

Analysis of the Chinese National Basketball Team's Performance on 2019 Fiba Basketball World Cup

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1. Introduction

Ever since the establishment of China, Chinese government officials have paid a lot of attention and support to basketball, football, and volleyball, and this is indicated by the word from General He Long, 'I will die with regret if the three big balls are not improved'. With the development of economy, society, and professionalization of leagues, the three big balls have entered a fast-growing stage. Today, the national volleyball team has already won the world champions, while the football and basketball teams are still struggling in the international competition. For the past decades, the national basketball team didn't gain any ideal results except the 2008 Olympic games, on which superstar Yao Ming led to the quarterfinal. In 2015, under the endeavor of local governments and the Chinese Basketball Association, China successfully bided for the 2019 FIBA Basketball World Cup. This is the first time that China holds a basketball world cup. This is also the first time that the national team adapts a dual-team system, which allows the head coach to observe as many players as possible, indicating the value that the association places on it. However, in the end, the national team ends the world cup with two wins and three losses, ranking number 24 among all teams, and it also loses the right to directly enter the Tokyo Olympic Games. On-court performance, as an important indicator of sports teams, reflects problems from many different aspects. According to the on-court performance of the national team in the world cup, China still has a big gap among the world's best teams. As a result, this article can reveal the pros and cons of the national team by analyzing its performance in the world cup.

As a highly physical sport, basketball requires a strong physical presence in order to achieve outstanding performance. According to Analysis and Research on the Offensive and Defensive Ability of Chinese Men's Basketball Team in the 18th Basketball World Cup, the Body Mass Index (BMI) is ranked the last place in its group in the world cup, and the index is far away from the first place. This causes the deformation on the court, resulting in failures of group games. Honestly, the physical fitness of players plays an important role when evaluating the on-court performance, but it cannot serve as a determining factor of win and loss. There are many other aspects other than physical fitness. For example, in the game which China plays against Poland, the national team loses because of the lack of experience and mentality problem, despite the fact that it is winning most of the time. Thus, as analyzing the game of basketball, people should easily draw a conclusion that teams lost games because of weak physical fitness; they need to combine data, videos, and comparisons to make conclusions.

This article utilizes authoritative literature, game videotapes, teams' statistics, and comparative analysis to inspect the group game, in which China versus Cote d'Ivoire, Poland, and Venezuela, and thereby understand the gap between China and the top 8 countries in the world. As the international game that the Chinese National Team played for the past year, the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2019 is worth studying for future talent selection and development.

2. Object and Research Methods

2.1 Object

The statistics in group games of the national team and the average game statistics of the final eight are used for an object to study. Cote d'Ivoire, Poland, and Venezuela are countries in the group, and Spain, Argentina, France, Australia, Serbia, Czech, United States, and Poland are the final eight.

2.2 Research Method

2.2.1 Authoritative Works of Literature

By citing Zhi Wang, TenCent Sports official website, and FIBA official website, this article establishes the theoretical basis.

2.2.2 Game Videotapes

The article analyzes the weakness in techniques, tactics, and rotation by observing the video of group games.

2.2.3 Data and Statistics

Collect the average game statistics of group game and average game statistics of the final eight and use it for statistical analysis on performance.

2.2.4 Comparative Analysis

Compare the Chinese National team with the group opponents and the final eight teams to analyze the pros and cons of the national team.

3. Results and Analysis

3.1 Chinese National Team's Scores of Each Quarter in a Group Game

First of all, according to Graph 1, the national team held a similar scoring trend: it rises in the first two quarters and reaches a peak in the third quarter, and then slightly decreases in the last quarter. The team cannot quickly enter the state at the beginning of the game. There is usually a slow-heating period that lasts for half of the game, and this is caused by multiple factors. For example, in international games, players are not able to perform as they do in domestic leagues as a result of pressure to win glory for the country. Especially as a host, the team's pressure level cannot be matched with the past international games. As a result, it's an unstable performance at the start of the games is understandable.

