

## Jeremy Lin: An Opportunity Lin-Analysis

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Basketball fan or not, if you have been anywhere near the news in the last two weeks, there's a good chance you've seen or heard at least one of the following terminologies in reference to the New York Knicks' out-of-nowhere phenomenon Jeremy Lin:

Lin-sanity, Lin-tastic, Lin-sational, Linked-Lin (yes, really), Lin-fatuation, Lin-derella, Super Lin-tendo (my favourite) and I will stop there because the list just seems to goes on and on.

But if you have not heard of him, not to worry, because I am sure you will soon as he's all over the Lin-ternet – from Twitter to Facebook to CNN, ESPN, CBS and thousands of blogger websites all over the world.

He has gone from a player who has sat on the end of the bench the majority of his undrafted NBA career, to a player who is now being called a legend-in-the-making. Now while I think it is a good story, I stop short of calling him a legend-in-the-making because for me it takes more than 5 games of good play to be compared to the likes of someone like Michael Jordan. But, I've definitely stopped to think about how this story has unfolded – how in just two weeks he has gone from a name nobody knew, to a complete brand that people identify with, support and love.

So, what is it about Jeremy Lin that the public is so attached to (besides his name)? He's obviously tapping into the NBA fan market, and I want to know why. After all, there are other players in the league that are better, or at least as good as him, that go virtually unnoticed, so why Jeremy Lin? What do people get out of watching him succeed?

Time for an Opportunity Lin-analysis.

When evaluating an opportunity, there are two different perspectives which need to be considered: external factors and internal factors. Let's take a look at a few external (market) factors of the Jeremy Lin opportunity first:

### **Differentiation**

Can anyone else name an NBA player with an economics degree from Harvard? Who was undrafted but fought his way onto the end of the Golden State Warriors bench via tryouts? Who is Asian American? Who has scored more points in their first five games as a starter than anyone in the history of the NBA? Who sleeps on their brother's couch in his one-bedroom apartment and is often mistaken as the trainer when he walks into Madison Square Garden?

Differentiation is about being different in a meaningful way that provides value to the target market. Jeremy Lin taps into his target market by simply being human, relatable, palpable. Not everyone can relate to being Michael Jordan or LeBron James, but most of us can relate to sitting on a bench wanting to play, to being underrated or overlooked, and working tirelessly for what we want in life.

### **Attractiveness**

To evaluate Jeremy Lin's attractiveness to the market, we need only look at the number of basketball fans, or even non-basketball fans, and the impact he has on them. Judging by the fandom surrounding him, the numbers are large, and so is his impact. Jeremy Lin's attractiveness is very high.

### **Change**

When evaluating an opportunity, we need to consider how much change addressing it would

require in current operations. What's interesting is that putting Jeremy Lin into the game, prior to it being out of necessity, actually would have required a lot of change and probably raised the 'risk' flag. It would have meant purposely sitting four higher-profile players ahead of him in the roster line-up, which many people would have called the Knicks coach insane for doing it.

Maybe a large amount of change is not such a bad idea sometimes?

Now let's take a look at a couple of the internal factors affecting the Jeremy Lin opportunity.

### **Feasibility**

Looking at the overall feasibility of success for Jeremy Lin, most people would have said success was not really that feasible for him. The Golden State Warriors certainly said that when they cut him, as did the Houston Rockets and even the New York Knicks, who were about to cut him prior to three weeks ago. Looking at his history from a high-level, most people wouldn't blame them – he never got an athletic scholarship to college, was undrafted in the NBA, and had barely been on the court prior to these last few weeks.

However, if people had looked a little closer, and looked at his numbers they would have seen how he led his high school to a state title, was named player of the year, was ranked in the top ten for scoring, rebounding, assists, blocked shots AND steals in his conference during his college career, was named by ESPN as one of the most versatile players in college basketball, and consistently held his own against nationally ranked players and teams.

And I think that is why it's important to break feasibility down into smaller chunks that make up the overall feasibility. Perhaps if teams had looked at his versatility feasibility, scoring feasibility, composure feasibility, winning feasibility, they would have seen that overall his feasibility of success was higher than they were actually evaluating.

### **Entry Barriers**

A big factor is when it comes to Jeremy Lin as an opportunity. For the last two years he sat on the end of a bench, fighting for his chance to play but was always blocked by barriers – his higher-profile teammates, his coach, his organization and judgment. Every team that has had him on the roster in the last two years never gave him the court time to prove his skills. Fast forward to two weeks ago when some of these barriers were removed (teammates injured), and voila, Jeremy Lin the opportunity has delighted the market. Timing can be everything, and so can be removing barriers to entry.

Jeremy Lin has been a great story, not only for the New York Knicks, but for the NBA as a whole. He has injected a new sense of enthusiasm, and tapped into a different set of market values than that of more mainstream superstars like LeBron James or Kobe Bryant. Nobody can be sure whether or not his level of play is sustainable once the barriers are removed (I can't see Carmelo Anthony, Amar'e Stoudamire, or Baron Davis riding the bench once they come off the injured list) but from where I sit, Jeremy Lin is a great opportunity that has been finally leveraged, and I look forward to seeing how it all turns out.

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