Analysis of the first part of the Euromillions Basketball League 2016-2017

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Except for a delayed game on December 23th (Willebroek vs Brussel), one quarter of the Euromillions Basketball League 2015-2016 is finished. Every team played each opponent one time, with three more meetings to go. Time for a first round-up from a coach's point of view. All stats come from the Euromillions Basketball League website. Here, one can find all traditional stats and box scores for all games and a ranking of the teams in scored points, allowed points and field goal percentage. In this analysis, I want to go a step further in analyzing the teams. By calculating more advanced and meaningful numbers, I want to make some conclusions about the playing styles, weaknesses and strengths of all teams in the league. Therefore, it is important to look beyond the traditional stats and to look at the numbers that are statistically more relevant.

To give an example: a team which plays on average on a higher pace (more possessions) will - of course - take more three pointers and have more turnovers after 9 games than a slower playing team. Therefore, I will not look at these absolute numbers, but I'm interested in the percentage of field goals which are three pointers and the number of turnovers a team commits in 100 ball possessions. These results will enable me to make the correct conclusions about how much a team relies on the three point shot and how well they take care of the ball.

Here's the official overall ranking (with 9 of 36 rounds played):

		GAMES	WON	LOST	S-A	HOME	AWAY
1	ANT	9	7	2	770 - 711	`3 - 1	`4 - 1
2	OOS	9	6	3	732 - 663	`4 - 1	`2 - 2
3	AAL	9	6	3	793 - 738	`3 - 2	`3 - 1
4	MON	9	5	4	681 - 650	`2 - 2	`3 - 2
5	BRU	8	5	3	621 - 621	`4 - 0	`1 - 3
6	CHA	9	4	5	710 - 745	`1 - 4	`3 - 1
7	WIL	8	4	4	634 - 661	`2 - 2	`2 - 2
8	LEU	9	3	6	735 - 785	`3 - 2	`0 - 4
9	LIE	9	3	6	691 - 755	`1 - 3	`2 - 3
10	LIM	9	1	8	708 - 746	`0 - 4	`1 - 4

Ranking of the Euromillions Basketball League on 23/11/2016

The ranking can be divided into three groups:
   Antwerp, Oostende and Aalstar on top, followed by
   Mons, Brussel, Charleroi and Willebroek, and finally
   Leuven, Liege and Limburg at the bottom of the ranking at this point.
These colors will be used consistently throughout this text to indicate a team's position in this early ranking. *Please note that Brussel could be joining Oostende and Aalstar when they win their delayed game at Willebroek.*

In general, one could conclude that Leuven *(all 3 victories at 'home')* and Brussel *(4 out of 5 victories at 'home')* heavily depend on their homecourt advantage, while for Charleroi it

appears to be a disadvantage *(3 out of 4 victories away)*. Probably the calender had some impact on these results and it will be more interesting to see how this evolves towards Round 18 of the competition.

1. Game pace and playing style

To get an objective view on the different playing styles in offense, I want to focus first of all on these three factors:
- Game pace: How many possessions per 40 minutes?
- How heavily does a team depend on its three point shot?
- How many free throws does a team provoke (per field goal attempt)

		PACE
1	LIE	78,4
2	LEU	78,3
3	AAL	76,0
4	ANT	75,9
5	CHA	74,2
6	LIM	73,0
7	WIL	71,4
8	OOS	70,7
9	BRU	70,0
10	MON	69,5

		%3pt/FG	3pt%
1	CHA	39,9	34,6
2	MON	39,8	36,2
3	LIM	38,1	32,9
4	WIL	37,7	33,7
5	BRU	35,8	33,0
6	LIE	35,1	41,4
7	AAL	31,7	40,3
8	LEU	31,5	30,1
9	OOS	30,9	33,2
10	ANT	29,0	35,6

		#FT/FGA
1	OOS	0,44
2	ANT	0,36
3	AAL	0,33
4	BRU	0,29
5	LIM	0,28
	CHA	0,28
	LEU	0,28
8	WIL	0,27
9	MON	0,26
10	LIE	0,25

PACE = Pace factor is an estimate of the number of possessions per 40 minutes by a team.
%3pt/FG = the percentage of threepoint attempts among all field goals
3pt% = three point field goal percentage
#FT/FGA = the number of free throws per field goal attempt

It is remarkable that Liege and Leuven, while ranked #8 and #9 in the standings, play the game with the highest pace. On average they have the most possesions a game of all teams. Teams like Mons, Brussel and Oostende tend to slow down their opponent (*full court pressure or more control/containment in defense instead of risky steals*), and offensively they depend more on their halfcourt setplays.
For the readers who think that the differences between all teams are rather small, let me state that 38% of all played games came down to two ball possessions! Therefore, we need to focus heavily on the smallest differences between the most objective gamechanging parameters!

Significantly is also the fact that the three best ranked teams (Antwerp, Aalstar and Oostende) are the teams that
1) take the fewest three point attempts
2) provoke the most free throws per field goal attempt.
This is contrary to the modern trend in the NBA where the best teams (Golden State and Cleveland) are the ones that rely the most on their three point shot, and consequently, don't provoke the most free throws, since these are correlated parameters. A three point shot rarely gives you the chance to go to the charity line.

