

= Yao Ming =

Yao Ming (born September 12 , 1980) is a Chinese retired professional basketball player who played for the Shanghai Sharks of the Chinese Basketball Association (CBA) and the Houston Rockets of the National Basketball Association (NBA) . He was selected to start for the Western Conference in the NBA All @-@ Star Game eight times , and was named to the All @-@ NBA Team five times . At the time of his final season , he was the tallest active player in the NBA , at 2 @. @ 29 m (7 ft 6 in) . He is also the only player outside of the US to lead the NBA All @-@ Star voting .

Yao , who was born in Shanghai , China , started playing for the Shanghai Sharks as a teenager , and played on their senior team for five years in the Chinese Basketball Association (CBA) , winning a championship in his final year . After negotiating with the CBA and the Sharks to secure his release , Yao was selected by the Houston Rockets as the first overall pick in the 2002 NBA draft . He reached the NBA Playoffs four times , and the Rockets won a first @-@ round series in the 2009 postseason , their first playoff series victory since 1997 . In July 2011 , Yao announced his retirement from professional basketball because of a series of foot and ankle injuries which forced him to miss 250 games in his last six seasons . In eight seasons with the Rockets , Yao ranks sixth among franchise leaders in total points and total rebounds , and second in total blocks .

Yao is one of China 's best @-@ known athletes , with sponsorships with several major companies . His rookie year in the NBA was the subject of a documentary film , The Year of the Yao , and he co @-@ wrote , along with NBA analyst Ric Bucher , an autobiography titled Yao : A Life in Two Worlds .

On April 4 , 2016 , Yao was elected into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame , alongside Shaquille O 'Neal and Allen Iverson .

= = Career in China = =

= = = Early life and CBA career = = =

Yao is the only child of 6 ft 7 in (2 @. @ 01 m) Yao Zhiyuan and 6 ft 3 in (1 @. @ 90 m) Fang Fengdi , both of whom were former professional basketball players . At 11 pounds (5 @. @ 0 kg) , Yao weighed more than twice as much as the average Chinese newborn . When Yao was nine years old , he began playing basketball and attended a junior sports school . The following year , Yao measured 5 feet 5 inches (1 @. @ 65 m) and was examined by sports doctors , who predicted he would grow to 7 feet 3 inches (2 @. @ 20 m) .

Yao first tried out for the Shanghai Sharks junior team of the Chinese Basketball Association (CBA) when he was thirteen years old , and practiced ten hours a day for his acceptance . After playing with the junior team for four years , Yao joined the senior team of the Sharks , where he averaged 10 points and 8 rebounds a game in his rookie season . His next season was cut short when he broke his foot for the second time in his career , which Yao said decreased his jumping ability by four to six inches (10 to 15 cm) . The Sharks made the finals of the CBA in Yao ' s third season and again the next year , but lost both times to the Bayi Rockets . When Wang Zhizhi left the Bayi Rockets to become the first NBA player from China the following year , the Sharks finally won their first CBA championship . During the playoffs in his final year with Shanghai , Yao averaged 38 @. @ 9 points and 20 @. @ 2 rebounds a game , while shooting 76 @. @ 6 % from the field , and made all 21 of his shots during one game in the finals .

= = = Entering the NBA draft = = =

Yao was pressured to enter the NBA draft in 1999 by Li Yaomin , the deputy general manager of the Shanghai Sharks . Li also influenced Yao to sign a contract for Evergreen Sports Inc. to serve as his agent . The agreement entitled Evergreen to 33 % of Yao 's earnings , but the contract was later determined to be invalid .

When Yao decided to enter the 2002 NBA draft , a group of advisers was formed that came to be known as " Team Yao " . The team consisted of Yao ' s negotiator , Erik Zhang ; his NBA agent , Bill Duffy ; his Chinese agent , Lu Hao ; University of Chicago economics professor John Huizinga ; and the vice president for marketing at BDA Sports Management , Bill Sanders . Yao was widely predicted to be picked number one overall . However , some teams were concerned about Yao 's NBA eligibility because of uncertainty over whether the CBA would let Yao play in the United States .

