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Fall 12-15-2017

TWO-WAY CONTRACTS: THE SOLUTION FOR THE NBA

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Luke Kornet remembers watching the 2017 NBA Draft at his home. As names were called and picks were finalized on that June evening, he knew that he wouldn't be drafted.

Then he was called by his agent.

Kornet's agent, Jim Tanner, called him with many offers but none presented the same elements as the two-way contract that the Knicks offered him.

As they mulled offers the two "went through all the possible options," said Kornet, a former Vanderbilt standout who in 2017 set the NCAA record for three-pointers made by a 7-footer. "The two-way really seemed like a good option of staying in the states and making a solid income and also staying in front of a team and hopefully end up being called up in the year."

What is a Two-Way?

After the NBA and its players' union renewed the collective bargaining agreement in January 2017, in came lots of changes. The two sides agreed on a shortened preseason, new maximum contracts for veteran players and the introduction of two-way player contracts.

These contracts allow players to be in both the NBA and its developmental/minor league, the Gatorade League--widely known as The G-League at the same time. (Before the recent sponsorship by Gatorade, the G-League was known as the NBA Development League, or the D-League.)

The two-way contract allots each team two extra roster spots for these selected players. Players who are signed to two-way contracts spend a maximum of 45 days with their NBA team, practicing or playing or both. During that time, they earn 1/170 of the \$582,180 rookie minimum contract per day. If the two-way player reaches his maximum, he can earn up to \$275,000. If he is never called up for a single day to their NBA club, he still will earn a minimum of \$75,000 per season.

The opportunity to make over \$200,000 through this contract has enticed more players into the G-League. Prior to the two-way, aspiring NBA players would opt to play overseas under lucrative contracts despite not being in the NBA pipeline.

G-League players who are not on a two-way contract are paid on two levels: "higher-tier" players make \$26,000 per season. A "lower-tier" player makes \$13,000 per season. The low wages of G-League have lessened players' confidence and have ultimately taken them away from the game.

Now, with the incentive of two-way contracts, the G-League a becomes a more viable option.

“There was an opportunity for me to go overseas that was higher [pay] but I feel like the opportunity [in the G-League] is better,” said Isaiah Hicks, a forward/center for the G-League’s Westchester Knicks.

Fresh from winning the 2017 NCAA National Championship with the University of North Carolina, Hicks was close to signing with the Charlotte Hornets G-League affiliate, the Greensboro Swarm, but chose to play with the Westchester Knicks after receiving the Two-Way offer.

“Nowadays more eyes are on this league than it used to be. You see the GM and the President here at some games,” Hicks said. “This is a great step to get where we got to go.”

How successful has the G-League been?

The G-League is becoming the league that NBA officials always envisioned.

“I’ve said this from the beginning,” said the G-League President, Malcolm Turner in [an interview](#). “Part of our mission, if you want to work at the highest level, is to help NBA dreams come true. Whether you’re a player, coach, referee, trainer or anything down the line, it’s always very fulfilling to see people realize that NBA dream and to know that we played a role in it.”

With the NBA urging its franchises to make the G-League a true farm system, similar to Major League Baseball and its minor league, the G-League has grown from eight teams in 2001 to now 26 affiliate franchises.

Thirty percent of all NBA players now have G-League experience. In the 2016-17 season 92 players were assigned from the NBA to the G-League, a record number. In addition, G-League games are televised on Facebook Live, and ESPN will feature 12 regular season games and nine playoff games this year.

Players who have made the jump from the G-League to the NBA include: Nets guard Jeremy Lin, San Antonio guard Danny Green, Orlando Magic forward Jonathan Simmons and Miami Heat center Hassan Whiteside.

“It’s inspiring,” said Jacob Wiley, a two-way player for the Long Island Nets, the Brooklyn Nets G-League affiliate. The Nets are one of the franchises that invest heavily in the G-League, with eight former G-League players on their opening day roster. “All of those guys are doing great for themselves,” Wiley said. “You want to follow in their footsteps obviously. I try to learn from them.”

How are Two-Way players doing?

While the two-way contracts are still in their primitive stages, players are reaping the benefits of spending time with both their parent club and their G-League affiliate.

