

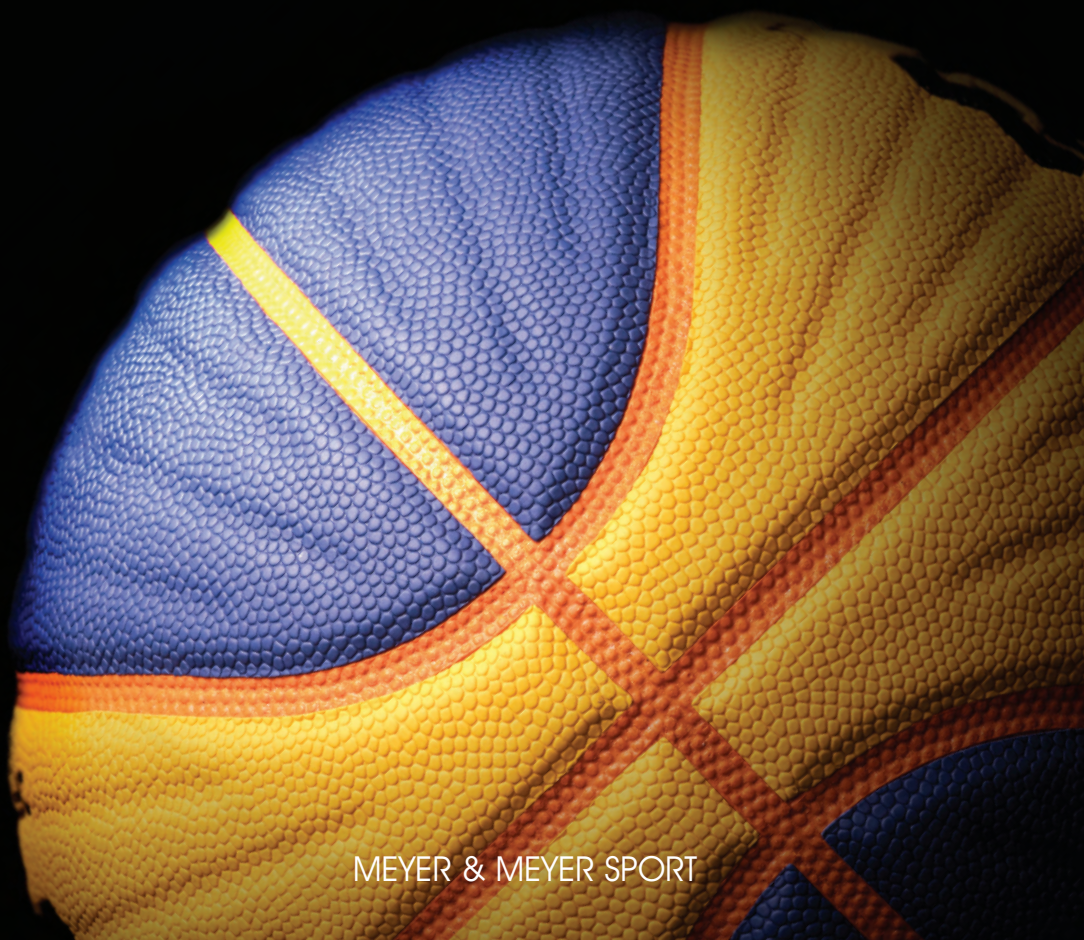
Luka Snoj

3X3

BASKETBALL

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW

Foreword by Dejan Majstorović, 3-Time FIBA 3x3 World Cup Champion



MEYER & MEYER SPORT

3x3 Basketball

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FOREWORD

As a player who has won multiple FIBA 3x3 World Cups, European Cups, and World Tours in the past, I am pleased and honored to write the foreword for the first-ever book about 3x3 basketball. Clearly the timing for this book is right, as 3x3 is set to make a spectacular debut on the biggest stage in sports—the Olympic Games.

3x3 is a beautiful game, and I fell in love with it from the first moment I played it. I was fortunate enough to be a part of the 3x3 community from the start, allowing me to watch this basketball discipline grow and develop to what it is today. As I helped shape the history of 3x3, I am more excited than ever to see what the future will bring.

First, I would like to warmly congratulate Luka, who I played against in several tournaments, on his initiative in bringing together and presenting this wealth of information. Luka has been involved in 3x3 for more than a decade. As the first European player to play in the first 3x3 international professional league, he opened a door and helped pave the way for international professional players. Honestly, there weren't many of us 3x3 professional players in the past, so I am extremely happy he is the one sharing his knowledge and presenting the game to the world.

