) 'direct approach', this involves examining and comparing respective capabilities and functioning's advantages. Three options exist: distinguished capability comparison (comparing some chosen vectors without fully completing evaluative rankings); partial ranking (ranking some vectors); and total comparison (ranking all vectors in terms of social circumstances) (Sen 1999). Sen (1999) advises against total comparison because it is too ambitious, advocating blended approaches, merging distinguished capability comparisons with partial rankings, initially focusing on more overarching capability

variables (employment/literacy/longevity/nutrition) before progressing to aggregated rankings surrounding capability sets. To bridge the two methods, employing capability weighing helps rank selected vectors based on people and communities' needs (Sen 1999). Despite incomplete coverage, this task helps direct systems through prioritising focuses and outcomes (Sen 1999).

Fragmentation

Britain–Scotland's basketball community and system is fragmented. As highlighted by one senior basketball personnel on a podcast, disjointedness constrains basketball's growth:

In the sport right now, we're so fixated on getting funding and growing the sport, but I always ask the question: what would we do with the funding? ... All the stakeholders in basketball are so fragmented at this moment in time. There needs to be a common vision. Everyone working together collectively to create that pathway. Right now, everyone has got their own little piece of the pie and it's not coming together. We talked about communication, teamwork and working together, but that's not something that hasn't happened with all the stakeholders involved in our sport ... I think with that focus, sharing resources, our capabilities improve drastically and then putting the players at the forefront and saying we're putting you through this journey, not only to be better athletes but to be better people. (Circe 2020)

As the statement alludes, social commitments to development need not function through states or private corporations, but via community-based arrangements, non-governmental agencies, the media, other sources of public communication and understanding alongside political and social organisations (Sen 1999). State's role alongside other agent's functions and value must be recognised in developmental processes, whereby, while the state are key actors', development is 'a shared responsibility of the society' (Sen 1999, p. 288). Despite partnerships existing, Scottish basketball remains fragmented with lacking collaborative efforts. For example, basketballscotland (2022a) and Gladiators only partnered in 2022. Additionally, self-interest is evident with limited collaborations between community clubs and organisations existing. Rather, they compete against one another.

While further internal basketball collaborations are required, as one governing body representative discussed in an interview, basketball is actively targeting broader networking, but struggle through lacking contacts and networking opportunities. To generate developmental outcomes, freedoms depend on social associations, especially interactive formations of collaborative comprehensions and public perceptions surrounding issues and solutions (Sen 1999). Development is a social product comprising a two-way relationship between social arrangements to expand freedoms and freedoms' usage to improve lives but also heighten systems' appropriateness and effectiveness (Sen 1999). As one interview outlined, organisations' strategies must be sensitive and knowledgeable about diverse connections and problems; hence local–national–international partnership's value. To maximise operations, each entity contributes their best resources (expertise/funding/local knowledge/time) to optimise capability-building processes (Sen 1999).

While collaboration is optimal for progress, as one senior basketball personnel stated on a podcast, internal stakeholders lack direction, unity and growth mindsets:

I think we are managing it wrong ... I think we should redefine ourselves ... Scottish basketball needs to stop setting its horizons and targets at a mediocre level. Rather than saying, making the national team is the ultimate level a Scottish basketballer can achieve, we need to start pushing for bigger and better goals. If we set these simple targets as our benchmarks, then people will either walk away from the sport early which is an all-too-common occurrence, or they will seek other avenues and go elsewhere out of the Scottish system ... We have to be continually pushing the boundaries or else there will be no progress, only a plateau. (Scottish Volleyball 2020)

This statement is corroborated by one basketball representative who alluded on a podcast that fragmentation and mediocrity stems from people within the systems' self-acclaimed elitist mindsets which needs assuaged (Aitchison 2021). Such advocacy to remove this mindset substantiates collaborative outcomes which are heightened when partners employ two-way developmental exchanges with those involved mutually benefiting whilst offering safety nets to provide supportive measures to safeguard potential ramifications (Sen 1999). Whereas systems oscillate when individuals and groups operate independently, focusing on respective agendas or seeking personal gain (Sen 1999). British–Scottish basketball must grow collectively than individually.

