

6-16-2016

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Recommended Citation

Georgia Southern University, "Incoming Freshman Victoria Stavropoulos Trying Out For U-18 Greek National Team" (2016).
Athletics News. 1864.
<https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/athletics-news-online/1864>

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Incoming Freshman Victoria Stavropoulos Trying Out For U-18 Greek National Team

Looking to make her second national team in three years



22nd Century Media

Victoria Stavropoulos (Sandburg 33) will travel to Greece to try out for the U-18 Greek National Team

Women's Basketball | 6/16/2016 2:00:00 PM

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STATESBORO, Ga. – Summer break is the perfect opportunity for many student-athletes to perfect their trade and prepare for the following year. Many seek out camps to attend while others work out on their own or with teammates, whether on campus or back home. Still others in select sports join summer league teams and compete with and against other student-athletes from many different divisions across the country. A select few get the opportunity to compete internationally on some of the biggest stages.

Incoming freshman women's basketball forward Victoria Stavropoulos is one of those few and she is embarking on a trip of a lifetime for the second time in three years.

She will be spending the next month in Greece competing for a spot on the Under-18 Greek National Women's Basketball Team with the hopes of helping the squad compete in the 2016 FIBA Under-18 Women's European Championship held in Sarajevo, Bosnia, July 23 - 31. Two years ago, the Chicago, Illinois, native made the cut and was able to compete with the U-16 team when the FIBA European Championships were held in Debrecen, Hungary.

"We are very proud that Victoria has been selected to try out for the U-18 Greek National team," said Georgia Southern women's basketball head coach [Kip Drown](#). "It will be an opportunity of a lifetime and we are excited to follow her progress as she goes through this process. We are hopeful that she will have the opportunity to participate in the FIBA European National Championships at the end of July."

Stavropoulos is eligible to join the Greek National Team because she is a dual citizen of both the United States and Greece. Her father, Thanos, was born and raised in Greece while her mother Christina's family has strong Greek origins. Her uncle, Konstantinos Stavropoulos, has played professional basketball throughout Europe and has helped the younger Stavropoulos forge her path overseas the last few years, including putting her in contact with coaches in Greece that helped her land an invite to try out for the U16 team two years ago.

"Getting to play for the U-16 National Team was a great opportunity because it was my first time competing overseas," Stavropoulos said. "Going into the tryouts this time, I'm more mature as a player and more aware of the differences in how the game is played in Europe compared to the US."

One of the biggest differences for Stavropoulos has been transitioning from playing the game while speaking English to speaking Greek.

"I speak Greek, but there was still a tough learning curve last time to learn the technical basketball terms because I've never played basketball in Greek," she said. "That experience has helped me be a lot more comfortable because a lot of the same girls that I competed and played with last time are going to be there again so that will help me ease in a little bit more."

But the language barrier was not the only difference Stavropoulos noticed as she began the tryouts. The style of play from the United States to Europe is also very different.

"Overseas the game is very technical, very elegant," she said. "We were playing against teams from Spain and Russia where a girl could be about 6-2, but could shoot threes and handle the ball like a point guard. It's not as much brute force like it can be played over here at times. It's a lot more basketball IQ where everybody saw the floor a lot

more openly and there was a lot more team playing going on as opposed to just get the point guard the ball and have her run the show. My travel team here in Chicago was a very run-and-gun type team, so it was a big shift to change gears like that. But I feel like the strengths I have coming from playing a much more physical style of basketball will help me out."

Not only does she now have the experience of having competed overseas while speaking another language, but she now also has had the opportunity to play two more years in high school, honing her skills to grow as a player.

"I like to think of myself as an all-around player so I've focused on improving every part of my game," said Stavropoulos. "I'm a much better shooter than I was two years ago and a much better ball handler, but I think the thing that really will help me the most is I'm a lot more confident right now with my abilities. I know if the ball is in my hands that I can do something with it whereas before I tried out with the U-16 team, I was a little timid with the ball and a little more passive."

Stavropoulos leaves for Greece today, Thursday, June 16, to get settled in before tryouts begin next week while working around enrolling at Georgia Southern and the requirements associated with starting school in August. The tryouts will feature three stages of cuts and will require the participants to travel all over Greece while they train, condition and compete. Participants will practice twice a day and will be on a strict diet and workout plan. The final stage will be held in Athens where the final cut for the team will be announced before the team heads to Bosnia for the tournament.

Greece will be competing in Division B with 18 other teams while 16 teams will compete in Division A. The tournament will start with pool play. Greece will be part of Group C along with Estonia, Ireland, England and the Republic of Macedonia (MKD). Greece opens the tournament on Saturday, July 23 against MKD.

"It's a great opportunity and I'm extremely grateful for it," Stavropoulos said. "I'm really thankful to everyone who has helped me get to this point and I can't think of a better way to thank them other than to go out there and play the game that I love to the best of my ability. It's really one of those things where you have a lot of smaller stories and when you look back you're going to remember that it was a lot of work, but once you get through the first week or so of tryouts you go, 'OK, toughen up and get through it.' But you end up with those great memories and I've met so many great people in this experience and made so many connections that you never know where they're going to take you later in life."

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