

IMMIGRANT CONTRIBUTIONS IN THE NBA AND
MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2014 NBA champion San Antonio Spurs are an example of how successful American enterprises today combine native-born and foreign-born talent to compete at the highest level. With 7 foreign-born players, the Spurs led the NBA with the most foreign-born players on their roster. Tony Parker (France), Boris Diaw (France) and Manu Ginobili (Argentina) played alongside Tim Duncan (U.S. Virgin Islands) and Kawhi Leonard (U.S.) to bring the team its 5th NBA championship since 1999.

The San Antonio Spurs are part of a larger trend of globalization in the NBA. In the 2013-14 season, the National Basketball Association (NBA) set a record with 90 international players, representing 20 percent of the players on the opening-night NBA rosters, compared to 21 international players (and 5 percent of rosters) in 1992.

Professional baseball started blending foreign-born players with native-born talent earlier than the NBA. On the 2014 Major League Baseball (MLB) opening-day roster there were 213 foreign-born players, representing 25 percent of the total, an increase of 2 percentage points from an NFAP analysis of MLB rosters performed in 2006. Leading foreign-born baseball players include 2013 American League MVP Miguel Cabrera, 2013 World Series MVP David Ortiz and Texas Rangers pitcher Yu Darvish.



San Antonio Spurs Coach Gregg Popovich (l) with Tony Parker (c) and Manu Ginobili (r).

SAN ANTONIO SPURS AND THE RISE OF FOREIGN-BORN PLAYERS IN THE NBA

Americans invented baseball and basketball. For much of the nation's history the sports were almost exclusively played professionally by native-born Americans – and only white Americans. Both Major League Baseball and the National Basketball Association broke through the color barrier to permit non-white players, most famously Jackie Robinson in 1947. But the rise of foreign-born players came slowly, particularly in the NBA.

As of 1992, “the NBA had only 21 international players on its rosters,” about 5 percent of the NBA at that time.¹ The “Dream Team” featuring Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson and other stars at the 1992 Summer Olympics in Barcelona is credited with boosting the profile of basketball globally and may have served as a catalyst for the rising talent level of international players.

In the 2013-14 season, 90 international players – 20 percent of the total – were on opening-night NBA rosters, a four-fold increase in the proportion of foreign-born players from 1992.² Foreign-born professional athletes generally use temporary visas, such as P or O, that have no numerical limits, and thus avoid the backlogs that can prevent a highly skilled scientist and engineer from gaining, for example, an H-1B visa to work in the United States. Also, many athletes self-petition for green cards to become permanent residents, using the employment-based first or second preference (EB-1 and EB-2), and may avoid the waits of 6 to 10 years, as well as certain bureaucratic procedures, experienced by many talented individuals in the technology and business sectors.³

The San Antonio Spurs led the league with 7 foreign-born players, according to the NBA. Moreover, data on Wins Produced, compiled by BoxScore Geek, indicate the foreign-born players on the Spurs were responsible for 32 of the team's league-leading 62 wins in 2013-14. The leading win producer among foreign-born players was Marco Belinelli, from Italy, with 6.7 wins produced, followed by Manu Ginobili, born in Argentina, with 6 wins produced, with important contributions also from Patty Mills (Australia, 5 wins), Tiago Splitter (Brazil, 4 wins), Boris Diaw (France, 3.8 wins), Tony Parker (France, 3.6 wins), and Cory Joseph (Canada, 2.8 wins).⁴

None of this is to argue that only the foreign-born players contributed to the San Antonio Spurs compiling the NBA's best record and the league championship. The team's two most important players were native-born Kawhi

¹ Mariama Diallo, “International Players' Impact on NBA Grows in Past Two Decades,” Voice of America, February 16, 2011. Percentage calculated based on number of players on NBA rosters in 1992 season, according to Basketball-Reference.com.

² “NBA Tips Off 2013-14 Season With Record International Player Presence,” NBA.com, October 29, 2013. Note: NFAP eliminated two players from the NBA's list, bringing the total number of foreign-born players to 90, since individuals born in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands are U.S. citizens at birth.

