

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

## Louis Vuitton looks to score more sports fans in NBA alliance

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*Louis Vuitton is teaming up with the NBA. Image credit: Louis Vuitton*

By SARAH JONES

French fashion house Louis Vuitton is leaning further into the sporting world through a partnership with the National Basketball Association.

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The multi-year agreement includes the creation of a custom trophy case for the NBA Finals and an annual capsule collection. While the label has links to other sporting events, this marks the brand's first partnership with a North American-based sports league.

"The world of sports is expected to grow from about \$488 billion in 2018 to close to \$614 billion in 2022, with spectator sports being the fastest-growing segment at a CAGR of just under 6 percent," said Rebecca Miller, founder/CEO of **Miller & Company**, New York.

"Louis Vuitton most likely decided to enter the partnership with the NBA to expand its presence in the sports arena, adding basketball to its mix, with the intent of gaining audience while capturing part of the growing merchandising segment expected to see 7 percent CAGR," she said.

Ms. Miller is not affiliated with Louis Vuitton, but agreed to comment as an industry expert. **Louis Vuitton** was reached for comment.

Slam dunk

Louis Vuitton has become the first official trophy travel case provider for the NBA. The house, which specializes in custom trunks, will create a bespoke holder for the Larry O'Brien Trophy, which will be presented to the team that wins the NBA Finals in June.

Made in Louis Vuitton's Asnieres workshop, the trunk features the brand's signature brown-toned monogrammed canvas. The case is fitted with brass hardware.

The partners will also team up to produce a series that tells the story of the trophy and its trunk.

"Louis Vuitton and the NBA are both icons and leaders in their respective fields, and the joining of the two promises

exciting and surprising moments, forging historic memories together," said Michael Burke, chairman/CEO of Louis Vuitton, in a statement. "Louis Vuitton has long been associated with the world's most coveted trophies, and with this iconic partnership the legacy continues victory does indeed travel in Louis Vuitton."

Last year, the sixth and final game of the NBA Finals drew a television audience of almost 14 million. With the Toronto Raptors the victors, the 2019 championship saw a record audience in Canada.

According to 2015 data from Nielsen, the NBA has one of the most culturally diverse audiences of any sports league. Multicultural audiences, led by African-Americans and Asian-Americans, spend more time tuning into games than white viewers.

Additionally, 43 percent of the NBA's audience is under the age of 35, giving Louis Vuitton the chance to reach a younger consumer through its partnership.

The NBA alliance also offers an opportunity to reach a lucrative North American audience.

In the first nine months of 2019, almost a quarter of LVMH's revenues came from the United States, and sales in the nation were up 8 percent year-over-year during that period.

Along with the trophy case, Louis Vuitton will also be producing a collection of merchandise for the NBA. Fittingly, Louis Vuitton's menswear artistic director Virgil Abloh is an American who has brought touches of basketball style to his designs.

For instance, Louis Vuitton's LV 408 trainer launched with a campaign featuring models on the basketball court.

[View this post on Instagram](#)

Setting the pace. @VirgilAbloh first sneakers for #LouisVuitton are the highly anticipated LV Trainers. Explore the collection via link in bio.

### *Instagram post from Louis Vuitton*

"The type of audience Louis Vuitton may expect to reach could be dedicated fans of the teams who they follow year-round by 'owning' product that helps them feel affiliated with the team a part of the family," Ms. Miller said. "Another group may be influenced by the team members who own and are seen with the product and the consumer who can then identify with the team or a certain athlete or coach. The range of product offerings will be broad enough price point- and design-wise to reach the largest group of potential consumers."

"Louis Vuitton is expanding their customization capacities by offering the consumer the opportunity to purchase a product that can extend an experience from both an entertainment and personal perspective through classic shapes, new product design, team logos and even one's initials," she said. "Limited-editions will increase awareness and serve to create a sense of buying urgency. They often obtain a bit of 'trophy value' status."

Bridging Europe and the U.S., for the first time the NBA is holding a regular season game in Paris on Jan. 24 between the Charlotte Hornets and Milwaukee Bucks.

### Sports strategy

As luxury becomes more about experiences than goods, Louis Vuitton has sought to place itself at the center of widely followed sports tournaments.

In 2018, Louis Vuitton leveraged its customization capabilities to commemorate the FIFA World Cup.

For the third time, the brand partnered with the tournament to help safely transport its trophy to Moscow, where the games were held that year. Taking the partnership further, Louis Vuitton also let soccer fans mark the event through a licensed leather goods collection ([see story](#)).

Last year, Louis Vuitton embarked on a multichannel partnership with game developer Riot Games, as luxury brands begin to take note of the vast opportunity within the esports industry.

The Louis Vuitton and Riot collaboration began with the League of Legends World Championship, with the fashion label creating a traveling trophy case for the esports tournament. Although luxury brands have been leveraging gaming for increased fan engagement, the esports market has been mostly untapped ([see story](#)).

"Sports has historically been an important part of human activity from a health and entertainment perspective," Ms. Miller said. "When a brand looks for authentic ways to engage with an audience, they go back to their roots and pull forward those elements that will naturally enhance and expand their story and image."

"The NBA is a natural next step following their League of Legends and FIFA World Cup alliances," she said.

"Basketball is a significant, popular sport in the U.S., offering the luxury market ample opportunities to reach a broad economic audience."