

Lyles wins in Zurich in 1st race since
worlds triple

2d

Besides Simone Biles, who will make the U.S. Olympic gymnastics team?



Seven-time national champion and GOAT of the sport Simone Biles is a shoo-in to make the Olympic team, but still has to compete this weekend. Five other women will also become Olympians. AP Photo/Tony Gutierrez



Alyssa Roenigk, ESPN Senior Writer
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The greatest gymnast in history will compete for perhaps the final time on U.S. soil this weekend. But Simone Biles isn't the only reason the U.S. Olympic gymnastics trials (June 24-27) is the must-watch event of qualifying season.

U.S. Olympic Gymnastics Trials

When: June 24-27

Where: St. Louis, Mo.

Watch: NBC's networks

Who qualifies: Four-member teams and one individual will be named for both men and women, along with Jade Carey, who has clinched an individual spot already.

It's been five years since the last Olympic trials, and the pandemic caused quite a shuffle at the top of the sport. Morgan Hurd, the only world champion since 2013 not named Biles, didn't make the 18-woman trials roster, and only Biles returns from the Final Five team that won at the Rio Olympics.

With the team size reduced from five to four in Tokyo, the competition is as fierce as ever. Biles, by all measures, is a shoo-in for a spot, but several questions still loom ahead of the four-day meet. We take a swing at the biggest ones.

Wait. Are we sending four women or six to Tokyo?

Good question. Team size for the Tokyo Games was dropped from five to four, but countries were also able to qualify in individual spots. The women will send a four-person team, as well as two individual athletes who are eligible to compete in all four events, but will not participate in the team competition.

The men will send a four-person team, plus one individual. At trials, the top two women and top man receive automatic berths onto the team. The remaining spots will be filled by the selection committees.

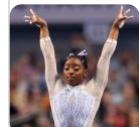


Jade Carey has mathematically clinched one of the individual spots based off her rankings in the World Cup circuit.
AP Photo/Tony Gutierrez

Why has Jade Carey already qualified for Tokyo?

This is both the easiest question to answer and the toughest to explain. Carey mathematically clinched an Olympic spot for herself through the apparatus World Cup series but hasn't formally accepted it yet. This is the first Olympic cycle where qualifying outside of Olympic trials was an option, and the 21-year-old made a decision to take her Olympic future into her own hands rather than leave her fate to a selection committee.

EDITOR'S PICKS



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Because she earned the spot for herself, if Carey finishes in the top two at trials and takes an automatic bid onto the team, the U.S. will forfeit her individual spot. Carey recently said she won't allow that to happen. "I have every intention to accept the individual spot that I worked very hard to earn," Carey wrote on Instagram last week. "My focus right now is preparing to compete at the Olympic Games in Tokyo and being able to contribute to Team USA in any way possible."

As an individual in Tokyo, Carey is not eligible to compete in the team competition, but she is able to compete in all four events and qualify for the individual all-around and event finals. Because of a two-per-country rule, Carey must qualify in the top two in the U.S. on any apparatus -- or in the all-around -- to compete in finals and have a shot at a medal. And yes, her medal counts toward the overall U.S. medal count.

Who will grab the four team spots?

Biles, of course, is the greatest all-arounder in history. Jordan Chiles, who trains with Biles at World Champions Centre in Houston, and Sunisa Lee, who performs one of the most difficult bar routines in the world, have emerged as the next two best all-arounders in the nation. Since the top two women in the all-around will receive an automatic berth onto the team, and it's likely Biles will nab the top spot, the Chiles-Lee meet-within-a-meet should be fun to follow.

If Biles, Chiles and Lee are considered near-locks for three spots, who will get the fourth?

National team coordinator Tom Forster has indicated he hopes to name the top four all-around finishers to the team, so strong all-arounders like Emma Malabuyo, who finished just off the podium at nationals, Grace McCallum, who finished tied for seventh but has two world championship teams under her belt, or Leanne Wong, who finished fifth in Fort Worth, appear to be top contenders. Riley McCusker, who was injured at Classics in May, is expected to return to the all-around and could make a case as well. (*Update: As of Friday morning, McCusker is only on the start list for bars and beam on Friday.*)

While an argument could also be made for a specialist such as MyKayla Skinner to be named to the team, this could be a riskier strategy. All four team gymnasts will compete on every apparatus during prelims and three of the four will compete each rotation in finals. That means if any team member is lost to injury before finals, the others must carry her events in finals. While the U.S. is the hands-down favorite for team gold in almost every situation, the selection committee might look past a specialist who is weak on a couple of events in favor of a gymnast equally strong on all four.





Riley McCusker could potentially be in the mix for either a team or specialist spot. AP Photo/Tony Gutierrez

What happens to the second individual spot?

In addition to the Olympic spot Carey secured for herself, the U.S. earned an additional spot for an individual who will be named at trials. So, who grabs that spot?

