

SPORTS

U.S. Cruises To Gold Medal At Tournament Of The Americas

By CHRIS SHERIDAN
AP Basketball Writer
SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) - Let there be no doubt: The United States is once again better than Argentina in basketball. Much, much better.

Turning the game into a dunking exhibition with a brilliant first half, the United States humiliated Argentina 106-73 Sunday night in the gold medal game at the Tournament of the Americas.

Unbelievable alley-oop dunks were followed by even better ones that sent the "ooh" and "ah" meter off the charts in the strongest all-around performance by a U.S. team since the Sydney Olympics.

"I think that game right there is really going to leave a taste in somebody's mouth," Tracy McGrady said.

A much more competitive game was expected after Argentina, which defeated the United States last summer at the World Championships, performed brilliantly in its semifinal win over Canada on Saturday night to qualify for the Olympics. Argentina also competed well against the U.S. team in the second round, losing by just eight.

But with nothing at stake aside from national pride, the Americans showed themselves ready to restore a sense of normalcy to a basketball universe that changed so drastically last summer when the U.S. team lost three times at the World Championships.

Led by Tim Duncan, Tracy McGrady, Vince Carter and Jason Kidd, the Americans brought a much stronger team to this tournament, a team that peaked in its finale.

One sequence over the first 51/2 minutes of the second quarter went like this: a dunk by Elton Brand, a high-arching alley-oop pass from Mike Bibby to McGrady for a dunk, an alley-oop dunk by Carter off a pass from Bibby, a basket for Argentina, a fast-break dunk by Carter, a steal and layup by Bibby, an alley-oop dunk by Jermaine O'Neal off a pass from Kidd.

When it ended, the score was 53-19.

Game over, except for the formality of the final 241/2 minutes.

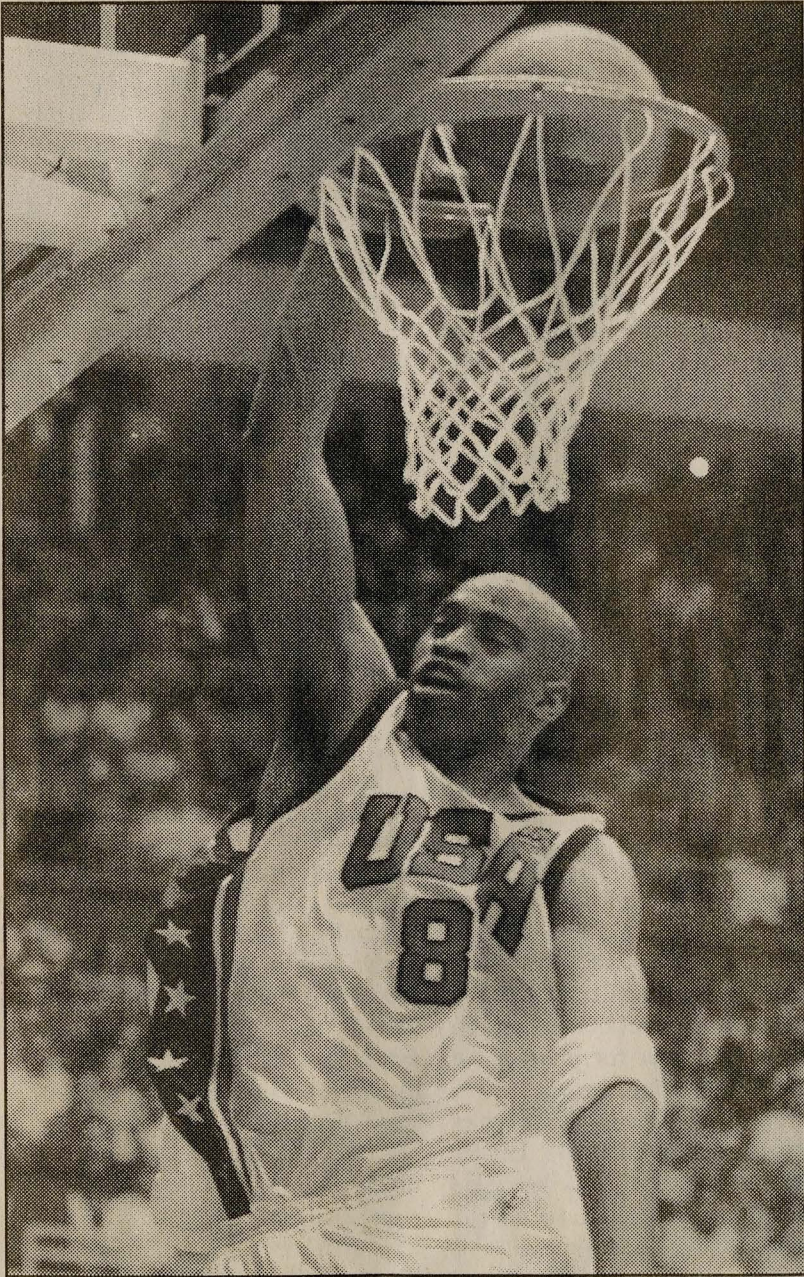
"The U.S. played their best game. They surprised us during the whole game," Argentina center Fabricio Oberto said. "The intensity was so much that we couldn't go up to that level. But we're very happy because our first objective was to classify for Athens."

