



## International Beach Volleyball Events in Greece

Greece has been hosting international beach volleyball events since 1995, when *Asteria* beach of the Athens suburb of Glyfada hosted a stop of the Men's European Tour and a qualification tournament of the Women's European Championships. Germany's André Frölich and Falk Zimmermann and Italy's Dionisio Lequaglie and Piero Antonini offered a thrilling final to the few spectators who braved the heat wave of that week in Athens to watch the match. The Italians blew two match-balls in the tie-break, allowing the Germans a 12-8, 9-12, 17-15 victory. In the women's final, Portugal's Maria Jose Sculler and Ana Cristina Pereira became the darlings of the crowds, when they scored a major upset in shutting out Norway's Solvi Byberg and Heidi Larsen 12-9, 12-2 in the final.

### Winners of International Events in Greece

Year	Venue	Event	Men	Women
1995	Glyfada	European Circuit	<a href="#">Germany</a> André Frölich Falk Zimmermann	<a href="#">Portugal</a> Maria Jose Sculler Ana Cristina Pereira
1996	Rhodes	European Circuit	<a href="#">Switzerland</a> Martin Laciga Paul Laciga	<a href="#">Italy</a> Lucilla Perrotta Daniela Gattelli
1997	Rhodes	European Circuit	<a href="#">Switzerland</a> Martin Laciga Paul Laciga	<a href="#">Czech Republic</a> Martina Hudcova Tereza Tobiasova
1998	Rhodes	European Circuit	<a href="#">Switzerland</a> Martin Laciga Paul Laciga	<a href="#">Czech Republic</a> Sona Dossoudilova Eva Celbova
1999	Xylokastron	European Circuit	<a href="#">Norway</a> Kjell Arne Goransson Iver Andreas Horem	<a href="#">Hellas</a> Vasso Karadassiou Efi Sfyri
2000	Xylokastron	FIVB Challenger	<a href="#">Switzerland</a> Patrick Heuscher Stefan Kobel	<a href="#">Bulgaria</a> Lina Yanchulova Petia Yanchulova
2001	Xylokastron	FIVB Challenger	<a href="#">Brazil</a> Murilo Klepper	<a href="#">China</a> Zi Xiong Rong Chi
2002	Rhodes	FIVB W.T. Open	—	<a href="#">U.S.A.</a> Holly McPeak Elaine Youngs
2002	Xylokastron	FIVB Under-18 World Champ.	<a href="#">Brazil</a> Pedro Salgado Ian Borges	<a href="#">Netherlands</a> Sanne Keizer Arjanne Stevens
2003	Rhodes	Swatch FIVB W.T. Open	<a href="#">U.S.A.</a> Dain Blanton Jeff Nygaard	<a href="#">Brazil</a> Ana Paula Sandra Pires
2003	Rethymnon	CEV European Tour Open	<a href="#">Switzerland</a> Sascha Heyer Markus Egger	<a href="#">Italy</a> Lucilla Perrotta Daniella Gattelli
2003	Kalo Nero	Balkan Championships	<a href="#">Rumania</a> Ioan Vardai Adrian Holhos	<a href="#">Hellas</a> Pola Kitsou Marianna Chounta
2003	Athens	FIVB Challenger	<a href="#">Italy</a> Fabio Galli Riccardo Fenili	—

In 1996 a beach volleyball event was held for the first time away from the beach, and thousands of spectators—tourists and locals—turned out to watch thrilling matches in the spectacular setting of Rhodes' Town Hall Square, ringed on all sides by historic buildings that nowadays house the Prefecture, the Town Hall, the Police Headquarters and the Municipal Theatre.

