



YOUTH BASKETBALL GUIDELINES

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YOUTH BASKETBALL LANDSCAPE

Basketball is the most popular youth sport in America. According to the Sports & Fitness Industry Association, 9.8 million boys and girls ages 6-17 played basketball in 2015.

While youth basketball remains strong in the U.S., the sport has historically been characterized by a lack of organizational structure at the grassroots level. The result is a fragmented youth basketball landscape that lacks national guidelines and standards for how the game should be played and coached.

NBA & USA BASKETBALL PARTNERSHIP ON YOUTH GUIDELINES

USA Basketball launched its Youth Development Division in 2013 to provide added governance and structure for youth basketball. The NBA expanded its Jr. NBA program in 2015 to help grow and improve the game.

In the spring of 2016, the NBA and USA Basketball came together to establish three expert working groups charged with developing guidelines designed to promote a positive and healthy youth basketball experience.

The three working groups are comprised of successful coaches and administrators from all levels of the sport; former men’s and women’s players, including several that played collegiately and professionally; and leading medical experts from around the world. See Appendix A for a complete list of working group members.

The three working groups that were established are focused on:

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

PLAYING STANDARDS

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

While each working group has its own focus, the overall objective is to develop guidelines for youth basketball that promote player health and wellness, oncourt skill development, and help create a lifelong love for the game of basketball.

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INITIAL GUIDELINES

The initial guidelines developed and released through this initiative are focused on the following two areas:

PLAYER HEALTH AND WELLNESS

YOUTH BASKETBALL PLAYER SEGMENTATION MODEL

Additional guidelines for youth basketball are being developed by the working groups – including developing age- and stage-appropriate playing rules and standards – that will be released subsequently.

YOUTH BASKETBALL PLAYER HEALTH AND WELLNESS RECOMMENDATIONS

The Health and Wellness working group has drafted a scientific paper that surveys the existing literature and makes eight key recommendations for promoting a positive and healthy youth basketball experience:

1. Promote personal engagement in youth basketball and other sports.

Sports provide opportunities for children and adolescents to connect with others, build meaningful relationships and take on challenges and leadership roles that promote overall personal development and well-being.

2. Youth sports should include both organized and informal, peer-led activities.

Peer-led activities allow children freedom to create and challenge themselves. In addition to having structured practices and competitions, basketball organizations should encourage informal, peer-led opportunities for individual growth.

3. Youth should participate in a variety of sports.

Sport sampling during childhood provides a foundation for long-term success, often by allowing young athletes a chance to find a sport that they enjoy and that may ultimately fit him or her best. For the sport of basketball, multi-sport participation in youth can help an athlete be a better basketball player.

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4. Delay single-sport specialization in the sport of basketball until age 14 or older.

Participation in multiple sports in early childhood is beneficial from a player health and player development perspective. Athletes that reach the highest level of achievement are more likely to have played multiple sports at a young age and delayed single-sport specialization until late adolescence.

Studies of world-class athletes in basketball and other team ball sports have demonstrated that top performing athletes often delayed single-sport specialization until age 16 or later. Thus, delaying specialization until this age range is recommended. However, when considering the need to balance time among school, sports, community activities, and other responsibilities, our experts recognize that single-sport specialization in the U.S. may occur upon entry to high school. Specialization in basketball prior to age 14 is discouraged.

5. Ensure rest from organized basketball at least one day per week and extended time away from organized basketball each year.

Daily rest is important for injury prevention, sport development and overall health. Rest days should be taken each week, and extended time off should be taken each year for physical recovery as well as to recharge oneself psychologically. Such an approach helps to maintain motivation for continued participation.

6. Limit high-density scheduling based on age-appropriate guidelines.

High density competition scheduling can increase risk for injury and burnout. Parent, coaches and event directors should be cautious in considering tournaments that schedule multiple competitive events (i.e. games) in short periods of time. Special attention must be paid to rest, recovery and refueling.

7. Further evaluation of basketball-specific neuromuscular injury prevention training programs is warranted.

Such programs appear valuable in reducing lower extremity injuries in other sports. Early results indicate similar benefits in basketball.

8. Parents and coaches should be educated regarding concepts of sport readiness and injury prevention.

Variations among youth in cognitive and social development, as well as motor skills, should be considered when setting goals and expectations.

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PLAYER PARTICIPATION GUIDELINES

Overscheduling of competitive events, overuse injuries and burnout have become too common in youth basketball. The tables below were developed in collaboration with the Health and Wellness and Playing Standards working groups to provide *recommended* and *maximum* amounts of youth basketball participation, based on a player's age.