Exclusivity

All findings link to Sen's (1999) advocacy for more social opportunities with Scottish basketball lacking entry points. This exclusivity is reflected in one senior personnel's viewpoint expressed on a podcast:

I think the way the structure is, it just keeps people out of the sport and then the perception is: "Oh, they just don't want to play the sport" ... How do we create more equity within that and knock down those barriers or perceived barriers for people to try sport? I believe that if we had that [development] mindset, then we'd double or treble. I see so many primary schools especially and grassroots, people love sport, it's just there's this big disconnection when it comes to club level ... There's a real appetite but then we kind of get this elitist mindset when it comes to competition and that's what club represents, when there's more to it than that, there's a whole recreational component that's missing out ... Schools are to me, the backbone ... cause that's where the resource is, that's where people learn from attainment. For people coming to school, it's a lot easier to measure there. I definitely feel schools have a part to play in that gateway. (Walker 2021)

Social opportunities are societal arrangements like participatory basketball opportunities which influence individual or group's substantive freedom to live improved lives (Sen 1999). Systems lacking opportunities or choosing not to create them contribute to people, communities and nations' underdevelopment (Sen 1999). Underdevelopment arises through inadequate processes (poorly organised systems) or inadequate opportunities (participation possibilities) such as capabilities for socialisation or to escape preventable morbidity and premature mortality (Sen 1999). As Sen (1999, p. 288) stated: 'The denial of opportunities ... is a failure of social responsibility'. One way to measure an environment's success or failure is through the extent and range of alternatives, choices and

opportunities available to people (Sen 1999). For example, depending on each person's needs, Blaze offer competitive, recreational and social opportunities for diverse groups such as children, adolescents, adults and the elderly alongside people with disabilities, additional support needs, in wheelchairs, struggling with mental health and from low socio-economic backgrounds (Blaze 2021). While opportunities constitute different levels, they collectively concern attaining freedoms people desire (Sen 2017). Whereas such broad-ranging opportunities are still to be incepted by Gladiators. According to one external partner on a webinar, inclusivity begins with identifying people's needs:

It's about understanding people's specific needs and . . . to be proactive about it . . . It's about understanding your community and seeking out the groups in your communities that are not involved and finding out why and placing real value on what they tell you . . . I think we need to recognise that people might need to develop new skills to help them listen and engage effectively with different groups. We also might need help making the right contacts with certain individuals and organisations that can help us, but once we do that, I think it's really critical to develop new partnerships and be willing to come up with new ideas and ultimately change the way you do things. (Actify 2020)

As the statement indicates, development focuses must remain freedoms' 'opportunity' and 'process' aspect (Sen 1999, p. 285). The issue is conflicts between having less inequality of freedoms and maximising freedom for all, irrespective of inequalities (Sen 1999). Although, social arrangement's main goal is freedom, meaning it efficiently recognises general welfare (Sen 1999). Furthermore, social opportunities facilitate economic participation, economics helps generate personal abundance and public resources for social facilities with freedoms strengthening and supplementing one another (Sen 1999). For example, increased opportunities in basketball can help reduce mortality rates which contribute to reducing birth rates before reinforcing basic education's influence such as literacy and schooling on fertility (Sen 1999). Opportunities are conducive to enabling people's active contribution to society. For example, one interviewee mentioned that through having positive experiences from basketball, this encourages people to stay involved long-term and to volunteer.

With adequate social opportunities, 'individuals can effectively shape their own destiny and help each other' (Sen 1999, p. 11). Basketball sessions comprising intentional components directed at people's development can have much larger and more significant broader effects on communities and society alongside political and national economies (Sen 1999). This was found with one participant at Blaze (2021) whereby basketball transformed their life:

Because of The Craggs, that's how I got close to Jona and his family. If I didn't get close to his family, I wouldn't have had a solid place to stay, or even found out about my immigration status, so I wouldn't get to go to university, or college, or play basketball overseas.

As the data reveals, basketball's societal value exceeds participatory opportunities to play basketball's initial offering. Overall, communitarianism is important to human and national development because each community has members excluded from communal benefits whether economically, politically or socially, forgoing lifestyles alongside values which have capabilities to catalyse development (Sen 1999).

