



**FIBA**  
**FIBA WORLD**  
**CHAMPIONSHIPS HISTORY**

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THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS FOR MEN**

## 1 THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS FOR MEN

### 1.1 .1950: BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA

1. Argentina
2. United States of America
3. Chile

The FIBA Congress, which met in London in 1948 on the occasion of the XIVth Olympic Games, decided to organise a world championship every four years between the Olympic tournaments. Argentina was prepared to accept the teething problems and so Buenos Aires was the location of the 1st World Championship for Men from 22nd October to 3rd November 1950.

FIBA limited the number of participating teams to ten: the three best teams at the preceding Olympic Games, the two best teams from Asia, Europe and South-America, plus the organising country which was automatically qualified.

The USA, France and Brazil, classed in that order two years previously in London, were therefore qualified along with Argentina, Chile and Peru. Uruguay, soundly qualified by winning the South American Championship, refused to cross the Rio de la Plata for political reasons and, more precisely, in order to protest against the Argentinian Government's refusal to grant visas to its press representatives.

Since no Asian team wanted to make the long and costly journey to Latin America, the competition was opened up to neighbouring countries along the Equator and to two additional European teams, Spain and Yugoslavia.

Relegated to fifteenth place at the Olympic Games in London two years previously, Argentina, cheered on by 25,000 supporters, surpassed itself in the Luna Park Arena and took the first championship title by beating the USA (64-50). The USA had not taken the World Championship very seriously, appearing with a corporate team from the Chevrolet factories in Denver. Interestingly, the Argentinians were the only ones in this competition to cross the 60-point barrier.

This championship was marked by two unforgettable incidents: the first being when Egypt which beat France (31-28) as the result of an error in the refereeing. It refused to replay the game and threatened to withdraw from the competition, before France renounced its appeal. The second occurred when Yugoslavia refused to face Franco's Spain, a withdrawal which resulted in the Yugoslav team being suspended for nine months including team members Nebojsa Popović, future Secretary General of the Yugoslav Olympic Committee, and Borislav Stanković, current Secretary General of FIBA.

### 1.2 .1954: RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL

1. United States of America
2. Brazil
3. Philippines

Originally scheduled to be held in Sao Paulo to celebrate the 400th anniversary of this city's foundation, the 2nd World Championship was finally organised in Rio de Janeiro, the roof of the la Palais des Sports in Sao Paulo having been damaged by bad weather.



Once again, the East Bloc countries declined to take part following the Brazilian authorities' refusal to issue entry visas to the Soviets. What is more, with Egypt having withdrawn from the Championship owing to the presence of Israel, only twelve teams were present in Brazil (seven from the Americas, three from Asia and two from Europe).

The competition was held in the brand new Maracanazinho stadium (with a capacity of 25,000), a stone's throw from the famous Maracana football stadium capable of holding 200,000 people.

With the Preliminary Round having eliminated Paraguay, Chile, Yugoslavia and Peru, the final group brought together the USA, Brazil, the Philippines, France, Formosa, Uruguay, Canada and Israel. The latter was notably responsible for eliminating Chile, despite its position at the top of the group along with Uruguay, Brazil and the USA.

Represented by a corporate team once again, this time from Caterpillar, but with six players over two metres, the USA carried off the title after having taught their opponents a lesson.

### 1.3 .1959: SANTIAGO DE CHILE, CHILE

1. Brazil
2. United States of America
3. Chile

For the first time ever, the USSR lined up at a World Championship, played on Santiago's football pitch which had been converted for the occasion.

Chile being automatically qualified, twelve teams were divided into three groups which played the Qualifying Round games in Conception, Temuco and Antofagasta.

There were several surprises on the cards, such as the USSR being beaten by Canada in Temuco, only qualifying on goal average behind Brazil, and even Argentina's and Egypt's defeats against the Chinese Formosa team which thus won its place in the final group.

The qualification of nationalist China was to totally distort the competition because although the Soviets won all their games in this Final Round, their refusal to face Formosa led to their relegation to second-to-last place, with last place going to Bulgaria for having wanted to imitate the Soviets.

This demotion did very nicely for Brazil which, in spite of having been beaten by the USSR (71-76), took the gold medal after beating a second-rate American corporate team 81-67.

