



SMARTABASE
BY FUSION



ALBA BERLIN

Success Story

About ALBA BERLIN

Founded in 1989, ALBA BERLIN has become the most popular basketball club in Germany and one of the premier franchises in European basketball. With an overall record of 11 German League titles, 11 German Cup titles and winning the Korac Cup in 1995, the club is among the most successful professional sports teams in Germany.

Its men's team competes in the German easyCredit BBL and the Turkish Airlines EuroLeague, continuing a 32-year-long streak of playing in European competitions and qualifying for the German playoffs every season.

From season 2019-20 until this year, ALBA BERLIN won the German national title three times in a row. Not only successful at the male professional level, ALBA BERLIN is proud to have the largest youth and women's department in Germany, being regularly awarded for their athletic achievements and excellent development standards. Its women's team so far competed in the German second league and has now been promoted to first division. Norbert Opitz is a youth coach for the club and leads their human performance data program.



Opportunity

Coming off yet another German league title, ALBA BERLIN has proven its ability to succeed in the present. To help sow the seeds for continued success in the future, the coaching and performance staff recognized an opportunity to have a single athlete management system (AMS) tracking players all the way from developmental youth teams up to the pro level. ALBA BERLIN saw that collecting more data on its athletes, centralizing it in an AMS, and making it available to coaches and domain experts would also improve load management, injury monitoring, and more. On the operations side, the club also wanted a way to bring together disparate data sources so its logistics were streamlined, organized, and efficient.



Challenge

With more than 160 basketball players spanning the entire development spectrum from boys' and girls' teams in every age group up to its professional men's and women's squads, ALBA BERLIN has many head and assistant coaches, each with their own method of doing things. How the coaching staff collected data on their players ranged from using spreadsheets to writing handwritten notes. This made it difficult to standardize how information was collected, presented, and acted upon. For operations, the biggest challenge was collating data on everything from player and coach interviews, travel itineraries, practice and game schedules, and more and making this available to everyone who needed it.



Solution

Smartabase is enabling ALBA BERLIN's coaches to log detailed, session-by-session practice notes in a central repository, rather than relying on spreadsheets and notebooks. For load monitoring, subjective data from a wellness questionnaire is combined with practice data to create a personalized acute-to-chronic ratio. The club has also completed the technical requirements for enhanced injury monitoring. When this goes live next season, everyone from team doctors, physiotherapists, and other medical staff to coaches and domain experts like sports psychologists will be able to see detailed injury profiles on each player.



Impact

Coaching and performance staff are able to look at how the details of each practice relate to on-court performance, injuries, and player development milestones. The club will continue to progress in each of these areas – plus player scouting – as it continues to log more detailed player health/availability information, testing results, anthropological data, and more. Smartabase has also helped personnel throughout the club become more organized, with players no longer missing media interviews and medical appointments because their schedules are kept up to date and individualized calendars are easily accessible via Smartabase.



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✉ sales@fusionsport.com

in Fusion Sport Inc



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The Opportunity



When we first decided to implement Smartabase, we configured it for our men's team. But then we saw it would be useful for the under-16s, under-19s, and women's team too.

- Norbert Opitz, Youth Coach and Data & Analytics Lead, ALBA BERLIN

ALBA BERLIN has a proud history as the most successful club in German basketball. To continue this rich tradition of winning, it isn't just the wins and losses of the men's and women's pro teams that matter, but also the continual development of young players who may eventually replace them. One of the barriers the club faced was a lack of continuity in how data was shared among its youth teams. This was highlighted by the fact that the club retained no data information about its two best youth players in recent memory – Moritz (Moe) Wagner and his brother Franz, who was named to the NBA All-Rookie Team.

"The Wagner brothers played for the University of Michigan and now in the NBA with the Orlando Magic, yet we can't compare them to anyone because there's no data from their time here," said

ALBA BERLIN youth coach Norbert Opitz. "Within our youth program, when the season is over, a player might go from the under-16 team to the under-19 squad. So he's going to have a new coach. This is the perfect way to lose data. If I was his previous coach, I would know that he had certain injuries, problems at school, and his parents were doing this or that. But this doesn't necessarily mean that the next coach will have this knowledge."

Opitz added, "We can hopefully develop more good players, but to do so we need to know where they're coming from. Information about each player shouldn't be limited to just one coach, and if he gets hurt, you shouldn't have to contact 10 other coaches to get a clear picture about them – you should just be able to go into Smartabase."