Shortly after Wang Zhizhi refused to return to China to play for the national team and was subsequently banned from playing for China , the CBA stipulated that Yao would have to return to play for the national team . They also said they would not let him go to the United States unless the Houston Rockets would take him first overall . After assurances from Team Yao that the Rockets would draft Yao with their number one pick , the CBA gave permission on the morning of the draft for Yao to play in the U.S. When the Rockets selected Yao with the first pick of the draft , he became the first international player ever to be selected first overall without having previously played U.S. college basketball .

= = NBA career = =

= = Beginning years (2002 ? 2005) = = =

Yao did not participate in the Rockets ' pre @-@ season training camp , instead playing for China in the 2002 FIBA World Championships . Before the season , several commentators , including Bill Simmons and Dick Vitale , predicted that Yao would fail in the NBA , and Charles Barkley said he would " kiss [Kenny Smith 's] ass " if Yao scored more than 19 points in one of his rookie @-@ season games . Yao played his first NBA game against the Indiana Pacers , scoring no points and grabbing two rebounds , and scored his first NBA basket against the Denver Nuggets . In his first seven games , he averaged only 14 minutes and 4 points , but on November 17 , he scored 20 points on a perfect 9 @-@ of @-@ 9 from the field and 2 @-@ of @-@ 2 from the free @-@ throw line against the Lakers . Barkley made good on his bet by kissing the buttock of a donkey purchased by Smith for the occasion (Smith 's " ass ") .

In Yao 's first game in Miami on December 16 , 2002 , the Heat passed out 8 @,@ 000 fortune cookies , an Asian cultural stereotype . Yao was not angry with the promotion because he was not familiar with American stereotypes of Chinese . In an earlier interview in 2000 , Yao said he had never seen a fortune cookie in China and guessed it must have been an American invention .

Before Yao ' s first meeting with Shaquille O 'Neal on January 17 , 2003 , O 'Neal said , " Tell Yao Ming , Ching chong @-@ yang @-@ wah @-@ ah @-@ soh " , prompting accusations of racism . O 'Neal denied that his comments were racist , and said he was only joking . Yao also said he believed O 'Neal was joking , but he said a lot of Asians would not see the humor . In the game , Yao scored six points and blocked O 'Neal twice in the opening minutes , and made a game @-@ sealing dunk with 10 seconds left in overtime . Yao finished with 10 points , 10 rebounds , and 6 blocks ; O 'Neal recorded 31 points , 13 rebounds , and 0 blocks . O 'Neal later admitted that he regretted how he hazed Yao early in his career .

The NBA began offering All @-@ Star ballots in three languages ? English , Spanish and Chinese ? for fan voting of the starters for the 2003 NBA All @-@ Star Game . Yao was voted to start for the West over O 'Neal , who was coming off three consecutive NBA Finals MVP Awards . Yao received nearly a quarter million more votes than O 'Neal , and he became the first rookie to start in the All @-@ Star Game since Grant Hill in 1995 .

Yao finished his rookie season averaging 13 @.@ 5 points and 8 @.@ 2 rebounds per game , and was second in the NBA Rookie of the Year Award voting to Amar 'e Stoudemire , and a unanimous pick for the NBA All @-@ Rookie First Team selection . He was also voted the Sporting News Rookie of the Year , and won the Laureus Newcomer of the Year award .

Before the start of Yao 's sophomore season , Rockets ' head coach Rudy Tomjanovich resigned

because of health issues , and long @-@ time New York Knicks head coach Jeff Van Gundy was brought in . After Van Gundy began focusing the offense on Yao , Yao averaged career highs in points and rebounds for the season , and had a career @-@ high 41 points and 7 assists in a triple @-@ overtime win against the Atlanta Hawks in February 2004 . He was also voted to be the starting center for the Western Conference in the 2004 NBA All @-@ Star Game for the second straight year . Yao finished the season averaging 17 @.@ 5 points and 9 @.@ 0 rebounds a game . The Rockets made the playoffs for the first time in Yao 's career , claiming the seventh seed in the Western Conference . In the first round , however , the Los Angeles Lakers eliminated Houston in five games . Yao averaged 15 @.@ 0 points and 7 @.@ 4 rebounds in his first playoff series .

