

1976 American Basketball Association/National Basketball

Association Merger Background Guide

Table of Contents

Letter from the Chair.....	2
Letter from the Crisis Director.....	3
National Basketball Association Background.....	4
American Basketball Association Background.....	4
Previous Merger Attempt.....	5
Committee Context.....	5
Committee Format.....	6
Guiding Questions.....	7
Role List.....	8
American Basketball Association (ABA).....	8
National Basketball Association (NBA).....	11

Letter from the Chair

Dear Delegates,

My name is Evelyn Richardson and I am a Sophomore here at George Washington University. It is my pleasure to welcome you to WAMUNC and to the ABA/NBA committee. I will be your chair for this committee, and I look forward to meeting each and every one of you.

Just like a basketball game, this committee will be extremely fast paced, so I look forward to you all coming prepared to move quickly and to constantly adapt to new elements of the committee. Delegates who will be the most successful in this committee will be those who come to the committee prepared with research, creative solutions, and complex argumentation to support their debate. Additionally, the most successful delegates will also be the ones who are collaborative and who value kindness before all else. Being a leader means being someone who is not only knowledgeable and able to guide others, but also someone who contributes to a positive environment that uplifts those around them.

As for myself, I come from a military family and have grown up all over the world, but currently live in Massachusetts. (Don't interpret this as me liking the Celtics, because I DON'T.) I am one of the Assistant Head Delegates here at George Washington University for the school's Model UN team. When I'm not traveling around the country for Model UN conferences, you can typically find me on a run, in the gym working out, or playing the piano. I ran in the Marine Corps Marathon my Freshman year here and have been playing the piano since I was around 5. One fun fact about me is that I extremely love cats and have a cat named after Minkah Fitzpatrick, the Miami Dolphins football safety, because my dad thought I chose the name "Minka" because of him and wrote Minkah instead of Minka on her adoption certificate.

I look forward to seeing you all bring your creative solutions and ideas to this committee. I urge you all to come to debate well prepared and to let your personalities shine through both your front room and back room performances.

