



# Hoopfest & HYL (Hooptown Youth League) Spokane Youth Basketball Program Overview



We will operate the best youth basketball programs anywhere for beginners, recreation players, skilled and highly skilled players! Our key aspirations are:

- |                                      |                                     |                               |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Kids start young and keep playing | 5. Match team skills in competition | 9. Avoid late night practices |
| 2. Affordable cost structure         | 6. Provide for "all-star" teams     | 10. Provide for open gym time |
| 3. Easy to understand & participate  | 7. Recruit, train, support coaches  | 11. Emphasize fitness         |
| 4. Fun regardless of skill level     | 8. Utilize neighborhood gyms        | 12. Teach leadership          |

## **Beginners & Recreation level players** – Start early, have fun with friends & classmates, learn the game, and play again next year

Starting in kindergarten, kids are able to learn the basics of basketball, have fun participating in the game, experience competition, and engage in fitness activities during the fall and winter months. The key elements of success are making participation fun, easy and affordable! This is accomplished by making the rec program primarily school-based, utilizing free/low-cost grade school gyms, recruiting and retaining coaches, attracting sponsors to pay for uniforms, and reducing operating costs ensuring every player gets the chance to play regardless of financial status.

Parents register their children as individuals on the HYL website. The grade school season for recreation players runs from the first practice in mid-October and ends on the second weekend of December. The league season is short enough to make it easy to participate and long enough to make it a meaningful experience. K through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade have 6 games, 3<sup>rd</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> grade have 5 league games plus a "Final 4" two-game tournament with four teams of similar skill based on the league results. Teams are formed and practices are held at the player's school, or neighboring school, depending on each school's level of participation.

Some recreation-level players want to continue playing after the HYL season ends in mid-December. To do so is completely optional and separate from the HYL league described above. Parents will need to work together to form teams and register their children with a team (not as an individual player as is the case with the HYL Fall season). Most commonly, HYL volunteer coaches will see if their team would like to continue to play. If some, but not enough players want to continue, then HYL coaches find other HYL teams to combine with to form a new team. This second season also allows players to play with friends, relatives, and coaches regardless of school affiliation. NOTE: coaches form teams with parents, Hoopfest and HYL do not form teams for the postseason.

The post-HYL season (after December 10th through February) is operated by Hoopfest. The rec division options for teams are:

1. Continue to practice at no cost if all players participated in the HYL Fall season
2. Play games against any other team on several Sundays in January and February, known as "Rivalry Games"
3. K through 2<sup>nd</sup>-grade register as teams for a 6-game league from January 6<sup>th</sup> - February 17<sup>th</sup>
4. 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and above teams play in tournaments in the recreation division on the weekends of 12/16, 2/3 and 2/17

## **Competitive level players** – Begins in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, teams based on high school boundaries, longer season, schedule customized

Since the early 1990s, Spokane AAU has offered a league and tournaments geared toward kids interested in playing competitive basketball. Over the last decade, the number of overall competitive teams has diminished, and the number of blowout wins has increased within the league and tournaments. HYL and Hoopfest seek to provide a better experience for these players and families with a less costly structure (as described above), with more playing opportunities, and attract more young athletes to the sport of basketball. The legacy AAU program breeds "super teams" composed of the best players from all over the greater Spokane area. Alternatively, the HYL approach endeavors to grow more talented players by forming teams drawing from all the grade schools that feed each area high school (and combining high schools, if need be, based on participation levels). Furthermore, the HYL game schedule for the competitive division will be determined based on a returning team's performance from the previous season and pre-season player evaluations. All divisions will be reviewed after the November 18<sup>th</sup> games and rescheduled if necessary to create better competition throughout the remaining regular season games. HYL will host a jamboree for 3rd-grade competitive teams only before the regular season to evaluate teams. This may even result in teams playing up a grade. The season-ending tournament consists of 4-team brackets determined based on league results with the goal to match team skills within each bracket. This approach connects young players with their future high school and minimizes games for teams in which they either win too easily or are discouraged by losing by wide margins.

Parents register their children in 3<sup>rd</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> grade as individuals on the HYL website to play in the Competitive division. It is at the parent's discretion to determine whether the recreation or competitive division is most appropriate for their child. Generally speaking, most children fit in recreation, whereas competitive players have played for several years and have excelled on their previous recreation teams. Most high schools offer a summer basketball camp in late June. The camp coaches and any prior team coaches should be able to recommend whether a player will fit better in the Competitive or Recreation divisions.

