

Basketball

中国金 篮球

BASKETBALL WAS INTRODUCED TO China in 1895, just four years after James Naismith, secretary and physical education instructor of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in Springfield, Massachusetts, nailed a fruit basket to a wall at Springfield College (then the YMCA training school). Naismith probably never imagined that his invention — basketball — would have such an impact on the world of sports. Today, the teams and players of the National Basketball Association (NBA) have won the hearts of many basketball fans throughout the world with their performances. The Dow Jones stock index rose when Michael Jordan returned to the NBA in 1995. And since Jordan first set foot

on a professional basketball court, the fee for broadcasting NBA games has increased tenfold. Chinese school-children who idolize Jordan proudly choose his name as their “English name.”

Basketball at first was called “Naismith ball.” However, because points were scored by shooting soccer balls into a fruit basket, the sport became known as “basketball” and soon became popular throughout the United States. Today, although fruit baskets, soccer balls, and nine players per team have long since disappeared, some of the original rules — such as the rule setting the height of baskets at 3.05 meters — still remain as Naismith conceived them.

In 1895 basketball appeared as a competitive sport in U.S. colleges. In 1898 the first professional basketball league was formed. Beginning with the 1904 St. Louis Olympic Games, basketball was played as a display sport until the

1936 Berlin Olympics, when basketball made its debut as an official Olympic event.

The U.S. team dominated Olympic basketball for a half century before it failed to win the gold medal for the first time at the 1988 Olympics in Seoul, South Korea. That failure eventually led to a rule change that allowed professional players to play in Olympic basketball games. At the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, a team consisting primarily of NBA stars, headed by Michael Jordan and Magic Johnson, took part in the Olympics for the first time and won the title of “Dream Team” with its excellent performance. However, the progress of European basketball teams, especially the Croatian, Yugoslavian, and Lithuanian teams, brought great changes in the 1990s as more European basketball players went on to star in the NBA. At the 2004 Athens Olympics, the U.S. team failed to win the gold medal for a second time.

Basketball has exploded in popularity in recent years amongst Chinese youth.

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Basketball in China

After the sport was introduced to China in at the Tianjin Zhonghua YMCA in 1895, basketball spread to YMCAs in Beijing, Shanghai, and other cities. In 1913 China sent a team made up of students from Shanghai, Nanjing, and other major cities, to participate in the first Far East Championship Games in

Manila, Philippines. In 1936 China competed for the first time in the Eleventh Olympic Games in Berlin.

The Chinese men's basketball team began to dominate the sport in Asia during the 1970s and 1980s. The team swept five Asian Championship titles in succession from 1975 to 1983. The Chi-

nese women's basketball team finished third at the 1983 World Championship.

The Chinese Basketball Association (CBA) was established in 1995. During the past ten years, the CBA has produced many basketball stars. WANG Zhizhi 王治郅 joined the NBA in 2001. Later YAO Ming 姚明, the league's most famous star, joined the Houston Rockets in 2002. Both players led Chinese basketball players onto the international professional basketball stage.

The popularization of basketball in China has been promoted aggressively by the CBA. Basketball has never been more popular than it is today: Much-favored three-men street basketball, campus basketball, and the Chinese University Basketball Association (CUBA), which has up to seven hundred teams, are all in full swing.

The Chinese men's national basketball team, headed by Yao Ming, defeated a strong European opponent, the Serbian team, and made its way into the top eight in the 2004 Athens Olympic Games.

Famous Coaches and Players

David Willard Lyon was born into a Christian missionary family in Hangzhou in southern China and received his education in the United States. After graduation from College of Wooster in Ohio, he was sent to work in China in 1895 by the Foreign Department of the International Committee of the YMCA of North America. He and his wife arrived in Tianjin on 17 November. On 8 December Lyon played a "basket and ball game" during his lecture

The YMCA Brings Modern Sports to China



Modern sports came to China toward the end of the nineteenth century. Britons resident in the "Middle Kingdom" established football clubs in Tientsin (1884) and Shanghai (1887), but Americans, especially those working under the auspices of the YMCA, were far more important players in the game of ludic diffusion. In its early years, Chinese basketball was nurtured almost exclusively by the YMCA. Dr. Willard Lyon, who opened the Tientsin YMCA in 1895, was a typical activist. He was not content to limit his attention to the young Chinese who frequented the YMCA. "As early as 1896," wrote Jonathan Kolatch, "the Tientsin YMCA embarked on a program of promoting athletic competition in [Chinese] schools." In 1902, when C. H. Robertson arrived to assume responsibilities in Tientsin, he followed Lyon's path and spent part of his time in the local Chinese schools. He also arranged for an American teacher of physical education to be employed, at YMCA expense, in the school system. To stimulate interest on the part of the Chinese, the Americans resident in Tientsin organized an annual athletic meet for students at the local schools.

Although the YMCA never had more than fifteen or twenty "physical secretaries" for

all of China, those few were amazingly influential as coordinators of programs in Chinese and mission schools, as promoters of athletic meets, as trainers of native sports administrators, and as propagandists for increased support of physical-education programs. Basketball was, as those familiar with the game's origins might have guessed, the YMCA's favored sport. Dr. Lyon had introduced it in Tientsin, but the most energetic promoters of the game were located in Shanghai, where Dr. Max J. Exner arrived in 1908 as the Chinese YMCA's first National Physical Director.

