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Where the game begins: home court advantage and performance contexts in female youth basketball leagues


Dónde empieza el juego: ventaja de jugar en casa y contextos de rendimiento en ligas juveniles femeninas de baloncesto

Onde o jogo começa: vantagem de jogar em casa e contextos de desempenho nas ligas juvenis de basquete feminino

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ABSTRACT

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study was to research on the extent of home court advantage (HA) and the percentage of home wins (HW), and to compare both metrics between different age categories (U14, U16 and U18) and the levels of ability in female youth basketball teams. **METHODOLOGY:** Data were gathered from the Madrid Basketball Federation over five seasons (2018–2019 through 2023–2024), analyzing a total 545 teams over three age categories: 178 U14 teams, 183 U16 teams and 184 U18 teams. Games without audience and the 2020–2021 season were not taken into account. Through a two-step cluster analysis, teams were classified according to ability into five groups: Foundational, Development, Competitive, High Performance, and Élite. **RESULTS:** The team's ability had significant impact both on HA and HW ($p < 0.001$). Foundational teams showed significantly lower values of HA (50.0%) and HW (10.0%) when compared to groups of greater ability, whereas Élite teams reached the highest HW values (88.8%). Across categories, significant differences were observed in HA, with values increasing from U14 (50.0%) to U16 (53.9%) and U18 (54.2%), which indicates a small increase consistent with age, whereas no significant differences were found in HW. **CONCLUSION:** The team's ability, rather than the age category, was identified as the major factor impacting HA and HW. Foundational teams showed the lowest HA and HW values; Development teams reached the highest HA, and Élite teams achieved the highest HW. These findings indicate that the team's ability plays a decisive role in the two performance results under study, whereas age category has only a limited influence.

KEYWORDS: performance, statistical analysis in sports, basketball games, group sports.

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RESUMEN

OBJETIVO: Este estudio tuvo por objetivo investigar la magnitud de la ventaja de jugar en casa (en inglés, HA) y del porcentaje de victorias como local (en inglés, HW), y comparar ambas métricas entre las diferentes categorías de edad (U14, U16 y U18) y los niveles de habilidad de los equipos en el baloncesto femenino de formación. **METODOLOGÍA:** Se recopilaron datos de la Federación de Baloncesto de Madrid a lo largo de cinco temporadas (2018–2019 a 2023–2024), analizando un total de 545 equipos distribuidos en tres categorías de edad: 178 equipos U14, 183 equipos U16 y 184 equipos U18. Se excluyeron los partidos sin espectadores y la temporada 2020–2021. Los equipos fueron clasificados por habilidad mediante un análisis de clústeres en dos pasos en cinco grupos: Fundacionales, en Desarrollo, Competitivos, de Alto Rendimiento y de Élite. **RESULTADOS:** La habilidad del equipo impactó significativamente tanto en HA como en HW ($p < .001$). Los equipos Fundacionales mostraron valores significativamente más bajos de HA (50.0 %) y HW (10.0 %) en comparación con los grupos de mayor habilidad, mientras que los equipos de Élite alcanzaron los valores más altos de HW (88.8 %). Entre categorías, se observaron diferencias significativas en HA, con valores que aumentaron de U14 (50.0 %) a U16 (53.9 %) y U18 (54.2 %), lo que indica un incremento pequeño pero consistente con la edad, mientras que no se encontraron diferencias significativas en HW. La habilidad del equipo, más que la categoría de edad, se identificó como el principal factor que influye en HA y HW. **CONCLUSIÓN:** Los equipos Fundacionales mostraron los valores más bajos de HA y HW, los equipos en Desarrollo alcanzaron la mayor HA y los equipos de Élite lograron la mayor HW. Estos hallazgos indican que la habilidad del equipo desempeña un papel decisivo en los dos resultados de rendimiento estudiados, mientras que la categoría de edad tiene solo una influencia limitada.

PALABRAS CLAVE: desempeño, análisis estadístico en deportes, juegos de básquetbol, deportes grupales.