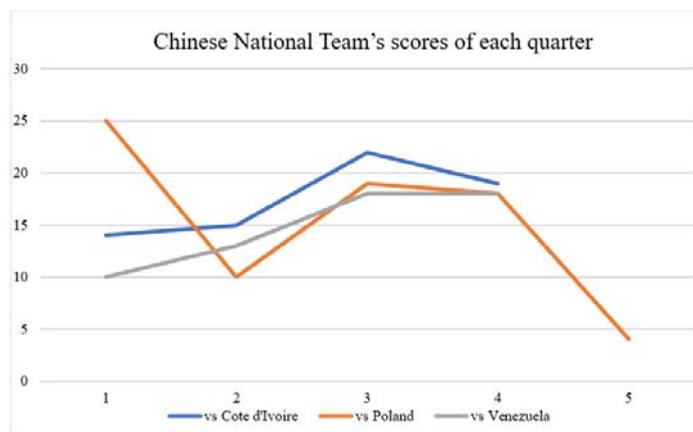


Fig.1 Scores of Each Quarter in the Group Game

From the table, it can be clearly found that the most outstanding performance of Chinese tea in the group stage is against Poland. Despite the huge public controversy that is caused by its turnovers in the last quarter, the national team undoubtedly played well against Poland, a top 8 team in this world cup. In the first quarter of the game, the Chinese team scored 25 points, which is the highest scoring record for the team in a quarter in a group game. However, in the second quarter, the team only got 10 points due to foul troubles, and it is the lowest scoring quarter in group games. Such a drastic difference reveals persistency issues of the team, and it also reminds us that getting overheated in offense might lead to careless fouls on the defensive side. Although the national team was not able to keep the lead all the way until the end, the extraordinary performance of this game gave fans the imagination of the future of the Chinese basketball team.

On contrary, the abnormal performance of the national team again Venezuela should be noticed. The team had the lowest scoring for the first, third, and fourth quarter. When it faces the defense from small Venezuelan guards, not only the half-court offense of the Chinese team was completely limited but also the pick and roll and transitional offense were restricted. Moreover, with the energy and mental issues that are caused by the game against Poland, the national team lost completely. This indicates that energy, skills, and mentality are decisive factors that affect the result of games.

3.1.1 Analysis of Average Statistics between the Chinese National Team and the Final Eight Teams

To begin with, it can be seen from graph 2 that the average score of the Chinese team is significantly behind the top 8 teams. It had 6.4 points less than Poland, which had the lowest average point among the final eight. Not only that, the national team averaged 5.4 three-pointers with a 26.2% shooting percentage. Both the field goal number and percentage are far less than the top 8 teams. Under the current playing style that advocates outside shooting, the national team still plays the games around the two centers in the paint. Obviously, it has not kept up with the development of world basketball. This can also be reflected in the rotation of Li Nan, the head coach of the Chinese National Team. When selecting the lineup of the world cup, Li Nan gave up Chen Linjian, Wu Qian, who have excellent performance in their three-point shooting in the league; when coaching on the spot, he abandoned Kyranbek, an elite three-point shooter who averages 40% in the league. The unreasonable lineup that Li Nan selected directly result in a great drop in the outside shooting efficiency of the Chinese National Team, which thereby led to a crowded space and a drop in attacking efficiency on the offensive side. The opponents can easily shrink their defense to double the guards who attack the rim and centers that are waiting for the ball in the paint since there is no threat from the national team's outside shooting.

