SOMT Unified Basketball Competition Guidelines

What is Unified Basketball?

In Unified Basketball, Unified Partners serve as on-court player-mentors and competitors. They help facilitate the game by communicating offensive and defensive plays, setting screens, and supporting the flow of action on the court.

However, their role extends beyond mentoring. Unified Partners are fully registered teammates who can shoot, score, defend, and actively participate in every aspect of the game. They are not on the court to stand back, simply instruct, or feed the ball to their teammates. They get in the mix, run the floor, play defense, and execute the game plan alongside all their teammates, both Special Olympics athletes and fellow Unified Partners.

The goal of Unified Basketball is growth, teamwork, and independence. Every teammate has an active role in contributing to the team's success. When the whistle blows, they compete together as one cohesive team, working toward a common goal.

Meaningful Involvement:

All players should have meaningful involvement without any type of individual player dominance. Meaningful Involvement is an effort to optimize participation by all team members (athletes and partners) based on the principle that every player should contribute to the success of the team.

The composition of any team must include players with necessary sport-specific skills. Teams should not permit players to dominate play, exclude other teammates from contributing to the success of the team, or present a health and safety risk on the court. By permitting any player to dominate play, other players' roles and opportunities are greatly limited.

This violates both the spirit and intent of the Special Olympics Unified Sports rules and philosophy and will be addressed by the SOMT Sports Department.

Examples of Meaningful Involvement NOT being followed:

- Players consistently have very limited opportunities to handle, pass, shoot and dribble the ball while their team is team control (athletes or partners).
- Teams change the way they play and how individual players are engaged, in medal matches compared to preliminary rounds.
- Coaches' substitution policy – are some players remaining on the bench for most of the game?

It is the coaches' responsibility to make sure they are adhering to SO rules regarding meaningful involvement. If an official or SOMT Sports Department staff member determines that a player is dominating play, the official/SOMT Sports Department shall sanction the player and/or coach. Consequences for non-compliance are either:

- Specific Player Sanctions (encourage voluntary substitution, warning, technical foul, ejection)
- Sanctions will include warning the player and/or coach, citing the player or coach with unsportsmanlike conduct or removing the player or coach from the game.
- Team Consequences (forfeiture of game, disqualification from tournament)

Player Dominance:

The following is a list of, and is not limited to, what may be considered "player dominance":

- Players of higher ability only pass to one another.
- Players of lower ability are rarely involved in team play.
- In the last two minutes of competition, the participation of higher-ability athletes noticeably increased to the exclusion of lower ability teammates.
- Higher ability players (athletes or partners) consistently steal or block shots of lower ability players.

It is NOT "player dominance" when players have the opportunity to display their individual skills to the best of their ability. Opportunities include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Fast break and layup after a steal
- Open shot
- Playing the point guard position

Guidelines for Unified Partners:

A UP may:

- Shoot when open.
- Steal the ball on a pass and lead into a fast break.
- Rebound and pass to athletes and other UPs.
- Play point guard.
- Play defense against another UP.
- Block another UP's shot.
- Anticipate a pass and steal the ball from an opposing UP.
- Bring the ball down court after a throw in.
- Play point guard.

A UP may not:

- Consistently block shots of lower ability players.
- Only pass to higher ability players – need to engage the entire team.
- Play in such a way as it crosses into player dominance and is not fun for the opposing team or their own team – taking all the shots, only passing to other UPs, aggressive/excessive rebounding and feeding their team for shots, stealing the ball excessively.

Unified partners are encouraged to be involved in play – they may shoot when open, steal the ball, and play defense against the UPs on the opposing team.

It is not the intention to take opportunities away from athletes in unified play by encouraging UPs to be involved and engaged in the game. The purpose is to engage athletes and Unified Partners in team basketball TOGETHER, where all feel included and part of the game.

At any time, if it is observed by SOMT Sports Department Staff that a coach does not follow the principles of Meaningful Involvement or allows excessive Player Dominance, the SOMT Sports Department may intervene at their discretion.