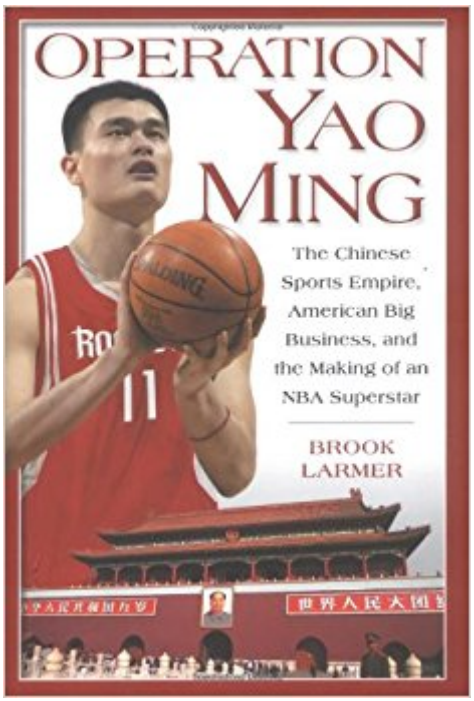
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Operation Yao Ming: The Chinese Sports Empire, American Big Business, And The Making Of An NBA Superstar



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Synopsis

The riveting story behind NBA giant Yao Ming, the ruthless Chinese sports machine that created him, and the East-West struggle over China’s most famous son. The NBA’s 7‘6" All-Star Yao Ming has changed the face of basketball, revitalizing a league desperate for a new hero while becoming a multimillionaire pitchman for Reebok and McDonald’s. But his journey to America—like that of his forgotten foil, 7‘1" Wang Zhizhi—began long before he set foot on the world’s brightest athletic stage. Operation Yao Ming opens with the story of the two boys’ parents, basketball players brought together by Chinese officials intent on creating a generation of athletes who could bring glory to their resurgent motherland. Their children would have no more freedom to choose their fates. By age thirteen, Yao was pulled out of sports school to join the Shanghai Sharks pro team, following in the footsteps of Wang, then the star of the People’s Liberation Army team. Rumors of the pair of Chinese giants soon attracted the NBA and American sports companies, all eager to tap a market of 1.3 billion consumers. In suspenseful scenes, journalist Brook Larmer details the backroom maneuverings that brought China’s first players to the NBA. Drawing on years of firsthand reporting, Larmer uncovers the disturbing truth behind China’s drive to produce Olympic champions, while also taking readers behind the scenes of America’s multibillion-dollar sports empire. Caught in the middle are two young men—one will become a mega-rich superstar and hero to millions, the other a struggling athlete rejected by his homeland yet lost in America.

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Customer Reviews

The 7’5" Yao Ming didn’t get where he is today because of some lucky genes and a good three-point shot. Everything about him, from birth to first endorsement deal, was planned by a confluence of government and business interests intent on creating a superstar. Basketball has been popular in China since the late 19th century, so a government with a Soviet-style, militaristic sports system intent on creating world-class athletes thought little of mating its tallest athletes in an attempt to pass on their genes. Thus in 1980, Yao was born to the tallest couple in China, the result of matchmaking that carried with it the dark shadow of eugenics. From there, a government campaign worked to turn "a boy with an ideal genetic makeup into the best basketball player in Chinese history," writes Larmer, and it wasn’t long before Nike and the NBA had their hooks in him. Larmer, Newsweek’s former Shanghai bureau chief, crafts his narrative well, explaining the byzantine interests competing for their pound of Yao’s flesh with admirable simplicity. Yao’s story is so controlled that when he finally overcomes his initial clumsiness and starts rebelling against his government at book’s end, it’s hard not to feel empathy for the gentle giant. Copyright Ã Â© Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Larmer, former Newsweek bureau chief in Shanghai (and Buenos Aires, Miami, and Hong Kong), traces the development and emergence of Yao Ming as China’s first bona fide NBA star, from the arranged marriage of his parents--both reluctant but sensational, and tall, basketball players in China--to his care and feeding as a youth by PRC sports officials, to Nike’s savvy insinuation into Yao’s career and into mainstream Chinese culture in the mid-1990s, to his number-one selection in the 2002 NBA draft. Not coincidentally, Yao’s story here reflects the seismic shifts taking place in Chinese sports, post-1949; it starts with a country virtually invisible in the global arena that becomes, by the time of Yao’s emergence, an international power not embarrassed to flex its muscle. If Larmer’s account succeeds in contextualing Yao in the high-octane world of the NBA, it also succeeds in revealing one aspect of China’s more fundamental struggle with its socioeconomic identity in the world today. Alan MooresCopyright Ã Â© American Library Association. All rights reserved