³ Immigration and National Act; Jaensch Immigration Law Firm. Professional athletes generally do not have to go through “labor certification” with the U.S. Department of Labor to receive an employment-based green card.

⁴ Data available at BoxScore Geek. For regular season only. Numbers rounded off.

Immigrant Contributions in the NBA and Major League Baseball

Leonard and Tim Duncan, who was born in the U.S. Virgin Islands and is considered a U.S. citizen by birth. But just like it would make little sense for technology companies to refrain from hiring any of the 71 percent of electrical engineering graduate students (or 65 percent of computer science graduate students) who are international students at U.S. universities, it also would be poor business practice for any NBA team to eliminate foreign-born talent from its potential labor pool if it wants to compete at the highest level.⁵

Table 1
San Antonio Spurs: Wins Produced in 2013-14 Season by Foreign-Born Players

Player	Native Country	Wins Produced
Marco Belinelli	Italy	6.7 wins
Manu Ginobili	Argentina	6 wins
Patty Mills	Australia	5 wins
Tiago Splitter	Brazil	4 wins
Boris Diaw	France	3.8 wins
Tony Parker	France (born in Belgium)	3.6 wins
Cory Joseph	Canada	2.8 wins
TOTAL WINS PRODUCED		32 (of 62 team wins, or 52%)

Source: BoxScore Geek, NBA. Numbers rounded off.

MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL

A similar story on the acceptance of foreign-born athletes and their contributions can be seen in Major League Baseball. In 1940, fewer than 2 percent of the players on Major League Baseball rosters were foreign-born. By 1990, the number had climbed to 10 percent.⁶ At the start of the 2014 season, 25 percent of the players on Major League Baseball rosters were foreign-born, a total of 213 players.⁷ (See Appendix.) That represents a higher proportion than the 23 percent recorded in a 2006 NFAP analysis of professional baseball rosters.⁸

Major League Baseball teams, like all employers, seek out employees that will make their companies better able to compete. Even a quick survey of recent awards and current statistics indicates many teams are rewarded for being open to talented individuals without regard to their place of birth.

⁵ National Science Foundation, Survey of Graduate Students and Postdoctorates in Science and Engineering, <https://ncesdata.nsf.gov/webcaspar/>. U.S. students include lawful permanent residents; National Foundation for American Policy analysis.

⁶ Stuart Anderson and L. Brian Andrew, *Coming to America: Immigrants, Baseball and the Contributions of Foreign-Born Players to America's Pastime*, NFAP Policy Brief, National Foundation for American Policy, October 2006.

⁷ "2014 Opening Day Rosters Feature 224 Players Born Outside the U.S.," Press Release, Major League Baseball, April 1, 2014. Note: NFAP excluded the 11 players from Puerto Rico from the MLB list, since individuals born in Puerto Rico are U.S. citizens by birth.

⁸ Stuart Anderson and L. Brian Andrew, *Coming to America: Immigrants, Baseball and the Contributions of Foreign-Born Players to America's Pastime*.

Immigrant Contributions in the NBA and Major League Baseball

Two of the best pitchers in the American League in 2014, as measured by earned run average, are Yu Darvish, with the Texas Rangers, and Masahiro Tanaka, with the New York Yankees, both born in Japan. The two leading hitters for average in the American League in 2014 have been the Seattle Mariners Robinson Cano (Dominican Republic) and the Detroit Tigers Victor Martinez (Venezuela).

In 2013, the American League's Most Valuable Player was awarded for the second consecutive year to Detroit Tigers slugger Miguel Cabrera, born in Venezuela. In the 2013 World Series, David Ortiz, born in the Dominican Republic, batted a remarkable 11 for 16, a .688 batting average, to garner the series' MVP award and lead the Boston Red Sox over the St. Louis Cardinals in 6 games. The Rookie of the Year award in the National League in 2013 went to Florida Marlins pitcher Jose Fernandez, who was born in Cuba.

