



1 BEST EVER

1.1 FIBA WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP 2006 IN JAPAN

Spain reigned at the FIBA World Championship in Japan this summer in the biggest and most competitive international basketball event ever staged.

With the field increased from 16 to 24 teams, six European sides made it to the last eight and Spain ultimately won over Greece to capture the gold medal.

“We saw that the level of basketball in Europe is very high,” said Greece’s legendary player and current national team boss, Panagiotis Yannakis.

There were great moments for all the continents.

African giants Angola and Nigeria reached the knockout stage, with the latter falling by a single point to Dirk Nowitzki and Germany.

Oceania’s two representatives, Australia and New Zealand, also made it to the last sixteen.

Yao Ming and FIBA Asian champions China advanced from Group D to the final 16 while the Americas had the United States and Argentina in the last four.

Basketball won new fans in Asia as FIBA took the sport to a new frontier.

1.2 RECORD ATTENDANCE

The event set a new spectator record for FIBA World Championships as over 75% of available tickets were sold. 225,000 people watched the games in fantastic arenas in Saitama, Hamamatsu, Sendai, Hiroshima and Sapporo. The old record dates back to Toronto in 1994 where 215,000 fans followed the action.

1.3 MEDIA COVERAGE

A record 3,000 media representatives registered for the event and guaranteed an record coverage on print media, television and websites.

Fiba.com exceeded more than 150 times the traffic it generated during the Athens 2004 Olympic basketball tournaments and had over 9 million single visitors.

The games were broadcasted to more than 150 countries with television ratings setting records in many countries. For the first time the television coverage included all African countries and fans were able to watch on fiba.com through broadband streaming.



1.4 FIERCE COMPETITION

The tournament demonstrated the tremendous balance in the game, with Spain capturing their first world title over a Greek team that came from behind to beat the USA in the semi-final.

Many group games, particularly in Hamamatsu, went to the wire.

Turkey, a wild card entrant in Japan like Italy, Puerto Rico and Serbia & Montenegro, did not lose until they were edged out by Greece in a fight for Group C supremacy.

Contests involving Lithuania, Australia and Brazil were not decided until the closing seconds.

The most remarkable game in Group C had to be Greece's 72-69 triumph over Australia.

Antonis Fotsis pulled the Greeks level with a three-pointer just nine seconds from the end, and after an Australian turnover, Nikos Zisis clinched victory with a three-ball at the buzzer.

"The players and coach of the Greek national team believe that we can try until the last second of every game," said star guard Dimitris Diamantidis.

There were great games at the other venues, with Angola losing to Germany in triple overtime in Group B, Lebanon upsetting France in Group A and China beating Slovenia with a three-pointer at the death to advance to the knockout round from Group D.

Friday, September 1, was semi-finals day and those games won't soon be forgotten.

Team USA, Greece, Argentina and Spain all ran onto court with undefeated records, fully expecting to reach the title game.

More than 17,000 fans in the sold-out Saitama Super Arena saw the United States fall 101-95 to Greece.

Yannakis' Greeks, trailing by 12 points, changed from a slower pace to an up-tempo style which utilised the great passing skills of guard Theo Papaloukas and involved reserve center Sofoklis Shortsianitis.

Greece fought back to lead at half-time and win the game, and fans poured into the streets of Athens.

Argentina, the Olympic champions from Greece, fell to Spain and Pau Gasol in the other semi-final.

Andres Nocioni missed an open three-pointer in the final seconds as Argentina lost 75-74, but the Spanish were deserving winners.

Spain, without Pau after he broke the fifth metatarsal in his left foot near the end of the victory over the Argentinians, still won convincingly over Greece in the final.

Pau's presence on the bench clearly galvanised his team-mates.

They wore T-shirts which read "Pau tambien juega" (Pau is also playing) as a symbol of unity and inspiration before the game and then played at a 100 miles per hour, especially on defense, in rolling to a 70-47 victory.

Spain got huge performances from captain Carlos Jimenez, Marc Gasol (Pau's brother), Felipe Reyes and Jorge Garbajosa.

Whether it was battling for rebounds (Jimenez had 11), or double-teaming Sofo, or pressuring the Greek guards – Spain won every battle.



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"They had us hand-cuffed," said Papaloukas.

"They wanted the game more. And for me, they really deserved the win."

Pepu Hernandez, the Spain coach, deserved so much credit, and not just for his tactics.

He had to cope with the passing of his father, with the news having been delivered to him just hours before tip-off.

"We've come out with so much emotion on the court and we are world champions," said Hernandez.

Pau, who averaged better than 21 points and nine rebounds before the injury, was I voted Most Valuable Player of event.

"The pain (in the foot) has gone now," Pau said after receiving his gold medal.

Jose Luis Saez, the president of the Spanish basketball federation, said of Spain's performance: "It's a lesson of pride, rage and team effort."

Back home Spain's national basketball team received the prestigious Prince of Asturias sports award in recognition of its World Championship title won in Japan.

The team outpolled 29 other candidates for the award in the category of sports, including Spanish tennis hero and French Open champion Rafael Nadal, retiring eight-time Grand Slam event winner Andre Agassi, and 2006 World Cup chief Franz Beckenbauer.

Manu Ginobili, Dimitri Papaloukas, Carmelo Anthony and Jorge Garbajosa were voted, along with Pau Gasol, all-tournament selections by an international panel of journalists.

Team USA won bronze by defeating Argentina, 96-81.

USA forward Anthony put on a brave face and said: "We're happy with the progress we've made.

"Unfortunately, we couldn't do what we came here to do, which was win the gold."

Winning gold is no easy feat for any country anymore.



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2 FINAL STANDINGS

1. Spain
2. Greece
3. USA
4. Argentina
5. France
6. Turkey
7. Lithuania
8. Germany
9. Angola
10. Australia
11. China
12. Italy
13. New Zealand
14. Nigeria
15. Serbia & Montenegro
16. Slovenia
17. Brazil
18. Japan
19. Lebanon
20. Puerto Rico
21. Panama
22. Qatar
23. Senegal
24. Venezuela