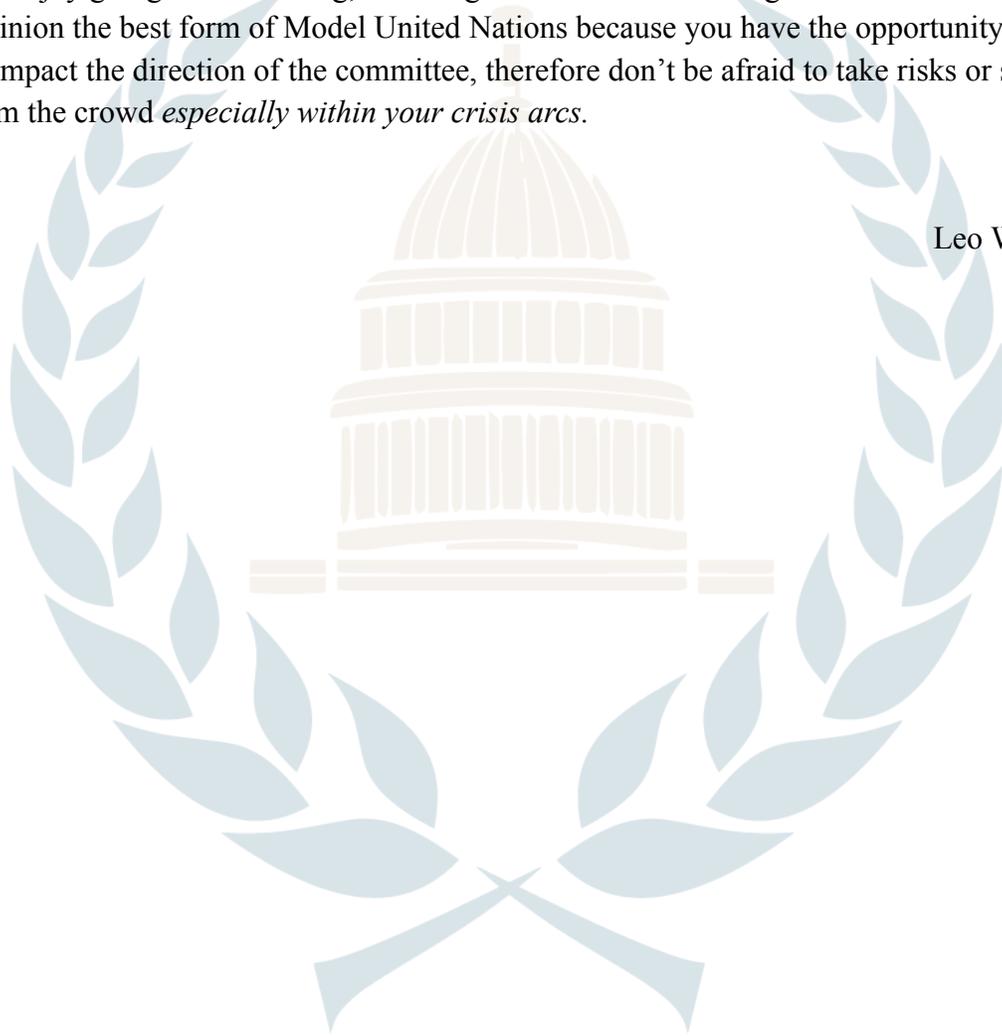
Sincerely,
Evelyn Richardson

Letter from the Crisis Director

Delegates,

Hello, my name is Leo Waldbaum and I am a freshman here at George Washington University studying international affairs with a minor in Chinese and GIS. I am from the Boston area and I have been doing Model United Nations for the last 7 years. Outside of Model United Nations I enjoy going rock climbing, watching Basketball and making balloon animals. Crisis is in my opinion the best form of Model United Nations because you have the opportunity to directly impact the direction of the committee, therefore don't be afraid to take risks or stand apart from the crowd *especially within your crisis arcs*.

Best,
Leo Waldbaum



National Basketball Association Background

Ever since James Naismith cut the bottom out of a peach basket, basketball has been a sensation across the United States. In 1946 the National Basketball Association (NBA) was founded to capitalize on the sports popularity which led the NBA to quickly establish itself as the top professional basketball league in the country. Historically the league has gone through periods of one team dominating the league whether that was George Mikan led Lakers 1947-1954 or Bill Russell's Celtics 1956-1969. However by the 1975-1976 season the league has become far more balanced and with 18 teams already with more on its way through the merger, the league has become more competitive than ever.

American Basketball Association Background

In 1967, the American Basketball Association (ABA) was formed as a direct competitor to the NBA. From its inception, the ABA's long term goal was to eventually merge with the NBA. Since franchising an ABA team was half the price of an NBA team, many franchise owners viewed a merger as an opportunity to quickly double their investment. However the ABA isn't just a knock off of the NBA, its very innovative as well. Valuing faster movement and flashy dunks ABA games were far more exciting to watch than their slower NBA counterparts. The ABA introduced the 3pt line, a colorful "red, white and blue basketball," and even the dunk contest. The ABA entered the 1976 offseason with 8 teams. A key element of the ABA is that players can be drafted after their first year in college while the NBA requires players to be at least 4 years removed from graduating High School. Despite strong talent the league is financially insecure and merger is the number one question for each team. Teams like the

Nuggets, Pacers, Spurs, and Colonels have proven they can match or exceed NBA competition, powered by stars such as Julius Erving, George Gervin, Moses Malone, and David Thompson. For the ABA trying to leverage their star power to stay financially successful is key.

Previous Merger Attempt

In 1970, the NBA and ABA attempted an original merger to form a single National Basketball Association that would combine the NBA's 17 teams with the ABA's 11 teams. After NBA owners voted to pursue the merger, the NBA Players Association, led by Oscar Robertson, filed an antitrust lawsuit in April 1970 (Robertson v. NBA), arguing that the NBA's draft system unlawfully restricted player movement since players could only move between teams if traded as no free agency system existed at the time. A revised agreement reached in May 1971 would have admitted all ABA teams except the Virginia Squires excluded due to territorial conflicts with the Baltimore Bullets. However the revised plan was ultimately blocked by Congress which deemed the NBA's restriction of player moving teams was illegal. A merger wouldn't be possible until the Supreme Court finally settled "Oscar Robertson V National Basketball Association" in the 1976 offseason.