Kornet and Hicks have yet to log minutes as NBA players, given the current logjam that the Knicks have in frontcourt positions, but the two have gained training experience and advice from players on the club.

Kornet recalled the advice he got from former NBA Defensive Player of the Year Joakim Noah, a center for the Knicks. “[He] emphasized to all of us wanting to play in the league; Its not about being a great scorer; it’s about you’re going to have a role and can you play that role and play harder than everybody else,” he said. “That’s going to be what teams are looking at in guys in [the G-League].”

Wiley has played in five games for the Brooklyn Nets, accumulating 33 minutes, and he says he is getting accustomed to the life of a two-way, floating back and forth between leagues.

“I went on a road trip with the Brooklyn Nets for about two weeks,” said the Nets forward. “I came home for a day and then went on a road trip back to the west coast for the G-League team. I was on the road for almost a month. You never know where you’re going to be at any moment. You could get a call, like ‘hey, we need you for a game’ or ‘we need you for practice.’ Especially with teams having so many injuries, you just never know where you’re going to end up.”

Many two-way players that have taken advantage of the opportunity to fill in for injured NBA teammates. Among those are Antonio Blakeney of the Chicago Bulls, Tyler Cavanaugh from the Atlanta Hawks, CJ Williams of the Los Angeles Clippers and most notably, Mike James of the Phoenix Suns.

Mike James, the point guard from the Phoenix Suns, used his 45 days as a two-way in record time.

With former Suns guard Eric Bledsoe sidelined with injuries, James quickly became the starter for Phoenix. When Bledsoe subsequently requested a trade [via Twitter](#)---not because of James’s playing time but because he had disagreements with management—James, who had spent time in Croatia, Israel, Italy, Greece and Spain, earned a full-time spot in the Suns rotation.

On December 7, 2017, James made history as the NBA’s first two-way player to convert his contract into a standard NBA contract.

“I don’t really think about it. I just think I’m a regular player,” [James said in an interview with Yahoo Sports](#). “To be honest, I didn’t think about it as much as everybody else thought about it for me. I think I just kind of played, and then this opportunity came, and I took it.”

Can Two-Ways End One and Dones?

If the G-League is able to bring in more of the premier undrafted players who head overseas, the next question is how does it affect the current NCAA system?

With the age requirement for the NBA at 19, there has been a “one and done” fad, where the best high school athletes attend a university for a year before becoming eligible for the NBA Draft.

The “One and Done” era has produced a lot of great talent over the years--NBA superstars John Wall, Kyrie Irving and Kevin Durant come to mind--but it also has come with a lot of foul play.

On September 29, 2017, many high-ranking officials from sneaker companies, grassroots basketball programs and universities were indicted by the FBI for mass corruption, bribery and wire fraud for arranging players to attend universities in exchange for lucrative sneaker endorsement deals.

The pay-for-play scheme unveiled the flawed system that has been in place in college basketball for over a decade. But with the G-League expanding and the addition of two-way contracts, high school athletes can forgo college and head straight to the G-League.

The G-League’s minimum- age requirement is 18. Therefore, a player could enter straight from high school, play professionally, be compensated fairly and be scouted and coached by NBA officials for a year before entering the draft.

Adam Johnson, the sideline reporter for the Santa Cruz Warriors, the Golden State’s G-League affiliate, has covered the G-League for years as a contributor and editor of 2Waysand10Days, an independent site that covers the G-League. He thinks it sparks a major change in the “one and done” era.

From the various angles the two-way contract increases the odds to play basketball in the NBA.

There is currently a 1.1 percent chance of making the NBA from the NCAA. With the addition of the two-way, 50 more players have the chance to make it to the NBA. If players are willing skip out on thousands of dollars and even in some cases millions, this is beneficial. The G-League and The Two-Way are not the only solutions to improving these odds, but they help.

“Rather than go overseas, I’d rather just be in a situation where I’m comfortable and I could build off of it,” said Hicks of the Westchester Knicks. Now, he says, the road to the NBA is “not far.” With the Two-Way, he says, the G-League “is the perfect place for me to develop.”