Table 1 Comparison of Average Data between the Chinese Team and the Final Eight Teams

Teams	China	Spain	Argentina	France	Australia	Serbia	Czech	U. S	Poland
Points per game	71	84.4	86	83.6	85.9	94.1	82.8	86.5	77.4

Made/Attempt	26.0/60.0	29.5/65.4	29.1/65.4	29.5/60.5	31.5/65.4	32.5/60.8	31.3/65.3	31.8/70.6	26.9/61.1
Shooting Percentage	43.3%	45.1%	44.6%	48.8%	48.2%	53.5%	47.9%	45.0%	44.0%
2PPMG/2PAPG	20.6/39.4	20.4/36.6	19.8/38.9	20.8/39.0	21.8/38.3	22.4/35.8	22.0/43.6	21.4/40.9	19.3/37.0
2P%	52.3%	55.6%	50.8%	53.2%	56.9%	62.6%	50.4%	52.3%	52.0%
3PPMG/3PAPG	5.4/20.6	9.1/28.8	9.4/26.5	8.8/21.5	9.8/27.1	10.1/25.0	9.3/21.6	10.4/29.8	7.6/24.1
3P%	26.2%	31.7%	35.4%	40.7%	35.9%	40.5%	42.8%	34.9%	31.6%
FTMPG/FTAPG	13.6/21.0	16.3/21.3	18.4/23.5	15.9/21.3	13.1/16.5	19.0/23.8	11.0/14.9	12.6/17.1	16.0/20.9
Free throw percentage	64.8%	76.5%	78.2%	74.7%	79.5%	80.0%	73.9%	73.7%	76.6%
Offensive/Defensive rebounds	9.4/25.4	11.4/28.5	9.9/27.6	8.5/25.6	10.4/29.3	10.8/28.3	10.6/27.5	11.8/31.3	9.3/25.6
Rebounds	34.8	39.9	37.5	34.1	39.6	39	38.1	43	34.9
Blocks	2.8	3.3	3	4.3	2.3	2.9	2.5	4	2.9
Assists	15.2	22.8	19.6	17.6	22.8	25.4	21.3	20.6	17.1
Fouls	21.8	19.4	20.8	20.5	18	20	17.4	18.4	17.9

In addition, Chart 1 also highlights the serious lack of fundamental skills of the Chinese National Team. In the 2019 World Cup, the three-points shooting percentage of the national team is 26.2%, and the free throw shooting percentage is 64.8%. The three-points shooting percentage ranked fourth from the bottom of the 32 teams in the world cup, and the free throw percentage is the worst among them. If the untypical performance of three-point shooting is a result of poor selection and rotation of the head coach, then there is no excuse to have such a disastrous percentage in the free-throws shooting. Free-throws, as one of the most basic ways of scoring, must be practiced frequently. A percentage of 64.8% is unacceptable in any team in the world. Shooting is one of the priorities of modern basketball. In this world cup, the Chinese National Team exposed huge incapability in both three-point shooting and free-throw shooting, and it indirectly led to the loss of many games. Thus, it is urgent to improve the shooting ability of the national team. Aside from shooting, the national team also shows a problem in rebounding. Although there are 3 centers over 6'8 ft, the national team only averaged 34.8 rebounds, ranked tenth from the bottom of 32 teams. This is a result of weak boxouts. In the game against Venezuela, the national team lost 10 offensive rebounds only in the first half of the game, and the opponents were much smaller than our players in sizes.

If the weak shooting ability indirectly led to the failure in the World Cup, then the problem of poor habits on the court may be the direct cause of failure in the group stage and the loss of Olympic qualification. The national team averaged 21.8 fouls, ranked fifth in the World Cup. And many of these fouls are results of bad habits such as careless reaching in and meaningless offensive fouls. However, in the Chinese Basketball Association, most of these actions are tacitly approved by the referees. As time pasts, the players formed this bad offensive and defensive habits and eventually suffer losses in the international competition. For example, in the China versus Poland game which drew a heated discussion, the national team made a series of unreasonable fouls that handed over victory to the opponent.

