



Playing Rules History

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Important Rules Changes for Women's Basketball

1891-92

- Basketball is invented by Dr. James Naismith, instructor at YMCA Training School in Springfield, Massachusetts, in December 1891. His 13 original rules and description of the game are published in January 1892 and read by Senda Berenson, physical education instructor at nearby Smith College. She immediately creates new rules for women to discourage roughness and introduces basketball to Smith women. Peach baskets and the soccer ball are used, but she divides the court into three equal sections and requires players to stay in their section. Stealing the ball is prohibited, players may not hold the ball more than three seconds and there is a three-bounce limit on dribbles. Berenson's rules, often modified, spread rapidly across the country via YMCAs and colleges, but many women also used men's rules.

1894-95

- Berenson's article describing her game and its benefits in general terms is published in the September 1894 issue of the magazine *Physical Education*. Clara Gregory Baer, physical culture instructor at Sophie Newcomb College in New Orleans, publishes the first women's basketball rules book, calling her game "Basquette" (this name is dropped in her first revision in 1908, called Newcomb College Basketball Rules). Her women stage a demonstration game March 13, 1895, before an all-female audience of 560 at the Southern Athletic Club (the first publicly played basketball game in the South by men or women). Baer's rules, much different than Berenson's, divide the court according to number of players on a side — 11 sections if 11 players, seven sections if seven on a side, etc. No dribbling or guarding is allowed. A player is given six seconds to aim and shoot the ball (later four). No backboards are allowed. Players may run only when the ball is in the air, and then only a few steps within their area. Goals are changed after each score so that offensive and defensive roles are reversed. Uniquely, the one-handed push shot is required (more than 40 years before the one-handed shot becomes popular in the men's game). A two-handed shot (and a two-handed pass) is a foul in Baer's game. Baer's rules are used widely across the South and in widely scattered places elsewhere until 1922, when Newcomb adopts "official" rules.

1901-02

- Noting the different sets of rules, Luther Gulick and other leaders at an 1899 physical training meeting in Springfield appoint four women at the meeting to form a Women's Basketball Committee to incorporate all modifications into one set of rules, with the health of the players the most important factor. Berenson heads the committee. It decides on Berenson's original three-court rules (in which only certain players play offense), plus five to 10 players on a side. These rules, edited by Berenson, are published in 1901 by Spalding Athletic Library. However, Baer's rules and men's rules also are used.

1903-04

- Halves are shortened to 15 minutes (from 20) in the first revised rules by the committee. To avoid the rush to retrieve the ball out of bounds, which had been allowed, the ball is awarded to an opponent of the player who caused it to go out. Six to nine players are on a side, 11 officials.

1905-06

- The National Women's Basketball Committee becomes part of the American Physical Education Association, known today as American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD).

1906-07

- Five to nine players are on a side. Description of backboard follows design of present backboards.

1908-09

- Boxing up (two opponents guarding a player in the act of shooting) is a foul. Placing one hand on a ball already held by an opponent is a foul. Player is warned after third foul, sent to bench after fourth. Committee notes that some are using open-bottom baskets, and notes that officials must make certain the ball has passed through the basket.

1910-11

- Dribbling is eliminated.

1913-14

- Single dribble returns, retaining requirement that ball must bounce knee-high. If the court is small, the court can be divided in half and the center on five-player team (center had special markings) could play entire court but not shoot for a basket.

1916-17

- No coaching from sidelines during game — only at halftime (a hardship since there still were no timeouts and no substitutions).

1917-18

- Player is warned after four fouls, disqualified after five. Center in small two-court game can shoot if she plays full court. Shooting foul now yields two free throws.

1918-19

- Substitutes can be used, but they may not re-enter the game. Bounce pass now legal. Throw-in from out of bounds awarded opponent for a violation (instead of free throw). Freedom to shoot reversed for roving center in small two-court game. Basket with open bottom now required (instead of closed basket with pull chain). Three timeouts of five minutes each are available. Rules are rewritten to conform with wording and sequence of men's rules "without in any way altering the spirit of the women's rules."

1921-22

- Two-handed overhead field goal now is worth one point (instead of two, because only vertical guarding is allowed and this shot has been perfected).