Committee Context

It's the 1976 offseason and the Supreme Court has finally settled former professional basketball player Oscar Robertson's lawsuit against the National Basketball Association. The end of the lawsuit meant two things: allowing for the possibility of a merger and the end of the NBA's reserve clause. The NBA's reserve clause was a common contract provision that stated a player couldn't negotiate contracts with other teams which effectively bound a player to one team for life unless they were traded. The end of the reserve clause opened the way for the

modern free agency system which allows players at the end of their contracts to negotiate with any team they want, helping drive salaries as every franchise has to compete for talent. An example of the competition for talent is NBA league MVP Kareem Abdul Jabbar is now requesting a trade from Milwaukee to either Los Angeles or New York City driving competition to sign the superstar. But most importantly, the lawsuit which initially blocked the merger being settled meant that the NBA/ABA merger is now inevitable. With 8 ABA teams and 18 NBA teams, some NBA and ABA teams will not survive the merger. The decisions both the merged league as a whole and each individual franchise will make will decide what greatly shapes the future of the league. Some of the important questions are what ABA innovations should the NBA adopt: 3pt line, dunk contest, faster game pace, and even a colorful (red, white and blue) ball. How can the merged league build on the ABA's unique promotions from the Kentucky Colonels signing the first professional female basketball player of Penny Early 5'3" to the Indiana Pacers having "Victor the wrestling Bear" perform a halftime show. Teams will decide whether they should stay where they are or take the risk and move markets or rebrand to try and attract a new crowd.

No matter what franchises do this offseason, surviving the merger means improving their finances and gaining as many fans as possible.

Committee Format

The committee will start at the beginning of the 1976 offseason with each delegate representing an NBA or ABA team. The first few committee sessions will be focused on guiding the league through the merger, and deciding which rules to adopt and how the new merged league can continue to expand its popularity. After the merger is finalized the committee will enter into the 1976-1977 season with each delegate trying to maximize their teams popularity and profit. It is

important to note, teams aren't just evaluated based on how many games they win but also on how they grow their market size and increase their profit.

Guiding Questions

1. What ABA innovations, if any, should the merged league adopt: *3pt line, dunk contest, faster game pace, and even a colorful (red, white and blue) ball?*
2. Should the NBA adopt the ABA's rules allowing college undergraduates to apply to the NBA draft?
3. Should your franchise move and/or rebrand to help build a new fanbase?
4. What NBA stars will ABA teams try to sign and vice versa?
5. Should the merged league start looking into international markets to grow its popularity around the world?
6. How will franchises hold on to their star players after the introduction of free agency?

Role List

American Basketball Association (ABA)

1. San Antonio Spurs

Originally founded as the Dallas Chaparrals in 1967, they moved to San Antonio in 1973 and started going by the name “Spurs.” A quite successful ABA franchise, they have recently acquired George Gervin known as “The Iceman” who has been leading their high power offense. Besides their on court success, the Spurs have become a sensation in San Antonio. The question for the Spurs is how can they continue to grow their popularity while restrained by their small market size.

2. Spirits of St Louis

The “Gateway to the West” held a team blessed with a wealth of young talent. With Michael Leon Carr star rookie averaging 18 points a game and Maurice Lucas averaging 16 points and 15 rebounds. The Spirits have no clear plan for the future, during the middle of the 1975-1976 season head coach Rod Thorn was replaced by Joe Mullaney and they traded away Gus Gerald to Denver despite the complaints of fans.

Despite being a solid team, the Spirits lack a clear vision for the future and coupled with low attendance the question for the Spirits is what's the plan for their future and how can they build their local popularity.

3. Indianapolis Pacers

The Pacers have been the most successful ABA franchise winning more finals than any other team. Finals runs had been led by George McGinnis however this most recent season the Philadelphia 76ers of the NBA poached George McGinnis hanging the Pacers their first losing record in a long time. The Pacers also moved to the new downtown Market Square Arena, the

largest ABA arena to help solidify their local roots. But a large arena means a lot of seats to fill the Pacers and after losing George McGinnis the question is how can the Pacers fill more seats. In the past the Pacers have used unique promotions including “Victor The Wrestling Bear” as a special half-time show to try and fill the stadium. How will the Pacers fill seats in their new Arena after a disappointing season and the loss of star power?

