



# Playing on the world stage

BY JOSH PATE

**H**art School Sport and Recreation Leadership graduate student Ashley Perez, a former JMU basketball player and current graduate assistant manager, spent the summer playing basketball for Puerto Rico's national team and competed in the FIBA World Cup in Tenerife, Spain. Puerto Rico qualified for the FIBA World Cup for the first time after winning the gold medal at the Centrobasket Women's Championship. For Perez, it was a once-in-a-lifetime experience playing on the world stage.

**Madison: How would you describe the experience?**

**Perez:** It was unique and amazing. We were around the best basketball players in the world, and that was huge because I've played basketball my whole life and grew up watching the greatest, like (Team USA players) Diana Taurasi, Brittney Griner, Sue Bird and Elena Delle Donne. To compete on the same playing field with them was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

**Madison: What did you learn that you can apply to your degree?**

**Perez:** The things that pop out were specific to the graduate facility and event management course I'm taking. I sat down with Gilles Tonoli (FIBA Sport and Competition Manager) and interviewed him to get a different side of what it takes to plan an event like this. It opened my eyes to job opportunities that go with planning mega-events such as the FIBA World Cup. It brought to life everything we are exposed to and study in our academic program.


**Madison: How did you come to play for the Puerto Rico team?**

**Perez:** Both sets of my grandparents were born in Puerto Rico. If you have a grandparent or parent born in Puerto Rico, you can play for the national team. They contacted me in high school because of the youth programs, but it was not a good time for me to play. They contacted me again my senior year of college, but again, it was not a good time. After I graduated, I had surgery on my ankle and they still called me. They were fine with that, said they would work with me and train with me. A year later, we qualified for the FIBA World Cup for the first time.

**Madison: How did it feel to travel the world playing basketball?**

**Perez:** It felt so rewarding. I can talk about sacrifices I had to make, but it was all very personal with the time I put in. Just to be able to do something I enjoy while getting new experiences was really rewarding.

**Madison: What was your favorite location you visited?**

**Perez:** Tenerife, for sure, which is part of the Canary Islands. It was beautiful, and the people were so nice to us while we were there as tourists during the tournament. 



**Perez drives to the basket during a FIBA World Cup game in Spain.**