The Americans opened the second half by scoring their first three baskets on dunks, two of them by Duncan in his most dominant performance of the tournament with 23 points and 14 rebounds.

Duncan nearly out-rebounded Argentina all by himself in the first half, grabbing 12 to Argentina's 13. He also had 19 points at the break as the U.S. team shot 70 percent from 2-point range and walked off with a 33-point lead, 60-27.

"It's expected to win, but it's a come out here and do it the right way," Duncan said. "Was it surprising? A little bit. We didn't expect to take it to them like that, but at the same time we knew we were capable of doing it."

It was 83-47 after three quarters, and Richard Jefferson got



USA's Vince Carter of the Toronto Raptors dunks the ball against Argentina during the gold medal game of the FIBA Americas Olympic Qualifying Tournament at the Roberto Clemente Coliseum in San Juan, Puerto Rico on Sunday. The three top teams qualify for the 2004 Olympics in Athens. AP Photo/Frank Rivera.

the Americans to 100 points on a foul shot with 90 seconds left.

"We wanted to come out and be extremely sharp, give the world something to think about for a year," Jermaine O'Neal said.

This performance should result in the United States entering the Athens Olympics as the strong favorite, although not a prohibitive one given the strength of several of the best European teams.

Although they executed and performed to perfection on their final night together, their 10-game, two-week trip to Puerto Rico showed the U.S. team to be in need of at least one more big man and another outside shooter.

Karl Malone and Kobe Bryant are expected to be on the roster next summer, and Kidd, Allen Iverson, Ray Allen, McGrady, Duncan, O'Neal also have been guaranteed spots. Carter, a veteran of the 2000 Olympic team, seemed to play more than well enough to earn himself a spot, and Brand, one of only two holdovers from the 2002 World Championship team, may have done the same.

As for Argentina, the consistent crispness that they showed at the World Championships was replaced by a striking degree of inconsistency that will need to be corrected if the team expects to be in medal contention next summer.

Argentina, which had stunning losses to Mexico and Venezuela in the first two rounds, was sloppy throughout the gold medal game as the Americans shut down all of their best players and left them hanging their heads as they walked off the court, and that was only at halftime.

Iverson sat out with a sprained

thumb and Kidd stayed in the locker room during the second half due to a sore ankle, but neither was needed on a night when America re-established itself as the best team on one side of the world.

Ohio State Humbles Huskies 28-9

By JOSH DUBOW

AP Football Writer

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) - Craig Krenzel dropped back, surveyed the defense and ran 23 yards into the end zone for a score while Maurice Claret watched from the sideline.

With Krenzel directing the offense and the same stout defense that won the national title, Ohio State didn't miss its star running back a bit.

