

GOLDEN AMBITIONS FOR CHINESE BASKETBALL

China is a strong basketball nation and its national teams have a glittering tally of gold medals to prove it. The Team China marketing programme is bringing support from major sponsors and guaranteeing live television coverage.

Infront's unique task

Infront Sports & Media is the exclusive global marketing partner of the China Basketball Association (CBA) for the country's national basketball teams through 2010. This role covers all key aspects of marketing, including sponsorship, television, new media and image rights and technical development of the Chinese national teams.

Infront's unique task is more than commercial. It has promised to help raise China's position in the FIBA world rankings and – based on Team China's performance at the Beijing Olympics and major basketball events – it is succeeding.

This is a new kind of partnership between a Chinese sports body and an international sports marketing company, creating powerful synergy in the promotion of Chinese basketball to the world.

A nation on the rise

China is an emerging power in world basketball. Its men's team took gold in the last Asian Games and reached the quarter-finals at the 2008 Beijing Games, having fought its way through the most difficult group in the Olympic basketball tournament.

Its women's team also took gold at the last Asian Games and is ranked as one of the best teams in the world. In the recent Olympics, it triumphed over Australia, Czech Republic, Russia and Spain, reaching the semi finals.

Most popular in China

Basketball is already one of the most popular sports in China. It has overtaken football as number one domestic sport with television viewers. 40% of the country's children regard basketball as their favourite sport and the number of players in the country is huge.

The superstars of the Chinese men's team include Yao Ming (all-time leading vote-receiver in the worldwide fan ballot for the NBA All-Star Game in 2005) and the two young stars: Yi Jianlian (New Jersey Nets, entered the NBA in 2007) and Sun Yue (New York Knicks, joined the NBA in 2008).

Transforming Chinese basketball

Together with the CBA, Infront is implementing a comprehensive and jointly-designed technical development plan for the men's and women's national teams. This includes recruitment of top foreign coaching staff, nutritionists, scouts, psychologists and other fitness training experts in support of the teams.

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A build-up programme for global events

One of the major objectives of the national team programme is to provide Team China with the highest quality opponents to give players maximum experience of the style of basketball they will face internationally. To help achieve this, there is an annual programme of national team matches, to help prepare the teams for global events such as the Olympic Games, the FIBA World Championships and the Asian Games.

This programme is the core of the offering to sponsors. In the build up to the Olympic Games, 15 cities across China hosted 21 games in the run up to the Olympics. This year, Team China is playing a series of warm-up matches from May to August in preparation for the FIBA Asian Championship – it has been Asian champion 14 times, winning more gold medals than any other team in the history of this event. In 2010, preparation will be designed as a build-up programme for the FIBA World Championship and the 2010 Asian Games.

Strategic partnership with CCTV

Infront China and CCTV Sports Promotion Corporation (CCTVSP) have formed a strategic partnership in support of the television broadcast of the matches of Team China. This year's warm-up matches ran from May to August and involved strong, invited opposition from Australia, Canada and Lithuania. There were nine matches for the women's national team during May and June and eight matches for the men's national team.

All were covered on CCTV-5 and the total cumulative audience exceeded 90 million viewers. This agreement is a very major step forward, helping to put a domestic sport in a strong position in the Chinese ratings and adding significantly to the return for the sponsors who support Team China.

Synergy with the League

As a result of Infront's existing and parallel role with the Chinese Basketball League, there is a unique opportunity for broadcasters and sponsors to focus on Chinese basketball as a dynamic product, taking advantage of the synergy between the CBA League and Team China, helping to put Chinese basketball on the world map and exploiting its potential to the full as the best way to reach Chinese consumers through their favourite sport.

Sponsor support grows

This programme of matches has now become the core of the offering to sponsors of Team China. An impressive group of national and global brands have joined together to support the national basketball teams, including Blue Sword, Brilliance Auto, China Mobile, Jasper, Kangzhiwei, Netease, Nike, Pearl River Beer, Quan Xing, TCL, UPS and Yake.

With Infront's help, this programme has become a properly co-ordinated sponsorship platform. Before Infront's initiatives, there was no consistent "look" for Team China basketball matches and no TCB brand. Each organiser created its own promotional materials. As a result, there was little awareness. Now, all events have a cohesive, immediately recognisable look and feel, so that fans can identify with Team China. The new "look" contains elements that reflect the traditions of China and at the same the vibrant attributes of the sport of basketball.

Helping players to develop

The development of China's sports talent is vital to the country's long-term and continuing success at the international level. Infront has recognised this and therefore formed an exclusive joint-venture with a premier basketball athlete management company in the US - Excel Sports Management - to establish a professional basketball athlete representation business in China. Its objective is to increase opportunities for Chinese players and athletes to gain experience abroad and give international stars more scope to play in China, while also providing a service that can link stars and sponsors for promotional purposes.

Infront is helping to build Chinese basketball to the next level, creating potential for new superstars and increasing the popularity of the game among fans at home and abroad.