1922-23

- Must be at least six players on a side; maximum of nine remains. Tie games are allowed to stand "to minimize the emphasis on winning."

1924-25

- Eight-minute quarters with two minutes between quarters and a 10-minute halftime. No coaching is allowed in the two minutes between quarters.

1925-26

- Goals scored by one-hand overhand throw, two-hand underhand throw, the shot-put throw and the throw with back to the basket also count as one point. Timeouts also used for injuries.

1926-27

- Timeouts reduced to two minutes (still five minutes for an injury).

1927-28

- Timeouts reduced from three to two per game.

1932-33

- Guarding on any plane is made legal (making the game much more exciting and skillful). All field goals now count two points. Two options to start the game — a center throw-in or a jump-up.

1933-34

- Must be two complete passes after a center throw-in (to prevent quick move on the basket).

1935-36

- Timeouts one minute each (still two per game).

1936-37

- Center throw-in mandatory (no jump-up to start game).

1938-39

- Two-court game with six players on a side is made mandatory (used experimentally for the two previous seasons by selected teams and proved highly popular). A team is three guards and three forwards; only forwards can score but all players are part of action.

1939-40

- Timeouts increased to three per game (number increased afterward until by mid-1970s five per game and one for each overtime, reflecting coach's greater importance).

1942-43

- Team scored against, either by field goal or free throw, gets ball at center court (previously, possession alternated after each goal, also at center court).

1945-46

- Team has choice of taking free throw or getting ball out of bounds at free-throw line.

1947-48

- Players must wear numbers both front and back (since 1927, only on back).

1949-50

- Three rules that had been experimental for one season become mandatory. They are a limited two-bounce dribble with no height definition, a timeout for all fouls and free throws, and guarding is redefined — one or both arms, legs or body in any plane now permitted. (The continuous dribble also had been allowed the experimental season, but respondents to a questionnaire prefer the limited dribble.)

1951-52

- Players can receive coaching during all timeouts and intermissions.

1953-54

- Tie game is permitted to continue for one or more extra periods with “sudden death” (scoring a total of two points) after the first extra period.

1955-56

- Three seconds in the lane is a violation.

1956-57

- Ball can be tied up with “both hands held firmly around the ball held by an opponent.”

1959-60

- Mandatory (after two seasons as an experiment) that missed free throw continues in play (bringing back the art of rebounding).

1960-61

- Tie ball permitted by either one or two hands held firmly on ball (making it possible to block a shot and encouraging faster passing and shooting).

1961-62

- After successful field goal or free throw, other team gets ball at the end line. Three-bounce dribble allowed.

1962-63

- After one experimental season, each team is permitted two players to rove the entire court and “snatching” the ball once again is permitted. Committee explains the former “provides more opportunity for team play and encourages all players to develop skills of shooting and both defensive and offensive tactics.”

1964-65

- Player can hold ball indefinitely if not closely guarded; five seconds if closely guarded (instead of three seconds). Part of old vertical guarding rule returns as “holding both arms extended horizontally” is prohibited. Two free throws awarded last two minutes of each half “to make it unprofitable to deliberately foul.” Officials now can remove a coach from the playing area for unsportsmanlike conduct. All these changes are made by a joint committee of the Division of Girls’ and Women’s Sports [now the National Association for Girls and Women in Sport (NAGWS)] and the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU). Its charge was to select the best from each group of rules to arrive at one set.

1966-67

- Continuous, unlimited dribble, used experimentally previous two seasons, becomes the official rule, making game much faster. Another two-season experiment, the 30-second clock, is made optional.

1968-69

- Coaching from the sidelines is no longer a foul.

1969-70

- Experimental use of five-player, full-court game, in combination with 30-second clock, is permitted for the first time, continues for a second season, and is highly popular.

1971-72

- Five-player, full-court game and 30-second clock is made official, with little fanfare. Thus the women’s game comes almost (but not quite) full circle back to the game designed by Dr. Naismith.

1975-76

- After one experimental season, 20-minute halves and the bonus free throw rule both become official. The latter awards no free throws on the first six common fouls of each half, then a free throw is awarded plus a bonus if it is made. Free throws never are taken for offensive fouls and always taken if against a player in the act of shooting — or in case of a flagrant foul. Halftime is increased to 15 minutes.