Diversity

Scottish basketball lacks diversity. For example, at Blaze, 90.9% of coaches and 65.5% of participants are of Caucasian ethnicity (Blaze 2021). While authoritative people might argue those excluded do not desire participation (Walker 2021), this is untrue, because many seek involvement but face impediments (Sen 1999). Most inequalities link to unfreedom's manifestations, leading to certain groups' exclusion, losses in important functionings (self-confidence/self-reliance) alongside declinations in mental and physical health, forcing people to forgo involvement and risk underdevelopment (Sen 1999). Reflecting on their own club, one coach/trustee outlined on a podcast that the issue is social capital and social mobility are retained by advantaged individuals and groups rather than being equally shared across society, meaning disadvantaged people remain trapped by prevailing circumstances (Nerburn and Sanderson 2020). Excluded people's development in Scotland is often overtaken by those in underdeveloped nations because such impediments mean residing in developed nations is developmentally detrimental (Brunner and Watson 2015). As one external stakeholder noted on a webinar, increasing diversity requires recognising and eradicating participatory barriers:

It's about understanding and removing the barriers people face ... Barriers are not a static thing, they change over time due to the world around people and their own personal circumstances ... [It is about] speaking to communities and people and finding out what their needs are and trying to tailor opportunities to meet those needs. It's not a one-off exercise, it's an ongoing effort. (Actify 2020)

Viewing development as substantive freedoms people obtain, such as opportunities to play basketball and acquire education or health benefits through basketball, helps understand developments' overall process through identifying Scottish basketball's strengths and weaknesses alongside its limits and possibilities (Jarvie *et al.* 2026). Before completing evaluations, assessments regarding developmental requirements must be undertaken because enhancing people and communities' capabilities requires removing societal unfreedoms (Sen 1999). To varying extents, Scottish basketball recognises and understands people and communities needs before implementing sessions to help deliver related outcomes. For example, to address mental health, Blaze adapt traditional basketball sessions to focus on connections and relationships over sporting skills (WTP 2022). However, barriers are more extensive than Scottish basketball realises and have more rudimentary underpinnings.

Given freedoms/unfreedoms distinct heterogeneity, people's diverse freedoms/unfreedoms must be denoted and considered over Scottish basketball's long-standing generalised approach to resolutions (Sen 1999). As explained by one senior Scottish basketball figure on a podcast, the system requires more holistic, inclusive approaches:

I'm looking at it from a deprivation standpoint. Coming from a council estate ... they are not getting the same opportunities as the more affluent kids within sport, and I believe basketball was a great tool back in the day and were renowned for being a working-class sport. That's not happening anymore, and I feel that when you start looking at the class divide, then you will start delving into the whole race divide and everything else that comes along with that as well too ... More needs to be done in that respect. (Circe 2020)

Development requires diverse and integrated systems whereby learning from others is fundamental to holistic development (Sen 1999). Until excluded communities are included, basketball alongside excluded groups move towards underdevelopment, less likely to develop because they lack connections and opportunities to facilitate freedom, restricting their life's potential and systems capabilities (Sen 1999). Including people from diverse backgrounds expands available freedoms, skills and values, meaning entire communities and systems can benefit from each other's actions with capabilities being 'productively complimentary' (Sen 1999, p. 255). Unlocking greater diversity improves basketball's possibilities in Scotland for two reasons: it creates more opportunities for increased funding; and it expands basketball's boundaries surrounding connections, knowledge bases and resources (Jarvie *et al.* 2026). For example, one interviewee discussed how having attracted one Muslim woman, their club resultantly welcomed new ethnic groups previously excluded such as South Asian women who later joined the club's board and started coaching. Cross-cultural appreciations and discussions are key components to more diverse development through developing a greater understanding of life (Sen 1999). Given basketball's universal appeal, especially among minority communities in Scotland, basketball can help societal diversification. The problem is society's and state's recognition of diversity is shrouded by 'oversimple generalisations about 'Western civilization' (Sen 1999, p. 247).