3.2 Comparison with a Similar Team

I believe that for fans who are familiar with Asian basketball teams, the South Korean team is certainly not a stranger. As the old opponent of the Chinese National Team, the South Korean team and China played against each other a total of 21 times in international competition, of which China won 17 times and lost 4 times. Although the Chinese team is obviously the dominant side according to the match record, for the past few years, the South Korean team has posted some serious threat to the national team. For example, the Korean team beat the Chinese National Team in the 2013 FIBA Asia Cup with 63 to 59. In the 2019 FIBA Basketball World Cup, neither the Chinese team nor the South Korean team broke through the group stage, and both lost their qualification for the 2021

Japan Olympics. Both teams build their lineups around cores in the paint, who are Yi Jianlian from China and Ricardo Ratliffe from Korea. In terms of points per game, three-point percentage, and free-throws percentage, the two teams are almost the same, ranked at the bottom of the World Cup.

Team	Point Per game	2P%	3P%	FT%	Rebounds	Assists
China	71	52.30%	26.20%	64.80%	34.8	15.2
South Korea	72.2	42.70%	31.30%	67.80%	40	18.2

Table 2 Comparison of Average Game Statistics between China and South Korea

What's different is that, China uses the center as an offensive and defensive core. There are pick-and-roll with 2 centers around the three-point line in almost every offensive round, and the guards attack the rim with the help of 2 big men. This is commonly known as the “horns” play. Nevertheless, the South Korean team sets the naturalized player Ricardo Ratliffe as a defensive core. Compared to the Chinese team, the Korean team has bigger offensive space, and they are heavily focused on outside shooting, allowing centers and power forwards to have different plays in the paint. China, on the other hand, has almost zero threats in the three-points line. Guards are left wide open, which further impeded the performance of the paint.

3.3 Suggestions to the Future Chinese National Basketball Team

3.3.1 About the Problem of Insufficient Basic Skills

As it is mentioned above, the Chinese National Team had a terrible performance on shooting in the World Cup, and many statistics were ranked at the bottom among 32 participated teams. Only if the national team improves its shooting ability, especially in the three-points line, there is a chance for the centers to show their advantage under the rim. What's more, free-throws are also a crucial part in the shooting. While there aren't any short cuts to improve free-throws, the only way is practicing. For the top basketball teams in the world, free-throws will never be a problem. The Chinese team must raise its free-throws percentage in order to be one of the best teams in the world.

3.3.2 About the Problem of Poor Defensive Habits

One of the major causes of the failure in the World Cup is flaws in rotation and lineup as mentioned in 3.2. The national team adopted a lineup of five guards, three centers, and two forwards. While the head coach Li Nan insisted to put three guards with two centers on the court, he abandoned players who had extraordinary performance in the CBA, such as Wu Qian, Abdusalam Abdurishit, and Kyranbek. As a result, the frontcourt players are too small in size, increasing the pressure of big men in the defensive end; it also caused the players to consume too much energy. Especially when the core is a 32 years center, the national team should bring one more center to substitute Yi as he is getting too tired. The rotation and lineup directly determine the performance on the court, and thus the national team must be more cautious and make more appropriate decisions on it.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, as the host of the 2019 FIBA Basketball World Cup, the Chinese National Team exposed a number of problems when facing the international elite teams. Firstly, the incapability of shooting is the direct cause of failure. As analyzed in 3.2, the Chinese team’s outside shooting is one of the worsts in terms of quality and quantity when compared with the world’s top teams, and the lack of training and inefficient training method probably caused it. Just like practicing free-throws, there isn’t any shortcut to improve three-points shooting. As long as the players take enough shoots during practice, they will make it better.

Moreover, the Chinese Basketball Association must be in line with FIBA when it comes to the referee's system; the referees in CBA need to change their judging scale on both the offensive and defensive side. In this World Cup, the national team had too many blocking fouls in pick-and-roll plays, and these fouls were often neglected by the refs, indirectly causing the failure of games. Thus, improving the referee's level and standard can prevent the national team from suffering in fouls

troubles. Although the Chinese National Team still has some distance from being a top 8 team in the world, the gap is reachable. As long as it faces the challenges and makes corresponding adjustments, the national team no doubt has a promising future.

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