In the summer of 2004 , the Rockets acquired Tracy McGrady from the Orlando Magic in a seven @-@ player trade that also sent Steve Francis and Cuttino Mobley to Orlando . Although Yao said that Francis and Mobley had " helped [him] in every way [his] first two seasons " , he added , " I 'm excited about playing with Tracy McGrady . He can do some amazing things . " After the trade , it was predicted that the Rockets would be title contenders . Both McGrady and Yao were voted to start in the 2005 NBA All @-@ Star Game , and Yao broke the record previously held by Michael Jordan for most All @-@ Star votes , with 2 @,@ 558 @,@ 278 total votes . The Rockets won 51 games and finished fifth in the West , and made the playoffs for the second consecutive year , where they faced the Dallas Mavericks . The Rockets won the first two games in Dallas , and Yao made 13 of 14 shots in the second game , the best shooting performance in the playoffs in Rockets history . However the Rockets lost four of their last five games and lost Game 7 by 40 points , the largest Game 7 deficit in NBA history . Yao 's final averages for the series were 21 @.@ 4 points on 65 % shooting and 7 @.@ 7 rebounds .

= = = Injury @-@ plagued seasons (2005 ? 2011) = = =

After missing only two games out of 246 in his first three years of NBA play , Yao endured an extended period on the inactive list in his fourth season after developing osteomyelitis in the big toe on his left foot , and surgery was performed on the toe on December 18 , 2005 . Despite missing 21 games while recovering , Yao again had the most fan votes to start the 2006 NBA All @-@ Star Game .

In 25 games after the All @-@ Star break , Yao averaged 25 @.@ 7 points and 11 @.@ 6 rebounds per game , while shooting 53 @.@ 7 % from the field and 87 @.@ 8 % at the free @-@ throw line . His final averages in 57 games were 22 @.@ 3 points and 10 @.@ 2 rebounds per game . It was the first time that he ended the season with a so @-@ called " 20 / 10 " average . However , Tracy McGrady played only 47 games in the season , missing time because of back spasms . Yao and McGrady played only 31 games together , and the Rockets did not make the playoffs , winning only 34 games . With only four games left in the season , Yao suffered another injury in a game against the Utah Jazz on April 10 , 2006 , which left him with a broken bone in his left foot . The injury required six months of rest .

Early into his fifth season , Yao was injured again , this time breaking his right knee on December 23 , 2006 , while attempting to block a shot . Up to that point he had been averaging 26 @.@ 8 points , 9 @.@ 7 rebounds and 2 @.@ 3 blocks per game , and had been mentioned as an MVP candidate . Yao was unable to play in what would have been his fifth All @-@ Star game ; he was medically cleared to play on March 4 , 2007 , after missing 32 games .

Despite Yao 's absence , the Rockets made the playoffs with the home court advantage against the Utah Jazz in the first round . The Rockets won the first two games , but then lost four of five games and were eliminated in Game 7 at home ; Yao scored 29 points ? 15 in the fourth quarter . Although he averaged 25 @.@ 1 points and 10 @.@ 3 rebounds for the series , Yao said afterwards " I didn 't do my job " . At the end of the season , Yao was selected to the All @-@ NBA Second Team for the first time in his career , after being selected to the All @-@ NBA Third Team twice .

On May 18 , 2007 , only weeks after the Rockets were eliminated from the playoffs , Jeff Van Gundy was dismissed as head coach . Three days later , the Rockets signed former Sacramento Kings coach Rick Adelman , who was thought to focus more on offense than the defensive @-@

minded Van Gundy .