### 1.4 .1963: RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL

1. Brazil
2. Yugoslavia
3. Soviet Union

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Originally scheduled to be held in Manila, but taken away from the Philippines as a result of their government's refusal to issue players and officials from socialist countries with visas, the organisation of this 4th World Championship was finally assigned to the Brazilians but not before FIBA had excluded the Philippines from the competition and fined their federation 2,000 dollars.

For the third time in ten years, Brazil was to play host to the best basketball players in the world. Of the thirteen countries involved, eight represented the Americas and four Europe.

After the preliminary games in Belo Horizonte, Curitiba and Sao Paulo, it was in a carnival atmosphere in Rio de Janeiro that Brazil retained its title from Santiago by beating Yugoslavia, the USSR, the USA and France, classed in that order.

Amaury Pasos and Wlamir Marques, the two star players of this World Championship, were to become just as famous in Brazil as the footballers Pelé and Garrincha.

The United States, represented by an inferior team yet again, had to admit defeat against Brazil, Yugoslavia and the USSR successively.

## 1.5 .1967: MONTEVIDEO, URUGUAY

1. Soviet Union
2. Yugoslavia
3. Brazil

After Argentina, Brazil and Chile, yet another South-American country, Uruguay, was assigned the organisation of this competition.

This 5th World Championship had been preceded one year earlier by an "extraordinary" world cup organised in Chile to mark the 35th anniversary of FIBA. It was won by Yugoslavia ahead of the United States and the USSR.

As for the "real" World Championship, it was played in the Sports Hall in Montevideo where electric heaters were installed to warm up the substitutes who sat freezing on the benches because it was so cold in Uruguay that May.

The USA, still not having lined up a proper national selection, was pushed back into fourth place though not before having subjected the USSR to its only defeat (58-59). But, victorious over the Yugoslavs and the Brazilians, the Soviets went and won the World Championship for the first time. They were awarded the first trophy bearing the name of James Naismith, the founder of basketball.

## 1.6 .1970: LJUBLJANA, YUGOSLAVIA

1. Yugoslavia
2. Brazil
3. Soviet Union



Following the first five championships organised in South America, the World Championship for Men moved further afield to Europe where the organisation was assigned to Yugoslavia.

With six teams the Americas had the most representatives (Brazil, USA, Uruguay, Cuba, Panama and Canada), ahead of Europe with four (Yugoslavia, USSR, Italy and Czechoslovakia) whilst Asia, Oceania and Africa only managed to send one team each.

The Final Round was held in the Tivoli hall in Ljubljana. Once again, the USA, with its "second fiddle" university team, was unable to play a leading role. Defeated by Brazil, Italy and Yugoslavia, it was knocked back to fifth place but not without first depriving the USSR of a world title by beating it 75-72. Having also lost to Brazil (64-66), the Soviets had to make do with the bronze in spite of a victory over Yugoslavia (87-72), which had been cheered on by 20,000 fanatical supporters. Nevertheless, taking advantage of its successes over Brazil (80-55), Italy (66-63) and the USA (70-63), Yugoslavia finally won a title which had not been usurped.

## 1.7 .1974: SAN JUAN, CAGUAS, PONCE, PUERTO RICO

1. Soviet Union
2. Yugoslavia
3. United States of America

This 7th World Championship had something of the exotic about it, being held in the Greater Antilles.

Fourteen teams were present in Puerto Rico. Yugoslavia, holder of the title won four years previously in Ljubljana, and Puerto Rico, as host country, were automatically qualified for the Final Round. The other teams were divided into three groups for the Preliminary Round at the end of which the USSR, the USA, Cuba, Brazil, Spain and Canada joined the Yugoslavs and Puerto Ricans.

Once more represented by a university selection which was not the best despite the presence of the excellent pair John Lucas and Tom Boswell, the USA conceded defeat to the Soviets (94-105) who then went on to win back the gold they had earned in Montevideo but lost later in Ljubljana.

The Americans had to content themselves with the bronze, the silver medal going to the Yugoslavs who, although beaten by the United States, came out on top in terms of goal average.

The All Stars of this tournament were the Russians, Alexander Salnikov and Alexander Belov, the Yugoslav, Vinko Jelovać, the Spaniard, Wayne Brabender, and the Cuban, Alejandro Urgelles.