1977-78

- Coach may call timeout — only on dead ball.

1978-79

- Injured player must be replaced, otherwise team must take timeout.

1979-80

- Mandatory that shot clocks be visible by 1980-81 season. Three free throws are awarded for intentional or flagrant foul on player in act of shooting, if attempt is missed.

1982-83

- It is a violation if the ball goes over the backboard from out of bounds.

1983-84

- Held ball becomes violation, not jump ball. Warning for first slap on hand of inbounder, then technical foul. Coach may call timeout after made field goal until opponent is positioned out of bounds. Bench selection is by home team, not coin toss. Women’s Basketball Coaches Association has membership on U.S. Girls’ and Women’s Basketball Rules Committee, which had been formed in 1979.

1984-85

- After two major research studies, committee legislates a smaller ball, about one inch less in circumference (becoming 28½ to 29 inches) and 2 ounces lighter (18 to 20 ounces) than the previous ball. (This is the same weight recommended by the original women’s committee in 1899.) Also, slapping ball in hand of inbounder is technical foul — no warning. Technical foul on bench also charged to head coach. All three and four free-throw awards are deleted.

1985-86

- Formation of the NCAA Women’s Basketball Rules Committee is approved at the 1985 NCAA Convention. The first changes determined by this group include: Offensive fouls only are on the player with ball—not the entire team. Fumble, dribble, fumble is allowed. Bottom lane space on free throw must be filled — no longer optional.

1986-87

- Coaches must stay in the coaching box and may not leave without the possibility of a technical foul. Alternating possession arrow is introduced — jump ball to start game and overtimes. Only head coach may stand during live ball.

1987-88

- Three-point field goal is introduced and set at 19 feet, 9 inches from center of basket (after a year of experimentation). No goal is allowed when personal foul is committed by airborne shooter. Interrupted dribble is legal. Only the four marked lane spaces on the free-throw lane may be occupied. Men’s and women’s rules are in one rule book for first time.

1988-89

- Intentional foul is two shots plus possession. Any squad member who participates in a fight will be ejected from the game and will be placed on probation. If that player participates in a second fight during the season, she will be suspended for one game. A third fight involving the same person results in suspension for the rest of the season, including championship competition.

1989-90

- Closely guarded distance while holding the ball is six feet, not three. Timeouts 75 seconds, not 60. Technical fouls of any kind are two shots.

1990-91

- Three free throws for foul in act of shooting 3-pointer if shot is missed. All alternating possessions inbound at closest spot. Goaltending a free throw is a technical foul.

1991-92

- Contact technical fouls count toward a player’s five fouls for disqualification and toward the bonus. The shot clock will be reset when the ball hits the rim instead of when the ball leaves the shooter’s hand. The fighting rule is amended. The first time any squad member or bench personnel participates in a fight she will be suspended for the team’s next game. If that same person participates in a second fight, she will be suspended for the rest of the season, including championship competition.

1992-93

- Unsporting technical fouls, in addition to contact technical fouls, count toward the five fouls for player disqualification and toward the team fouls in reaching bonus free-throw situations.

1993-94

- A foul shall be ruled intentional if, while playing the ball, a player causes excessive contact with an opponent.
- The game clock will be stopped after successful field goals in the last minute of the game and the last minute of any overtime period with no substitution allowed.

- The rule concerning the use of profanity is expanded to include abusive and obscene language in an effort to curtail verbal misconduct by players and coaches.

1994-95

- The inner circle at midcourt is eliminated.
- Teams are permitted to use the wide channel (one-quarter inch) black-seam basketball.
- Scoring is restricted to a tap-in when three-tenths (.3) of a second or less remain on the game clock or shot clock.
- The fighting and suspension rules are expanded to include coaches and team personnel.

1995-96

- All unsporting technical fouls charged to anyone on the bench count toward the team foul total.
- An exception to the personal-foul penalty is adopted. When a foul occurs simultaneously with the horn to end the game, only those free throws necessary to determine a winner will be awarded. If a winner has already been determined when a foul occurs simultaneously with the horn to end the game, no free throws will be awarded.