On November 9 , 2007 , Yao played against fellow Chinese NBA and Milwaukee Bucks player Yi Jianlian for the first time . The game , which the Rockets won 104 ? 88 , was broadcast on 19 networks in China , and was watched by over 200 million people in China alone , making it one of the most @-@ watched NBA games in history . In the 2008 NBA All @-@ Star Game , Yao was once again voted to start at center for the Western Conference . Before the All @-@ Star weekend , the Rockets had won eight straight games , and after the break , they took their win streak to 12 games . On February 26 , 2008 , however , it was reported that Yao would miss the rest of the season with a stress fracture in his left foot . He missed the 2008 NBA Playoffs , but he did not miss the 2008 Summer Olympics at Beijing , China in August . After Yao 's injury , the Rockets stretched their winning streak to 22 games , at the time the second @-@ longest such streak in NBA history . Yao underwent a successful operation on March 3 , which placed screws in his foot to strengthen the bone , and recovery time was estimated at four months . Yao 's final averages in 55 games were 22 @.@ 0 points , 10 @.@ 8 rebounds , and 2 @.@ 0 blocks a game .

The next season , Yao played 77 games , his first full season since the 2004 ? 05 season , and averaged 19 @.@ 7 points and 9 @.@ 9 rebounds , while shooting 54 @.@ 8 % from the field , and a career @-@ high 86 @.@ 6 % from the free throw line . Despite McGrady suffering a season @-@ ending injury in February , the Rockets finished with 53 wins and the fifth seed in the Western Conference . Facing the Portland Trail Blazers in the first round , Yao finished with 24 points on 9 of 9 shooting in the first game , and the Rockets won 108 ? 81 , in Portland . The Rockets won all their games in Houston , and advanced to the second round of the playoffs for the first time since 1997 , and the first time in Yao 's career .

The Rockets faced the Lakers in the second round , and Yao scored 28 points , with 8 points in the final four minutes , to lead the Rockets to a 100 ? 92 win in Los Angeles . However , the Rockets lost their next two games , and Yao was diagnosed with a sprained ankle after Game 3 . A follow @-@ up test revealed a hairline fracture in his left foot , and he was ruled out for the remainder of the playoffs . In reaction , Yao said the injury , which did not require surgery , was " better than last year " . However , follow @-@ up analysis has indicated that the injury could be career threatening . The Yao @-@ less Rockets went on to win Game 4 against the Lakers to even the series 2 ? 2 . The Rockets eventually lost the series in seven games .

In July 2009 , Yao discussed the injury with his doctors , and the Rockets applied for a disabled player exception , an exception to the NBA Salary Cap which grants the injured player 's team money to sign a free agent . The Rockets were granted the exception , and used approximately \$ 5 @.@ 7 million on free agent Trevor Ariza . After weeks of consulting , it was decided that Yao would undergo surgery in order to repair the broken bone in his left foot . He did not play the entire 2009 ? 10 season .

For the 2010 ? 11 season , the Rockets said they would limit Yao to 24 minutes a game , with no plan to play him on back @-@ to @-@ back nights . Their goal was to keep Yao healthy in the long term . On December 16 , 2010 , it was announced that Yao had developed a stress fracture in his left ankle , related to an older injury , and would miss the rest of the season . In January 2011 , he was voted as the Western Conference starting center for the 2011 All @-@ Star Game for the eighth time in nine seasons . Injured All @-@ Stars are usually required to attend the All @-@ Star functions and to be introduced at the game , but Yao was not in Los Angeles because of his rehabilitation schedule after his surgery . Yao 's contract with the Rockets expired at the end of the season , and he became a free agent .

= = = Retirement = = =

On July 20 , 2011 , Yao announced his retirement from basketball in a press conference in Shanghai . He cited injuries to his foot and ankle , including the third fracture to his left foot sustained near the end of 2010 . His retirement sparked over 1 @.@ 2 million comments on the Chinese social @-@ networking site Sina Weibo . Reacting to Yao 's retirement , NBA commissioner David Stern said Yao was a " bridge between Chinese and American fans " and that

he had " a wonderful mixture of talent , dedication , humanitarian aspirations and a sense of humor .
" Shaquille O 'Neal said Yao " was very agile . He could play inside , he could play outside , and if he didn 't have those injuries he could 've been up there in the top five centers to ever play the game . "

Yao was nominated by a member of the Chinese media for the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame as a contributor to the game . He would have been eligible for induction as early as 2012 , but Yao felt it was too soon and requested that the Hall of Fame delay consideration of the nomination . The Hall granted Yao 's request , and said it was Yao 's decision when the process would be restarted . He would be renominated in 2015 .