RESUMO

OBJETIVO: Este estudo teve como objetivo investigar a magnitude da vantagem de jogar em casa (em inglês, HA) e da porcentagem de vitórias em casa (em inglês, HW), além de comparar ambas as métricas entre as diferentes categorias etárias (Sub-14, Sub-16 e Sub-18) e os níveis de habilidade das equipes no basquete feminino de formação. **METODOLOGIA:** Foram coletados dados da Federação de Basquete de Madrid ao longo de cinco temporadas (2018–2019 a 2023–2024), analisando um total de 545 times distribuídos em três categorias etárias: 178 equipes sub-14, 183 equipes sub-16 e 184 equipes sub-18. Foram excluídas partidas sem espectadores e a temporada 2020–2021. As equipes foram classificadas por habilidade em uma análise de cluster em duas etapas em cinco grupos: Fundadoras, em Desenvolvimento, Competitivo, Alto Desempenho e Elite. **RESULTADOS:** A habilidade da equipe impactou significativamente tanto em HA quanto HW ($p < 0,001$). As equipes Fundadoras apresentaram valores significativamente menores de HA (50,0%) e HW (10,0%) em comparação com grupos de Alto Desempenho, enquanto as equipes Elite alcançaram os maiores valores de HW (88,8%). Entre as categorias, foram observadas diferenças significativas em HA, com valores aumentando de Sub-14 (50,0%) para Sub-16 (53,9%) e Sub-18 (54,2%), indicando um aumento pequeno, mas consistente, com a idade, enquanto não foram encontradas diferenças significativas em HW. **CONCLUSÃO:** A

habilidade do time, e não a faixa etária, foi identificada como o principal fator que influencia em HA e em HW. As equipes Fundadoras apresentaram os menores valores de HA e HW, as equipes em Desenvolvimento alcançaram o maior HA, e as equipes Elite alcançaram o maior HW. Essas constatações indicam que a habilidade da equipe desempenha um papel decisivo nos dois resultados de desempenho estudados, enquanto a faixa etária tem influência limitada.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: desempenho, análise estatística em esportes, jogos de basquete, esportes em grupo.

1. Introduction

The concept of home-court advantage (HA) is well-recognized among basketball players and coaches as a significant factor in competitive games (Inan, [2020](#); Smith, [2005](#)). Research indicates that basketball demonstrates a particularly pronounced HA compared to many other sports (Pollard et al., [2017](#)). This phenomenon has been consistently observed across various basketball leagues (Alonso et al., [2022](#); Pollard & Gómez Ruano, [2007](#)) typically measured as the proportion of home victories relative to a team's total wins throughout a season (Alonso et al., [2022](#)). Alongside HA, home win percentage (HW) focuses exclusively on the success of teams during games played at home (Alonso et al., [2022](#)).

The factors contributing to HA and HW include familiarity with the playing environment, the motivational boost from supportive crowds, the potential influence of spectators on referees' decisions (Nevill & Holder, [1999](#)), minimized travel fatigue, and the psychological comfort of competing in familiar surroundings. These elements collectively enhance team confidence and performance in home settings (Pollard et al., [2017](#); Pollard & Gomez, [2014](#)).

Understanding the phenomenon of HA and HW in youth female basketball is critical for advancing our comprehension of the underlying factors that contribute to team performance. Previous literature attributes HA to various factors, such as travel fatigue (Alonso Pérez-Chao, Nieto-Acevedo, et al., [2024](#); Carter, [2015](#)), crowd influence (Alonso-Pérez-Chao et al., [2024](#)), and familiarity with the playing environment (Gómez & Pollard, [2011](#)). However, studying youth categories in contexts where travel is negligible and crowd influence is minimal allows us to isolate the effect of familiarity with the facility.

This analysis is particularly important because it provides insights into how psychological and environmental factors influence team performance at developmental stages. In youth basketball, identifying the extent to which HA and HW vary across categories and skill levels can help basketball practitioners design better training and preparation strategies tailored to the specific needs of different age groups and performance levels. This study also addresses a gap in the literature by focusing on youth female athletes. In this regard, the objective of this study was to investigate the extent of HA and HW and to compare both metrics across age categories and team ability levels in female youth basketball teams.

We hypothesized that HA and HW would differ among the age categories, with younger teams (U14 and U16) showing higher HA and HW compared to the U18 teams. Furthermore, based on prior studies, we expected that HA would be more evident among teams with lower performance levels, while higher-performing teams would demonstrate superior HW (Alonso Pérez-Chao, Nieto-Acevedo, et al., [2024](#); Alonso Pérez-Chao, Portes, et al., [2023](#)).