RECOMMENDED PARTICIPATION GUIDELINES

AGE	GAME LENGTH	GAMES PER WEEK	PRACTICE LENGTH	PRACTICES PER WEEK
7-8 years	20-28 minutes	1	30-60 minutes	1
9-11 years	24-32 minutes	1 to 2	45-75 minutes	2
12-14 years	28-32 minutes	2	60-90 minutes	2 to 4
Grades 9-12	32-36 minutes	2 to 3	90-120 minutes	3 to 4

MAXIMUM PARTICIPATION GUIDELINES

AGE	MAXIMUM GAMES PER DAY	MAX HOURS PER WEEK OF ORGANIZED BASKETBALL
7-8 years	1	3 hours
9-11 years	2*	5 hours
12-14 years	2*	10 hours**
Grades 9-12	2*	14 hours**

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The maximum participation guidelines outlined above are intended to serve as limits on a young athlete’s participation in organized basketball (subject to the guidance on youth basketball camps and academies below). It is possible that participation in organized basketball within the maximum limits but in excess of the recommendations is also not advisable from a health and wellness standpoint; however, this issue requires further study.

**Youth basketball players, parents, and coaches should demonstrate caution in scheduling or participating in more than one game per day, especially on consecutive days. If young athletes participate in an event or tournament in which more than one game is played per day on consecutive days, players should have additional time off from sports activities following the event to allow for recovery.*

***Young athletes in these age ranges who are approaching these maximum hour limits should NOT be playing another sport concurrently.*

REST GUIDELINES

AGE	MINIMUM REST DAYS PER WEEK	MAX MONTHS PER YEAR IN ORGANIZED BASKETBALL	RECOMMENDED HOURS OF SLEEP PER NIGHT
7-8 years	2	4 months	9-12 hours
9-11 years	2	5 months	9-12 hours
12-14 years	1	7 months	8-10 hours*
Grades 9-12	1	9-10 months	8-10 hours

**For 12 year olds, 9-12 hours of sleep is recommended*

Definitions and additional information regarding the recommended and maximum participation tables are provided in Appendix B.

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YOUTH BASKETBALL PLAYER SEGMENTATION MODEL

Basketball currently lacks a consistent way to group kids for competition, and the result is a patchwork of different structures, age requirements and rules. Classmates may be able to play with one another in a given tournament that uses a grade-based classification system (based on academic year in school), but be prohibited from competing together in a separate event that uses an age-based system.

In response to this lack of consistency, the NBA and USA Basketball have established a Youth Basketball Player Segmentation Model designed to help ensure player safety, competitive fairness and balance for youth basketball players.

This player segmentation model was developed by the Playing Standards working group after careful consideration of the different segmentation models currently being used in youth basketball, as well as the guidelines created and implemented by the national governing bodies of other sports.

The Youth Basketball Player Segmentation model features a hybrid age/grade structure that employs strict age groupings through age 13, and then uses a grade affiliation model once a player enters the ninth grade. Its key features are below:

AGE-BASED SEGMENTATION THROUGH AGE 13

- ▶ For purposes of eligibility, a “Playing Year” is defined as Sept. 1-Aug. 31.
- ▶ Beginning at age 6, players are segmented by single-year age through age 13. Date of birth relative to Playing Year is the final determinant of eligibility.
- ▶ For age segments, each age designation reflects the maximum age of a player during the Playing Year. For example, using the 2016-17 Playing Year, the 12U segment is for players who are 12 years of age and under as of Aug. 31, 2017. Should a player turn 13 on Aug. 31 or earlier, the player would be ineligible for the 12U segment and would be considered a 13U player.

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14U / EIGHTH GRADE TRANSITION YEAR

- ▶ A transition year between age-based and grade-based affiliation is necessary to allow for players who have been held back in school or started school at an older age. This provides a transition period from playing with one's age segment to playing with kids in the same academic grade.

GRADE-BASED SEGMENTATION IN GRADES 9 - 12

- ▶ Players in grades nine through 12 are classified based on the grade they are attending in school as of Oct. 1 of the Playing Year.
- ▶ **Exceptions:** For grade segments only, players must be enrolled in school at the grade level in which they are competing AND can only be up to one Playing Year older than their grade indicates. For example, using the 2016-17 Playing Year, a ninth grade player cannot turn 17 prior to Sept. 1, 2017.