= = International career = =

= = = 2000 and 2004 Olympics = = =

Yao first played for China in the Summer Olympics at the 2000 Olympics Basketball Tournament , and he was dubbed , together with 7 @-@ foot (2 @.@ 1 m) teammates Wang Zhizhi and Mengke Bateer , " The Walking Great Wall " . During the 2004 Athens Olympics , Yao carried the Chinese flag during the opening ceremony , which he said was a " long dream come true " . He then vowed to abstain from shaving his beard for half a year unless the Chinese national basketball team made it into the quarter @-@ finals of the 2004 Olympics Basketball Tournament . After Yao scored 39 points in a win against New Zealand , China lost 58 ? 83 , 57 ? 82 , and 52 ? 89 against Spain , Argentina and Italy respectively . In the final group game , however , a 67 ? 66 win over the reigning 2002 FIBA World Champions Serbia and Montenegro moved them into the quarterfinals . Yao scored 27 points and had 13 rebounds , and he hit two free throws with 28 seconds left that proved to be the winning margin . He averaged 20 @.@ 7 points and 9 @.@ 3 rebounds per game while shooting 55 @.@ 9 % from the field .

= = = Asian championships = = =

Yao led the Chinese national team to 3 consecutive FIBA Asian Championship gold medals , winning the 2001 FIBA Asian Championship , the 2003 FIBA Asian Championship , and the 2005 FIBA Asian Championship . He was also named the MVP of all three tournaments .

= = = 2006 World championships = = =

Yao ? s injury at the end of the 2005 ? 06 NBA season required a full six months of rest , threatening his participation in the 2006 FIBA World Championship . However , he recovered before the start of the tournament , and in the last game of the preliminary round , he had 36 points and 10 rebounds in a win against Slovenia to lead China into the Round of 16 . In the first knockout round , however , China was defeated by eventual finalist Greece . Yao 's final averages were 25 @.@ 3 points , the most in the tournament , and 9 @.@ 0 rebounds a game , which was fourth overall .

= = = 2008 Olympics = = =

After having surgery to repair his fractured foot , Yao stated if he could not play in the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing , " It would be the biggest loss in my career to right now " . He returned to play with the Chinese national team on July 17 , 2008 . On August 6 , Yao carried the Olympic Flame into Tiananmen Square , as part of the Olympic torch relay . He also carried the Chinese flag and led his country 's delegation during the opening ceremony . Yao scored the first basket of the game , a three @-@ pointer , in China 's opening game against the eventual gold medal @-@ winning United States .

" I was just really happy to make that shot " , Yao said after the Americans ? 101 ? 70 victory . " It

was the first score in our Olympic campaign here at home and I ? ll always remember it . It represents that we can keep our heads up in the face of really tough odds . "

Following an overtime defeat to Spain , Yao scored 30 points in a win over Angola , and 25 points in a three @-@ point win against Germany , which clinched China 's place in the quarterfinals . However , China lost to Lithuania in the quarterfinals by 26 points , eliminating them from the tournament . Yao 's 19 points a game were the second @-@ highest in the Olympics , and his averages of 8 @.@ 2 rebounds and 1 @.@ 5 blocks per game were third overall .