CONCLUSION: SUBSTANTIAL REVENUE INCREASES FOR NBA AND MLB

NBA revenues have increased substantially over the past 30 years. In the 1982-83 season, NBA revenues were \$118 million, compared to \$4.6 billion for the league's 30 teams in the 2012-13 season, according to *Forbes*.⁹ Similarly, revenues for Major League Baseball rose from \$1.4 billion in 1995 to over \$8 billion in 2013, reports *Forbes*.¹⁰ And there is no evidence the entry of foreign-born talent has lowered the wages of NBA or Major League Baseball players, who have been enjoying record salary levels.

If the National Basketball Association and Major League Baseball had hired more foreign-born players and it resulted in an inferior product, then that would likely be reflected in league revenues. Both leagues rely on the voluntary purchases of tickets (and TV viewership) by consumers, who appear to be fine with foreign-born players on their favorite teams. Revenue figures indicate, it can be argued, that globalization and the ability to hire talent from around the world has benefited the leagues by enhancing the quality of play and attracting new fans and revenues. Being open to talented individuals without regard to their place of birth and combining their abilities with native-born athletes has not been bad for business.

⁹ Kurt Badenhausen, "As Stern Says Goodbye, Knicks, Lakers Set Records As NBA's Most Valuable Teams," *Forbes*, January 22, 2014. Not adjusted for inflation.

¹⁰ Maury Brown, "Major League Baseball Sees Record Revenues Exceed \$8 Billion for 2013," *Forbes*, December 17, 2013. Not adjusted for inflation. Adjusted for inflation the 1995 figure would be approximately \$2.2 billion.

APPENDIX**2013-14 NBA Opening-Night Roster – International Players (90)**

COUNTRY	BIRTHPLACE	NAME		TEAM
Argentina		Carlos	Delfino	Milwaukee Bucks
Argentina		Emanuel "Manu"	Ginobili	San Antonio Spurs
Argentina		Pablo	Prigoni	New York Knicks
Argentina		Luis	Scola	Indiana Pacers
Australia		Aron	Baynes	San Antonio Spurs
Australia		Andrew	Bogut	Golden State Warriors
Australia		Matt	Dellavedova	Cleveland Cavaliers
Australia		Kyrie	Irving	Cleveland Cavaliers
Australia		Patty	Mills	San Antonio Spurs
Bosnia and Herezgovina		Ognjen	Kuzmic	Golden State Warriors
Bosnia and Herezgovina		Mirza	Teletovic	Brooklyn Nets
Brazil		Vitor	Faverani	Boston Celtics
Brazil		Tiago	Splitter	San Antonio Spurs
Brazil		Anderson	Varejao	Cleveland Cavaliers
Brazil		Nene		Washington Wizards
Cameroon		Luc Richard	Mbah a Moute	Sacramento Kings
Canada		Joel	Anthony	Miami Heat
Canada		Anthony	Bennett	Cleveland Cavaliers
Canada		Cory	Joseph	San Antonio Spurs
Canada	South Africa	Steve	Nash	Los Angeles Lakers
Canada		Andrew	Nicholson	Orlando Magic
Canada		Kelly	Olynyk	Boston Celtics
Canada		Robert	Sacre	Los Angeles Lakers
Canada		Tristan	Thompson	Cleveland Cavaliers