## 1.8 .1978: MANILA, PHILIPPINES

1. Yugoslavia
2. Soviet Union
3. Brazil

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As in Puerto Rico, four years earlier, the title-holder, USSR, and the Philippines, as organisers, skipped the three groups in the Preliminary Round and went directly into the group for the Final Round where they met up with Yugoslavia, Brazil and the USA who were unbeaten in the Preliminary Round, as well as Canada, Italy and Australia.

Using the brilliance of its trio Drazen Dalipagić, Dragan Kicanović and Kresimir Cosić and a team which was more offensive than defensive, Yugoslavia finished the championship without having experienced a single defeat and always with a high score (117-101 against the Philippines, 108-76 against Italy, 100-93 against the USA, 105-92 against the USSR and 105-101 against Australia). However, they were unable to exceed the 100-point mark against Brazil (91-87).

The USA, which had come to the islands of the Philippines with a poor selection representing "Athletes in Action", was condemned to play a minor role with four defeats in the games against Italy, Yugoslavia, Brazil and the USSR, as opposed to three victories, one of which was snatched from Australia (77-75) in the Preliminary Round but counted in the final classification.

## 1.9 .1982 : CALI, BOGOTA, MEDELLIN, BUCURAMA, CUCUTA, COLOMBIA

1. Soviet Union
2. United States of America
3. Yugoslavia

Although they had never taken part in a World Championship, Colombia was assigned the organisation of this ninth edition with the advantage of qualifying directly for the Final Round group where, unfortunately, it was unable to stand up to the big guys from the USSR, the USA, Yugoslavia and even Spain, Australia and Canada.

Having finally become aware of the adverse possibilities, the United States this time sent a team to Colombia which was much more representative than its predecessors and included some good players such as Glenn "Doc" Rivers, Antoine Carr and Jim Thomas who was on the threshold of a professional career. The Americans' first surprise came in the Preliminary Round against the Spaniards with the excellent Juan Antonio San Epifanio (99-109), following which they only conceded defeat once and by a single point (94-95) in the Final against the Soviets with their "control tower" Vladimir Tkatchenko (2.20m). The Soviets thus took their revenge on the same Americans who had beaten them a few days previously.

The Yugoslavs were able to mount the podium once again but this time had to content themselves with the bronze medal which they had struggled hard to win against Spain (119 117).

## 1.10 .1986: MADRID, BARCELONA, ZARAGOZA, FERROL, MALAGA, TENERIFE, SPAIN

1. United States of America
2. Soviet Union
3. Yugoslavia

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The World Championship this year in Spain had never before known the likes of such participants, not only in terms of the number of teams participating but also the quality of the selections put forward.

Twenty-four teams lined up at the start and for some of them it was the first time that they had ever been present at a World Championship (Greece, Netherlands, Federal Republic of Germany, Angola, New Zealand and Malaysia).

Given the wealth of participants, FIBA decided that no teams would be automatically qualified. The twenty-four countries were therefore divided into four groups of six playing simultaneously in Zaragoza, El Ferrol, Malaga and Tenerife.

The top three teams in these preliminary groups were then placed into two groups for the Semi-Finals, one of which was played in Oviedo and the other in Barcelona where the Final Round was also played.

The USA, fielding a team that lacked neither style nor possibilities with young players like David Robinson, Tyrone Bogues and Derrick McKey, committed just a single blunder against Argentina (70-74) which was then relegated to twelfth place in the final classification. Otherwise, with victories over Yugoslavia (69-60), Brazil (96-80) and the USSR (87-85) after a Final game which could have gone either way from start to finish, the Americans reminded the world that it should always reckon with them, even if, taking the tournament on the whole, the most impressive individuals were not on their team, at least as far as the statistics were concerned: the best scorer was thus the Greek, Nick Gallis (with an average of 33.7 points per game), the top rebounder was the Brazilian, Gerson Victorino (10.2), the best passer was the Argentinian, Miguel Cortijo (4.7) and the best blocker was the Yugoslav, Stojan Vranković (3.7).

### 1.11 .1990: BUENOS AIRES, SANTA FE, ROSARIO, VILLA BALLESTA, CORDOBA, SALTA, ARGENTINA

1. Yugoslavia
2. Soviet Union
3. United States of America

For its eleventh edition, the World Championship returned to its roots in Argentina, where, 40 years earlier, the first competition had been played in Buenos Aires' Luna Park.