This book is one of a kind. It provides detailed insight into the game of 3x3. It is excellent, professional literature, rich with historical background, statistical data, specific terminology, strategies, game structure definitions, tips and instructions for players, and in-depth analyses. When considering all the above, clearly this book will serve as the foundation for further professional advancement in this discipline. I also hope the book will significantly contribute to the continued rise of 3x3's popularity, which currently receives less media attention than traditional basketball.

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of this book is that it shows that 3x3 and traditional basketball are not as similar as one might think. Luka has done a fantastic job systematically clarifying the differences between the two sports and explaining how 3x3 has formed its own identity. This basketball discipline is also attractive to players of traditional basketball as they can easily transition to 3x3. Luka presents and explains every facet of 3x3 basketball with clear and informative language, making this book appealing to both those who are new to the sport and those seeking further information.

It is with great pleasure that I heartily recommend this book to all who are involved in or want to be involved in the exciting and challenging world of 3x3 basketball. It is my hope and expectation that this book will be an effective learning experience and a valuable resource.

–Dejan Majstorović

3-time FIBA 3x3 World Cup Champion

4-time FIBA 3x3 World Tour Champion

2-time FIBA 3x3 Europe Cup Champion

Former number 1 player in the FIBA

3x3 World Ranking

MVP of the FIBA 3x3 World Cup 2017

MVP of the FIBA 3x3 Europe Cup 2019





INTRODUCTION

There is only one sport called basketball. But there is more to basketball than the traditional game of 5-on-5 with which most people are familiar.

3x3 basketball has not been around long as a formal and professional game, even though it has a rich origin, having been played for years on streets and playgrounds. In the past, the format of three players per side with only one basket was fondly called “21” or “three-on-three.” Despite the fact 3x3 shares a lot with streetball and traditional basketball, it is important to not equate this new Olympic discipline with either one. Traditional basketball is a game of five players per side playing with two baskets. Outside of the United States, basketball has been governed by the International Basketball Federation (FIBA) since 1932. Streetball is an informal variation of basketball usually played on outdoor courts. 3x3, on the other hand, a game of three players per side using one basket, is a formal, standalone basketball discipline and was never a sub-product of the traditional game.

What makes 3x3 stand out is its inclusiveness, as it provides equal opportunities for players. This basketball discipline is by far the most accessible for all ages and backgrounds. According to FIBA, 3x3 stands for nonstop excitement and fun; 182 countries and regions participate, with almost one million registered athletes. This makes 3x3 the most popular urban team sport in the world, according to

the International Olympic Committee. 3x3 is also sometimes referred to as the "10-minute sprint," so as you read this book, keep in mind that 3x3 basketball is extremely fast paced and is always played in a tournament form. At tournaments, teams never just play one game, but instead they can play a minimum of two and, in some cases, even seven or eight games in a day!

3x3 basketball has had a profound impact on my life. I fell in love with it from the beginning, probably because of the freedom it gave me to express and showcase my basketball skills and the relaxed atmosphere at events. I discovered in it something similar to the streetball I played as a kid on the playground with my friends. But my first thought was how quick and physical this discipline is.

I come from the small Central European country of Slovenia, home to just two million inhabitants, where basketball is the second most popular sport behind soccer. In Slovenia, once the basketball season ends, players usually start playing 3x3 on outdoor courts in their off-season to help develop their basketball skills. Slovenia was part of the former Yugoslavia, where basketball was extremely popular, until 1991. The Yugoslavian national team achieved impressive results on the biggest stage, winning the FIBA 1970 Basketball World Championship in my hometown of Ljubljana. Since Slovenia's independence, players like Luka Dončić Goran Dragić, Sasha Vujačić, and Radoslav Nesterović have emerged on the NBA scene and continued Slovenia's remarkable basketball legacy. However, Slovenia has also achieved stellar results in 3x3 and played a vital role in promoting and developing this game. The success has culminated in Slovenia winning medals at FIBA 3x3 World and European Cups. Slovenian teams have also been extremely successful on the FIBA 3x3 Professional Circuit, twice winning the FIBA 3x3 World Tour Final.

Maybe love of one game led me to another. Obviously, 3x3's closest relatives are traditional basketball and streetball because of the similarities they share in rules, techniques, and their common aim of scoring a basket. But I strongly believe there are significant similarities with blitz chess. When I was about seven years old, before I started playing basketball, I played chess every other day, and I eventually completed chess middle school. In blitz chess, you have a limited amount of time—maybe only five minutes per player—so you have only few seconds to think about your next move. You are constantly under time pressure, having to anticipate your

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opponent's strategy, react quickly, and problem solve on the fly—just like in 3x3. Once the chess match starts, the player is alone, and no help is allowed from their coach, which is also similar to 3x3, where you can't receive any coaching during the game. Both games are also played in tournament style with numerous matches a day and no time for a rest, which tests players' mental abilities. In both chess and 3x3, a side can win the game before the game clock runs out, which led me to believe that these two games have more in common than anyone previously thought.

