

Tough questions need to be asked

Spain 97, China 81
Russia 73, China 54
Australia 81, China 61

Any way you look at them, be it upside down, back to front or standing on your head, the Chinese men's results in the Olympic basketball tournament are enough to make a fan's eyes bleed.

China, with games against Brazil and host Britain, is all but relegated now to the inglorious battle for places eight to 16 after progressively worse losses to arguably progressively weaker opponents. Spain is widely tipped to play the United States in the final, the Russians have reasonably strong semifinal prospects and the Boomers are not a team to be taken lightly, but to lose by an average of more than 18 points a game is alarming, bordering on disgraceful.

The burden of these horrid defeats falls upon the shoulders of head coach Bob Donewald Jr, who vowed before these Games that China's opponents would know they had been in a game because this was "the best" defensive team the nation had ever produced.

Glad to see I never saw the worst. To be fair, you can only paint with the colors you have been given and the American is pretty much using black, white and gray (I know they are hues, but stick with me here), but this ugly picture is still of his design.

He is now lamenting the retirement of Yao Ming, but, hey Bobby, the Aussie don't have their big man Andrew Bogut, the US Dwight Howard and almost every other team at the event as key component of their perfect squad, so cry me a river.

Donewald's vaunted defense is relatively slow and generally undersized. When China puts on a press it seems halfhearted and its zone in penetrated or shot over with alarming regularity.

But that's not the robust American's greatest concern; that comes



TYM GLASER

when China has the ball and becomes a two-trick pony.

The simple to read Chinese offensive policy is to chuck the ball around the perimeter until someone can get an open shot for a three or pass it to the team's one world-class player, Yi Jianlian, and let him weave a little of his NBA-style magic.

Against Australia on Thursday, almost half of the team's points (27 and all from Wang Shipeng) came from three-point land. Anybody who follows basketball knows that place outside the arched line is fickle territory and can grow mighty cold. The Aussies just bided their time knowing when the big chill came that China and Donewald Jr had no Plan B.

Now, with its Olympic campaign all but in tatters, the Chinese basketball authorities must decide what to do to move the team forward and, more importantly, ask itself if the oft-times bristly Donewald is the man for the task.

The simple questions they must ask are:

- 1) Does Donewald have the tactical nous to improve the side?
- 2) Does his in-your-face style motivate or discourage the players?
- 3) Have we seen improvement in the squad?

After the first three games at the Olympics it's impossible to tick any of those boxes.

Tym Glaser is a senior sports copy editor who did dunk once (honestly!!!), but nobody saw it. He can be contacted at tymglaser@chinadaily.com.cn



ERIC GAY / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Blood runs down the face of China's Zhu Fangyu after he collided with another player during a basketball game against Australia on Thursday. Australia won 81-61. China has failed to claim a single victory in its first three group matches, all but killing its hopes of advancing to the final eight.

Great big hole in the middle exposed

By **CHEN XIANGFENG**

In London

chenxiangfeng@chinadaily.com.cn

Yao Ming was right to be worried.

The retired NBA center, now serving as a TV commentator at the London Games, voiced his concerns about China's lack of dominance in the paint before the team's game against Australia on Thursday.

Sure enough, China was completely overwhelmed in the middle, losing 81-61 and casting serious doubt on its ability to advance to the final eight.

China was outscored 30-13 in the paint and out-rebounded 51-36.

"Yes, we miss Yao Ming," said head coach Bob Donewald Jr. "We need more different styles of players. But we



Yes, we miss Yao Ming."

BOB DONEWALD JR
CHINA'S BASKETBALL COACH

have to accept the reality and hopefully we can have more guys on this team come up to help Yi (Jianlian)."

Yi, now the only Chinese player in the NBA, was double-teamed constantly, scoring only 13 points, while fellow big men Wang Zhizhi and Zhang Zhaoxu combined for just three points.

Australian power forward David Andersen — Yao's former teammate

with the Houston Rockets, incidentally — had 17 points and seven rebounds.

"Yi had a great game and he gave what he could against such physical opponents. Wang tried to give him some help, but he just could not get the ball," Donewald said.

Yi was the MVP at last year's Asian Championships, where he helped China earn Asia's only ticket to the Games.

"It's not the Asian Championships," Donewald said. "It's the Olympic Games and the highest level. We cannot have just one Yi on the team. We need more great guys like him in the future."

China will have to play medal-contender Brazil and host Britain in the remaining two group matches. Winning both, and admission to the quar-

terfinals, will be nearly impossible.

"Physical play is our weakness," Donewald said. "We were worn out in the latter half of the game every time we played against physical teams. Brazil has three NBA players and is an even tougher opponent. But we will give what we can and learn from these experiences."

"I know these guys are down after three losses. I will help them pick their heads up and let them know it's not the end. We have two more games and we just cannot give it up."

Making things worse, Yi appeared to injure his knee, and was helped off the court by his teammates.

"We will see how he is doing after treatment. Hopefully, he will be OK," Donewald said.

**YOUR GATEWAY
To CHINA**

London

T: +44 20 7537 7156

Email: UK@chinatelecomeurope.com

Frankfurt

T: +49 69 240 032 901

Email: Germany@chinatelecomeurope.com

Moscow

T: +7 495 626 0160

Email: Russia@chinatelecomeurope.com

Dubai

T: +971 4 3756 989

Email: MiddleEast@chinatelecomeurope.com



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China Telecom (Europe) Ltd.
<http://www.cteurope.net>