Krenzel accounted for 230 yards and ran for two first-half scores as the second-ranked Buckeyes opened the season with a punishing 28-9 victory over No. 17 Washington on Saturday night.

"I don't think we ever relied on just one person," Krenzel said. "This year, we have so many weapons offensively that we're only going to be as good as our ability to spread the ball around."

Claret showed little emotion as he stood on the sideline in a red sweat suit serving the first of his multigame suspension for violating NCAA rules.

But even without their best player and five defensive starters who are in the NFL, the Buckeyes looked just as tough as they did in winning their first national title in 34 years in the Fiesta Bowl against Miami in January.

"It was great to play football again," coach Jim Tressel said. "That's what we like to do. That's one of the reasons these guys are at Ohio State. It was great to play in front of 105,000 fans. The atmosphere was extraordinary."

Claret's replacements, Maurice Hall and Lydell Ross, each ran for a score in the Buckeyes' 15th straight win, the second-longest streak in school history. Hall finished with 58 yards on 15 carries and Ross had 43 on 12.

"More than anything else we

sent a message to ourselves. We feel confident with the players we have and the coaches we have that we can beat anybody in the country," Krenzel said.

The defensive line led by Simon Fraser, Will Smith and Darriin Scott gave Cody Pickett no time to throw and held the Huskies to seven yards rushing.

Washington had nearly as tumultuous an offseason as Ohio State, firing coach Rick Neuheisel for taking part in an NCAA tournament pool. Offensive coordinator Keith Gilbertson, who was promoted to the head coaching job July 29, had no answers in his Huskies coaching debut.

"They are as advertised," Gilbertson said. "They are big and powerful and quick and they have lots of athletes."

Washington, which averaged 420.7 yards per game last year, was held to 147 yards through three quarters and didn't score a touchdown until Pickett's 2-yard run with 3:27 remaining.

"We were flying around," Buckeyes defensive lineman Tim Anderson said. "We were making good open-field tackles. I don't think we missed very many tackles. That was the key."

With Claret sidelined, the Buckeyes came out throwing the ball early for a change.

Krenzel, who had more than 22 pass attempts just once last season, threw 18 times in the first half as Ohio State took a 21-0 lead in front of an enthusiastic crowd of 105,078 in the sixth night game ever at Ohio Stadium.

With running back Rich Alexis bottled up by Ohio State's line, Washington's high-powered duo of Pickett and receiver Reggie Williams generated little offense.

"They were a pretty solid defensively," Williams said. "They

have four guys up front that put a lot of pressure on you and it causes you to do things you shouldn't do."

Buckeyes cornerback Chris Gamble shadowed Williams every time he lined up wide and Williams got most of his 10 catches on short passes in the slot. Pickett finished 26-for-49 for 255 yards.

On Ohio State's second drive, Krenzel hit Drew Carter on a 37-yard pass to set up Hall's 2-yard score.

Krenzel completed three straight passes for 37 yards on the next drive before weaving his way through Washington's defense for a 23-yard score that made it 14-0.

After punter B.J. Sander pinned Washington on its own 1 late in the second quarter, the Buckeyes defense forced a punt. Gamble returned Garth Erickson's 34-yard kick 10 yards to the 25 with 2:07 left.

Krenzel completed a key third-down pass to Antonio Holmes before scampering into the end zone on third-and-10 from the 11 with 11 seconds left in the half.

"The most important thing a quarterback does is make decisions," Tressel said. "He goes back and sees if the routes are open. If not, he steps up and goes."

Krenzel finished 15-for-27 for 203 yards and ran for 27 more to improve to 16-1 as a starter.

Washington started the second half with its first sustained drive of the game, using short passes and five-receiver sets to go 47 yards to set up Evan Knudson's 46-yard field goal.

But Ohio State put the game away with a punishing Claret-like 15-yard run by Ross, who bulled through Jimmy Newell's arm tackle on his way into the end zone to make it 28-3.

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