



*Special
Olympics*
Massachusetts



Unified
Champion
Schools

2026

Unified Basketball

Information

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2026 Unified Basketball Information

Unified Sports, at the interscholastic level, brings together students with and without intellectual disabilities to train and compete on the same team while representing their school. The Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association (MIAA) and Special Olympics Massachusetts are proud to partner together to offer Unified Basketball opportunities for member schools. Below are the MIAA/Special Olympics Massachusetts Unified Basketball Rules for the Fall 2026 season.

Schedule and Season Commitment

August 24:	First Potential Practice Date
September 6:	First Potential Game Date
October 2:	Intent to Enter Postseason Jamboree Due
October 9:	Team Rosters due to Special Olympics Massachusetts
October 23:	Team Sportsmanship Award Nomination Deadline
November 4-22:	Postseason Jamborees

Roster

- Co-ed rosters must have a proportional number of Athletes and Partners (ideally 50/50 split).
- *Athletes* are considered team members with an intellectual disability.
- *Partners* are considered team members without an intellectual disability.
- Per Special Olympics Massachusetts guidance and MIAA Handbook Rule 46, "A student-athlete shall participate in only one MIAA interscholastic sport in any defined MIAA sport season."
- During game competition, teams must have 3 athletes and 2 partners on the court at all times.
- A minimum team roster size of 8 students is recommended.
- Team rosters must include a minimum of 3 Unified Partners.
- Schools may field multiple teams if a roster size is above 15 students.
- Rosters are due to Special Olympics Massachusetts by October 9.

Regular Season

- A Pre-Game meeting with coaches and officials is recommended.
- Games will be played in two (2) halves, with a minimum of 15-20 minutes running time per half. Halftime will be a maximum of 5 minutes. The last minute of play will utilize stop time.
- Overtime will be 4 minutes with running time.
- A five (5) game minimum schedule is recommended to uphold the integrity and philosophy of Unified Sports and maximize participation opportunities for all student-athletes.

Coaches

- New coaches are required to attend a pre-season meeting offered by MIAA and Special Olympics Massachusetts.
- Returning coaches are strongly encouraged to attend a pre-season meeting.
- All coaches must complete a one-time NFHS Online Course "Coaching Unified Sports":
<https://www.nfhslearn.com/courses/coaching-unified-sports>

Officials

- Regular season: It is recommended that Game Officials are adult/staff members with basketball experience or are assigned by a league assigner. Clock management can be filled by student or adult volunteers with basketball experience.
- Postseason Jamborees: Game officials will be coordinated by host sites.
- Please see the playing rules on pages 3-5 of this document as a reference for officials.



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Medical

- Please reference MIAA Handbook Rule 5 regarding medical coverage.
- Please reference MIAA Handbook Rule 56 regarding physical examinations/concussion training/medical coverage.

Postseason Jamboree

- All teams are strongly encouraged to participate in one of the Postseason Jamborees.
- An *Intent to Enter* for participation in a Postseason Jamboree must be submitted by October 2.
- Postseason Jamboree schedules and locations will be communicated to all teams by mid-October.
- Schools interested in hosting a Postseason Jamboree are encouraged to contact Kathy Lutz at kathy.lutz@specialolympicsma.org and Peter Smith at psmith@miaa.net.

****Jamboree Format****

- Sites should accommodate at least two playing courts, with schedules to include approximately 3 rotations of games. A 3-4 hour total time for the event is anticipated.
- Games will be played in two (2), 10-15 minute halves with running time and a 2 minute halftime.
- The last minute of play for each half will utilize stop time.
- Overtime will be 4 minutes with running time.
- *Jamboree Directors may make modifications to game schedules as needed.*

Team Sportsmanship Awards

- Team Sportsmanship Awards will be presented during the Postseason Jamborees.
- Please [click here](#) to submit a nomination. Nominations are due by October 23.