The Challenge



We're always trying to develop junior players for our own men's team, but we were missing key data to compare them. We needed a way to capture reliable information so we could see their injury history and everything else about them.

One of the reasons for player development data falling through the cracks at ALBA BERLIN is that each coach had their own way of managing data. "Some coaches captured player information on spreadsheets, some on paper, and others not at all," Opitz said. This lack of standardization made it challenging to monitor load, manage practice details, scout new players, and track injuries.

The club also saw opportunities to improve communication, scheduling, and other elements of its operations. When ALBA BERLIN players had an upcoming appointment, a coach or

other staff member used to send them a notification via WhatsApp. The trouble is that they might not use this app very often or could read a message and then forget to put the event on their calendar. As a result, they sometimes didn't show up, creating more work on the back end around rescheduling.

Similarly, staff members struggled to find the information they needed to manage travel arrangements, media relations, and other logistics because it wasn't available in a central location.



The Solution

“ Smartabase has started to become our one place for all basketball-related data. We have big steps to take in front of us, but now the foundation is set.



After evaluating multiple systems, ALBA BERLIN chose the Smartabase athlete management system (AMS) to support player development. Since the initial selection, the club recognized the benefit of using the platform as a single source for practice planning, load management, scouting, injury monitoring, scheduling, player communication, and more.

Practice Planning

ALBA BERLIN's coaches are using Smartabase to create complete practice plans. The platform also allows them to record all the information for every session that might be useful in the future. This includes the total number of minutes that each squad member logged, the breakdown between different drills (like 3-on-3), and player roles. Such details are presented in a convenient practice dashboard.



Load Management

A wellness questionnaire that every player fills in daily helps coaches monitor load. This provides a fuller picture of each squad member's readiness and preparedness for training and competition and also lets coaches know whether their assessment of intensity and workload is accurate or not. After practice, each player grades the session from one to 10 on a rate of perceived exertion (RPE) scale, while the coach enters the duration of the practice.

“Smartabase multiplies time by intensity and then shows where the total is on a chart of chronic work ratio,” Opitz said. “It helps us take the first step in deciding what we’re doing right and wrong and helps us monitor how much load we’re providing to players who are coming back from injury. Having this full data set also helps the coach to confirm their initial feeling about how much load they can expose players to and whether certain people are actually getting too tired or not.”



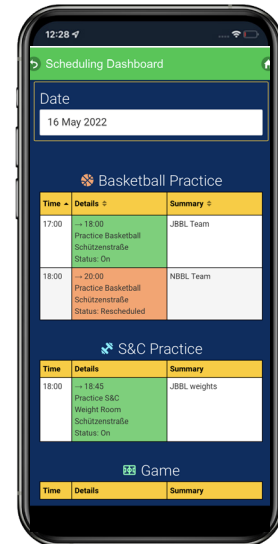


Player Scouting

In addition to developing its own young players through its developmental teams, ALBA BERLIN is always on the lookout for external talent that could strengthen its squad. Rather than keeping scouting reports and other documents in spreadsheets or as hard copies, the team is now able to access it in one convenient location. “We use Smartabase in our scouting procedures when we want to assess new players,” Opitz said. “We have a database in there, so everyone involved in that evaluation process has access to all the data they need.”

Scheduling and Logistics

Instead of relying on the old way of using WhatsApp to communicate with players about their upcoming commitments, ALBA BERLIN’s staff has switched over to Smartabase. “All communication between the club and our players – including their travel, game and practice schedules and media, sponsor, and medical appointments – is now in Smartabase,” Opitz said.



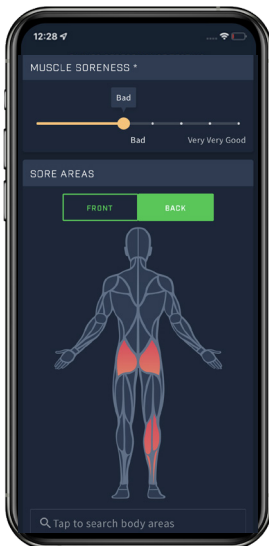
Injury Reporting

The next significant phase of ALBA BERLIN’s athlete data management project will be injury monitoring. This will enable the club’s sports scientists to identify trends, while coaches and medical staff focus more on the day-to-day injury status of players who are hurt.

