

AAU Basketball Primer

The following is a brief AAU basketball primer prepared by the Shiocton Hoops Club Board. It is not an endorsement of any particular AAU program—or of even having your child participate. Rather, it is an attempt to provide basic information so you can come to your own conclusions.

Beyond the material here, you'll find links in the Resources section to some Wisconsin AAU programs and other relevant websites. We strongly suggest that you do your own research and discuss the interest/possibility with your child in order to make the best decision for your situation.

AAU BACKGROUND

For many parents, AAU Basketball is a mystery.

What is AAU? AAU stands for Amateur Athletic Union and is one of the oldest and largest non-profit, volunteer sports organizations in the United States. It is a multi-sport program dedicated to the promotion and development of amateur athletes.

What is AAU Basketball? It generally refers to tournament basketball. AAU teams play in weekend tournaments and typically play 3-5 games in one weekend. It is very common to play several games in one day. Teams from all over the region compete in these tournaments. AAU sanctions regional tournaments where teams compete to earn invitations to national tournaments. There are several organizations that conduct tournaments and national level events.

OVERVIEW

AAU basketball groups are independent clubs and organizations that form teams and participate in various tournaments throughout the year under the AAU umbrella organization. Important differences exist between AAU teams and school or travel team leagues:

Season: The AAU season is largely dormant during the typical basketball season of November through February as most of the AAU players are playing on school, recreation, or travel programs. Most AAU teams are very active between April through July, with some programs also playing through the summer and fall.

Tryouts: AAU tryouts are typically in January and February. Parents have to do their homework and be organized or risk missing tryouts for their teams. AAU teams and tournaments are organized by gender and typically, age rather than grade. Most programs run teams at a variety of age levels, starting around the ages of 9-10 and continuing through high school.

Variety: AAU teams are independent organizations with a lot of latitude as to type of team, practice and play schedule, costs, playing time, travel limits, coaching philosophy, etc. It's important to match the right program with the needs of your child and you.

Games: Most games are played in tournaments (some AAU sanctioned, some not) that typically take place on weekends. Some teams play only locally, while others travel within the state, and some travel to other states. Some teams stay overnight in hotels for tournaments when the commute is long, and elite teams at older levels might even fly to a tournament or two.

Cost and time: There's a significant money and time commitment to participating in AAU. Costs vary but can range from \$200 to \$1000 or more per year—not counting travel, meals, and hotels. As for time involvement, this is also variable, but many AAU teams practice one to two nights per week and play 4-7 tournaments per season.

ADVANTAGES OF AAU

Your child will likely improve. Youth sports have changed and become more competitive. Children who practice and play a sport in the off-season generally improve more than kids who don't. It also provides a chance to play with other players with a comparable playing ability and desire to play basketball.

Your child will experience a more focused program. While AAU can seem intense, there are important life lessons in focus and commitment. Because of the required commitment, a well-run AAU team will give your child a deep, rich sports experience. You can find outstanding coaches and resources that match the best that

top high schools offer.

You have flexibility in picking a program. The AAU system is a free market, where programs come in a variety of shapes and sizes to fit various needs. Most programs are quite competitive, use experienced coaches, and cater to serious basketball players.

AAU teams are important recruiting grounds for colleges. Due to scheduling conflicts (college coaches are busy with their own teams during the winter) and the chance to see kids play against top competition, AAU tournaments have become important in college recruiting. But this should be taken in context:

Most college recruiting does not take place until high school, and with a few exceptions (possibly younger elite teams). College coaches do not attend 12U games unless their own kids are playing or the next LeBron James is on the floor. The NCAA has strict rules on recruiting, and you should refer to the NCAA website for more information.

If your son/daughter is good enough, the colleges will find him or her regardless of the setting.

The vast majority of kids, including those on AAU teams, do not play in college. Making a certain AAU team guarantees nothing. No AAU program will be able to guarantee your child will be exposed to any college program.

LIMITATIONS OF AAU

Specialization comes at a cost. There are also advantages to breadth over depth. Playing different sports exercises and trains a body in different ways. The Shiocton Hoops Club does not promote becoming a one sport athlete; we do encourage participation in other sports in addition to basketball.

Money doesn't guarantee a quality experience. Some AAU tournaments are moneymakers for athletic clubs, sports centers, or just people wanting to make a living doing what they love. Being picked for a team doesn't guarantee you playing time; most AAU teams will not make any guarantees for minimum playing time. As we've noted, every program is different, and it's important for you and your child to research and understand playing time philosophy.

The team you want might not want you. While you're seeking the right team for your child, the team you want may not want you or be convenient. Your child might not be selected at tryouts, or the team you want might already be filled with players from the previous year. It's a good idea to have backup choices when it comes to AAU. And just because your child was on a team last year doesn't mean that her or she will make the team this year. Your child may wish to try out for several AAU teams in order to "test drive" the program and to have a backup.