See Appendix C for a player segmentation chart for the 2016-17 season.

NEXT STEPS

Establishing guidelines for youth basketball is an important first step towards creating an infrastructure for the sport that promotes health and wellness, skill development, and positive basketball experiences for boys and girls.

The NBA and USA Basketball have committed to adopting these guidelines and implementing them across our youth programming.

To drive meaningful change across youth basketball, the NBA and USA Basketball are seeking like-minded organizations that have influence in the basketball ecosystem and/or run youth basketball programming to similarly endorse and adopt the guidelines.

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APPENDIX A ▶ WORKING GROUP MEMBERS

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Mark Adams

Renee Brown

Jamie Carey

Matt Doherty

John Jakus

Troy Justice

Chris Keller

Matt King

Leigh Klein

Don Showalter

Dawn Smyth

Greg Turner

PLAYING STANDARDS

Shane Battier

Jeremiah Boswell

Bruce Bowen

Kathy Brook

Jay Demings

L.J. Goolsby

Joe Lewandoski

Frank Lopez

Leo Papile

James Parker

Sue Phillips

Carol Ross

Dan Searl

Brad Taylor

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

John DiFiori, MD

Joel Brenner, MD

Jean Cote, PhD

Arne Güllich, MD

Brian Hainline, MD

Robert Malina, PhD

Ed Ryan, ATC

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APPENDIX B › ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON PARTICIPATION TABLES

Definition of Organized Basketball

Organized basketball includes game competition as well as practice time and structured training in which an athlete works in a focused way (typically with or at the direction of a coach) to improve his or her game. Unstructured individual or peer-led time oncourt does not constitute organized basketball for the purpose of this table (e.g., pickup games, a player individually shooting baskets by himself/herself, a player working with a peer at their direction to practice a skill).

Youth Basketball Camps and Academies

Participation in a youth basketball camp or academy may result in a young athlete exceeding maximum weekly participation guidelines.

Camp program content and duration is variable, and youth basketball camps can be a positive experience for young athletes even in cases where they exceed the guidelines above. Camp directors should, however, keep the guidelines above in mind and seek to include activities other than organized oncourt basketball participation, particularly for longer-duration camps. We recommend additional rest for young athletes following camp attendance to allow for recovery prior to resuming organized basketball sessions or attendance at another camp.

Youth sports academies that provide more comprehensive training experiences for young athletes also exist, particularly outside the United States. As with camps, the curriculum, training protocols and health and wellness resources at academies are also variable. To an even greater degree than camps, a significant portion of a basketball academy's physical curriculum should involve activities other than organized basketball participation, which can include self-directed or peer-led basketball practice or play, or non-basketball sport and training activities. This is particularly true for academies that may include athletes that have not yet reached the ninth grade.

Camps and academies should recognize that there is a lack of evidence to support early single-sport specialization. The overall effects on the health and well-being of young athletes of longer-duration camps and youth academies require further study.

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APPENDIX C ▶ PLAYER SEGMENTATION FOR 2016-2017 YOUTH BASKETBALL SEASON

DIVISIONS	2016-2017 SEASON ELIGIBILITY	RULE
7U	Born on or before Aug. 31, 2010	
8U	Born on or before Aug. 31, 2009	
9U	Born on or before Aug. 31, 2008	
10U	Born on or before Aug. 31, 2007	
11U	Born on or before Aug. 31, 2006	
12U	Born on or before Aug. 31, 2005	
13U	Born on or before Aug. 31, 2004	
14U/8th Grade*	Born on or before Aug. 31, 2003 or in 8th or lower grade as of Oct. 1 2016*	8th grader turning 16 prior to Sep. 1, 2017 must move up to higher division
9th Grade*	In 9th or lower grade as of Oct. 1 2016*	9th grader turning 17 prior to Sep. 1, 2017 must move up to higher division
10th Grade*	In 10th or lower grade as of Oct. 1 2016*	10th grader turning 18 prior to Sep. 1, 2017 must move up to higher division
11th Grade*	In 11th or lower grade as of Oct. 1 2016*	11th grader turning 19 prior to Sep. 1, 2017 must move up to higher division
12th Grade*	In 12th or lower grade as of Oct. 1 2016*	12th grader turning 20 prior to Sep. 1, 2017 must move up to higher division

* To be eligible to compete in a listed grade division, a player must be enrolled in that grade as of October 1 of the Playing Year AND can only be up to one Playing Year older than one's grade indicates.