A future for basketball in Britain–Scotland

As CA and this study highlights, Scottish basketball is trapped by its own mentality, falling victim to mediocrity (Sen 1999). While increased funding would enable development, the system is the main constraint. Since inception, basketball was labelled a non-populous, non-traditional sport, residing on British–Scottish sport's periphery (Walker 2023). Today, basketball champions growth mindsets yet accepts secondary sporting status believing that through being peripheral and underfunded, it cannot excel. Subsequently, Scottish basketball not only needs CA to help people and communities flourish, but to realise its own potential (Brunner and Watson 2015) with basketball obtaining greater interest and participation than policymakers realise. Furthermore, as the findings reveal, basketball operates above its capacity and capabilities despite limitations. In particular, basketball excels at the ground-level through offering competitive, recreational and social opportunities tailored to people's needs (Walker 2025); albeit more required. Thus, in any future system, basketball's social value and return must be centralised through recognising, advancing and publicising basketball's ability to create social impact *en masse* (Jarvie *et al.* 2026). Subsequently, CA represents one approach to and conceptualisation of development with social impact today central to public policy and national systems (Sen 1999, Svensson and Levine 2017, Jarvie 2023). Based on this focus, a new system's shared premise entails that everyone has core entitlements which are the systems duty to uphold (Sen 1999). For example, while states might not prioritise basketball opportunities, sport systems should help facilitate people's right to basketball (Jarvie *et al.* 2026).

Basketball's current system remains disconnected with no clear progressive pathway between grassroots programmes, community clubs and professional organisations. Reinforcing Gibbons and Malcolm (2017) dis-United Kingdom theory alongside Walker's (2025) assertion about self-interest, some stakeholder's seek individual

recognition and elevation rather than helping collectively expand British–Scottish basketball overall. The latter would prompt basketball’s overall growth with each level’s strategic priorities interlinked and impacting each other (Walker 2023). Yet, basketball and broader Scottish sport’s structure to date has arguably caused this individualism whereby to grow, organisations did so independently because the system offers limited support (Sen 1999, Jarvie *et al.* 2026). Growth could be achieved with greater diversity and integration whereby Scottish basketball’s current white, middle-class-dominated ecosystem limits it (Walker 2023). Yet, hindering basketball’s engagement is lacking opportunities, forcing high drop-out rates with people moving to sports with clear and supported pathways (Woods 2020). Retaining more people overall leads to increased demographics (Sen 2017). This allows basketball to progress internally through inclusive growth and more extensive opportunities rather than depending on external funding through improved connections, knowledge and resources (Sen 1999). While potential collaborations with the NBA alongside the NBA Europe League’s establishment offers possibilities to grow basketball through increased funding and international visibility, these opportunities marginalise Scotland with London and Manchester identified as the main hubs, but also the sole benefactors of ongoing investments into community-level development. Thus, embracing the NBA risks expediting internal disparities and inequalities whilst undermining a British system’s legitimacy, particularly one that serves the desired and much needed local, regional and national communitarianism required to rebuild a coherent domestic basketball system.

To progress, Jarvie (2019) identifies coherency and effectiveness through more strategic investments, clearer purposes and direct visions. Subsequently, British–Scottish basketball requires a clearly structured and forthright system, based on evidence, theoretical frameworks and holistic insights from other sport-basketball systems but also British–Scottish basketball’s key stakeholders (Brunner and Watson 2015). This new system must include transparent objectives that unite and guide the entire basketball ecosystem to one or multiple common goals across different societal-sporting areas that stakeholders can contribute to and learn from (Jarvie 2019). Aims are developed via incorporating voices from the basketball community alongside broader personnel connected to funding, policy and partnership opportunities (Sen 1999). Doing so ensures the system is based on and proactively working towards meeting people’s needs and aspirations rather than responding reactively which explains some constraints persistence (Walker 2025). This necessitates co-creating strategic working documents to direct and educate personnel on new transparent pathways whilst providing guidance around opportunities for assistance, collaboration and funding (Sen 2017). Many British–Scottish basketball personnel recommend collective action, yet few enact it; hence, requiring a democratic system individuals and groups can buy-into, feel supported and are valued for contributing towards (Sen 2017). However, any altruistic intent must embed and be driven by data-led development approaches, tailored to what information recommends alongside respective community’s needs (Walker 2025). Lastly, ongoing impact measurement and evaluation is required by all stakeholders to pinpoint efficiencies and inefficiencies of the system alongside key barriers and challenges (Sen 1999). Doing so helps understand how and why positive changes and support mechanisms can be implemented from within the basketball community.