Immigrant Contributions in the NBA and Major League Baseball

Congo		Serge	Ibaka	Oklahoma City Thunder
Czech Republic		Jan	Vesely	Washington Wizards
Democratic Republic of the Congo		Bismack	Biyombo	Charlotte Bobcats
Dominican Republic		Francisco	Garcia	Houston Rockets
Dominican Republic		Al	Horford	Atlanta Hawks
France		Nicolas	Batum	Portland Trail Blazers
France		Nando	De Colo	San Antonio Spurs
France		Boris	Diaw	San Antonio Spurs
France		Evan	Fournier	Denver Nuggets
France		Rudy	Gobert	Utah Jazz
France		Ian	Mahinmi	Indiana Pacers
France		Erik	Murphy	Chicago Bulls
France	Belgium	Tony	Parker	San Antonio Spurs
France	French Guiana	Kevin	Seraphin	Washington Wizards
France	Martinique	Ronny	Turiaf	Minnesota Timberwolves
Georgia		Zaza	Pachulia	Milwaukee Bucks
Georgia		Tornike	Shengelia	Brooklyn Nets
Germany		Elias	Harris	Los Angeles Lakers
Germany		Dirk	Nowitzki	Dallas Mavericks
Germany		Dennis	Schroder	Atlanta Hawks
Great Britain	South Sudan	Luol	Deng	Chicago Bulls
Great Britain		Joel	Freeland	Portland Trail Blazers
Greece		Giannis	Antetokounmpo	Milwaukee Bucks
Haiti		Samuel	Dalembert	Dallas Mavericks
Israel		Omri	Casspi	Houston Rockets
Israel		Gal	Mekel	Dallas Mavericks
Italy		Andrea	Bargnani	New York Knicks

Immigrant Contributions in the NBA and Major League Baseball

Italy		Marco	Belinelli	San Antonio Spurs
Italy		Luigi	Datome	Detroit Pistons
Italy		Danilo	Gallinari	Denver Nuggets
Latvia		Andris	Biedrins	Utah Jazz
Lithuania		Jonas	Valanciunas	Toronto Raptors
Lithuania		Donatas	Motiejunas	Houston Rockets
Macedonia		Pero	Antic	Atlanta Hawks
Mexico		Gustavo	Ayon	Atlanta Hawks
Montenegro		Nikola	Pekovic	Minnesota Timberwolves
Montenegro	Switzerland	Nikola	Vucevic	Orlando Magic
New Zealand		Steven	Adams	Oklahoma City Thunder
Nigeria		Festus	Ezeli	Golden State Warriors
Poland		Marcin	Gortat	Washington Wizards
Russia		Sergey	Karasev	Cleveland Cavaliers
Russia		Andrei	Kirilenko	Brooklyn Nets
Russia		Timofey	Mozgov	Denver Nuggets
Russia		Alexey	Shved	Minnesota Timberwolves
Senegal		Gorgui	Dieng	Minnesota Timberwolves
Senegal		Hamady	Ndiaye	Sacramento Kings
Serbia		Nemanja	Nedovic	Golden State Warriors
Serbia		Miroslav	Raduljica	Milwaukee Bucks
Slovenia		Goran	Dragic	Phoenix Suns
Slovenia		Beno	Udrih	New York Knicks
Spain		Jose Manuel	Calderon	Dallas Mavericks
Spain		Victor	Claver	Portland Trail Blazers
Spain		Marc	Gasol	Memphis Grizzlies
Spain		Pau	Gasol	Los Angeles Lakers

Immigrant Contributions in the NBA and Major League Baseball

Spain		Ricky	Rubio	Minnesota Timberwolves
Sweden		Jonas	Jerebko	Detroit Pistons
Sweden		Jeffrey	Taylor	Charlotte Bobcats
Switzerland		Thabo	Sefolosa	Oklahoma City Thunder
Tanzania		Hasheem	Thabeet	Oklahoma City Thunder
Turkey		Omer	Asik	Houston Rockets
Turkey		Ersan	Ilyasova	Milwaukee Bucks
Turkey		Enes	Kanter	Utah Jazz
Turkey		Hidayet "Hedo"	Turkoglu	Orlando Magic
Ukraine		Viacheslav	Kravtsov	Phoenix Suns
Ukraine		Alex	Len	Phoenix Suns
Venezuela		Greivis	Vasquez	Sacramento Kings

Source: NBA. Note: Players from Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands were removed, since individuals born in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands are U.S. citizens at birth.

