

Merrimack Valley Basketball League Rules

Grades 3 & 4

The Merrimack Valley Basketball League is a recreational program, intended to be fun while challenging our youth to play competitive basketball with surrounding towns. It is meant to be inclusive of players of all skill levels and promote good sportsmanship, since not all of our youth will move on to play travel basketball. This league is not meant for AAU or town travel programs, but will be evaluated on a case by case basis and upon the approval of all towns within the league.

General

Unless otherwise stated below, the game is played under NFHS (Federation) rules:

- **ALL TEAMS MUST BE DIVIDED INTO EQUALLY TALENTED TEAMS.**
- All players **MUST** have equal playing time. In the event of a team having more or fewer than 10 players, the coach will be required to rotate players in so that everyone has “approximately equal playing time.”
- To provide every player with an opportunity to contribute to the score, each player will attempt one foul shot at halftime. Made foul shots will be-added to the team's score. If there are an uneven number of participants per team: the coach with the fewer players may choose the player(s) to shoot the additional shot(s) to make up the difference.
- Games will consist of **two 20-minute halves of running time and a 5 minute half time**. The clock will only be stopped:
 - ✓ At approximately 5 minute intervals during the game to allow both teams to substitute players.
 - ✓ For timeouts and injuries at the referee’s discretion.
 - ✓ The last minute of each half will be stop time. (This means, that during the last minute of each half, the clock will be stopped on all dead ball (ref whistle) situations.
 - ✓ Each team is awarded **three 30 second timeouts** per game.
- Substitutions will be allowed into the game between periods and on dead ball situations. Substitutes must report to the scorer's table to be recognized by the official prior to entering the game.
 - ✓ Mass substitutions are required every 5-minutes so that kids have equal playing time. The official will stop the game on a dead ball approximately every 5 minutes for substitutes and matching up players to guard each other. Coaches may substitute more frequently than 5 minutes as long as kids get equal playing time, and they can work with the kids to make sure they know who they are guarding. If coaches substitute more frequently, **the clock will not stop**.
- Games will end after regulation time regardless if the score of the game is tied.
- A jump ball will start the game and follow the alternating possession arrow rule throughout the game.
- Basketball Size and Rim Height:
 - ✓ A youth size ball (**27.5** circumferences) for boys and girls.
 - ✓ Games will be played with **9-foot** rim height for girls and boys (where possible).
- Coaches or volunteers will keep score for all games utilizing one person from each team whenever possible.

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- 3-point shots are only allowed if the court is marked.
- Players, Parents, and Coaches are **prohibited from arguing** with officials. The first instance will result in a warning the second will result in removal of the player or coach for the remainder of the game. The opposing team will be rewarded two foul shots plus possession of the ball.
- ALL players must remove all jewelry and hats, must have long hair tied back, and must have nails cut. Players with hard casts are prohibited from participating.
- **Three second rule interpretation:** *Referees are encouraged to tell players to move out of the key rather than calling 3-second violations.*
 - ✓ *If the player continues to stand in the key and gain an advantage, then a three second violation should be called.*
 - ✓ *If a player is in the key but not included in the play (not gaining an advantage but rather not aware of the situation) then the referee should not call the violation.*
 - ✓ *At this age, most players range for shooting is within the key so the referees should encourage movement. The 3- second violation should seldom be called.*
- **Closely guarded five second rule:** A five second violation occurs when a player holds the ball while closely guarded for five seconds without dribbling or passing.
 - ✓ Referees are encouraged to remind players to pass the ball or do something with it as the count approaches the five- second mark. At this age, the longer a player holds the ball, more of the other players end up migrating to the ball looking for a hand off or a pass. Play ends up bunched up and not spread out.
- **Closely guarded 5 seconds while dribbling rule:** NFHS Federation has recently removed 5 second closely guarded off the dribble. This is also not a rule at the college level either. For both levels closely guarded is only in play for a held ball.
- **The 10-second backcourt rule will apply.** This means that the offense must dribble the ball over the half court line within a ten second count.
- **Isolation plays are not allowed.** The first instance of an Isolation play on the offense will result in a warning and the ball out of bounds. Any subsequent instances will result in a violation. Isolation of players to one-side of the court or at the mid-court area is not allowed.
- Free Throw shooters must be behind the foul line but can jump over the foul line during the shot. The shooter must wait for the ball to hit the rim before attempting to rebound. Any action seen by the referee as an attempt to gain advantage by abusing this rule will be called a violation. ***In the event a player can't reach the rim from the foul line, it will be the discretion of the coaches to allow the player to shoot from between the foul line and the lower arc.***
- Players in all age groups are allowed to steal off the dribble once the offense has crossed half court.