2. Methods

Sample

Data were collected from the Madrid Basketball Federation. The dataset covered five regular seasons (from the 2018–2019 season to the 2023–2024 season) excluding pre-season games, playoffs games, and games played without spectators due to pandemic-related restrictions. In these leagues, groups are mainly formed according to previous season results, ensuring balance home and away schedules but still allowing teams of different levels to compete against each other. All data from the 2020–2021 season were excluded, as crowd attendance was prohibited during that period. The final dataset consisted of 545 team samples distributed across three age categories: 178 U14 teams, 183 U16 teams and 184 U18 teams.

Procedures

Data were obtained from a publicly available website (www.fbm.es, accessed on 15 November 2024). The collected variables comprised season year, category (U14, U16, and U18), number of home wins, away wins, total wins, total games played, and total home games per team for each season. These data were compiled into customized Microsoft Excel spreadsheets (version 16.0, Microsoft Corporation, Redmond, WA, USA) for subsequent analysis. Calculations were then performed within these spreadsheets to determine the HA and HW for each team across all seasons. Specifically, HA (%) was computed as $[(\text{total home wins} / \text{total wins}) \times 100]$ (Alonso et al., [2022](#); Pollard & Gómez Ruano, [2015](#)), while HW (%) was calculated as $[(\text{total home wins} / \text{total home games}) \times 100]$ (Gómez & Pollard, [2011](#)). For example, the HA for a team that won 10 games at home and 10 games at away venues would be equal to $[(10/20) \times 100 = 50\%]$ (Alonso et al., [2022](#)). Teams were additionally classified based on their ability for each season, with team ability determined by calculating the win percentage over the full season (for example, a team winning 30 out of 36 games would have a win percentage of $30/36 = 83.3\%$) (Alonso et al., [2022](#); Alonso Pérez-Chao, Nieto-Acevedo, et al., [2024](#)). In this way, a two-step cluster analysis was used to stratify teams according to ability into five different groups (average silhouette = 0.6) as follows: **Foundational teams** (win percentage = $8.5\% \pm 6.2\%$, $n=55$ teams or 10.1% of total dataset), **Developing teams** (win percentage = $29.1\% \pm 5.8\%$, $n=114$ teams or 20.9% of total dataset), **Competitive teams** (win percentage = $45.4\% \pm 4.2\%$, $n=137$ teams or 25.1% of total dataset), **High-Performance teams** (win percentage = $61.7\% \pm 5.4\%$, $n=142$ teams or 26.1% of total dataset), **Elite teams** (win percentage = $85.5\% \pm 8.1\%$, $n=97$ teams or 17.8% of total dataset).

Statistical analysis

A Shapiro-Wilk test was employed to assess the normality (Ghasemi & Zahediasl, [2012](#)). A descriptive analysis was performed for all variables, reporting the median \pm interquartile range (IQR) for non-parametric data (HA and HW). Additionally, the coefficient of variation (CV %) was calculated for all continuous variables. To assess differences between categories (U14, U16, U18) and team ability levels (Foundational, Developing, Competitive, High-Performance, and Elite teams), the Kruskal-Wallis test was applied. When significant differences were detected, pairwise comparisons were conducted using Dunn's test with Holm adjustment for multiple testing. Effect sizes were calculated using epsilon-squared (ϵ^2) for the Kruskal-Wallis test and rank-biserial correlation (r_{rb}) for pairwise comparisons to quantify the magnitude of the effects. The significance threshold for all statistical tests was set at $p < 0.05$.

Descriptive statistics and inferential analyses were carried out using JASP (version 0.18), with IBM SPSS for Windows (version 23, IBM Corporation, Armonk, NY, USA) also employed for statistical procedures.

3. Results

The Shapiro-Wilk test revealed that both HA and HW did not follow a normal distribution across categories and team ability levels (all $p < 0.05$). Descriptive statistics for HA and HW according to age category and team ability are presented in [Table 1](#) (López García et al., 2026).

Table 1.

Descriptive analysis of home-court advantage (HA) and home win percentage (HW) according to category and team ability.

Variables	HA		HW		
	Median (IQR)	CV	Median (IQR)	CV	
Category	U14	50.0 (9.28)	29.9 %	50.0 (40.0)	48.8%
	U16	53.85 (10.0)*	29.6%	50.0 (30.0)	44.9%
	U18	54.20 (10.0)*	29.0%	50.0 (30.0)	44.8%
Team ability	Foundational teams	50.0 (66.67)	85.2%	10.0 (20.0)*	119.7%
	Developing teams	57.14 (20.24)	25.7%	30.0 (10.0)*	30.4%
	Competitive teams	55.56 (10.0)	15.6%	50.0 (15.56)*	17.3%
	High-Performance teams	53.85 (10.99)	14.3%	66.67 (10.0)*	15.3%
	Elite teams	50.0 (5.57)	8.80%	88.89 (10.0)*	11.4%

Note: Significant values ($p < 0.05$) are shown in bold and marked with*. Source: the authors.

