

Fairport's Scott Fitch wins gold medal as coach of U16 USA Basketball



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A once-in-a-lifetime opportunity has come threefold for Scott Fitch.

The longtime Fairport boys basketball coach won his third gold medal as an assistant for USA Basketball's Men's U16 national team in Merida, Mexico, where they won the FIBA Men's U16 Americas Championships in June. Fitch was happy his latest roster of future NBA prospects experienced representing America on the podium, just as he did in 2017 and 2018.

"I feel very blessed to be a part of it. Hopefully I'm bringing something to the table that's making USA Basketball better too," Fitch said.

Fitch's hoops acumen propelled teenagers from Rochester and beyond into the NBA. Isaiah Stewart, the former McQuaid star entering his fourth season with the Detroit Pistons, played under Fitch in 2018 before training together exclusively.

"We just have that chip on our shoulder. Everyone took different routes, but we made it to the NBA, and what coach Fitch



has done is not talked about enough," Stewart said. "Fitch doesn't care about the credit. His resume, what he's built as a player, and especially as a coach, is crazy. I always tip my hat to him."

How Fitch joined USA Basketball

Fitch's journey to USA Basketball began 13 years ago.

That's when Fitch traveled with a basketball team to Russia. It was not the national team, but Fitch stayed in touch with USA Basketball after the trip. He became an assistant on USA's U16 team in 2017 that beat Canada in the gold medal game in Argentina. Fitch rejoined the staff back in Argentina in 2018, when the U17s struck gold against France.

Fitch returned to the national team this year, joining head coach Sharman White of Pace Academy and Chet Mason from Brush High School.

"Not only have I gained coaching buddies, I've gained two dear friends," said Fitch, who was also head coach of USA's Nike Hoop Summit team in 2019.

Fitch will continue working with USA Basketball when the organization hosts a camper clinic in Brazil in the fall. Turkey will host the 2024 FIBA tournament. In the winter, Fitch will run a Fairport team that appeared in the Section V Class AA final in March. Fitch's Red Raiders won section titles in 2006, 2007 and 2017, and battled Rush-Henrietta for years.



"Scotty is tremendous. He's as good of coach you're going to find," said coach Chris Reed, who recently retired from his post at Rush-Henrietta.

USA Basketball's road to gold

Fitch was the mastermind of USA Basketball's defense.

He configured aggressive press, man and zone defenses to speed up the FIBA Americas teams: Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Dominican Republic, Mexico, Puerto Rico and Uruguay. USA's crippling defense often led to transition baskets. USA's roster featured 10 players between 6-foot-5 and 6-foot-10, so they used a "position-less" offensive concept paired with willing passers.



Training camp was held in Colorado Springs, Colorado, where 12 players were selected: Cameron Boozer, Cayden Boozer, AJ Dybantsa, Isiah Harwell, Caleb Holt, JJ Mandaquit, Brandon McCoy, Jalen Montonati, Koa Peat, Darryn Peterson, Jayden Quaintance and Tyran Stokes.

Cameron Boozer — whose father Carlos Boozer is a former NBA all-star, NCAA champion and Olympic gold medalist — may be the best of the bunch. He won tournament MVP after a 24-point, 12-rebound finals performance. Peterson made the all-tournament team, and Peat was another standout.

USA Basketball's bike rides and team dinners helped them overcome adversity on the court. When Canada scored the first five points of the gold medal game, USA responded with a 27-0 run. The final score was 118-36.



"This group is special because they're talented, unselfish, wanted to be great, and played defense," Fitch said. "Sometimes you get around kids

that think they know everything. But they wanted to be coached. That made it fun."

USA Basketball finished the tournament 6-0, improving its lifetime FIBA record to 43-0 with eighth consecutive gold medals. NBA players like Jalen Green and Scottie Barnes both played under Fitch in the past. Stewart was on the 2018 team.

Working with Isaiah Stewart, Anthony Lamb

Fitch and Stewart's relationship blossomed at the 2018 FIBA tournament.

The two teamed up again at the 2019 Nike Hoop Summit. In preparation for the 2020 NBA Draft, Stewart asked Fitch for help. They quarantined together for eight months when COVID struck, securing a small gym in hopes of improving the University of Washington star's draft stock.

"It was a time I look back at and cherish. It was a blessing for him and I," Fitch said. "I definitely grew during that period with Isaiah."



A two-time All-Greater Rochester pick, Stewart became the area's highest drafted NBA prospect when he was selected 16th overall, and it was all thanks to his improved jump shot. Stewart called Fitch the "Shot Doctor", praising him for fixing his shooting mechanics and confidence. In 2022-23, Stewart attempted 159 more 3-pointers than his 2021-22 campaign despite playing 21 less games. The 11.3 points he averaged last season was a career best.

Stewart credited Fitch for the four-year, \$64 million contract extension he signed with Detroit in July.

"We got a chance to spend eight months together and build a great relationship," Stewart said. "As the days went on, I began opening up more and seeing his personality. He's a great person who I've always respected. He's straight forward and he's always pushed me to become better."

Anthony Lamb, the All-Greater Rochester Player of the Decade for the 2010s who played for the Golden State Warriors last season, said Fitch's Fairport boys looked like an American East Conference team while attending an August camp. Lamb has known Fitch since his Greece Athena days. He'd often hoop in Fairport church leagues back then. Fitch played too.

"And you'll see him slip and cut at the right times," Lamb said. "His sense of the little things is underrated. I've picked that up from him. Our basketball shoptalk is top tier too."

Lamb improved under Fitch's tutelage with career highs across the board. In 2022-23, Lamb played in 62 games and averaged 6.7 points. He shot over 47 percent from the field and over 36 percent from 3-point range. Lamb applauded Fitch for his attention to detail and reassuring his jumper.

Lamb expressed Rochester's older ball players and their competitive drive, as well as Section V coaches like Fitch, for Rochester's NBA surge.

"He's one of the best coaches I've ever worked with. Top five," Lamb said. "He has the ability to teach, and he cares about your development from youth on up."