Yet again, the United States seemed to have forgotten their lesson from the Olympic Games in Seoul. They were visibly unaware that their safety margin with the rest of the world had been eroded by the progress of certain European nations. They sent a team to Argentina which was far from being the most representative even if players like Alonzo Mourning, Kenny Anderson and Billy Owens were subsequently to be recruited by the professional NBA league. On the other hand, Yugoslavia, for example, had brought together all of its elite players, whilst ensuring the participation of Drazen Petrović, Zarko Paspalj and Vlade Divač who were already with the NBA. However, it took several games before this trio became integrated into Dusan Ivković's group which would explain, in part, the team's defeat at the hands of Puerto Rico (82-75) in the Preliminary Round. This was to be Yugoslavia's only failure. With Petrović back on form and Toni Kukoč dominating all positions with his immense talent, the road to gold was opened up to the Yugoslavs who dominated the Americans in the Semi-Finals (99-91) before putting seventeen points difference between themselves and the Soviets in the Final.



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Inconsistent throughout the tournament, the USSR, no longer being able to count upon the participation of Baltic players such as Arvydas Sabonis, Rimas Kurtinaitis or Valdemaras Komitchous, often lacked inspiration in an offensive game in which the "old guard" of Alexander Volkov, Valeri Tikhonenko and Alexander Belostenny sometimes managed to mask the shortcomings.

Having beaten Yugoslavia and then the USA in the Quarter-Finals, the Puerto Ricans stumbled just before reaching the podium, their fine team carried along by José Ortiz who was to pay for his efforts at the end of the tournament when the team succumbed to the USSR in the Semi-Finals (82-98) and again in the game for third place against the USA, albeit only narrowly (105-107).

And although Brazil had to make do with fifth place, its highly-skilled scorer, Oscar Schmidt, had at least put up a fight once again, scoring an average of 35.5 points per game.

## 1.12 .1994: TORONTO, HAMILTON, CANADA

1. United States of America
2. Russia
3. Croatia

This championship was like no other. Firstly because it was played in Toronto's monumental Skydome, usually home to baseball, with a capacity of up to 70,000 people. But, having been converted for the occasion, it would actually register a crowd of 32,616 spectators on the final evening: a World Championship record.

Different also through the presence of a USA team which, with its NBA superstars Alonzo Mourning, Dominique Wilkins, Dan Majerle, Reggie Miller, Mark Price and even Shaquille O'Neal, was well deserving of its title of "Dream Team II" and justified it by following in the footsteps of Michael Jordan's "Dream Team I" which had walked away with the gold medal at the Olympic Games in Barcelona two years previously.

Lastly, with acrobats and cheerleaders from Charlotte and Phoenix livening up the time-outs, the atmosphere was reminiscent of major NBA events, the staff of which, it has to be said, had been made available and were present in force helping FIBA to organise this 12th World Championship.

The wind of change had also blown through the participating teams. Thus, the USSR, which had been dismantled, had made way for Russia, and Yugoslavia, submitted to a UN embargo, was not admitted to Toronto, where Croatia appeared at a World Championship under its own flag for the first time.

The "Dream Team II", following some teething troubles on the first day when the Spaniards managed to stand up to them (115-100), radiated a superiority which even became crushing in the Final where the Russians found themselves lagging behind by 46 points (137-91). There were, however, mitigating circumstances for the latter team, which had, on the previous day, had to fight a merciless battle against the Croatians with Toni Kukoć and Dino Radja to assure themselves of a place in the Final (66-64).

In the definitive fight for the title, the exploits of Sergei Babkov, Mikhail Mikhailov and Sergei Bazarevich were not enough to counteract the skills of Dominique Wilkins, Alonzo Mourning and Shawn Kemp and especially not sufficient to prevent the giant Shaquille O'Neal from enforcing his own law under the two baskets.

Europe managed to place three teams behind the invincible "Dream Team II" since, apart from Russia (silver) and Croatia (bronze), Greece had enjoyed its best championship ever with victories over Canada and China.

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Individually, Bazarevich (Russia), Miller and Kemp (USA), Radja (Croatia) and the MVP Shaquille O'Neal made up the five "All Stars".