When the YMCA organized China's first national athletic meet, at Nanking in October of 1910, basketball was part of the program (along with track and field, tennis, and soccer). Although the officials were Americans, all the athletes on the one hundred forty competing teams were Chinese. A symbolic moment occurred during the meet when high-jumper SUN Baoqing snipped off the queue of hair that had knocked the crossbar from its support and made his first attempt a failure. He tried again, shorn, and became the national champion.

■ ALLEN GUTTMANN



A young basketball player in Beijing goes for a lay up shot.

at Beiyang Medical School. In March 1896 he organized the first basketball game at the Tianjin YMCA. Thus, Tianjin became the birthplace of Chinese basketball.

DONG Shouyi 董守义 is known as the “father of Chinese basketball” 中国篮球之父. After graduation from Beijing Tongzhou Xiehe College (later merged into Beijing University) in 1916, he became sports secretary of the Tianjin YMCA. He participated in the Far East Championship Games several times as a member and later captain of the Chinese basketball team. In 1923 he studied at Springfield College in Mas-

sachusetts. After his return to China in July 1925, he coached the men’s basketball teams of Tianjin Nankai University and Beijing Normal University. The Chinese men’s national basketball team consisted mainly of members of these two teams. Between 1936 and 1952, he took part in the Olympic Games three times as a coach and as the head coach of the Chinese team. Between the 1920s and 1960s, he coached a number of basketball stars and other coaches in China. He was a member of the International Olympic Committee between 1947 and 1958.

Yao Ming 姚明 may be the most outstanding player in the history of Chinese basketball. Born in Shanghai in 1980, Yao Ming received his first basketball as a gift on his fourth birthday from his parents, who were both basketball players. He joined the Chinese national team at age eighteen and led the team to the Asian Championship title many times. In June 2002, as the NBA’s number one draft pick, Yao Ming signed a three-year contract worth \$10.8 million with the Houston Rockets. Soon, Yao Ming attracted public attention in the United States and throughout all of Asia. Some people

Baseball in China



Japan may be considered Asia's premier baseball nation, but China was the first Asian country where baseball (*bangqiu*) was introduced. In 1863 the Shanghai Baseball Club was established by American medical missionary Henry William Boone. Boone, born in Java, spent his early years in China. As a teenager he moved to New York City, then the hub of baseball. After medical school and a brief stint as a surgeon for the Confederate States of America, Boone returned to China to become director of the General Hospital for Europeans in Shanghai. A sports enthusiast, Boone organized baseball teams in Shanghai schools. From there the game spread throughout China. School-centered tournaments were the primary venue for competition, but the Chinese also sporadically organized teams for international games. In 1913, for example, during the presidency of YUAN Shikai, China finished third in the Far East Games.

Baseball remained popular in China for over fifty years, but its heyday came during the

late 1920s and 1930s when China was ruled by CHIANG Kai-shek and the Guomindang. Then the Shanghai Pandas were China's most powerful team. The popular team was founded by LIANG Fuchu, the "grandfather of Chinese baseball," who learned to play baseball while studying in Japan. In 1934 Liang organized a game in Shanghai against an American all-star team, featuring Babe Ruth.

After the Communist victory in 1949 Liang Fuchu taught Chinese sailors in Qingdao how to play baseball. A 1950 Communist Party decree required People's Liberation Army soldiers to learn the game. Liang Fuchu coached the winning team from Shanghai in the 1956 national competition. Baseball peaked in China in 1959 when twenty-three teams comprised a national league and thirty provincial, military, and city teams participated in a national tournament. Within a few years, however, MAO Zedong decided to disband the league claiming it was a remnant of Western impe-

rialism. During the height of anti-Western Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), former coaches and players were often targeted for abuse. Chinese were forced to hide gloves, bats, and other equipment for fear of attack by overzealous Red Guards.

With the opening of China and the coming to power of reform-minded DENG Xiaoping, the Chinese were reintroduced to baseball. By the 1970s the China Baseball Association was formed and in the 1980s Liang Fuchu's sons worked as baseball coaches for city teams. The Los Angeles Dodgers made the first overtures for international cooperation by sponsoring Chinese developmental leagues. In 1986 the Dodgers financed a new modern baseball facility in Tianjin called "Dodger's Stadium." Today the China Baseball League has six teams that play a thirty-game season. Major League Baseball International maintains close ties with the China Baseball Association.

■ JUNE GRASSO

called him China's "biggest export" ever. However, the biggest gainer from Yao Ming's signing might just be the NBA itself because the increased interest of Asian fans has contributed to the NBA's policy of expanding overseas, especially in Asian markets.

Basketball in the Beijing Olympics

In order to realize its goal of ranking sixth in the 2008 Olympics, the Chinese men's basketball team in April 2007 began a six-month train-

ing program, playing more than thirty practice games. The Chinese men's team faced problems such as a relatively weak guard play, a loose defense, and tendency to miss shots at crucial moments. Only if these problems were solved during training could the Chinese men's team, led by Yao Ming, Wang Zhizhi, and YI Jianlian 易建联, be a match for the strong teams fielded by the United States, Argentina, and Spain in the Beijing Olympics. The team's prospects were further weakened by a foot injury Yao Ming sustained in February 2008. The stress fracture side-

lined him from the rest of the Houston Rockets season, and his Olympic teammates had to cope with the possibility that Yao would have to sit out the Beijing Games.

The Chinese women's basketball team set fourth place as its goal in the Beijing Olympics. Led by MIAO Lijie 苗立杰 and SUI Feifei 隋菲菲, in the spring of 2008, the eighteen-woman team began five months of intensive training and practice games to prepare for the Olympics.

■ ZHANG LING 张玲