Foreign-Born Players on 2014 MLB Opening Day Rosters (213)**ARUBA (1)**

Bogaerts, Xander, BOS

AUSTRALIA (2)

Balfour, Grant, TB

Rowland-Smith, Ryan, ARI

BRAZIL (1)

Gomes, Yan, CLE

CANADA (10)

Adduci, James, TEX

Axford, John, CLE

Crain, Jesse, HOU

Henderson, Jim, MIL

Lawrie, Brett, TOR

Martin, Russell, PIT

Morneau, Justin, COL

Paxton, James, SEA

Saunders, Michael, SEA

Votto, Joey, CIN

COLOMBIA (4)

Frieri, Ernesto, LAA

Quintana, Jose, CWS

Solano, Donovan, MIA

Teheran, Julio, ATL

CUBA (19)

Abreu, Jose, CWS

Alonso, Yonder, SD

Bueno, Francisco, KC

Cespedes, Yoenis, OAK

Chapman, Aroldis, CIN

Elias, Roenis, SEA

Escobar, Yunel, TB

Fernandez, Jose, MIA

Garcia, Onelki, LAD

Gonzalez, Miguel, PHI

Grandal, Yasmani, SD

Hechavarria, Adeiny, MIA

Iglesias, Jose, DET

Martin, Leonys, TEX

Nieto, Adrian, CWS

Pena, Brayan, CIN

Puig, Yasiel, LAD

Ramirez, Alexei, CWS

Viciedo, Dayan, CWS

*Immigrant Contributions in the NBA and Major League Baseball***CURAÇAO (5)**

Bernadina, Roger, CIN
Jansen, Kenley, LAD
Profar, Jurickson, TEX
Schoop, Jonathan, BAL
Simmons, Andrelton, ATL

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC (83)

Abad, Fernando, OAK
Alburquerque, AI, DET
Almanzar, Michael, BAL
Almonte, Abraham, SEA
Alvarez, Pedro, PIT
Arias, Joaquin, SF
Aybar, Erick, LAA
Bastardo, Antonio, PHI
Bautista, Jose, TOR
Beltre, Adrian, TEX
Beltre, Engel, TEX
Benoit, Joaquin, SD
Bonifacio, Emilio, CHI
Cabrera, Melky, TOR
Cano, Robinson, SEA
Casilla, Santiago, SF
Castillo, Welington, CHI
Castro, Starlin, CHI
Ciriaco, Pedro, KC
Cleto, Maikel, CWS
Colon, Bartolo, NYM
Cruz, Arnoldi, STL
Cruz, Nelson, BAL
Cueto, Johnny, CIN
De Aza, Alejandro, CWS
Deduno, Samuel, MIN
Encarnacion, Edwin, TOR
Familia, Jeurys, NYM
Figueroa, Pedro, TB
Florimon, Pedro, MIN
Furcal, Rafael, MIA
Garcia, Leury, CWS
German, Gonzalez, NYM
Gomez, Carlos, MIL
Hernandez, Roberto, PHI
Herrera, Kelvin, KC
Jimenez, Ubaldo, BAL
Lagares, Juan, NYM
Lake, Junior, CHI
Liriano, Francisco, PIT
Marmol, Carlos, MIA
Marte, Starling, PIT
Martinez, Carlos, STL

Immigrant Contributions in the NBA and Major League Baseball

Mejia, Jenrry, NYM
Nicasio, Juan, COL
Noesi, Hector, SEA
Nova, Ivan, NYY
Ogando, Alexi, TEX
Ortiz, David, BOS
Oviedo, Juan Carlos, TB
Ozuna, Marcell, MIA
Paulino, Felipe, CWS
Peguero, Francisco, BAL
Peralta, Jhonny, STL
Peralta, Joel, TB
Peralta, Wily, MIL
Perez, Juan, SF
Pimentel, Stolmy, PIT
Pineda, Michael, NYY
Pujols, Albert, LAA
Ramirez, Aramis, MIL
Ramirez, Hanley, LAD
Reyes, Jose, TOR
Rodney, Fernando, SEA
Rodriguez, Wandy, PIT
Rogers, Esmil, TOR
Rosario, Wilin, COL
Salazar, Danny, CLE
Santana, Carlos, CLE
Santiago, Ramon, CIN

