

## Jeremy Sochan: The British Dennis Rodman and his journey from MK to the NBA



(Photo by Thearon W. Henderson/Getty Images)

**By Jamie Mullock**

Jeremy Sochan was the eighth British-developed player ever to make it to basketball's promised land after commissioner Adam Silver called his name in the 2022 NBA draft.

This defensive barbarian was drafted ninth overall, standing at 6'9 with a 7'0 wingspan. Sochan has cemented himself into the San Antonio Spurs starting line-up under iconic head coach Gregg Popovich.

He has just concluded his second season in the league, making an appearance in the All-Star Weekend Rising Stars game two years in a row. As well as making the All-Rookie second team.

Born in Oklahoma to a Polish mother and American father, Sochan grew up in Milton Keynes and spent the majority of his childhood in the UK, he is very much a product of the British basketball system.

Sochan said: "A lot of the time I was playing with older people. There's not a lot of exposure. I started off in a conference league in Milton Keynes.

"It was just us destroying teams all around MK. It went pretty easily until we played in the playoffs against better teams, especially London teams and teams from up north.

“As I got older and better, we realized I needed to find another place to play. I went to a premier team and started getting some buzz.

“I kept playing with older people and moved to Southampton where I really elevated my game and got the opportunity to play outside of England – for Poland, the country I represent.”

Young Sochan started to gather momentum after moving to the South coast where he played for the Solent Kestrals youth side as well as Itchen College in the Elite Academy Basketball League (EABL).

The EABL is the elite level of college/high school basketball in the UK, and this was where people started to take notice of the phenom power forward.

The Spurs starter said: “That time was very valuable to me. I really stepped up my game in that year of playing at Itchen College.

“I was playing with older people than me. And the coaches really held me to a standard. Whenever I was messing up, they would check me and tell me, but (they would) also lift me up.”

Sochan is an inspiration to the young hoopers paving their way to the elite level of basketball and is often spoke about fondly by those surrounding the league.

He said: “It makes me very proud. It’s cool that they remember me even though I only played one year in EABL. I think it’s just exciting.

“That league has so much potential and there’s a lot of talent that’s not being exposed to the eyes of scouts and professional clubs in Europe and colleges and high schools.

“Having people who are hungry and inspired by others to keep going in that league and striving for more.”

Sochan took part in the HoopsFix All-Star Classic, an event that brings together the nation’s best young basketball players to compete against one another.

The event is highly regarded in the British basketball community and has drawn comparisons to the McDonalds All-American game which has a similar format.

The Classic involves a U19 All-Star game as well as a dunk contest, three-point shootout and lots of activities throughout the day.

Sochan explained: “That classic was extremely fun and exciting. I remember it was the first time for me that everyone – the top talent in England – was together.

“It was exciting to be around the best and talk to them, get to know them, play against them, watch them play.

“It’s exciting for the culture of basketball in England. Sam Neter who is the founder of Hoopsfix has a lot of pride and determination to help build up the culture of basketball in England and I think it’s going the right way.”

After a stint at La Lumiere School and a year with Orange Academy in Germany, Sochan was being scouted by top college programmes in the States, eventually committing to the NCAA’s Baylor University in July 2020.

This was a highly productive season for the teenager, claiming Big 12 Sixth Man of the year and was named to the Big 12 All-Freshman Team.

He led the Baylor Bears to the number one seed in the 2022 NCAA Division 1 tournament averaging 9.2 points, 6.4 rebounds and 1.3 steals.

In April 2022 he declared for the NBA Draft and the rest was history, with the 6’9 star becoming a British basketball icon as he joined the Spurs.

Sochan broke down the barrier for British talent with hopes of reaching the NBA and is an inspiration for young British hoopers.

He said: “I feel like it’s always good to be a role model and inspire others to do what you did or even more than what I did. Just being there, being able to talk to them, and give them some type of motivation is always important.”

The 20-year-old offered up some advice for rising British prospects as they look to follow in the extravagant forward’s footsteps.

“Find your X factor. Find something that’s going to make you stand out. And that doesn’t mean you have to score 30 points in a game. Whether it’s your defence, energy, rebounding, playmaking – just find that.

“And also work on your whole game. Listen to your coaches. Be open to different ideas. And just play hard.”

Sochan’s story is a sign that basketball in Britain is heading in the right direction, proving to the future stars of the game that it is possible to cross the Atlantic and play at the top level.

Basketball is at a vital stage in this country, while question marks surround the sustainability of the ownership of the British Basketball League there are diamonds in the rough.

The London Lions women’s team made history in becoming the first British basketball team to achieve European success as they won the EuroCup.

The NCAA D1 and D2 is littered with British ballers who are all aiming to walk the path that Sochan has trodden on his way to the league.

There is plenty going right for the game, and Sochan sees the vision:

“I think it’s going up positively. The basketball league is getting more competitive. The London Lions are proving that they’re a really good European team now. They’ve made it far in the EuroCup.

“Youngsters are coming to college, playing for top teams in the NCAA Division 1. It’s getting there. I wish it was more funded, I think it’s something that has so much potential, and a lot of kids play it in school.

“If there was a little more push, I think it could really blossom. I think it’s getting there. (It) still has so much to do, but again – the potential is limitless for England and basketball.”