

Yao Ming

China's basketball megastar Yao Ming plays for the NBA in the United States and is one of the most prominent athletes on China's Olympic team. As well as being a national icon in China, Yao Ming is one of the world's most popular athletes, with a fan base of millions around the planet.

The five-time NBA All Star plays center for the Houston Rockets, having joined the team in 2002, and he has played on the Chinese National Team since the age of 18. With a height of 2.29m (7'6"), he is also among the tallest of players in the NBA.

Beyond his outstanding athletic skills, Yao Ming is an outspoken environmental advocate, making him a natural choice to become UNEP's first-ever Environmental Champion.

As a UNEP Environmental Champion, he will spread the environmental message with governments, the private sector and the public at large. He will also work with young people across the world and inspire them to plant trees, use energy efficient light bulbs and to become environmental champions in their own communities.

Yao Ming has also campaigned on issues including disadvantaged youths and HIV/AIDS. In 2006 he pledged to give up eating shark's fin soup – a popular dish in China – as part of a campaign for the protection of endangered sharks.