“We want to make sure every injury is recorded in a smarter way,” Opitz said. “The Smartabase dashboard I created will allow coaches to see how many days, practices, and games a player has missed, whether it’s an acute injury or an ongoing issue, and all the other information we need to keep players on track. We’ll also show treatment phases so that we can better connect injuries to treatment. Smartabase will also run calculations so that we can see the big picture, like how many injuries are sustained for every 1,000 hours of practice. This will be our new standard by the beginning of next season.”

Once ALBA BERLIN rolls out its injury monitoring initiative with the help of Smartabase, Opitz believes that the system’s data visualization and reporting tools will help give coaches the up-to-date information they need to make informed player selection decisions in the moment. It could also enable them to get more detailed information about an individual’s injury history.

“An extra injury report could show coaches the results of the wellness questionnaire, like how many times somebody has had problems in certain areas and if it’s just a minor complaint, how it develops over time,” he said. “This is something our coaches want to have information about on a daily basis, and they want to understand it afterward.”





The Impact



Before, coaches used to wonder if what they were feeling about player load was accurate or just a feeling. Now we have proof in the data with Smartabase.

When trying to manage load, Opitz shared that ALBA BERLIN's coaches used to just make adjustments during practices based on what they were seeing the players do. Whereas now, they can combine their years of expertise with data-driven insights. Even so, Opitz sees even more potential with the data, "To get the full benefit, we need to use this information to look to the future, predict what's going to happen, and be better prepared than old-school coaches ever could have been."

This long-range approach also extends to how the practice data ALBA BERLIN is logging could be used to further its youth development. "I sat down with the other coaches to find out what kind of information we might want to see about our practices after the season ended," he said. "If a player isn't developing as we'd hoped, we can look back at all this practice data in Smartabase to try and find answers. It's allowing us to store as much information about practices as possible that could help us in the future."

Looking ahead at how ALBA BERLIN can extend the use of Smartabase, Opitz sees potential for gathering, visualizing, and acting upon athlete information gleaned from its younger players as they progress through the development system toward the professional ranks. "Going into year two with Smartabase next season, we'll collect even more data from players aged 14 and up," he said.

One of the reasons that ALBA BERLIN is utilizing Smartabase in ways that go far beyond what the club initially intended is that Opitz took advantage of Fusion Sport's comprehensive client education program.

"I did the Smartabase Certification Course at the beginning of the COVID-19 lockdown here," he said. "It enabled me to do a lot of things on my own, which I am quite proud of, and I have the final approval to make sure everything is built the right way. I had a high interest in testing things out on my own, and then if I needed anything, our Fusion Sport consultant was a big help."

As Opitz and his colleagues continue expanding the scope of their athlete and organizational data management project, he sees how Smartabase will become a single source of truth for the entire club, from the youth development program up to the men's and women's pro teams and on into the front and back offices. "We've taken a good first step in increasing awareness of what our needs are and how we can use data to identify problems, challenges, and good development practices," he said. "Smartabase is helping us see what is working well and how we can improve in other areas. The second step is having one place where all data is for everybody. We have the medical and organizational pieces in place – all that's missing is the performance part, which is what's coming next."

All of this fits with ALBA BERLIN's strong commitment to optimizing its players' growth at every stage of their career, from the moment they join the club's junior ranks to the time that they either represent the men's or women's pro teams, play college basketball in the US, or compete at the highest level elsewhere. "It's my vision that in the next 10 years, we'll have anthropological and testing data, injury history, load exposure – a full history of every player," Opitz said. "Smartabase will allow us to compare them, see what we did to develop them into the players they become, and form a complete picture. In my eyes, this should be our biggest goal."



About



Fusion Sport

sales@fusionsport.com

fusionsport.com/contact-us

A global company founded in Brisbane, Australia in 2003 with international headquarters in Colorado and London, Fusion Sport is a global leader in using data to optimize human performance. The company's performance and analytics platform, Smartabase, is the source of truth for national sporting federations, Olympic committees, many of the world's highest-profile sporting teams, military research and operational wings, and performing arts organizations. To discuss how we can help you realize the full potential of your data and improve human performance, health, and wellness, contact us at sales@fusionsport.com.



 sales@fusionsport.com

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