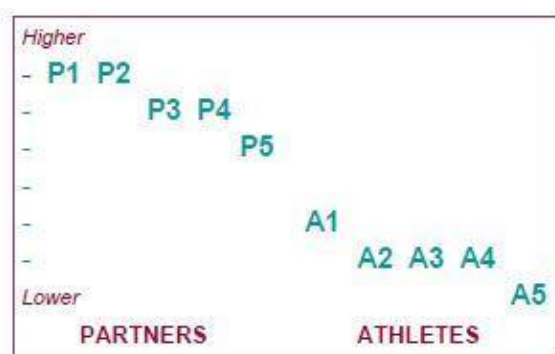


Interscholastic Unified Basketball Guidelines & Adapted Rules



Introduction to Interscholastic Unified Basketball

The purpose of Unified Sports is to create unique teammate bonds through authentic competitive experiences tailored to the appropriate skill development and ability level of participants. In Unified Sports, individuals with intellectual disabilities (athletes) are paired with individuals without intellectual disabilities (partners) to promote growth in sport-specific skills (*shooting, passing, dribbling, rebounding, etc.*). Additionally, Unified Sports experiences create a culture of inclusion and foster understanding in schools and communities. Participation in Unified Sports leads to new friendships, improved self-esteem and positive changes in attitude and behavior. In the Player Development Model, higher skilled Unified partners or “P” are typically paired with lower skilled athletes “A”, as noted in the diagram below.



The Unified partners’ role is to be a supportive teammate, facilitating the flow of the game and assisting athletes in following plays and directions issued by their coaches. Coaches are responsible for teaching rules of the game, game flow, game situations, game expectations, and developing sport-specific skills so that teammates can eventually be ready for a higher level of play. Coaches are also responsible for educating all players about the purpose and philosophy of Unified Sports, emphasizing **TEAMWORK** and the **INCLUSION** of everyone. To guarantee meaningful involvement and optimize participation, teams should not include players who dominate play. Permitting any teammate to dominate play greatly limits opportunities for other participants and undermines the spirit and intent of Unified Sports.

The Interscholastic Unified Sports basketball season will be determined by the Vermont Principals’ Association (VPA) in partnership with Athletic Directors and Special Olympics Vermont (SOVT). Regional divisioning (i.e. North, South), official assignments, max and min game requirements, game start time, seeding, and tournament play will be under the direction of the VPA in partnership with SOVT.

Team Composition



- Participation is intended for high school students, grades 9-12. Students in grade 8 may be permitted to participate on an as needed basis in accordance with current VPA policies and procedures
- Teams will be co-ed (co-ed applies to athletes and Unified partners)
- Teams will adhere to an on-court ratio of 3 athletes to 2 Unified partners at all times
 - In the event a team does not have 2 Unified partners available due to injury, illness, etc, the team may designate one athlete to play in the role of a Unified partner for the duration of the game. In this circumstance, it is critical that the athlete understands the shift in their role in order to maintain the ratio of 3 athletes to 2 Unified partners.
 - A Unified partner may not assume the role of athlete at any time.
- No cap on number of players per team; however, athletes and partners should be selected in adherence to the Principle of Meaningful Involvement.
- Coaches are required to play all team members each game and strive for roughly equal playing minutes for all teammates.
- Coaches shall strive to contain a roughly equal number of athletes and Unified partners on their roster. NOTE: Although the exact distribution of roster spots is not specified, a basketball roster containing eight athletes and two partners does not meet the goals of Special Olympics Unified Sports
- Teams must comply with all policies and procedures in accordance with the VPA as it relates to attire. This includes but is not limited to proper uniforms, undershirts, head coverings, etc. Individuals who do not adhere to these policies will not be allowed to enter a game.
 - T-shirts and pants are permissible. Athletic-wear is strongly encouraged.
 - Unified Sports® is a registered trademark of Special Olympics. For guidance on incorporating Special Olympics assets on apparel, print materials, and other uses, please contact the Special Olympics Vermont office at (802) 863-5222.

