Just how big can the “Village Basketball Association” tournament become? Even hoops legend Yao Ming says he is unsure if he can get a seat in the stands.

The popularity of this year’s “Village BA” was evidenced by the sold-out crowds that packed into the 30,000-capacity stands over the weekend at Taipan village in Southwest China’s Guizhou province.

The two-day grassroots event attracted fans from across the nation to the tiny village, which has a population of about 1200. Media also descended on Taipan, with national broadcaster cctv.com even providing a live broadcast of the action. The finals captured the imagination of netizens on Chinese social media too, with the hashtags “Guizhou Village BA finals” and “People in the stands at Village BA finals” viewed over 65 million and 14 million times respectively on Weibo by Monday afternoon.

Four teams contested this year’s finals, which tipped off on Saturday. A torrential downpour forced the championship game to be rescheduled to Monday afternoon when Team Qiandongnan prevailed 68-65 against Team Zunyi. On Sunday, Team Zunyi and Team Qiandongnan respectively beat Team Bijie and Team Tongren 71-67 and 57-50 to finish third.

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With the teams comprised of amateur players mostly hailing from local villages and nearby cities, spectators flocked from all over the country to soak up the unique festival-like atmosphere. Apart from the hoops action, fans enjoyed pre- and post-match parties, local markets serving food and snacks, and music and dance performances that showcased local ethnic culture.

Sturgeons are awarded as prizes to the players of Team Zunyi at the 2023 Village BA. Local specialities such as duck, rice and pig feet are also used as gifts for players and spectators during the event.

In a league of its own

The grassroots basketball event is surprising more kids to pick up the sport. "The event is helping the development of the village and it really motivates more people to embrace sports," said Liu Shangbo, a local sports bureau official who is unsure if he can get a seat in the stands.

But the most-coveted spaces in Taipan are courtside. “Hotel rooms are highly sought-after for match days. Every year our rooms are fully booked during the tournament, but I keep the price at the same level. I can’t just raise prices because of the Village BA,” said Zhang Shouwu, who runs a hotel with about 80 rooms in Taipan.

“Many people even wear adult diapers so they can sit for hours in the stands. If you go to use the bathroom, you will find it back. As a result, spectators go to great lengths to hang onto their vantage points. "If you dare to leave your spot for just a minute, you’re unlikely to get it back. As a result, spectators go to great lengths to hang onto their vantage points."

"The event is helping the development of the village and it really motivates more people to embrace sports,” said Liu Shangbo, a local sports bureau official who has been stationed in Taipan for the Village BA for the past five years. "The event is helping the development of the village and it really motivates more people to embrace sports," said Liu Shangbo, a local sports bureau official who has been stationed in Taipan for the Village BA for the past five years.

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