

Does Recreational Basketball “Help or Hinder” Competitive players?

Note: This article is not intended to lessen the importance of Recreational Basketball leagues – it is intended to make a point that competitive AAU / YBOA basketball players should consider whether or not they should be involved in “non-competitive” Rec leagues while at the same time participating on a “competitive” team. It should be acknowledged that there are many very competitive recreational leagues (especially in the bigger cities) that do benefit competitive players (but this article is about the non-competitive leagues that are supposed to introduce the game of basketball to newcomers, and allow non-competitive players to enjoy basketball with other youth basketball players of the same skill level).

On many occasions the Rec Basketball season is going on at the same time as the Competitive (AAU, YBOA leagues) season. Although this may appear to be a good thing (players are playing lots of basketball right), sometimes it can be a breeding ground for bad habits, and it appears to take “forever” to break players of these bad habits. Please keep in mind that this article is written from experience coaching in a smaller city where the Rec leagues are not very competitive. For example, in many non-competitive Rec basketball leagues there are many rules like – no defense outside the 3 point line, no pressing, using a 9 foot basket, players not being able to steal the ball at certain areas of the court, etc. These types of rules can affect competitive players having to switch gears to compete in AAU / YBOA games using high school rules (without all the restrictions).

Players can form poor habits that are very hard to correct. Most smaller cities have non-competitive Rec basketball leagues geared toward having fun and allowing everyone to play equally. It is very common for competitive players to completely dominate the weaker Rec players and score all the points (there goes Johnny again, stealing the ball and dribbling coast to coast racking up his 30th point). How much fun can that be for the novice players out there just to have fun while learning a little basketball? Tell me how playing against weaker players is going to help Johnny become a better basketball player? I know the parents don't mind seeing their child score 30 points, but will Johnny benefit from running up and down the court scoring easy baskets against weaker players or benefit more from a structured, competitive AAU / YBOA practice that teaches players to become better skilled players? Competitive players that participate in the “weaker” recreational leagues during their AAU/YBOA seasons are in fact “playing down” in skill level (which is quite different from a 12yr old player playing on a 13yr old team – playing up against bigger and more skilled basketball players).

This is one of those “pay me now or pay me later” type scenarios – do you want to hold your son or daughter back from playing competitive basketball just so you can watch them score 20-30 a game in a “weaker” basketball league? If they are going to compete at a higher level of play, then get them started “now” not “later” – It will make a big difference!

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