Game Rules & Adaptations

Interscholastic Unified Basketball in partnership with the Vermont Principals' Association and Special Olympics Vermont employs NFHS (National Federation of State High School Associations) rules. Minor adaptations to these rules are listed below to ensure alignment with the Unified Sports Player Development model.

- A coach must identify each player as an athlete or Unified partner at the start of the season on their private roster. **Please note:** Athletes are participants with intellectual disabilities (ID), partners are participants without ID – this distinction is NOT based on a participant's skill level.



- Coaches will share their private rosters with officials, scorekeepers, and the opposing team's head coach prior to each game to ensure everyone is on the same page regarding teammates' roles.
 - Athletes and partners should not be identified or separated on public rosters.
- Unified partners are expected to act as supportive teammates on the court.
 - Partners **are expected** to help facilitate game play by bringing the ball up the court, creating scoring opportunities for athletes, rebounding, and assisting athletes in setting plays as directed by the Head Coach. If a violation is called on an athlete, partners are encouraged to educate their teammates on the court, helping them improve their skills and understanding of the game.
 - Unified partners **may not** shoot, score, steal the ball, or block shots from athletes OR other Unified partners. When rebounding, partners may move to catch missed shots, but are not allowed to jump to the basket to rebound. Partners may encourage athletes to rebound.
- Teams may apply defensive pressure to the offensive team once the ball has crossed half-court (**half-court press**). Defensive pressure may be applied man-to-man or via zone defense.
- If a coach feels that any teammate is dominating play, the coach is expected to call a time-out (1 uncharged per game) to discuss with the opposing coach. If the coaches cannot come to a consensus on if the player was dominating play, the official shall make the final decision. If it is deemed that the player is in fact dominating play, the official shall sanction the player and/or coach. Sanctions will include: warning the player and/or coach, citing the player and/or coach with unsportsmanlike conduct, or removing the player and/or coach from the game. Dominating play includes: excessive rebounding, attacking the basket, unnecessary contact play.
- A size 6 basketball will be used; circumference [28.5 in]
- An athlete may take two steps beyond what is permitted by NGB rules without being called for travelling. However, if the player takes additional steps, a travel violation should be called immediately.
- An athlete may double dribble on occasion. However, in the event of excessive and repeated double dribbling in which an unfair advantage has been gained, a double dribble violation is called immediately.
- Certified officials are to be used and paid at the sub-varsity rate with no mileage reimbursement.
- The referee is the authority on the court. Coaches and referees are encouraged to check in before the game and at halftime to ensure consistent expectations. Following check-ins with coaches, decisions of officials are final.

Coaching & Risk Management



- Athletes and Unified partners involved in Interscholastic Unified Sports should follow the policies of their individual school. This includes following the same policies and protocols as a varsity or junior varsity sport/athlete in regards to proper medical release forms, parental liability waivers, etc.
 - Participants (athletes and partners) following their school policy, must have their parents and/or guardian sign the Special Olympics Vermont “Participant Release Form.” This is to be administered by coaches/athletic directors and managed by Special Olympics Vermont.
- School administration may choose to accept Special Olympics medical forms at their discretion; however, schools will assume full liability for their student participants as it pertains to their involvement in Interscholastic Unified Sports. Schools who choose to use the Special Olympics medical form are strongly encouraged to also require a school-based participant release form.
- Coaches must meet requirements of their individual schools and that of the Vermont Principals’ Association. Minimum requirements include:
 - Coaching Principles (must be complete within first year) *
 - First Aid*
 - Concussion Education (required every two years)
 - CPR (compression only, does not need to be full certification)
 - AED Education
 - Coaching Unified Sports
 - Attendance at pre-season Coaches’ Meeting

*Course can be waived if a coach has taken compatible course. Coaches can request and submit waivers to Bob Johnson at the VPA. Curriculum from compatible courses must be submitted along with waiver