Rhodes would be host to European Championship events for three years running and Switzerland's Martin and Paul Laciga were there each time to win the titles. In 1996 the Laciga brothers defeated 12-7, 12-6 Italy's Lequaglie and Antonini, who for the second year running in an event in Greece reached the final but failed to win. Then, a year later the Lacigas shut out the Czech Republic's Marek Pakosta and Milan Dzavoronok 12-9 12-4. In 1998 the Laciga brothers scored a hat-trick, when they stunned everyone by thrashing the tournament's No. 1 pair and World Champions of 1995, Norway's Björn Maaseide and Jan Kvalheim, 12-6, 12-4. The Swiss did the trick once more, in 2000, when Xylokastron had moved up to an FIVB Challenger event, by defeating Brazil's Paulão and Bellaguarda 25-17, 25-23 in that finally. Briefly, Norway's Kjell Andre Goransson and Iver Andreas Horem had interrupted Swiss domination in Greece, when they defeated in the final of a 1999 European Circuit tournament at Xylokastron Italy's Fosco Cicola and Simone Bendandi 15-11. What the Paulão and Bellaguarda failed to do in 2000, their compatriots Murilo and Klepper achieved a year later, when they beat the USA's Gaston Macau and Matt Heath 21-17, 21-18 in the final of the 2001 FIVB Challenger at Xylokastron.

Women's international competition in Greece have been dominated by numerous countries, although teams from the Czech Republic has managed twice to come away with gold medals—both time at European Circuit events in Rhodes. In an all-Czech final in 1997 Martina Hudcova and Tereza Tobiasova beat Sona Dossoudilova and Eva Celbova 12-9, 12-10. A year later Dossoudilova and Celbova got their moment of fame, when they shut out Dutch sisters Debora Schoon-Kadijk and Rebekka Kadijk

12-3, 12-10. The two women's FIVB Challenger events at Xylokastron have proved a tremendous success with fans, which on both counts were 5,000-strong in packing the 3,000-seat central court (and surrounding areas. In 2000 Bulgaria's Yanchulova sisters, Lina and Petia, won the gold medal when Greece's darlings of the crowds, Vasso Karadassiou and Efi Sfyri withdrew from the final as they led halfway into the first set, due to injury of Sfyri. A year later, China's Zi Xiong and Rong Chi edged the USA's Ali Wood and Danalee Bragado 21-18, 19-21, 26-24 in the most thrilling final in Greece to date.

Greece organised its first ever FIVB World Tour Open in 2002, when a women's event was held in Rhodes Town, as international beach volleyball returned to the Dodecanese after a four-year absence. The USA's Holly McPeak and Elaine Youngs dominated Australia's Kerri-Ann Pottharst and Natalie Cook 21-17, 21-16 in the final—but it was here that Karadassiou and Sfyri achieved their best-ever World Tour finish, with a bronze medal.

Greece moved up to a double-gender event (although on separate weekends) in 2003, as the USA's Dain Blanton (a gold medallist at the Sydney Olympics in 2000) and Jeff Nygaard scored a major upset 22-20, 21-18 over Brazil's Benjamin and Marcio Araujo to win the gold in the familiar location of downtown Rhodes. A weekend later, Ana Paula and Sandra Pires dominated the all-Brazilian women's final 21-23, 21-19, 15-12 over Adriana Behar and Shelda. Karadassiou and Sfyri came ever so close to yet another semi-final appearance at the 2003 Rhodes Women's Open. But it was the then emerging Greek pair of Thalia Koutroumanidou and Vicky Arvaniti that took the tournament by storm, as Greece's wonder-girls, appearing for the first time as a team, scored some impressive victories and finished an impressive fifth.

Several other events were hosted in Greece in 2003, as the country geared up to the 2004 Olympic Games. An Open of the CEV European Tour Championships was held in the Cretan city of Rethymnon, with Switzerland keeping up to the tradition—although this time it was Sascha Heyer and Markus Egger who defeated Norway's Jorre Kjemperud and Vega Hoidalen 21-16, 21-15 in the men's final. Switzerland's Laciga brothers, Paul and Martin, winners of previous European events in Greece in 1996 and 1997, had to contend with a bronze medal. The women's tournament in Rethymnon was dominated by Italy's Lucilla Perrotta and Daniella Gattelli, six years after their previous success in a European event in Greece. Perotta and Gattelli edged the Czech Republic's Sona Dosoudilova-Novakova and Eva Celbova 21-19, 12-21, 15-12. An FIVB Challenger event for men was also staged in Greece, as the official Test Event of the 2004 Olympics. At the venue of the Olympic Games, in the coastal zone of Phaleron, Italy's Fabio Galli and Riccardo Fenili defeated Kjemperud and Hoidalen 36-34, 21-15 to win the gold medal.