1996-97

- Each team is entitled to one 20-second timeout per half of a regulation game. If a team has not used its 20-second timeout in the second half and the game goes into overtime, that 20-second timeout carries over to the extra period. No additional 20-second timeouts are allowed regardless of the number of overtime periods to be played.
- In an instance when fouls are committed by opponents at approximately the same time (i.e., double technical foul or double flagrant technical foul) and the free-throw penalties for each foul are the same, no free throws will be awarded and the ball will be awarded by the alternating possession arrow.

1997-98

- Beginning with the 10th foul in a half, two free throws are awarded for each common foul.
- The number of full-length timeouts allowed in games not involving commercial electronic media is changed from five to four. Two 20-second timeouts are still allowed but may be used at any time rather than one per half. The number of full-length timeouts allowed in games involving commercial electronic media is changed from three to two and the number of 20-second timeouts allowed is changed from two to three (including two that may be carried over to the second half).

1998-99

- A movable basket ring pulled down by a player and contacting the ball before the ring returns to its original position is basket interference.
- When a double personal foul is called, the ball will be awarded to the team that had team or player control when the foul was called. There will be no change in the possession arrow. The shot clock will not be reset.

1999-00

- Twenty-second timeouts increased to 30 seconds in length. New electronic-media/timeout format adopted.
- A maximum of five players on the free-throw lane. Players may not move from assigned lane spots.

2000-01

- All unsporting (direct) technical fouls committed by a coach, player or bench personnel will be penalized by awarding two free throws to the opponent and putting the ball back into play at the point of interruption. The team in possession of the ball at the time of the technical foul will retain possession.
- All administrative and conduct-of-player (indirect) technical fouls will be penalized by awarding one free throw to the opponent and putting the ball back into play at the point of interruption.
- Five players will still be permitted to occupy lane spaces during a free throw, but now the third defensive player on the lane will be permitted to line up at either the third or fourth position on either side of the lane.
- The electronic-media timeout format has been changed to include four 30-second timeouts and one 60-second timeout that may be called by a team. Three of the 30-second timeouts can be carried over to the second half. Conferences will not be allowed to extend the 60-second timeout because of an electronic-media contract.
- Coaches/players also will be given the flexibility to call consecutive 30-second timeouts in order to allow players to sit during those timeouts. The coach must indicate that two consecutive timeouts will be called when he or she calls the first for players to be permitted to sit. Players will continue to be prohibited from sitting during a single 30-second timeout.

- When a foul is committed by the defense on a throw-in after any score, the team putting the ball in play will not lose the ability to run the end line as it had in the past. The original rule rewarded the defensive team for fouling. Also, if a simultaneous held ball occurs during a throw-in situation and the possession arrow favors the throw-in team, the ball shall be awarded to the throw-in team but the shot clock will not be reset.
- Uniforms may include a logo or mascot at the center or apex of the neckline on a game jersey. Only a team abbreviation was permitted in that space previously.
- Also, the color, style and design of all teammates' game jerseys and game pants must be alike.

2001-02

- Four defensive players, two offensive players and the shooter will be allowed on the lane during a free-throw situation. The defensive players at the bottom of the lane will line up above the box, eliminating the traditional first lane space.
- The first player who commits a lane violation in a free-throw situation will be the only player penalized. If simultaneous lane violations were to occur, the penalty would remain a double violation.
- Officials shall be permitted to go to an official courtside monitor to determine if a try for goal is a three- or two-point attempt, regardless of whether the shot is made. This will enable them to use the information gathered from viewing a replay, when necessary, to decide whether two or three free throws shall be awarded. Previously, officials could not check the monitor unless the shot was made.
- After there is a flagrant or intentional foul after the opposing team scores, the offended team's throw-in player shall be permitted to run the end line after a missed free throw. The previous rule put the ball back in play at a designated spot. This makes the rule agree with the procedure used after a personal foul in the same situation.
- All technical fouls, both direct and indirect, shall be penalized by two shots and the ball will be returned to the point of interruption (that is, there is no change of possession) for the resumption of play. As before, direct technical fouls shall count toward disqualification and toward the team-foul total. Indirect shall count neither toward disqualification nor toward the team-foul total. In addition to the change in the penalty for all technical fouls, excessive technical fouls in the women's game will be penalized by two free throws and loss of possession of the ball.
- For games with electronic media, the first 30-second team timeout of the second half shall be expanded to a media timeout, the length of which is determined by the media agreement. Under the previous rule, the first 30-second team timeout in the first half was expanded to a media timeout, the length of which was determined by the media agreement. The purpose is so that the media timeout will still be available in television doubleheader situations when the first game overlaps into the second game and a media timeout might be missed.