In the early years of professional 3x3, when I also started playing it professionally overseas, people really only knew about traditional basketball. Some of them didn't know that the sport of basketball, which has been for decades one of the biggest and most popular sports in the world, has two different disciplines. Since 3x3 was not yet popular and internationally established, some people simply called it the "other" basketball game. However, in a less than a decade, 3x3 quickly developed, forged its identity, and became part of the biggest multi-sport international events. Things could really take off when it showcases at the Tokyo Olympic Games in 2021, and the afterglow could culminate in more commercial and professional opportunities.

During my career, I was never ranked as the best 3x3 player in the world; my highest world ranking was 27th. My purpose in writing this book is not to celebrate my achievements but to present the game and help people understand it. As with any new sport, understanding the fundamentals is vital before it can be properly scrutinized. Therefore, a book specifically describing every facet of the game, analyzing its principles and defining the relevant terms, is needed for people to learn and understand 3x3. One of the things that pushed and motivated me to write this book was the fact that this game was and still is relatively unknown to many and that there hasn't been widespread independent research on it.

Clearly my time researching and writing was not a sprint, but rather a marathon. Having coaching and playing experience just wasn't enough. I had to collect large amounts of data over the years, systematically study the field, research, and conduct interviews and analyses in order to properly inform, explain, and inspire readers.

On that note, I would like to thank FIBA 3x3 for providing me with previously unreleased historical, statistical, and other data that were crucial for writing this book. I also have to thank pioneering 3x3 athletes and coaches for the details shared in their interviews. I hope this book will be an inspiration to and useful literature for many players and fans of 3x3 basketball.



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO 3X3 BASKETBALL

**For the purposes of this book, we will use the official International Basketball Federation (FIBA) terminology 3x3 basketball, or 3x3 for short, which is distinct from traditional basketball (i.e., five-on-five).*

BASKETBALL VARIATIONS AND 3X3

Basketball is one of the world's most popular sports and people love to play it or watch it no matter what the form. There are several variations of basketball worldwide, with tweaks that differentiate it from the traditional five-on-five discipline, but the core skills that players use with and without the ball remain intact. These variations, which can be either formal or informal, look almost identical to traditional basketball, but there are differences in structure and rules. Informal basketball variations such as "streetball" are played without strict official rules, usually on the playgrounds without referees or other officials. 3x3, on the other hand, is a formal basketball discipline with strict rules. This variation involves two teams of three players each—and usually one substitute—played on one basket. The team wins if it scores 21 points first or has scored the most points by the end of the regulated time period of 10 minutes. Generally, 3x3 shares a lot in common with five-on-five basketball, including ball handling regulations and

basic violation rules like goaltending, double dribble, three-second rules, and so on. 3x3 is also easily played on the half of a regular basketball court, and the fundamental skills involved in 3x3 are similar to traditional basketball. However, there are some key structural and rule differences that set the two games apart. As an example in 3x3 compared to traditional basketball, in-game coaching is not allowed; there are three players a side compared to traditional basketball's five; the 3x3 offensive shot clock is set to 12 seconds rather than basketball's 24; and 3x3 players use a unique ball which is smaller than the one used in traditional men's basketball competitions. Based on the aforementioned structural and rule differences, the gameplay of 3x3, including teams' styles and scoring preferences, also differs from basketball's, mostly because of different scoring rules. Even though a three-point arc in traditional basketball (*FIBA rules) is the same distance from the basket as the two-point arc in 3x3, 3x3 players choose to take these shots more frequently because they see more value in them. A three-pointer in traditional basketball is worth 50 percent more than a made shot inside the two-point arc, but in 3x3, a shot inside the arc is worth one point while a shot beyond the arc is worth 100 percent more: two points.



Hakeem "The Dream" Olajuwon, NBA Hall of Fame Inductee: "3×3 is the kind of game that everybody loves."¹

Why 3x3 Was Formalized: FIBA's Goals

Before 2007, traditional basketball was FIBA's only formal and officially regulated basketball discipline. FIBA (International Basketball Federation) was founded by eight nations in 1932, and it and now brings together 213 national basketball federations worldwide. In the late 2000s, three-on-three streetball, played around the world, aroused the interest of the association. This variation was extremely popular for decades, but athletes simply didn't have an organized platform to compete more professionally. FIBA saw an excellent opportunity to change this. Their idea was to create a new discipline that would attract new athletes to basketball, allow lower-ranked basketball nations to compete, push the game of basketball into new boundaries, and increase the sport's popularity. FIBA also had a vision to make basketball the most popular sports community in the world by the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics. To attain these changes, they believed the new game format should provide entertainment, be easily accessible to players, and inexpensive and easy to organize. They believed that events should be held in iconic places, city centers, and urban areas where the action could catch the attention of passers-by.