The HYL competitive season runs longer than the rec season with 8 games plus a "Final 4" tournament for a total of 10 games. Practice begins in early October, and the season ends in late January. Competitive teams generally practice twice a week as opposed to rec teams that practice once per week.

In 2022, Hoopfest eliminated the AAU league below the 7<sup>th</sup> grade with the launch of HYL. However, Hoopfest grandfathered existing 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>-grade teams from the previous season (i.e. 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> grade in 2022) and allowed those teams to play in the 2022 Spokane AAU league. In 2023 the previously grandfathered 6<sup>th</sup>-grade teams (that played in the 2022 5<sup>th</sup>-grade AAU league) will register and play as a team in the competitive HYL league. Their league schedule will be subject to the scheduling process as described above. Teams not wanting to play within the competitive HYL league may still register as a tournament-only team and receive insurance, but not free practice gyms.

Additionally, the legacy AAU league had a league playoff that began in January and culminated in late February on Presidents Day weekend. The HYL competitive league will have the same number of games as prior AAU seasons but end in late January. This change was based on the coach's requests to end the league earlier to allow players to either move on to other sports or be available to play in regional tournaments.

**The competitive HYL league as described above does not limit players from playing on "coach select teams" for tournaments.**

Hoopfest will continue to operate the Boo Ball tournament in late October, Santa Slammer in mid-December, and the traditional January and February tournaments. HYL league teams, or any team, can play in these tournaments. There will be no scheduled HYL league games on the Saturdays of tournament weekends. Additionally, teams may arrange games against any other team on several Sundays in January and February, known as "Rivalry Games".

In short, the Competitive HYL division improves the legacy AAU league by reducing costs, increasing the competitiveness of games, connecting players to their respective high schools, and attracting more athletes. Families will no longer be disadvantaged when they are unable to find a team for their son or daughter. Between the HYL league, Hoopfest-sponsored tournaments, and Rivalry Games, competitive players will be able to play even more basketball - on their school-based HYL team and even on a second team for tournaments.

**Advanced Competitive level players – Begins in the 5th grade, teams based on tryouts county-wide for tournament play**

Hoopfest will work with the Hooptown Elite LLC program to pilot and sponsor 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup>-grade regional teams for boys and girls at the highest skill level in the Spokane region. These teams will play in the Pacific Northwest regional tournaments. Coaches will be selected by Hooptown Elite, subject to approval by Hoopfest and supporting school districts. There will be one, and possibly two, teams for each grade. Players are required to participate in the HYL competitive league and be selected by the coaches (not Hoopfest or HYL) at an open, well-publicized tryout in the late spring of each year for the upcoming season. Teams may practice during the HYL season provided they work to avoid conflicts with HYL practices and Saturday games. Teams will be eligible for low/no-cost gym access for practices. This program will launch in the spring of 2023 for the 2023-2024 season. Hoopfest will provide financial support for these teams.

**Seventh and Eighth Grade – Traditional AAU league & tournaments plus WIAA Junior High basketball**

Hoopfest (not HYL) will operate a traditional AAU league for 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> graders (previously grandfathered 6<sup>th</sup> grade AAU teams may play together in HYL Competitive as described under the "Competitive level players" section). The traditional AAU league in October through January is necessary at the competitive level to supplement the short 6-week school winter sessions. Hoopfest may choose to operate this league outside of the AAU brand to reduce player costs while still providing competition at the highest level. If so, teams will no longer be required to carry an AAU card, as Hoopfest will obtain insurance that will cover the league. AAU league will conclude the last weekend in January rather than mid-February and will consist of the same number of games as previous years. This is in addition to the middle school varsity and junior varsity programs offered by the schools. Generally, players need to be selected to play on varsity teams, but junior varsity teams are formed for all interested players and are not subject to "cuts". As a side note, the varsity/JV structure is governed by the WIAA and specifically excludes 6<sup>th</sup> graders.

**[For more information, volunteer & coaching opportunities and links for registration go to:](http://www.hooptownusa.com)**  
**[www.hooptownusa.com](http://www.hooptownusa.com)**