= = Career statistics = =

= = = CBA statistics = = =

= = = NBA statistics = = =

= = = = Regular season = = = =

= = = = Playoffs = = = =

= = Awards and achievements = =

Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame : Class of 2016

8 x NBA All @-@ Star : 2003 , 2004 , 2005 , 2006 , 2007 , 2008 , 2009 , 2011

5 x All @-@ NBA Team :

Second Team : 2007 , 2009

Third Team : 2004 , 2006 , 2008

NBA All @-@ Rookie First Team : 2003

NBA Rookie All @-@ Star Game : 2004

Gold medal winner with Team China at the 2001 , 2003 , 2005 FIBA Asian Championship

MVP of the 2001 , 2003 , 2005 FIBA Asian Championship

All @-@ Tournament Team , FIBA World Championship : 2002

Chinese Basketball Association Champion : 2001 ? 02

Rebounding leader in CBA in 2001 ? 02

2003 Sporting News Rookie of the Year

2003 Laureus Newcomer of the Year

= = Off the court = =

= = = Personal life = = =

Yao met Chinese female basketball player Ye Li when he was 17 years old . Ye was not fond of Yao at first , but finally accepted him after he gave her the team pins he had collected during the 2000 Summer Olympics . She is the only woman he has ever dated . Their relationship became public when they appeared together during the 2004 Olympics closing ceremony . On August 6 , 2007 , Yao and Ye married in a ceremony attended by close friends and family and closed to the media . On May 21 , 2010 , the couple 's daughter Yao Qinlei (whose English name is Amy) was born in Houston , Texas .

In 2004 , Yao co @-@ wrote an autobiography with ESPN sportswriter Ric Bucher , entitled Yao : A

Life in Two Worlds . In the same year , he was also the subject of a documentary film , The Year of the Yao , which focuses on his NBA rookie year . The film is narrated by his friend and former interpreter , Colin Pine , who stayed with Yao during Yao 's rookie year , and interpreted for him for three years . In 2005 , former Newsweek writer Brook Larmer published a book entitled Operation Yao Ming , in which he said that Yao 's parents were convinced to marry each other so that they would produce a dominant athlete , and that during Yao 's childhood , he was given special treatment to help him become a great basketball player . In a 2015 post on the website Reddit.com , Ming stated that this was not true and that he started playing basketball for fun at age 9 . In 2009 , Yao provided the voice for a character of a Chinese animated film The Magic Aster , released on June 19 .

Yao enrolled at the Antai College of Economics & Management of Shanghai Jiao Tong University in 2011 . He is taking a tailored degree program with mostly one @-@ on @-@ one lectures to avoid being a distraction on campus .

= = = Public life = = =

Yao is one of China 's most recognizable athletes , along with Liu Xiang . As of 2009 , he had led Forbes ' Chinese celebrities list in income and popularity for six straight years , earning US \$ 51 million (CN ¥ 357 million) in 2008 . A major part of his income comes from his sponsorship deals , as he is under contract with several major companies to endorse their products . He was signed by Nike until the end of his rookie season . When Nike decided not to renew his contract , he signed with Reebok . He also had a deal with Pepsi , and he successfully sued Coca @-@ Cola in 2003 when they used his image on their bottles while promoting the national team . He eventually signed with Coca @-@ Cola for the 2008 Olympics . His other deals include partnerships with Visa , Apple , Garmin , and McDonald 's .

Yao has also participated in many charity events during his career , including the NBA ? s Basketball Without Borders program . In the NBA 's offseason in 2003 , Yao hosted a telethon , which raised 300 @,@ 000 U.S. dollars to help stop the spread of SARS . In September 2007 , he held an auction that raised 965 @,@ 000 U.S. dollars (6 @.@ 75 million yuan) , and competed in a charity basketball match to raise money for underprivileged children in China . He was joined by fellow NBA stars Steve Nash , Carmelo Anthony , and Baron Davis , and movie star Jackie Chan . After the 2008 Sichuan earthquake , Yao donated \$ 2 million to relief work , and created a foundation to help rebuild schools destroyed in the earthquake .

Yao has also been a dedicated supporter of Special Olympics . He serves as Global Ambassador and member of the International Board of Directors .

On July 16 , 2009 , Yao bought his former club team , the Shanghai Sharks , which were on the verge of not being able to play the next season of the Chinese Basketball Association because of financial troubles .

In August 2012 , Yao started filming a documentary about the northern white rhinoceros . He is also an ambassador for elephant conservation . Yao has filmed a number of public service announcements for elephant and rhino conservation for the " Say No " Campaign with partners African Wildlife Foundation and WildAid .