4. Denver Nuggets

In anticipation of an NBA merger they changed their name from the Rockets to Nuggets in 1974 due to the existence of the NBA Houston Rockets. The Nuggets was a star team, finishing the season with the best record in the ABA. The Nuggets have a star Point Guard in David Thompson averaging almost 30 points a game and is the only NBA #1 draft pick to sign with an ABA team. Likely the greatest forward to be born in Akron Ohio, Bobby Jones nicknamed the “Secretary of Defense” led the league in field goal percentage. But despite their impressive talent and attendance the question is how can they hold on to their current players and record through this merger.

5. Kentucky Colonels

Led by the dominant Artis Gilmore in the paint, the Colonels have won more regular season games than any other ABA team. They recently captured the 1975 ABA championship proving their strength, many believe they are stronger than their NBA counterparts, this claim was supported when the Colonels beat the 1975 NBA champion Golden State Warriors 93-90. However in this last season the Colonels sold fan favorite forward Dan Issel for cash. The question for the Colonels is how can they get their fanbase’s support back and prove that they are a NBA caliber franchise.

6. Virginia Squires

As a regional team, the squires played in arenas across Norfolk, Richmond, Hampton, and Roanoke. Often squandering their power the squires notably sold Julius Erving and George Gervin for cash. These disastrous decisions have cost them a lot of their fanbase. The Squires are in a tough spot, strapped for cash they have taken out a few loans to keep their heads above water for a little bit longer. But if the squires want to turn the ship around they will need a change, whether that means leaving Virginia or to dig deep and build their current fan base.

7. New York Nets

Winner of the most recent 1976 ABA Championship over the Denver Nuggets, the Nets also recently broke the ABA's season win record on the back of Julius Erving better known as "Dr. J." Dr J's flashy style and high flying above the rim action has greatly increased the nets popularity. However if the Nets are to stay in the New York Area they will be forced to pay the Knicks an "Invasion fee." Will the Nets choose to leave their large long island fanbase or will they pay the "invasion fee" and whether they will be able to keep Julius Erving while doing so.

8. Utah Stars

The Utah Stars have had a recent rough patch, going from leading the division to lagging behind. Despite this their 1974 draft pick of Moses Malone has shown tremendous growth now averaging 23 points and 18 rebounds Malone has situated himself as a dominant center. Nicknamed the "chairman of the boards" for his rebounding ability, Moses Malone is a lone star for the Utah stars. The stars have had recent financial trouble which has been compounded by low attendance levels despite being the only pro sports team in Utah. The question this offseason is what can the Utah Stars do to fill seats and how can they capitalize on Moses Malone's star power to help grow their popularity.

National Basketball Association (NBA)

9. Boston Celtics

The valiant efforts of Dave Cowens, Jojo White and John Havlicek led the Celtics to becoming the NBA's champions again after beating the Phoenix Suns 4-2 in the finals. The Boston Celtics are the gold standard of NBA franchises and their passionate fanbase has gotten used to winning championships. The question for the Celtics is can they run it back despite the possibility of more league competition and the introduction of free agency rules that could see some of their star power getting poached by other teams.

10. New York Knicks

Despite a strong back court with Earl Malone and Walt Frazier, the Knicks finished 5th in the east a far cry away from their championship winning team in 1973. But 3 time MVP Kareem Abdul-Jabbar just requested a trade from the Milwaukee Bucks to either Los Angeles or New York City. Are the Knicks able to get Kareem to go to the big apple. Additionally with a merger taking place the so called "New York Nets" are positioning themselves to take away from the NYC market share. The question is how can the Knicks grow their popularity and prove that they are New York City's team?

11. Golden State Warriors

The 1974–1975 Golden State Warriors were NBA champions after sweeping the heavily favored Bullets in 4 games. This season the Warriors had the league's best record leading many to believe that the Warriors would go back and get another championship. Despite the dynamic Rick Barry leading the league in steals and averaging 30 points a game the Warriors lost to the suns in the western conference finals. The question for the Warriors is can they go back to the playoff despite the merger adding new competitors to the league.