If the goal, as Forster has said, is to maximize individual medals, then it likely will be an athlete who complements Carey, a gymnast who is powerful on vault (the event on which she secured her Olympic spot) and floor.

McCusker is a stellar bars swinger, would complement Lee in the event and has a legitimate shot at an Olympic medal. Kara Eaker is a strong beam performer who, with a clean performance at trials, could make a case for penciling her name into that sixth spot. McCallum, Wong or Malabuyo could also take that second individual spot if they aren't named to the four-person team, as all three are strong on multiple events.

Can Brody Malone back up his win at nationals?

At U.S. championships earlier this month, Sam Mikulak went into the competition hoping to win his seventh national title. But his weekend did not go as planned.

Competing for the first time in 15 months, the two-time Olympian fell on parallel bars, made major errors on floor and pommel horse and finished the first day of competition in seventh place in the all-around.

Then, on Day 2, Mikulak posted the highest total of the session, ultimately finishing third overall and reminding fans why he will likely make his third Olympic team this summer.





Brody Malone won the U.S. national championships this year, cementing his status as a favorite for the Olympic team.
AP Photo/Tony Gutierrez

But the star of nationals on the men's side was Malone, the two-time reigning NCAA all-around champion and former rodeo competitor who led out of the gate and finished in the top spot overall. A performance anything like that which he turned in in Fort Worth will send the gymnast Mikulak called "the future" to Tokyo.

How many Biles skills will Biles perform?

And will she compete [the incredible Yurchenko double pike vault again](#)? All signs point to yes on this bonus question. Biles has indicated she'd like to perform the vault again in St. Louis.

Now is a good time to mention that Biles currently has four skills named after her: two tumbling passes on floor, one vault and a dismount off beam. (Once she competes the Yurchenko double pike vault in international competition at the Tokyo Games, it too will bear her name.)

At trials, it is likely we'll see her compete two of the four already named Biles. Both of her eponymous floor skills -- a double layout with a half twist and a triple twisting double tuck -- are included in her floor routine. We may never see her compete the double-double beam dismount again. Because of the low difficulty score FIG awarded the skill, Biles has said the risk outweighs the reward.

Update: On Wednesday, Biles proved us wrong and did a double-double dismount off beam in podium training. All bets are off!



Coach Steve Kerr hopes Team USA will learn from its loss to Lithuania. (0:40)



Brian Windhorst, ESPN Senior Writer

Sep 3, 2023, 03:31 PM ET

MANILA, Philippines -- Team USA has been in some adverse situations in the [2023 FIBA World Cup](#), but this isn't one of them.

This is an ode to an old [LeBron James](#) quote, and it's an appropriate one. It is easy to have a sharp reaction whenever the always-favored Americans lose in international play. And they sure as heck lost to [Lithuania on Sunday, 110-104](#).

But it should be understood this is not a crisis or some kind of challenge that was unexpected. The Americans are managing a glaring weakness that has been a glaring weakness all along.

The U.S. is small and boy did Lithuania take advantage. The Americans have been small for years in these events. They might be small for years to come, which will be discussed in

a moment.

They combat the height disadvantage with various remedies, and they usually are effective in doing so. And they could be quite effective at this again.

Coach Steve Kerr has elected -- and not this week or this month, but when he put the team together with USA Basketball leadership -- that instead of fighting this problem, they are going to embrace it. Instead of trying to find big players to go head-to-head, they are going to lean into all the great American guards and wings who have the quickness and ability to guard bigger players.

EDITOR'S PICKS



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That is why there is only one true center --- [Walker Kessler](#), and he plays the least -- and a number of forwards who play center such as [Jaren Jackson Jr.](#), [Bobby Portis](#) and [Paolo Banchero](#). And there are players such as [Tyrese Haliburton](#), [Mikal Bridges](#), [Austin Reaves](#), [Cam Johnson](#) and [Josh Hart](#) who are long and can defend different positions.

It isn't an accident or some bad luck the U.S. is so small.

"That's always the equation, as coaches you have to factor in all these things when you decide what scheme to play," Kerr said last week. "Some things you live with, you kind of go into every game and figure out what are you willing to live with versus non-negotiables."

Kerr's non-negotiables, both with Team USA and the [Golden State Warriors](#), are well established. His trophy case tells the tale of how it's worked out.

Lithuania is the biggest and strongest team in the tournament and it is in the midst of a magical run of 3-point shooting. Its performance in Sunday's game was one of the best in the history of the World Cup.

The team made its first nine 3-pointers. Nine! And it made 14-of-25 overall. Lithuania came into the game shooting 44% on 3s in the tournament, tops among all teams. And then it got better. Nine different players made at least one 3. Nine!