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Fouls

- Fouls will be called but at the 3rd/4th grade level, a player cannot foul out of a game (Except Flagrant and Technical Fouls).
- Coaches are not to keep track of fouls.
- Coaches must not encourage, direct, or reward players for committing fouls. Any coach found instructing players to foul intentionally may receive a warning, followed by a technical foul, and potential removal from the game at the referee's discretion. Repeated violations may result in suspension from future games.
- If a player creates a situation that may deliberately injure another player, uses foul language, or other inappropriate behavior, they will be issued a Flagrant Foul and removed for the remainder of the game. The other team will be awarded 2 foul shots and possession of the ball. Depending on the nature of the Flagrant foul, the Directors may elect to suspend the player for the next game.
- Unsportsmanlike conduct will not be tolerated. The player or coach will be issued 1 verbal warning. The 2nd offense will be a Technical Foul and the 3rd offense will be a 2nd Technical Foul, removal from the game, and a game suspension. Upon issuance of a Technical Foul, the other team will receive 2 foul shots and possession of the ball.
- Coaches, if acting inappropriately or arguing with the referees or other team, will be given Technical Fouls and the other team will be provided with 2 foul shots and possession of the ball. Upon a 2nd Technical Foul, the coach will be removed from the game and gym and the other team will be awarded 2 foul shots and possession of the ball.
- Referee will decide how many foul shots a player will receive.

Notes:

- ✓ *Severe offenses or any offense that may jeopardize the enjoyment of the sport, use of a facility, or may be detrimental to the team or sport may warrant immediate termination from team activities (e.g., fighting, bullying, etc.) and will be determined by the Directors from each town and/or referees.*
- ✓ *Ongoing similar offenses across multiple team activities and after reminders by the coaches may warrant removal of the player from the team activity and/or single or multi-event suspensions.*

Defense

- Teams must play player-to-player defense. **No zone defenses are allowed.** It is acceptable to play "help defense" but only when the offensive player with the ball is within or close to the key and driving to the hoop. It is not "help defense" if the offensive player is not actively driving to the hoop and will be called a double team at the referee's discretion. Any "help defense," trapping, or double teaming outside the key (within reason and interpretation of the referee) will be called a violation by the referee. Players should be encouraged to help and recover to their player or call switch. See more details below under double teams.
- **No full court defense (pressing)** is allowed. Teams must pick up their players at the midcourt line. Once the team playing defense gains possession of the ball in their backcourt the other team

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must move back to the half court line. Any steals that occur in the backcourt will be a violation and returned to the other team to pass in from out of bounds.

- **Steals** are allowed on the defensive side of the court only and can be from a pass or via dribbling as long as a foul is not committed. In the interest of fair play, if there are players on one team that are better than others and steals consistently happen, the coach should direct the players to play hard defense and not steal the ball.

Double Teams

- **Double Teaming of the player dribbling up court is not allowed.**
 - ✓ A player cannot leave his player in an attempt to steal the ball from another player's man. This type of double-teaming usually happens out on the perimeter and the intent of the rule is to prevent a player from roaming the midcourt area looking to steal the ball.
 - ✓ The double team rule is not in effect to force a player to stay with their assigned offensive player all over the court. This would go against every defensive principal taught by coaches. The idea of help and team defense should be introduced at an early age. The concept of help defense verses the double-team can be confused by coaches, parents, players.
- Under the following situations **double-teaming SHOULD be called:**
 - ✓ If a defensive player leaves his/her player in the midcourt area to go steal the ball from another players assignment
 - ✓ Any traps that occur in the perimeter (corners, midcourt area, sidelines).
- Under the following situations. **double-teaming SHOULD NOT be called:**
 - ✓ **Double-teaming should not be called within the key** or on offensive rebounds that are retrieved in the key. When a player enters the key with the ball (dribbling the ball), the defensive players instincts should be to stop the ball whether it is their player or not. If a player gets the rebound underneath, it is only instinct to try and stop the other player from shooting whether it is your assigned player or not.
 - ✓ If an offensive player is driving to the basket and beats the player that was covering them. Or is not covered at all then help defense should step in and attempt to stop the drive. If not, then the players will start to develop bad habits such as watching someone dribble by them for a lay-up and that is not teaching proper defense. In this situation the double team should **not be called.**
 - ✓ When the offense is running a pick on the ball double-teaming may occur as a result of confusion by the defense. Both defensive players could end up on the same player as a result of the pick. In this case. The offense is forcing this situation to potentially occur and **the inadvertent double-team should be accepted as part of play** and play should continue on rather than forcing a stoppage each time this happens. However, the referee should ask the players to find their player.

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****New rule as of the 25-26 season** Sportsmanship Rule** – if a team reaches a lead of 20 points:

- ✓ scoring is stopped for that team. Scoring may resume if/when the opponent scores, therefore diminishing the point difference to less than 20.
- ✓ Stealing is no longer allowed for that team – this is to be communicated amongst coaches and enforced by officials
- ✓ That team's defense must drop below the 3-point line, rather than half court – this is to be communicated amongst coaches and enforced by officials

Player Swaps/Borrowing

- In the event that a team doesn't have enough of their roster players to play a game, they may borrow players from another team within their program. The player(s) borrowed should be of similar skill level to the players missing that game, and **must be approved by the director/president of that program prior to the start of the game.**

Bullying

- MVBL has a zero tolerance policy for player bullying. It is the responsibility of coaches to monitor and manage player and team behavior. If there is an issue with a player bullying (repeated and targeted harassment) a teammate, the coach may need to remove the player from the game or practice, and report the incident to their director.