2. Offensive or defensive edges

To examine on which end of the floor a team creates its edge over other teams, I will look at the following parameters:
- How many points does a team score in 100 ball possessions?
- How many points does a team allow in 100 ball possessions?
- How many times does a team turn the ball over in 100 possessions?

		ORtg
1	AAL	115,9
2	OOS	115,0
3	ANT	112,7
4	BRU	110,9
5	WIL	109,3
6	LIM	107,7
7	MON	107,4
8	CHA	106,0
9	LEU	104,0
10	LIE	97,9

		DRtg
1	MON	102,5
2	OOS	103,9
3	ANT	104,0
4	LIE	107,0
5	AAL	107,9
6	BRU	110,5
7	LEU	111,3
8	CHA	111,6
9	LIM	113,5
10	WIL	113,9

		TOV%
1	BRU	13,4
2	MON	13,5
3	AAL	14,0
4	OOS	14,7
5	LIE	14,8
6	CHA	15,4
7	ANT	15,4
8	WIL	16,1
9	LIM	16,4
10	LEU	17,0

ORtg = points scored per 100 possessions (= 100 * PPP)
DRtg = points allowed per 100 possessions
TOV% = number of turnovers per 100 possessions.

Logically, Oostende, Antwerp and Aalstar act better than the average, both on the defensive and the offensive end. More surprising is the difference between both ends of the floor for Liege: ranked #4 in the defensive ratings, they are isolated #10 on the offensive end, with on average 6 points more allowed per 100 possessions than #9. The addition of Vincent Simpson, who scored 32 points in his first game, is hopeful for the club, however. Different story for Limburg, who seem to have enough quality on their team in offense (ranked #6), but struggle on the defensive end (#9). It is also clear that the two teams who turn the ball over the most in this league (Leuven and Limburg), pay it cash in the overall ranking.

3. Rebounding

It is well-known that rebounding is a crucial part of the game of basketball, which heavily weighs on the results of a team. However, I will not focus on the absolute number of rebounds. *If we watch a game between two teams with a big difference between the field goals percentage, one of both teams has a lot more opportunities to take a defensive rebound.* Therefore, we will calculate the percentage of rebounds a team took out of all missed field goals:

		ORB%
1	LEU	33,8
2	WIL	32,8
3	OOS	32,6
4	ANT	29,4
5	BRU	28,0
6	LIM	27,7
7	CHA	26,9
8	MON	25,8
9	LIE	22,9
10	AAL	22,5

		DRB%
1	ANT	76,2
2	BRU	75,5
3	OOS	75,4
4	MON	72,0
5	LIM	71,7
6	CHA	69,7
7	WIL	69,5
8	LEU	69,3
9	LIE	69,1
10	AAL	68,3

DRB% = Defensive rebound percentage is an estimate of the percentage of available defensive rebounds a team grabbed
ORB% = Offensive rebound percentage is an estimate of the percentage of available offensive rebounds a team grabbed

Clearly, Antwerp and Oostende are two teams that create an edge by cleaning the boards effectively on both ends of the floor.

Remarkable here is the last position of Aalstar in rebounding, on both ends. They compensate for this with an overall field goal percentage of 49,8% (ranked #1) and just 11.5 turnovers per game (ranked #3).

The low position for Liege probably has a lot to do with the injury of their best rebounder John Fields, but is certainly a key reason why they are ranked #9 overall in the ranking so far.

Interesting to see is the difference for Leuven between the offensive (ranked #1) and the defensive rebounds (ranked #8). For sure, one cannot explain the sloppyness on the defensive board with a lack of length or qualities given their numbers on the other end. Possible explanations are just the mindset (less focused when a rebound does not give you immediately a scoring opportunity) or the fact that they focus too much on fastbreak situations (game pace ranked #2) without securing the defensive rebound first.

4. Decision making in money time

Close games are games that end with a difference of 5 points or less between both teams. These games could be decided in the two final possessions. Crucial is the decision making of the players, but also of the staff, in moneytime. So far, 17 out of 44 games played (38%) were so-called *two-possession games*.

Thus far in this analysis, we have had only the poor defensive rating (ranked #9) and TOV% (ranked #9) to explain the isolated last spot in the overall ranking for Limburg. Pretty remarkable is the fact that they could win none of their 6 (!) close games. Hopefully for Limburg, the return of Jerime Anderson will bring some extra basketball IQ to the team in these crucial situations.

Antwerp and Brussels each won three of such *two-possession games*. One of the reasons is likely the wave of confidence on which both teams act after their good results last season *(Antwerp: Cup finalist & Final 8 FIBA Europe Cup / Brussels: semi-finals Belgian League)*. Interesting to see how long they can extend this positive vibe.

	CLOSE GAMES	
1	ANT	3/4
2	BRU	3/5
3	MON	2/3
	WIL	2/3
	CHA	2/3
	LEU	2/3
7	OOS	1/2
8	LIE	1/2
9	AAL	1/3
10	LIM	0/6

Author

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