2023 FIBA World Cup

Team USA has advanced to the quarterfinals of the World Cup (Aug. 25-Sept. 10) in the Philippines:

- [It's no accident Team USA's roster is small](#)
- [Team USA loses to Lithuania; Italy up next](#)
- [Haliburton shines on World Cup stage](#)
- [Team USA routs Jordan](#)

[More: TV schedule, roster and news](#)

Late in the fourth quarter, Eimantas Bendzius threw in -- legit threw in -- a vital 3-pointer from the corner at the shot-clock buzzer after the U.S. played 23.5 seconds of great defense. [Anthony Edwards](#) slapped the ball out of his hands with two seconds on the shot clock and Bendzius made a prayer.

"Shoutout to No. 22, man," Edwards said.

Indeed. It called to mind the game the USA lost to Greece in 2006 in the World Championship. Yes, that was a flawed and unprepared American team. Yes, the Greeks were awesome for so much of that night and earned the win. And yes, Greece threw in a couple of absolutely wild shots, including at least one 3-pointer that banked off the glass and had no business going in.

It would be smart for Team USA to root for any team that plays Lithuania the rest of the way. The Americans couldn't play Lithuania again until the World Cup final, though the U.S. has a lot of work to do between now and then.

Lithuania is a terrible matchup for this team; it has the size and the depth to mitigate what the Americans do best. It was known to be a serious test before the game and proved to be that.

If these teams played five times, the Lithuanians would probably win the rebounding battle all five. It might not be close. But the U.S. won the second half Sunday by 11 points and that was with some adversity.

If Lithuania keeps shooting the 3-pointer like this -- it's up to nearly 47% now -- it's going to win the World Cup. If Team USA keeps getting one rebound every two games from Jackson, as was the case this weekend, it probably won't medal.

The Americans have a lot going for them. Including Edwards, who scored 35 points Sunday.

"We're fortunate the loss doesn't hurt us in terms of our goal, which is to win the gold medal," Kerr said. "But it's a great game for ... to experience."

1:06

What led to Team USA's loss vs. Lithuania? Brian Windhorst recaps Team USA's 110-104 loss to Lithuania.

More takeaways from Team USA's loss to Lithuania:

- So, why isn't there any size on the U.S. roster? Let's use our knowledge of NBA rosters and think about the available American centers. There are a lot of European names out there who are starting. Some, such as Lithuania's [Jonas Valanciunas](#), are in Manila playing against them.

At the last World Cup in 2019, the U.S. took three big centers, [Myles Turner](#), [Brook Lopez](#) and [Mason Plumlee](#). They were totally ineffective. The Americans finished seventh.

In Tokyo, Team USA brought two smaller, quicker and defensively versatile centers: [Bam Adebayo](#) and [Draymond Green](#). It won the gold. [JaVale McGee](#) was on the roster but didn't play much. [Kevin Durant](#) played more at the back line of defense.

Kessler was picked because he represents the biggest and toughest defender of the young American big men. Perhaps the Cleveland Cavaliers' [Evan Mobley](#), a potential defensive star, would have been an option. But he doesn't have the bulk of Kessler or Banchero, which Kerr seems to have preferred.

[Anthony Davis](#) is an option and a great one. He has won gold medals. He would absolutely help. He has signed an extension with the [Los Angeles Lakers](#) and won't have to worry

about free agency next summer when the Olympics are on the schedule. He'd fit well in what Kerr wants to do.

Davis is open to the idea of returning to the national team next year, sources said, but it's way too early to know.

FIBA World Cup on ESPN2

Tuesday's Quarterfinals

United States vs. Italy, 8:30 a.m.

All times Eastern

This brings us to [Joel Embiid](#). He's an American citizen as of last summer. He could play for the U.S. in Paris next year if he's healthy enough and wants to turn down a chance to play for France, where he also has citizenship.

Grant Hill, the USA Basketball executive director, and Sean Ford, the general manager, know this, of course. There has been recruitment, of course. Embiid would make a huge difference.

But he can't be counted on. He doesn't fit the way Kerr wants to play. And he's not in the Philippines.

Assistant coach Erik Spoelstra has a saying, borrowed from Hall of Famer Pat Riley: "You have to be active participants in your own rescue."

Here's another one of Spo's: "We have enough."

Both are true in this case.

- What is next? Italy in the quarterfinals. It might seem like a break that the U.S. drew the Italians and not traditional power Serbia, whom it would've played had it beat Lithuania.

Maybe not. Italy is a stronger rebounding team than Serbia, which doesn't have [Nikola Jokic](#). If Jokic were playing in this event -- whoa, he might have a chance at the double gold summer that Marc Gasol pulled off in 2019 with the [Toronto Raptors](#) and Spain.

Right now, rebounding strength is most important when looking at the Team USA opponent. The Italians are also better at shooting the 3-pointer than the Serbians,

significantly so actually.

At this point, nothing can be taken for granted.