2002-03

- No free throws will be awarded to the offended team for a foul committed by a member of the team in control of the ball when the bonus is in effect, as they were previously. Instead, the offended team will be awarded possession at a designated spot (out of bounds). A foul committed by the offense will continue to count toward disqualification and toward the team-foul total. Under the previous rule, the offended team shot the bonus free throws. This rules change is meant to keep the game moving and to make the penalties for offensive and defensive fouls more equitable in such situations.

2003-04

- At or near the end of any period, officials will be permitted to consult a courtside television monitor, when such monitor is available, to assist in determining if the game clock or shot clock expired before the release of a shot.
- The term intentional technical foul will be deleted. In a situation in which contact is made during a deadball, a direct technical foul can be called in lieu of the previously used term. Assuming the contact doesn't merit a flagrant foul, which an official could still call, a direct technical foul will result in two free throws and returning the ball to play at the point of interruption, instead of loss of possession.

2004-05

- The committee recommended procedural adjustments to the game officials' use of courtside television monitors to better clarify last-second shots. The recommendations are intended to clarify game- and period-ending situations that caused confusion among fans, coaches and media the previous season. Use of a monitor will balance limiting interruptions of the game with ensuring that the correct call is made.

- In order to limit timeouts from occurring too close together, when a foul is committed that causes a dead ball at one of the specified times for media timeouts, the free throw(s) shall be taken afterward. Currently, the free throw(s) are taken before the media timeout, which may result in media timeouts being used in close proximity to each other.
- In the points of emphasis, displacement remains from 2003-04. The areas in which the committee seeks greater enforcement of displacement as a foul include hand-checking, post play, screening, cutting and rebounding. The committee also noted that the principle-of-verticality rule should be enforced more closely with the way it appears in the rules.

2005-06

- Expanding on the rule from two seasons before, officials who consult a courtside monitor at the end of either half or any extra period can correct the official game time if needed and/or determine whether a foul was committed before time expired. Officials can also consult a courtside monitor any time during the game to correct a timer's mistake.
- The time allowed to replace a disqualified player was reduced from 30 to 20 seconds and the warning signal will be sounded five seconds before the expiration of the time limit.
- Violations when the ball has been intentionally kicked will no longer result in the reset of the shot clock to 30 seconds. When the violation occurs with 15 or fewer seconds remaining, the shot clock will be reset to 15 seconds. When the violation occurs with more than 15 seconds remaining, there shall be no reset of the shot clock.

2006-07

- A timeout will no longer be recognized when an airborne player's momentum carries him or her out of bounds or into the backcourt. The committee's rationale was that often the player already committed a violation before a timeout was granted. It was felt that the play is happening too frequently in the current game.

2007-08

- The rule regarding fouls and penalties was organized into four areas: personal fouls, administrative technical fouls, player/substitute technical fouls and bench technical fouls. The rule was also changed to consistently count all technical fouls toward the categories of team foul count. In addition, all technical fouls assessed to a player or substitute will count toward that individual's five fouls toward disqualification and the two fouls toward ejection. Under the previous rule, there were some indirect technical fouls that did not count toward disqualification, team foul count or ejection. The only remaining indirect technical foul is the technical foul assessed to the head coach for actions of bench personnel.

2008-09

- When the entire ball is above the level of the ring during a field-goal try and contacts the backboard, it is considered to be on its downward flight. In such a case, it is goaltending when the ball is touched by a player.
- For any single flagrant technical foul, the ball shall be awarded to the offended team at the point of interruption, instead of at a designated spot at the division line.