Initially, FIBA had to overcome a few obstacles, with their first goal being to structure, organize, and formalize three-on-three. Another goal was to provide an international platform to showcase it worldwide. This led to three-on-three making its official worldwide debut in the 2010 Youth Olympic Games in Singapore. The move from three-on-three played informally on the street to a formal basketball discipline involved a name change to "3x3." In the past, 3x3 was often mistakenly referred to as "3-on-3" basketball, but FIBA has made it very clear that the official name of this basketball discipline is 3x3. The correct pronunciation FIBA has set is "3 ex 3." Since 2010, the game has quickly progressed and become global under the guidance of FIBA 3x3, which set up a World Cup and other regional cups for national teams and World Tour events for professional teams.

The popularization of 3x3 began in Europe and Asia and later spread to the USA and other parts of the world as fans fell in love with its entertainment value. 3x3 is always about more than just the on-court action. It genuinely seeks to entertain people through various side events, such as a dunking contest. The high entertainment value, urban culture, and the fact that 3x3 is organized in

tournaments where spectators can see multiple games in one day has helped capture new fans who might not have been interested in hoops before.

Only seven years passed from when 3x3's first official international event was held in 2010 to when it was added to the Olympic program on June 9, 2017, slated for the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo. Few major sports have received such international recognition so fast. This was a result of the great work of the whole 3x3 community, most especially the cooperation of FIBA, national basketball federations, and private promoters. Many do not know who the key FIBA official was that initiated the 3x3 movement and later accelerated 3x3 development. The late FIBA Secretary General Patrick Baumann was the 3x3's early pioneer, who foresaw that it would be a major part of basketball's future. He envisioned it as a perfect game for youth because it challenges them to be more innovative. He also believed 3x3 could help expand basketball beyond traditional boundaries because costs for staging outdoor 3x3 events are lower, and not as much infrastructure is required compared to a traditional basketball game in the indoor arena. This would allow 3x3 to quickly spread to new frontiers. Furthermore, and most important, he believed that 3x3 offers non-traditional basketball countries opportunities to participate in international competitions, which can be difficult for these nations given the large number of players required to comprise a traditional basketball team. Traditional basketball tests the depth of smaller nations because teams need to have 12 players. In 3x3, however, the depth of talent is less vital because teams only need four players, putting many nations on more equal footing.

The Rise of Non-Basketball Powerhouses

This basketball discipline isn't just better balanced, but it is also more unpredictable given the short time frame and low scoring target of 21 points. There have already been many memorable underdog stories in 3x3, with Mongolia's high rankings in both the men's and women's categories a testament to this. Other countries, such as Latvia, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, Qatar, and Ukraine have won medals in FIBA 3x3 World Cups, which was not achievable for them in traditional basketball. On the flip side, the USA—the undisputed basketball powerhouse—only won their first men's FIBA 3x3 World Cup in 2019



Men's USA team, winning their first FIBA 3x3 World Cup in 2019. From left to right: Robbie Hummel, Kareem Maddox, Canyon Barry, Damon Huffman.

and has been upstaged over the years by Eastern European countries. The red, white, and blue have had better success in the women's category, where they have won several World Cups. However, winning the first men's gold medal for the USA and getting an MVP at the 2019 FIBA 3x3 World Cup helped Robbie Hummel receive the USA Basketball Male Athlete of the Year award. The previous awardees include superstars Michael Jordan, Shaquille O'Neal, and Reggie Miller. Many high-profile NBA and WNBA players have represented the USA at FIBA 3x3 World Cups, including Zach Collins, PJ Washington, Arike Ogunbowale, and Sabrina Ionescu. This shows that even big countries have serious intentions for this up-and-coming Olympic discipline.



Team of the tournament at the FIBA 3x3 World Cup 2019: Karlis Lasmanis (LAT), Robbie Hummel (USA), Michael Hicks (POL).

Different Variations of Three Players Against Three on One Basket

Many basketball players encountered the stripped-down format of playing three against three on one basket before 3x3 was formalized. Players played this way through streetball variation on outdoor courts or at traditional basketball practices. Traditional basketball involves five players from each team at the same time on a court with two baskets, but during the course of the training process, traditional basketball coaches often reduce the number of players on the teams, with rules retained or slightly modified. This is called a small-sided basketball game and is a great way of learning basketball when it is played in the form of three against three. Some basketball federations even preferred organizing three-on-three basketball leagues for junior players, believing this format was more appropriate for young players' development, as they got more touches and playing time.