Across age categories (U14, U16, and U18), the Kruskal-Wallis test revealed significant differences in HA ($H(2) = 8.72$, $p = 0.013$, $\epsilon^2 = 0.016$), while no significant differences were found in HW ($H(2) = 0.42$, $p = 0.811$, $\epsilon^2 < 0.001$). Post-hoc analyses showed that U14 teams had lower HA than U16 and U18 teams, presented in [Table 2](#). Moreover, the distribution of HA across ability levels showed a non-linear pattern, with Foundational and Elite teams presenting the lowest HA values, while Developing teams reached the highest values. In contrast, HW displayed a progressive increase according to ability level, with Elite teams achieving the highest values ([Table 1](#)).

Regarding team ability, differences in the HA were observed ($H(4) = 22.39$, $p < 0.001$, $\epsilon^2 = 0.041$) and in HW ($H(4) = 450.37$, $p < 0.001$, $\epsilon^2 = 0.828$). Post-hoc comparisons revealed differences across ability levels, as reported in [Table 2](#).

Table 2.
Post-hoc Dunn's test results for HA and HW according to category and team ability.

Comparison	HA		HW	
	p_{holm}	r_{rb}	p_{holm}	r_{rb}
U14 vs U16	0.030*	0.145	1.000	0.028
U14 vs U18	0.022*	0.163	1.000	0.038
U16 vs U18	0.810	0.012	1.000	0.011
Foundations teams vs Developing teams	0.271	0.135	< .001*	0.841
Foundations teams vs Competitive teams	0.843	0.023	< .001*	0.961
Foundations teams vs High-Performance teams	0.871	0.005	< .001*	0.964
Foundations teams vs Elite teams	0.387	0.051	< .001*	0.977
Developing teams vs Competitive teams	0.453	0.149	< .001*	0.737
Developing teams vs High-Performance teams	0.038*	0.218	< .001*	0.971
Developing teams vs Elite teams	< .001*	0.321	< .001*	1.000
Competitive teams vs High-Performance teams	0.594	0.113	< .001*	0.754
Competitive teams vs Elite teams	0.012*	0.278	< .001*	0.999
High-Performance teams vs Elite teams	0.271	0.203	< .001*	0.876

Note: Significant values ($p < 0.05$) are shown in bold and marked with*. Source: the authors.

4. Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the extent of HA and HW and to compare both metrics across age categories and team ability levels in female youth basketball teams. The main findings were: (1) team ability was strongly associated with differences in HA and HW, with Foundational teams showing the lowest values in HA and HW, Developing teams reaching the highest HA, and Elite teams achieving the highest HW; and (2) small but significant differences in HA were observed across categories, with U14 showing slightly lower values than U16 and U18 teams, while no significant differences were found in HW across categories.

The findings of this study revealed a bell-shaped pattern in HA across team ability levels, with Foundational and Elite teams presenting the lowest values and Developing teams achieving the highest HA. At the same time Elite teams show the greatest HW.

This pattern differs from what has been reported in professional contexts. In the NBA, a detailed analysis of 24 regular seasons demonstrated that contender teams (win percentage = 69.6% ± 5.0%) had significantly higher HA and HW compared to teams with other ability levels, including low ability teams (win percentage = 21.2% ± 5.4%) (López-García et al., 2024), suggesting the critical role of team ability in maximizing home-court performance, with higher ability teams better exploiting tactical and psychological advantages compared to lower-ability teams.