The story of Yao Ming--the NBA’s tallest-ever player who stands 7’6’’--is necessarily the tale of the "sports machine," of politics, and of international business deals. Caught up in the forces of history, Shanghai’s own homeboy has emerged as a symbol of the love-hate, push-pull relationship between China and the West. In Operation Yao Ming, award-winning journalist Brook Larmer has penned an enlightening and somewhat controversial account of the factors that shaped Yao’s life,

paved his way to the NBA, and rendered him a bridge to and eventually a symbol of East-West relations.Tension is the key operative word in this story. There is tension between Yao's life as a basketball player and what it might be otherwise, between Yao's life as the star on a Chinese basketball team and as 2002's number one draft for the American NBA, between American basketball training methods and the Chinese sports training system, between communism and capitalism, between the concept of sports as a way to glorify a nation and sports for their own sake. As a pawn in the center of all of this, Yao served as the key to unlock the treasure chest in many high stakes games--sports and otherwise.While the book is intriguing for its presentation of research on the Chinese basketball system and how its star player winds up in the NBA, a few faults must be mentioned. Operation Yao Ming was derived from a series of articles written for Newsweek between 2000 and 2003. While that means that the book displays the merit of much research, it also unfortunately succumbs to the hazards of allowing all that information to be hastily thrown together. The result is that the reader faces some abrupt topic changes and must suffer egregious repetitions--at times Larmer even uses the exact same adjectives, metaphors, and phrases. It is surprising that a seasoned journalist would not have done a more thorough job editing his material or hired someone to do it for him.The book also gives nearly equal billing to Yao's idol and rival, Wang ZhiZhi. Though some people may find this annoying, others--especially basketball fans--will enjoy the way Wang and Yao's paths to and experiences with the CBA and the NBA are compared and contrasted, with the tension of one man's successes measured against the other's hard luck and occasional role reversals. I, however, found myself distracted by the extra plotline.Overall, Operation Yao Ming is both entertaining and interesting. Those who find the inner workings of the Chinese sports machine, international politics, basketball training, the business of basketball, international business, or above all Yao Ming, appealing will enjoy this book.

It met my expectations. Looking go info on developing better athletes. Also insight into Chinese society

very good book to know a broader background of Yao Ming and the cultural difference between US and China. But I doubt some of the information in the book, like the marriage between his parents, cannot believe it's only for the genetic consideration by the government. Anyway, a must read book for Yao!

An excerpt from this book was featured in Sports Illustrated last month, providing an intriguing look

into the Chinese political and sports systems. From that article it was made clear that Yao Ming did not simply appear on the international basketball scene; his very existence was the result of meticulous planning by Chinese authorities desperate to raise their status on the world stage.Through the travails of Yao Ming and his basketball counterpart, Wang Zhizhi, Brook Larmer explores in detail the workings of the Middle Kingdom over the past half century. Larmer examines the political, economic and cultural influences responsible for the emergence of these two superstars. A former Newsweek bureau chief in Hong Kong and Shanghai, Larmer has written a remarkable and entertaining tale that clearly draws on his broad knowledge of the territory.Operation Yao Ming is not just an absorbing tale of a talented (and tall) Chinese youth's journey to the NBA--it is a complex canvas that exposes many of the harsh realities of life in China.

I enjoyed this book immensely. The historical background provides a basis for understanding the handling of China's athletes; from the brutal and tedious training regimens to expectations of unconditional loyalty and obedience. Larmer provides a thorough description of the evolution of China's sports machine in tandem with the political and social shifts over the past century. It is evident that there have been no shortcuts in the research.As fascinating as the history lesson is, the process of bringing Chinese basketball and it's players to the global stage is what will draw the NBA fan to the book; from the tug of war between agents and Chinese basketball authorities to his mother's influence as Yao's decision maker. The cultural education of Yao by his Houston Rocket teammates is very entertaining reading.I actually found Wang Zhi Zhi's struggle to claim his independence an equally compelling story. The juxtaposition of Wang and Yao's separate paths to stardom contrast their personalities, but also the complexities of bridging two worlds. China rides the talented youngsters from birth towards glory for the Middle Kingdom. Ironically, it is captialism that becomes a necessary parner, as it will in nearly every step towards China's goal as the global economic power. Larmer illustrates this superbly.

I was a bit skeptical at first, as my impression (from skimming a quick article about it a few years ago) was that the book was just another "conspiracy theory" book based on loose facts and one author's imagination.However, when I glanced at it while browsing books last summer in my local public library, I found that it had much more depth and substance than initially expected. After further reading, I discovered that it was very interesting, backed by many credible sources (interviews, articles, etc).Although one might not agree with the author's suggestions of government manipulation in order to "create" Yao Ming (such as the intentional pairing of his tall, basketball

player parents to produce China’s next star center), this shouldn’t be a reason to dismiss the book altogether.As a fan of basketball with a strong interest in China, I found it very fascinating to read about the background of Yao’s parents (acc. to the author his mother was a "Red Guard"), his childhood, his journey to the NBA, and also the compelling story of Wang ZhiZhi (former PLA soldier/player and China’s first ever player to be drafted in the NBA).

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