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Apart from traditional five-on-five, other basketball variations were not known as official competition sports and were usually practiced outside on the street and called street basketball. They were occasionally played at amateur-level tournaments. This variation didn't have a rigid structure or a common international playing platform and wasn't formalized. It is clear that basketball players have played a format of three-on-three before, but 3x3 basketball is a formal basketball discipline with strict game rules. Another three-on-three variation is Fireball3, which is popular in the USA (the "BIG3" league). This variation has different rules from FIBA 3x3 or NBA five-on-five and is generally played inside arenas, with in-game coaching allowed and headlined by former NBA stars.

Traditional Basketball, Streetball, and 3x3 Basketball

Even though 3x3 is a standalone discipline, it has been heavily influenced by traditional basketball and streetball. The parallels are obvious, but the differences also stand out.

3x3 resembles traditional basketball and streetball in its objective of scoring more points than the opposition by shooting the ball through the hoop. It retains the same rules for dribbling and shooting, among other things. 3x3 has adopted bits of each of these formats. Its accessibility, culture, and urban nature is much closer to streetball, whereas its strict rules, structured competition platform, and professional organization is more akin to traditional basketball. Regarding playing style, 3x3 is a fusion of both, as traditional basketball is a sport of structure and discipline, while street basketball is about freedom, creativity, and spontaneous decision-making. Due to the countless similarities between basketball and 3x3, most people would think that being good in traditional basketball means being good in 3x3. This might be true to a certain degree, as skills of one game can easily translate to another. The more detailed answer to this question will be presented later, but it is important to know that having fewer players on the court, a shorter shot clock, and a smaller court size gives 3x3 an alternative style and dynamic, meaning it is played differently than traditional basketball. The gap

between the two games is likely to widen over the years in terms of their playing style, rules, and specific training methods as 3x3 continues to forge its own identity.



3x3, the largest urban sport in the world, has been heavily influenced by both streetball and traditional basketball.

TRADITIONAL BASKETBALL AND ITS HISTORY

Traditional basketball is a team sport with two teams of five players, each trying to score by shooting a ball through a hoop elevated 3.05 meters (10 feet) above the ground. A successful score is called a “basket.” A basket can count as one, two, or three points depending on where the shot was attempted from. The game is played on a rectangular floor, and there is a hoop at each end of the court, which is divided into two main sections by the mid-court line. It is usually played indoors in a gym. A game lasts 40 minutes by FIBA rules or 48 minutes in the NBA, and the team with the most points at the end of the game wins. Basketball is considered one of the most popular sports in the world. It arguably has the widest

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global reach of any sport other than football (soccer). It has become popular over the years because it's fun to watch and play, uses only simple equipment, and is an all-weather sport.

The Origins of Traditional Basketball

Dr. James Naismith invented basketball in 1891 at the YMCA in Springfield, Massachusetts. He was a physical education instructor and was determined to create an indoor, non-contact sport to keep athletes in shape throughout the winter. "Basket ball" only had 13 rules—published on January 15, 1892, in the YMCA's Triangle Magazine—and they were quite different from those of today's sport (for example, players were not allowed to dribble). The first basketball game was played with a soccer ball and two peach baskets nailed to the wall at 10-feet on a court just half the size of what we are familiar with today. Soon, basketball spread globally to Asia, Europe, South America, and all corners of the world. In 1932, FIBA was established as the international governing body for basketball, and four years later, basketball made its Olympic debut. In 1946, the most renowned basketball league, the BAA (now the NBA), was established in the USA. In the first three decades after World War II, basketball steadily grew in popularity. Interest in the game deepened because of television exposure in the 1980s, and the game's popularity exploded soon after that. With world-famous basketball players such as Earvin "Magic" Johnson, Julius Erving, Larry Bird, Michael Jordan, Allen Iverson, and Kobe Bryant, and significantly increased exposure, basketball quickly moved to the forefront of the world's sporting scene.

Triangles in Offensive Team Tactics

Traditional basketball coaches have frequently practiced three-on-three basketball to use player triangles as a basis for running tactics on offense. Cooperation between all three players is pivotal, and the movement of those players sets up good offensive options for their teammates. Basketball offensive plays such as the "UCLA offense" or the continuity basketball offense called the "triangle offense" have been popular schemes for decades, with the primary purpose of creating triangles on one side of the court in which, unlike in a two-player formation, a