

US ready to flex its muscles

AMERICANS KEEN TO DOMINATE AND HAVE FUN AT SAME TIME AS THEY LOOK TO ENHANCE NATION'S LEGACY

By SUN XIAOCHEN
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HUIZHOU, Guangdong — The United States is ready to show the world its deep basketball foundation at the 26th Universiade.

Despite worldwide fever for the NBA, the hottest basketball competition in the US is the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), which paves way for student players, who are good enough, to make their way into the lucrative NBA.

Comprising a glittering group of young NCAA talent, the US men's Universiade team is ready for some tough battles in Shenzhen while also experiencing the event's unique atmosphere.

"Honestly, our goal is to win the gold medal. But we know it's going to be a very tough competition here," said the US squad's head coach, Matt Painter, after stunning Chinese Basketball Association (CBA) club Dongguan New Century 88-61 in a warm-up game in Huizhou, Guangdong province, on Aug 11.

"It was a great tune-up for us. They presented a lot of pressure and forced us to make improvements," Painter said.

"We don't know much about our opponents. We don't have the scouting reports. I think it's relatively even for everyone. We just want to concentrate on ourselves and go out to play smart basketball and have a lot of fun here," said Painter, who helped the US claim the Under-19 World Championship as an assistant coach in 2009.

Aiming for its 14th Universiade championship, the US squad features an energetic lineup that includes sophomore sharpshooter John Jenkins from Vanderbilt, U-19 Worlds champion team guard Ashton Gibbs from the University of Pittsburgh and Minnesota's junior forward Teravor Mbakwe.

Jenkins, who is a big fan of Boston Celtics' guard Ray Allen, reminded local fans of the all-star shooter by hitting seven 3-pointers in a game-high 21 points against New Century.

Jenkins, a 2011 All-Southeastern Conference (SEC) first team



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member, said he felt honored to play at the same event as his idol, who helped the US team claim the 1995 Universiade title with fellow NBA big names like Allen Iverson and Tim Duncan.

"Taking part in the University Games will be a great experience. Hopefully we can win the gold medal while also making new friends," said the 20-year-old.

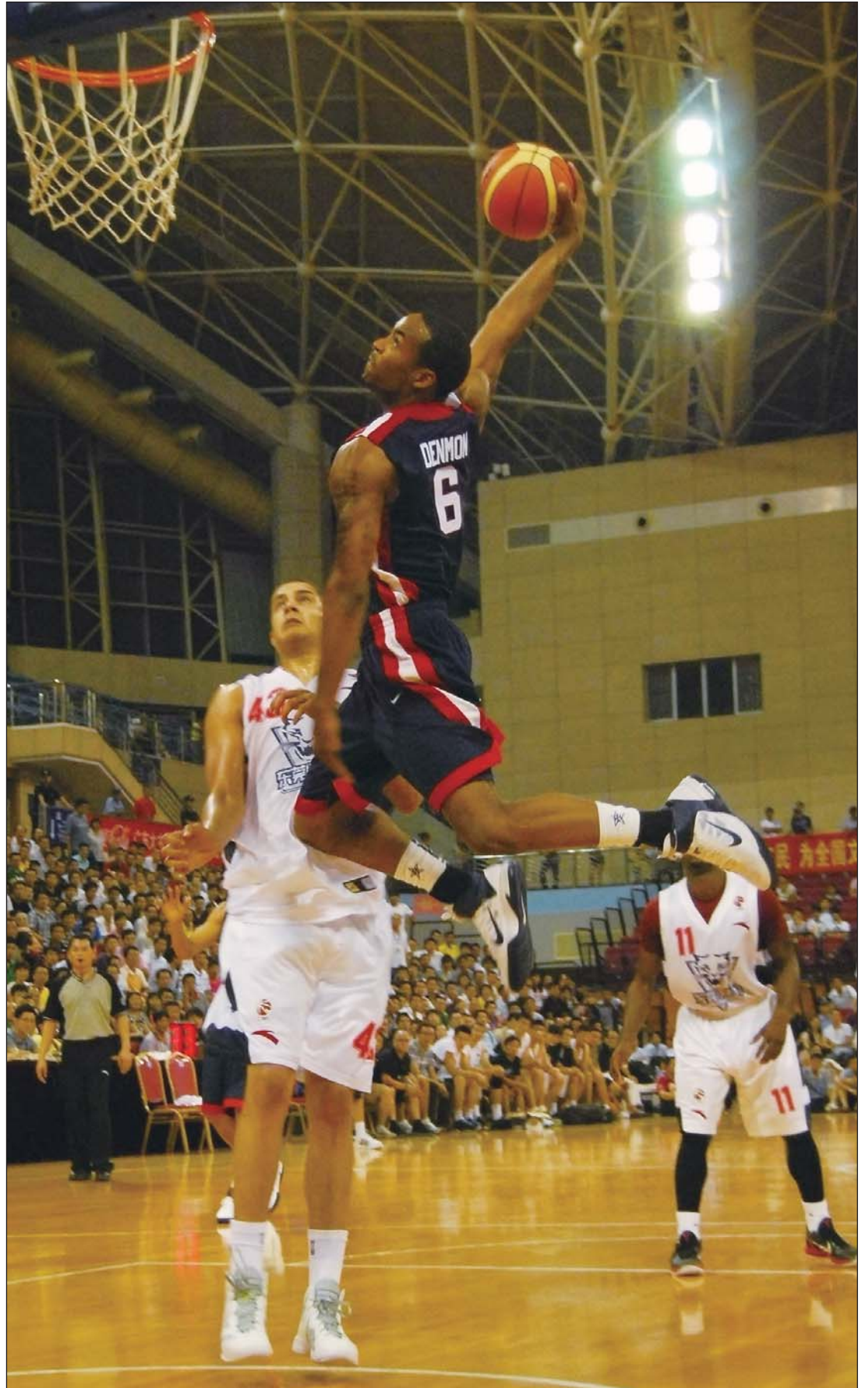
Jenkins' teammate, Orlando Johnson, echoed that sentiment.

"It's pretty cool how you see all of the different countries here and get a chance to interact with them. I'm very honored to be here and to have the chance to not only play with some great athletes but also to meet others from around the world," said Johnson, UC Santa Barbara's junior guard, who was named the Big West Player of the Year in 2010.

Arriving at the athlete's village on Tuesday after a 30-hour trip, the US squad took to the court for three quarters of scrimmaging against Japan the next day before heading to Huizhou on a two-hour bus ride to play the exhibition game.

Coach Painter said the tight schedule would help the young guns adjust after such a long journey.

Team USA will take on Mexico on Saturday in its opening group game at the Universiade Main Gymnasium.



Marcus Denmon, a guard from University of Missouri, dunks the ball during the US Universiade team's warm-up game against CBA club the Dongguan New Century in Guangdong province's Huizhou on Aug 11.

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