2008-09

- Officials are permitted to use the monitor to determine whether a flagrant foul has occurred. When it is determined that a flagrant foul did not occur but an intentional personal or a (men) contact technical foul or (women) player/substitute technical foul for dead ball contact did occur, those fouls shall be penalized accordingly. However, no other infractions may be penalized.
- After an initial jump ball or a jump ball for the start of an extra period(s) when possession is not gained by either team which would establish the alternating-possession procedure, a jump ball shall take place between any two players.

2009-10

- The playing rules cycle shifts from one year to two years.
- The rule on uniforms was rewritten to allow more freedom of design while protecting the integrity of the number. An area designated as the "neutral zone" will house only the player's name and number. There will be no color or design restrictions outside the neutral zone. The game shorts must also be a color similar to that of the neutral zone.

2010-11

Note: 2010-11 was a non-rules change year, but the following rule was passed for student-athlete safety.

- Stronger penalties are assessed to players who swing an elbow and make more than incidental contact with an opponent above the shoulders. A common foul is no longer an option when the contact is above the shoulders and more than incidental. A minimum of an intentional foul must be assessed for this type of foul.

2011-12

- The three-point line moves from 19 feet 9 inches to 20 feet 9 inches (the current distance in men's basketball).
- A restricted area arc should be added three feet from the center of the basket. The arc will mark the area under the basket where a secondary defender is not permitted to establish a legal guarding position.
- A secondary defender shall not establish initial legal guarding position under the basket when playing a player who is in control of the ball or who has released the ball for a pass or try for goal.
- The use of the term "intentional foul" has been eliminated and replaced with "Flagrant 1".
- When a coach requests a review of the monitor to determine whether a Flagrant 1 foul for elbow contact or a Flagrant 2 foul occurred and no such foul occurred, then that team will be charged a timeout.
- A stronger penalty will be assessed for rough or unsportsmanlike play when the ball is dead. The penalty for all nonflagrant contact during a dead ball shall be two free throws and the ball awarded to the offended team regardless of whether the contact involved an elbow above the shoulders of an opponent.
- If a team is not ready to play when the second horn sounds to end a timeout, officials are instructed to formally warn that team on the first offense. On the second and subsequent offenses, the official shall make the ball ready for play.
- Officials are permitted to review the monitor for a foul to ensure that there was elbow contact above the shoulders of an opponent.
- All games are permitted to use the electronic-media timeout format regardless of whether there is paid advertising present.
- The free throw lane is allowed to be more than one color.

2012-13

Note: 2012-13 was a non-rules change year, but the following rule was passed for student-athlete safety.

- The playing court must be completely finished in a manner that is similar throughout, including the 3-foot area outside each sideline and 6-foot area outside each end line. The committee's rationale was to improve student-athlete safety by ensuring a consistent playing surface.

2013-14

- Adopt the 10-second back court rule. The 10-second count shall begin when a player legally touches the ball in that team's back court except on a rebound or jump ball. In such case, the 10-second count shall start on player control.
- Designate a lower defensive box by placing two tick marks on each side of the lane. A secondary defender cannot establish initial legal guarding position in the restricted area for the purpose of drawing a player control foul/charge when defending a player who is in control of the ball, or who has released the ball for a pass or try when that player was located outside the lower defensive box when she started her movement to the basket.
- Several changes were made to the uniform rule: Commercial advertising is not permitted; other names intended to celebrate or memorialize persons, events or other worthy causes are permitted only in the back neutral zone; long-sleeved (compression) undershirts that extend below the elbow are permitted; full length tights are permitted; the use of an arm sleeve, knee sleeve and lower leg sleeve is permissible without medical verification.
- It is a flagrant 1 personal foul to cause excessive contact with an opponent.
- When a timeout is granted and creates a dead ball within 30 seconds before the media marks or creates the first dead ball after one of the 15-, 10- and 5-minute marks or the 16-, 12- and 4-minute marks, that timeout will become the electronic-media timeout for that specified media mark time.
- A player in control of the ball in the front court only while holding the ball is closely guarded when her opponent is in a guarding stance at a distance not exceeding 6 feet.

2014-15

Note: 2014-15 was a non-rules change year.

- The rules committee did not pass any changes or experimental rules, but did identify several areas of concern for the 2014-15 season, including post play, freedom of movement, contact on and by the ball handler/dribbler, screening, contact on the shooter, restricted area/lower defensive box/legal guarding and sportsmanship.