Unified Basketball Playing Rules

Special Olympics, NFHS and MIAA Basketball Rules will be adhered to with the following modifications:

1) Principles of Play:

- Coaches should ensure that the Unified Sports principle of '[meaningful involvement](#)' is adhered to for all members of the team.
- Coaches should ensure that the Unified Sports principle prohibiting '[player domination](#)' is adhered to for all team members.
- No rule or rule modification shall be implemented that would completely restrict Unified partners from competing, including but not limited to scoring points during competition.

2) Player & Safety Equipment*:

- **Special Olympics does not allow the following in the sport of basketball during a game: Helmets of any kind, wheelchairs, walkers, crutches, canes, boots, hard casts, jewelry.*
- The sport of basketball by its nature is a contact sport. Per Special Olympics rules we do everything we can to limit the contact but, as much as we try, we cannot eliminate all aspects of contact or incidental contact. It is the responsibility of Special Olympics to look out for the safety and well-being of all participants and to manage any and all potential risks that may result or cause an injury to a participant.



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- Participants with Physical Disabilities (per [NFHS/Special Olympics Resource Guide](#)):
When creating opportunities for Special Olympics athletes with physical disabilities to participate in sports training and competition, Special Olympics Programs should be guided by the following principles: 1) each athlete should enjoy a dignified and meaningful competition experience; 2) the integrity of the sport must be preserved; and 3) the health and safety of all athletes, coaches and officials must not be compromised.
- Please see Item #12 regarding Skills Competition opportunities for students that use devices.

3) **Cues:**

- A Partner may give verbal or visual instructions only to members of their own team.
- Communication designed to distract or confuse the opposing team is prohibited.

4) **Timeouts:**

- Timeouts will be 60 seconds.
- Each team will have four (4) timeouts per game (2 timeouts per half). Unused timeouts do not carry over to the second half or overtime.
- One additional timeout will be allowed for overtime.

5) **Substitutions:**

- A head coach may make a substitution in dead ball situations only (i.e. the ball goes out of bounds, a foul is called, etc.).
- The coach must inform the referee first, who will stop play momentarily to allow the substitution.
- The referee should preferably use a verbal and physical signal.
- Teams may choose to substitute at regular intervals (i.e. every 3-4 minutes).

6) **Ball Handling Infractions (Traveling, Double Dribble, etc.)**

- Unified Sports Player Development is a training model for athletes to progress their skills through gameplay. Therefore, basketball game rules must be followed as closely as possible.
- Efforts must be made by coaches and officials to explain traveling and double dribble violations.
- Warnings may be communicated to participants.
- In general, a player may take two steps beyond what is allowable. However, carrying the ball around the key or up the court is not permitted.

7) **Three-Second Rule:**

- The three-second rule, allowing offensive players to remain in the free throw lane for only three seconds, will not be enforced.
- Efforts should be made by coaches and officials to explain the three-second violation.
- Warnings may be communicated to participants.

8) **Game Ball:**

- A 28.5 women's basketball will be used for games.

9) **Game Times:**

- Games will be played in two (2) halves, with a minimum of 15-20 minutes running time per half.
- Halftime will be a maximum of 5 minutes.
- The last minute of play will utilize stop time.
- Overtime will be 4 minutes with running time.



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10) **Uniforms:**

- Basketball uniforms must be worn during games and Postseason Jamborees.

11) **Additional Rules:**

- Any areas or situations not covered in the Unified Player Development Rules will be governed by the complete set of Special Olympics rules which can be found at [this link](#).

12) **Skills Competition**

A structured skills competition has been created to prioritize safety for students and provide an opportunity to highlight participation of students that use assistive devices.

- The skills competition will be conducted during one or more segments of the game as determined by the participating schools.
- Participants in the skills competition will consist of athlete/partner pairs or additional team members.
- Coaches should make arrangements with the opposing team to design the skills competition framework and timeframe, reflective of teamwork and the Unified Sports model.
- The competition should consist of all or a combination of the following basketball components: a passing drill, shooting drill, and dribbling drill.
- A scoring portion from the Skills Competition may contribute to the overall game score by mutual agreement between the participating teams in advance of the game.
- For the Postseason Jamborees, registration to participate in a Skills Competition will be included in the Intent to Enter Form.