WHAT TO ASK WHEN CHOOSING A TEAM

1. Who is the coach? What is his/her reputation? Do I like the coach's approach?
2. Playing vs. player development. Some AAU programs are all-star teams devoted to playing lots of games, winning, and exposing the kids to recruiters. Others concentrate more on practice and player development. All will say they focus on player development, but you'll need to observe and monitor words vs. actions. For example, what is the ratio of games to practices?
3. Is it a local, regional, or national team? What are the number of practices, games, and travel requirements?
4. What is the philosophy of the program on important issues such as missed practices and games, playing time, communication, participation in other sports, playing style, etc.?
5. What do parents who have been in the program say about the coach and the experience, especially on issues key to your child and you?
6. How will you manage logistics? Will your child know other kids on the team? Is car-pooling an option?
7. What does your child think? Especially as he or she grows older, do the commitment and sacrifice required make sense? Can your child handle it along with other commitments like school? Is it about them or about you? Are you and your child ready to commit for the season, even if it isn't working out partway through?
8. What are the costs? How much, for what, when?

STEPS TO FINDING A TEAM

1. Network with teammate parents and coaches.
2. Do online research (the sites below are a good start). If you learn of other sites and/or clubs, please let us know.
3. Interview potential program directors and coaches.
4. Discuss it as a family.
5. Plan on attending tryouts.
6. Have a backup plan.

FORMING YOUR OWN TEAM

Each year, hundreds of new AAU teams are formed. Administratively, forming your own AAU team is easy and the AAU websites (see Resources) walk you through it, step by step. Also, finding tournaments to play in merely requires a bit of Internet research. However, forming and running an AAU program is a huge commitment and should only be undertaken after careful consideration.

Some issues to resolve:

- Do you have the time, interest, and experience?
- What can you offer that other programs don't?
- What gym will you use for practices? When is it available? Cost?
- How will you recruit enough players?
- What about uniforms, balls, and supplies?
- Which tournaments? Age level? Level of competitiveness?
- Length of season?
- How will you manage money and logistics?
- What is the philosophy of your program: playing time, goals, etc.?

RESOURCES

AAU Boys Basketball - <http://aaboysbasketball.org/>

AAU Girls Basketball - <http://www.aagirlsbasketball.org/>

AAU Wisconsin Basketball – <http://wisconsinaa.org>

Tournament/Team Locator - Listing of tournament and teams:

<http://www.aca hoops.com/>

<http://www.wissports.net/page/show/605323-event-directory> (select the appropriate gender and grade) – You can sort by date by clicking the “Start Date” column.

<http://www.infosports.com/basketball/>

Wisconsin “AAU” Teams – Possible Off-Season Teams, Not All-Inclusive of All Available

Wisconsin Blizzard (Boys and Girls Teams) - <http://www.wisconsinblizzard.com>

Wisconsin Crusaders (Boys and Girls Teams) - <http://www.missionbasketball.org/>

Green Bay Metro (Boys and Girls Teams) - <http://www.gbmetrobball.com/>

Purple Aces (Girls) - <http://www.purpleacesgb.com/>

Wisconsin Legends (Girls) - <http://legendsbasketball.org/>

Oshkosh Flight (Girls) - <http://www.oshkoshflight.com/home>

Wisconsin Playground Warriors (Boys) - <http://www.wiplaygroundwarriors.com/index2.html>

Wisconsin Playmakers (Boys) - <http://www.wisconsinplaymakers.com/>

Higher Level Camps (Boys and Girls Teams) - <http://www.higherlevelcamps.com/>

Wisconsin Academy (Boys and Girls Teams) - <http://www.wisconsinacademybasketball.com/>

Wisconsin Hoops Select (Boys and Girls) – <http://www.wishoopsselect.com/>

Wisconsin Elite Girls Basketball (Girls) - <http://www.wielitebasketball.com/>

Wisconsin Swing (Boys and Girls Teams) - <http://www.wisconsinswing.com/>

Wisconsin Force (Boys and Girls Teams) - <http://www.wisconsinforce.com/>

Wisconsin Shooters (Boys) - <http://www.wishooters.com/>
Wisconsin Rap (Boys and Girls Teams) - <http://www.wisrap.com/index.html>
Wisconsin F(Boys and Girls Teams) - <http://www.wisconsinfury.com/>
Wisconsin Rage (Girls) - <http://wisconsinrage.com/>
Wisconsin Bulldogs (Boys and Girls Teams) - <http://ballcharts.com/teams/index.php?team=WISCONSINBULLDOGS>
Playground Elite (Boys and Girls Teams) - <http://www.playgroundelite.com/>
Wisconsin Blaze (Boys and Girls Teams) - <http://www.wisconsinblaze.com/>