### 1.13 .1998: ATHENS, GREECE

1. Yugoslavia
2. Russia
3. United States of America

The best players in the USA refused to participate at this championship owing to the NBA lock-out, and so the Dream Team, which had gone to Toronto now stayed away from Athens. This was a hard blow for the popular success of the competition. The Palais des Sports in Maroussi, which could hold up to 18,000 spectators, saw no more than just a few thousand turn up for the first game, which the Americans won over the Brazilians (83-59) nevertheless. And if an NBA star was indeed present at the foot of the Acropolis, it was only because the great Hakeem Olajuwon had travelled to Greece to support his home team, Nigeria.

But Olajuwon's presence did not prevent the Africans from coming last in the classification and, what is more, from being deprived of one of their players, Julius Nwosu, who was suspended following a doping control which proved positive for ephedrine. Furthermore, FIBA had taken the decision to sanction the use of cannabis in all their competitions.

With the USA not having sent its best players, there had never been so many candidates for the medals, especially since Yugoslavia had returned to the competition. From this point on though, their team would be made up entirely of players from Serbia and Montenegro.

The games involving potential medal winners were most often evenly-matched and gave rise to several surprises. Thus, with twenty-nine points from Arturas Karnishovas, Lithuania led Uncle Sam's nephews a merry dance (84-82) and it was only after extra time that Yugoslavia beat Russia (82-74) and Spain got the upper hand over Argentina (68-67). Spain was still to give the USA a hard time (73-75) and Yugoslavia would succumb to Italy by one point (60-61).

Increased discipline leading to the elimination of Australia (96-78) in the Quarter-Finals, the USA once again got the upper hand over Italy (80-77) but had to give up the title in the Semi-Finals to a Russian team led by the excellent Sergei Babkov (30 pts.).

For its part, Yugoslavia, in the other Semi-Final game, was disturbed by Greece taking control for some thirty minutes, notably owing to the superior height of its players Jakovos Tsakalidis (2.17m), Panagiotis Fassoulas (2.13m) and Efthymios Rentzias (2.12m) only to then collapse under the assaults of Bodiroga and his partners.

Finally, Yugoslavia confirmed its superiority in Europe in the Final against Russia where the actions of the "young guard" Zeljko Rebraca, and Dejan Bodiroga who was voted the tournament's MVP, made it possible to forget about the absence of Predrag Danilović, Vlade Divač and Zoran Savič and to take home its fourth world title for Yugoslavia.

### 1.14 .2002: INDIANAPOLIS, USA



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1. Serbia & Montenegro
2. Argentina
3. Germany

The 2002 FIBA World Championship will go down in history as the first to take place in the homeland of basketball and one of the most exciting FIBA competitions ever. Before the start of the competition most experts agreed that more than half of the competing teams could make the semi-finals, and lip service was paid to the notion that the USA could not count on a gold medal. However, the USA was still the runaway favourite for the title and after all they couldn't lose on home soil, could they?

The question was answered when USA played Argentina in the Eighth Final Round and lost with 87 – 80. This loss meant the end of USA's 58 – 0 running streak until that game in FIBA competition and forced the 2000 Olympic Champion to play reigning FIBA World Champion Serbia and Montenegro in the Quarter Finals. After losing against the Serbs with 78 - 81, it was clear that the USA was out of the medals for the first time since using NBA players.

In the gold medal game Serbia & Montenegro was able to repeat their 1998 triumph in a overtime thriller against Argentina (84 - 77) whilst Germany secured against New Zealand (117 – 94) a bronze medal and their first medal in the FIBA World Championships.

Dirk Nowitzki from Germany was voted MVP of the championship with Manu Ginobili (ARG), Yao Ming (CHN), Pero Cameron (NZL) and Dejan Bodiroga (SCG) joining him in the All Star Five.

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## 2 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP MEDAL TABLE 1950-1998

### MEN'S MEDALLISTS

	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	3	3	3	9
SOVIET UNION	3	3	2	8
YUGOSLAVIA	3	3	2	8
BRAZIL	2	2	2	6
RUSSIA	-	2	-	2
CHILE	-	-	2	2
ARGENTINA	1	1	-	2
YUGOSLAVIA (Serbia and Montenegro)	2	-	-	2
CROATIA	-	-	1	1
PHILIPPINES	-	-	1	1
GERMANY	-	-	1	1