12. Omaha/Kansas City Kings

The Kings managed to surpass their low expectations and made it all the way to the conference semifinals. This surprise success led to their Coach Phil Johnson winning coach of the year. The Kings are led by Nate Archibald who averaged 25 points and 8 assists a game. The Kings are also in a unique position because they split their home between Omaha Nebraska and Kansas City Missouri. The question for the kings is should they continue to split their time between Omaha and Kansas City or should they find a permanent place to settle down.

13. Philadelphia 76ers

The Philadelphia 76ers made a big jump going from winning 34 to 46 games, a jump attributed to the signing of former ABA Pacers star George McGinnis. The 76ers are a far cry from their 1972-1973 season which after going 9-73 was the worst season record in history and the fans have “trusted the process.” The question for the 76ers this offseason is how are they going to prove to fans that this recent season wasn’t a fluke. Will they introduce new fan promotions to fill seats or use this merger to sign some more ABA star power?

14. Washington Bullets

The Bullets recently moved into the Capital Center and rebranded as the Washington Bullets. In the 1974-1975 they tied the Boston Celtics for the league’s best regular-season record, however they were swept by the Warriors in the Finals. Wes Unseld is leading the league in rebounds while Elvin Hayes and Phil Chenier are both averaging 20 points a game. This team has been filling seats but with inconsistent branding and identity the question for the Bullets is how can they become Washington DC’s team. Additionally with a merger on the horizon how can the bullets protect their market share with the possibility of the Virginia Squires being added in an expansion.

15. Milwaukee Bucks

The Milwaukee Bucks have enjoyed success behind Oscar Robertson and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar leading them to dominate their division for years. That run ended when Robertson retired after the 1974 season and Kareem missed the start of 1975 with injury. Although Kareem returned to average 30 points per game, the Bucks finished just 38 - 44. Frustrated by the decline despite his individual success, Kareem has demanded a trade to New York or Los Angeles. The question for Milwaukee is whether a full rebuild is needed or can they find a way to trade Kareem for a player who will get fans to come back to the arena.

16. Buffalo Braves

League MVP and scoring leader Bob McAdoo has led the Buffalo Braves to their best record in franchise history. On court success has translated into one of the NBA's highest attendance figures, firmly establishing the team in Buffalo. The Braves also played six "home" games in Toronto extending their reach to a Canadian audience as the only NBA team to stage games abroad. The ABA/NBA merger is set to fill American Markets but the central question is whether Buffalo should double down on its passionate local base or take a risk and try to leverage McAdoo's star power to create a Canadian following.

17. Houston Rockets

Despite being the only NBA team in Texas, the Rockets lack of star power has produced mediocre results and below average attendance. Playing in the University of Houston's arena has weakened their identity and with the potential arrival of the San Antonio Spurs through the merger, Houston must act quickly to expand its fan base and establish itself as Texas's team. Above all, the Rockets need to acquire a true star to anchor both on court success and market appeal.

18. New Orleans Jazz

The New Orleans Jazz first season was led by former LSU star Pete Maravich, “Pistol Pete.” Regardless, the Jazz placed last in the league which is concerning given the team traded a large amount of their future draft picks for “Pistol Pete” which they believed would be a win now move. The team is also stunted by the small capacity of Loyola Field House, the Jazz need a modern arena with larger capacity to help grow its fanbase. As a new franchise in New Orleans, the Jazz must build their reputation in the city and decide whether they are going to off load “Pistol Pete” or build a winning team around him.

19. Los Angeles Lakers

Jerry West’s retirement before the season began was the first start in the Lakers downslide. Without a clear star the Lakers dropped to the bottom of the league and missed the Pacific Division title for the first time in their history. Although their attendance was the second highest in the league (only behind Boston) due to their strong market. There is talk about Jerry West coming back to the Lakers as a coach which could help put the Lakers on the right track. Additionally three-time MVP Kareem Abdul-Jabbar requested a trade from Milwaukee to Los Angeles or New York, the question is whether the Lakers can land Kareem and restore their status in the city of Angels.

20. Portland Blazers

Entering their fourth season, the Portland Trail Blazers posted an above .500 record and secured the #1 pick in the 1974 NBA Draft, selecting standout UCLA center Bill Walton. While Bill Walton’s first seasons were underwhelming, however many fans believe that he is going to be a breakout star in his second season. The key questions now are how can the Blazers grow its

popularity despite the small size of Portland and whether they can build around Walton to create a championship level team.