At the policy-level, CA encapsulates how basketball is underappreciated, under-recognised and underutilised (Jarvie and Ahrens 2019). Overall, Scottish basketball needs monetary and experiential support, but investors seek short-term results over long-term transformations which is why development fails and systemic growth stagnates (Jarvie *et al.* 2026). Thus, funders must stop concentrating on economic effects and focus on social economy alongside economy of societal welfare outputs whereby improvements in these areas resultantly increases national economics (Sen 1999). Given basketball's prevailing issues, the sport must grow internally (Sen 1999). Overall, the entire system must work collaboratively, seeking local, national and international partnerships from mainstream and non-mainstream organisations within and out with sport (Walker 2025). Within under-supported systems, collective action outweighs individual autonomy with resolutions and resources, as highlighted by Blaze, already existing internally (Brunner and Watson 2015). A united system sharing assets, contacts and knowledge remains marginalised communities' means of progressing through developing internal dependencies and sustainable growth (Sen 1999, Jarvie 2023). Although basketball's limitations are broad and multilevel, subsequently affecting the community similarly (Sen 1999), greater entrepreneurship and philanthropy is key to overcoming limitations (Walker 2023). At the ground-level, practitioners require support from federations to help navigate basketball's current stressful, unfamiliar and changing landscape. This entails learning how to generate today's desired development outcomes from sport whilst contributing to a new system's restructuring and enactment, whereby directly engaging with people and communities helps cement buy-in and understandings of shared visions (Walker 2025). However, the key challenge for basketball is that its argument is still to be cemented economically, politically and socially and that it operates in a constantly evolving space in relation to emerging politics and policies (Jarvie 2023). Yet, despite the wide range of stakeholders with different ideals, it needs one agreed common purpose (Jarvie 2023).

Limitations and recommendations

The research's main limitation entails how insights are gleaned from one sport system and knowledge emanates from a single theoretical framework. Therefore, the study highlights a paucity of knowledge regarding two overarching areas. The first gap highlights the need for more studies embedding recent thinking around CA's value and revisionism. Thus, future research might consider employing alternative capability thinkers or models of CA such as Nussbaum (2011). The second concerns basketball in the UK. Subsequently, future research must delve more critically into policies influencing basketball in Britain. Doing so helps understand basketball's failures, but also provides insights into broader factors either constraining or which can enable British basketball to flourish. Research must also explore the recent dissolution of the British Basketball Federation to pinpoint existing complexities surrounding sport governance and politics but also challenges and pressures facing governing bodies within the contemporary British sporting landscape.

Conclusion

The proposition put forth in this research argues that within British–Scottish basketball’s redevelopment, it must address the sport’s limitations whilst redesigning, redefining and restructuring the system. To help understand and resolve impediments, factors constraining the sport must be considered at the local, national and international level. This entails engaging and evaluating communities, regions and entire countries such as England and Scotland individually and collectively due to similarities and differences existing across each context. British–Scottish basketball’s future entails that the new federation is one that leads from the forefront through clear visions, guidance and a holistic awareness of the broader socio-economic-political landscape. It must also engage diverse stakeholders across the entire system in its redevelopment, so its inauguration and efforts reflect and serve its entire community of interest and do not marginalise former excluded groups. Furthermore, while public funding is required to underpin the system, the sport should not persistently and so heavily rely on it to the same extent as previous leadership groups. Rather, they must explore ideas to self-generate revenue that can sustain the sport such as facility-ownership opportunities through community asset transfers which have proved successful for existing organisations like Blaze. Additionally, it must address the landscapes’ issues via encouraging extensive collaboration, increasing participatory opportunities, improving diversity and inclusivity. Lastly, organisational aims must align with broader government and non-governmental policies beyond sport such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals alongside those within British–Scottish sport (Meir *et al.* 2024, Jarvie *et al.* 2026).

The research’s key message echoes Jarvie’s (2023) point that smaller nations and sub-states such as Scotland alongside the individual and peripheral federations within need to operate more boldly and embrace innovation if they are to prosper. Furthermore, each federation must act based on their own community of interests’ needs and not allow dominant actors’ self-interests to dictate proceedings which might not best serve their requirements or aspirations. However, if properly redeveloped, given the growing interest in British–Scottish basketball today, basketball in Britain can achieve its potential, becoming more mainstream and the UK an international hub for basketball. However, if these issues are left unaddressed, British–Scottish basketball will return to its former one-size-fits-all challenging ecosystem, continuing to operate insecurely and creating further internal disparities between stakeholders. Without significant change, basketball will remain peripheral. Therefore, collective action is required. A disjointed environment further marginalises basketball from policymakers, society and its own community, creating an environmental disconnect and leading to contestation from aggrieved stakeholders.

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