

Transformation of basketball competitions in Ukraine under martial law

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Abstract. The article examines the transformation of the basketball competition system in Ukraine under martial law. The main factors that influenced the organization of the championships are identified: the destruction of sports infrastructure, the reduction of personnel potential, and the reduction of financial resources of communities. Changes in the format of the Super League and the Higher League competitions in the 2023–2024 and 2024–2025 seasons are analyzed, in particular, the reduction in the number of teams, the introduction of a «points» system, and the use of tournament tables based on the percentage of wins. The dual impact of «points» on the sports process is shown: reducing travel and risks for participants, but at the same time increasing the intensity of games and limiting training time. It is established that the percentage of wins system introduced by the FBU provides a fairer ranking of teams in unequal calendar conditions. It is concluded that the adaptation of the competition format has become a necessary condition for maintaining the continuity of the championships and sports intrigue under martial law.

Keywords: basketball; martial law; «points» system; winning percentage.

Introduction. Military operations always become a difficult test for any state, as they affect all spheres of public life - economy, culture, education and sports. In Ukraine, which has been in a full-scale war for a long time, the issue of holding sports competitions acquires special importance and at the same time causes a lot of discussion.

On the one hand, war creates serious risks for the safety of athletes, organizers and spectators. Air raids, missile attacks, restrictions on mass events force to review the formats of competitions or completely abandon them. Often sports facilities are destroyed, and sports funding is reduced in favor of defense needs. In such conditions, holding competitions seems inexpedient or even dangerous. On the other hand, sport in wartime performs an extremely important social and psychological function. It helps people maintain faith in a normal life, supports the morale of the population and the military, and contributes to the unity of society. Ukrainian athletes who continue to train and compete become symbols of the nation's resilience and indomitability. Their victories in international arenas draw the world's attention to Ukraine's struggle and strengthen its image.

The huge tragedy in Ukraine, caused by military aggression, shattered not only peaceful everyday life, but also the sports plans of many talented Ukrainian athletes. Military events became a transformative stage in their careers, forcing them to solve urgent issues of security and the future (Gorodnya et al., 2024).

The Ministry of Youth and Sports of Ukraine (<https://mms.gov.ua>) by its order

containing conditions and restrictions allowed the holding of all-Ukrainian sports events and training camps under martial law. The Ministry of Youth and Sports of Ukraine allowed the organization of all-Ukrainian sports competitions and training camps in certain areas in compliance with the security conditions stipulated by the legislation on martial law.

The war in Ukraine has had a significant negative impact on the development of sports activities, creating serious threats to the safety of participants in the sports process and complicating the organization of competitions. Missile danger, destruction of infrastructure and restrictions on movement have led to a reduction in the number of sports events and interruption of the educational and training process. A significant part of athletes and coaches has been mobilized or has lost the opportunity to continue their professional activities (Isichko, 2023).

At the same time, a comprehensive approach is needed to preserve and develop sports in wartime, which includes ensuring security, financial and psychological support for athletes, restoration of infrastructure and close cooperation between state structures, sports organizations, the public and international partners. Only joint efforts of all stakeholders can ensure the functioning and further development of Ukrainian sports in wartime (Boreyko & Azarenkova, 2023).

Holding sports competitions in Ukraine during the war requires strict adherence to safety rules. Most events are held without spectators or with a limited number of them, with mandatory shelters and clear evacuation plans. Online broadcasts are actively used, allowing fans to support their teams remotely without being exposed to danger (Silaei & Gancheva, 2022).

Thus, sports in Ukraine during hostilities are not just competitions for medals or records. It is a form of cultural resistance, a way to preserve national identity and demonstrate to the world that even in the most difficult times the country continues to live, fight and move forward. Holding sports competitions in such conditions is evidence of the strength of the spirit of the Ukrainian people and their desire for future peace.

Purpose of the study. To analyze the features of holding basketball competitions in Ukraine under martial law.

Materials and methods of research. Research methods: analysis of scientific and methodological literature, content analysis. Research results and their discussion. Martial law in Ukraine significantly affected the organization and holding of basketball competitions, necessitating the systematic adaptation of sports institutions. With the beginning of the full-scale invasion in February 2022, all official tournaments were suspended. The resumption of the competitive process became possible only after the implementation of special security protocols that ensured the minimization of risks for participants.

The consequences of the war were manifested in the destruction of sports infrastructure, the reduction of personnel potential due to the mobilization of coaches and athletes, as well as in the reduction of financial capabilities of local communities. This led to a limitation of resources for the development of basketball and complicated the organization of championships.