In contrast, studies conducted in Europe showed different findings (Alonso Pérez-Chao, Nieto-Acevedo, et al., 2024; Alonso Pérez-Chao, Portes, et al., 2023). In an analysis of 16 regular seasons from the five main European Leagues (Spanish, German, Italian, Greek, and Israeli leagues), teams were divided into three groups by their team ability: low ability (Win% = 32.85%), medium ability (Win% = 52.27%), and high ability (Win% = 80.22%), and it was observed that low-ability teams tended to have a higher HA than medium and high-ability teams. At the same time, higher-ability teams had higher HW than the low- and medium-ability teams (Alonso Pérez-Chao, Portes, et al., 2023). This aligns with findings from the two premier Spanish basketball leagues, were during 12 regular seasons (from the 2010–2011 season to the 2022–2023 season, excluding games with crowd restrictions due to the pandemic, playoffs, and pre-season games), it was observed that the lower-ability teams (win percentage = 38.0%) had a higher HA than higher-ability teams (win percentage = 71.7%), while the higher-ability teams had a higher HW than lower-ability teams (Alonso Pérez-Chao, Nieto-Acevedo, et al., 2024). This indicates that, in European basketball, external factors like crowd support or familiarity with home environments, play a larger role for lower-ability teams, while higher-ability teams succeed through their superior competitiveness. Unlike the European pattern, where the HA is higher in lower-ability teams, our findings revealed a bell-shaped distribution with Developing teams showing the highest HA, while HW progressively increased with ability. This suggests that in youth female basketball, familiarity with the home environment and confidence play a relatively greater role at intermediate ability levels, while the progressive increase in HW with ability reflects the superior competitiveness of stronger teams.

The absence of significant differences in HW across U14, U16, and U18 teams, alongside the small differences observed in HA, suggests that age category does not substantially influence these metrics. Instead, team ability emerges as the primary factor driving variations in both HA and HW. This pattern aligns with findings from professional

women's basketball in Spain, where no significant differences were found in HA ($p= .482$) and HW ($p=.772$) across different competitive periods (pre-pandemic, pandemic, and post-pandemic) nor between games with and without fan attendance (Alonso-Pérez-Chao et al., [2024](#)). These results reinforce the idea that, in women's basketball, regardless of fan presence or age category, team ability appears to play a more decisive role in determining game outcome.

The results from this study offer a range of practical applications, mainly towards the potential to design more balanced competitions in youth sports by grouping teams according to their competitive level. This structure fosters an environment where all teams have a realistic chance of success, enhancing learning, motivation, and player engagement. Additionally, balanced leagues promote more competitive matches, which further develop the technical and psychological skills of players while minimizing the frustration that can arise from competing against significantly more skilled opponents. This approach also benefits families and communities by creating a healthy sporting environment and encouraging active involvement in the player's formative process.

Moreover, coaching interventions focusing on building psychological resilience and familiarity with away environments could mitigate the disparity in performance between home and away games, especially for lower-ability teams.

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. Firstly, the analysis focused exclusively on a single region (Madrid), which may limit the generalizability of the results to other areas or contexts where competitive dynamics, league structures, and team skill levels could vary significantly. Additionally, the available dataset did not allow for a robust analysis of the interaction between age category and team ability level without compromising statistical power and the interpretability of the results. Future research should aim to examine the combined influence of age and ability by expanding the dataset to include a larger number of teams per subgroup, which would allow a more granular understanding of how ability impacts HA within each age category (e.g., U14, U16, U18).

Youth sports games typically have low spectator attendance, which may reduce the influence of external factors such as crowd support, commonly associated with HA in professional competitions. This aspect could affect the magnitude of the HA observed in this study and its comparability with more competitive contexts. It should also be acknowledged that team quality may act as a confounding factor, as stronger teams are more likely to win regardless of game location. Although the present study stratified teams by ability levels to account for this aspect, the influence of team strength can not be fully isolated. Future research should incorporate additional performance indicators to better distinguish home-court effects from overall team quality.

The limited HA observed in this study (median values barely above 50% for the total sample) reflects the absence of one of the most important factors, such as crowd influence, long distance travel or referee bias. This leaves familiarity with the facility as one of the reasons for the small differences detected. This result is a key finding, rather than solely as a limitation, that highlights the distinct dynamics of youth female basketball compared to professional contexts.

5. Conclusions

This study highlights that team ability was identified as a key factor influencing HA and HW, whereas age category showed only a limited effect. Foundational teams showed the lowest values in HA and HW, Developing teams reached the highest HA, and Elite teams achieved the highest HW. Small but significant differences in HA were observed across categories, with U14 showing slightly lower values than U16 and U18 teams, while no significant differences were found in HW across categories. Overall, these results provide a descriptive framework to better understand how team ability shapes HA and HW dynamics in youth female basketball, while emphasizing the need for further research to explore these relationships in more depth.

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A-Financing, **B**-Study design, **C**-Data collection, **D**-Statistical analysis and interpretation of results, **E**-Manuscript preparation

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