Segura, Jean, MIL
Sierra, Moises, TOR
Simon, Alfredo, CIN
Soriano, Alfonso, NYY
Soriano, Rafael, WSH
Strop, Pedro, CHI
Uribe, Juan, LAD
Valverde, Jose, NYM
Ventura, Yordano, KC
Veras, Jose, CHI
Villanueva, Carlos, CHI
Villar, Jonathan, HOU
Volquez, Edinson, PIT

JAPAN (9)

Aoki, Nori, KC
Darvish, Yu, TEX
Fujikawa, Kyuji, CHI
Iwakuma, Hisashi, SEA
Kuroda, Hiroki, NYY
Suzuki, Ichiro, NYY
Tanaka, Masahiro, NYY
Tazawa, Junichi, BOS

Immigrant Contributions in the NBA and Major League Baseball

Uehara, Koji, BOS

MEXICO (9)

De La Rosa, Jorge, COL
Estrada, Marco, MIL
Gallardo, Yovani, MIL
Garcia, Jaime, STL
Gonzalez, Miguel, BAL
Pena, Ramiro, ATL
Perez, Oliver, ARI
Salas, Fernando, LAA
Soria, Joakim, TEX

NICARAGUA (3)

Cabrera, Everth, SD
Lopez, Wilton, COL
Ramirez, Erasmo, SEA

PANAMA (4)

Chen, Bruce, KC
Delgado, Randall, ARI
Ruiz, Carlos, PHI
Tejada, Ruben, NYM

SOUTH KOREA (2)

Choo, Shin-Soo, TEX
Ryu, Hyun-Jin, LAD

TAIWAN (2)

Chen, Wei-Yin, BAL
Wang, Wei-Chung, MIL

VENEZUELA (59)

Adrianza, Ehire, SF
Altuve, Jose, HOU
Alvarez, Henderson, MIA
Amarista, Alexi, SD
Andrus, Elvis, TEX
Arcia, Oswaldo, MIN
Avilan, Luis, ATL
Belisario, Ronald, CWS
Blanco, Gregor, SF
Cabrera, Asdrubal, CLE
Cabrera, Miguel, DET
Callaspo, Alberto, OAK
Carrasco, Carlos, CLE
Cervelli, Francisco, NYY
Chacin, Jhoulys, COL
Chirinos, Robinson, TEX
Doubront, Felix, BOS
Escalona, Edgmer, BAL
Escobar, Alcides, KC
Escobar, Eduardo, MIN

Immigrant Contributions in the NBA and Major League Baseball

Galvis, Freddy, PHI
Garcia, Avisail, CWS
Gomez, Jeanmar, PIT
Gonzalez, Alex, DET
Gonzalez, Carlos, COL
Gonzalez, Marwin, HOU
Gutierrez, J.C., SF
Guzman, Jesus, HOU
Hernandez, Cesar, PHI
Hernandez, Felix, SEA
Herrera, Jonathan, BOS
Infante, Omar, KC
Izturis, Maicer, TOR
Lobaton, Jose, WSH
Machi, Jean, SF
Martinez, Victor, DET
Medina, Yoervis, SEA
Montero, Miguel, ARI
Morales, Franklin, COL
Mujica, Edward, BOS
Navarro, Dioner, TOR
Ortiz, Joseph, TEX
Parra, Gerardo, ARI
Perez, Martin, TEX
Perez, Salvador, KC
Petit, Yusmeiro, SF
Pinto, Josmil, MIN
Prado, Martin, ARI
Ramos, Wilson, WSH
Rodriguez, Francisco, MIL
Rondon, Bruce, DET
Rondon, Hector, CHI
Sanchez, Anibal, DET
Sanchez, Hector, SF
Sandoval, Pablo, SF
Scutaro, Marco, SF
Tabata, Jose, PIT
Torres, Alex, SD
Valbuena, Luis, CHI

Source: Major League Baseball.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR AMERICAN POLICY

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