Analysis of the Ukrainian championships among men's teams of the Super League and the Higher League in the 2023–2024 and 2024–2025 seasons (<https://fbu.ua/>) showed a decrease in the number of participants and a modification of the format. In the Super League, the number of clubs was reduced to 8–10, the regular championship was held in four rounds with subsequent play-off series. In the Higher League, the number of teams was also reduced, and the competition system provided for an even distribution of home and away matches, which ensured a balance of the load.

Key structural changes include:

- reduction in the number of teams due to financial difficulties and the presence of clubs in the combat zone;
- introduction of the «Dublin» format, which allows for tours in relatively safe cities with minimal travel;
- correction of the tournament table system, where team positions are determined by the percentage of wins, which ensures a fairer assessment of results in conditions of an unequal number of matches played.

Basketball competitions in Ukraine in the 2023–2024 and 2024–2025 seasons were held mainly in the central and western regions of the country (Kyiv, Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv, Cherkasy, Dnipro), while cities under increased threat (Kharkiv, Mariupol, Kherson, etc.) temporarily did not host matches. Adapting the championship system to martial law conditions preserved the sporting intrigue, while ensuring the safety of participants. The key innovation was the introduction of the «ball» format - tournament blocks, within which several teams gathered in one city and held a series of matches over 2–4 days. Usually, four teams participated in the «ball», which played 1–2 matches against each other. The hosts were clubs that had the appropriate infrastructure and security guarantees (in particular, in Kyiv, Dnipro, Ivano-Frankivsk). In the event of an aggravation of the military situation, the «ball» was moved to another city or canceled.

The use of «points» had a dual impact on the sports process. On the one hand, it helped reduce the number of moves, save financial resources, and reduce risks for teams. This format allowed players to maintain the rhythm of the game, concentrate on matches, and reduce stress levels in an unstable situation. On the other hand, the intensity of games in the «bubble» (2 matches in 2–3 days) created an uneven load, which could lead to overfatigue and injuries.

In addition, the reduction in training time limited opportunities for technical and tactical training, and the lack of support from local fans in safe cities affected the emotional state of athletes.

The «points» system became a forced adaptation to the conditions of martial law, which ensured the continuity of the championships, but at the same time changed the dynamics of the training and game process, combining both positive and negative consequences for the development of basketball in Ukraine.

In the 2023–2024 season, the Dnipro Super League team demonstrated an example of effective adaptation to the «points» format. Thanks to competent management of game and recovery cycles, the club managed to maintain stable sports form, which was reflected in high results – 26 wins in 27 matches of the regular

championship. Such an example shows that functioning in «points» requires specialized physical training methods that take into account the intensity of matches, limited time for training and psychological stress on athletes.

A feature of the championships during the war period was the formation of the standings by the percentage of wins, and not by the number of points. This was due to the uneven number of matches played due to postponements and cancellations. The four best teams of the regular championship reached the playoffs, and the series were held up to two wins. The calculation formula was as follows:

The use of this system allowed for an objective ranking of teams, even with different numbers of matches played (for example, 20 vs. 16). In the 2023–2024 and 2024–2025 seasons, it was the percentage of wins that determined the participants in the playoffs, which made it impossible for a team with more matches to occupy a higher position despite lower efficiency.

It is worth noting that the percentage of wins system was introduced by the Basketball Federation of Ukraine (FBU) back in 2021 as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and later became a necessary adaptation in the conditions of martial law. It differs significantly from the classic model of pre-war seasons, ensuring a fairer distribution of places in the standings and preserving sports intrigue.

Before the introduction of martial law in Ukraine, the classic point system was used: for a win, a team received 2 points, for a loss - 1 point. Ranking was carried out by the total number of points, regardless of the number of matches played. The disadvantage of this model was that clubs with a greater number of games played could occupy higher positions in the standings even with a lower percentage of wins. This created biased situations, especially with an uneven competition calendar.

In wartime conditions, when matches are often postponed or canceled, the Basketball Federation of Ukraine introduced a system of forming the standings by the percentage of wins. This approach allows for a flexible response to changes in the calendar and provides a fairer reflection of the real efficiency of the teams.

Conclusions.

1. Martial law in Ukraine significantly transformed the system of basketball competitions, requiring the adaptation of organizational, financial and personnel resources. The main structural changes were: reducing the number of teams, introducing the «points» format and using tournament tables by percentage of victories.
2. The introduced changes became a forced but necessary adaptation that ensured the continuity of the championships and the preservation of sports intrigue, while creating new challenges for the training and competitive process.

Prospects for further research lie in analyzing the effectiveness of the game actions of the teams of the leading basketball clubs of Ukraine during martial law.

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