

Between all of the modern technology and social media many people have heard of AAU basketball. In fact, it is one thing many basketball players wish to do. On average many people don't know exactly what it is or they know some info and just don't care to learn more about it. I am here to inform you about the major things you should know about AAU.

Basketball comes in all different levels and can mean a lot to some but not a ton to others. It means the world to me and I spend a lot of my time playing. NY Havoc, the team on which I play, is a high level team. The traveling can be a lot to handle at times. On the other hand there are smaller teams who play in local tournaments and focus on just getting better rather than also trying to get their name out in the recruiting world. Many players who don't enjoy basketball as much only play for their school. You don't need to pay to be on a high school team and you don't have to pay for traveling. AAU is a lot but it is a ton of fun if you're playing with a great group of people.

AAU basketball can't be a lot of stress for someone who isn't in a good mental state. Along with AAU comes a lot of traveling. It is also hard on the families who aren't financially stable. Depending on what type of team you play for there can be a lot of traveling not any at all. When it comes to traveling it is very hard on most parents. It costs a lot to go to big tournaments but in the end it should pay off. It is important not to make AAU a waste of your time. If you work hard enough and get good grades the chances of getting a scholarship are high. But what exactly is AAU basketball?

Many people don't actually know what AAU stands for, they just use it as a term for a travel basketball team. AAU stands for Amateur Athletic Union. It is an organization based in the United States. It was founded on January 21, 1888 by James Edward Sullivan. As of 2018 there are almost one million athletes and coaches that're members of the AAU. In the 1980's this youth league became a big hit when Sonny Vaccaro and Phil Knight has a big movement to promote youth sports.

Shortly after the movement, AAU basketball had a downfall because it became more of a competition between big name brands, such as Nike, Under Armour, and Adidas. These companies were fighting to sponsor the really good players. Nowadays, name brands will sponsor entire teams. They will sponsor teams as young as middle school. AAU programs can start as soon as third and fourth grade for both girls and boys. Many of those young teams only participate in local tournaments.

If the child participating on an aau basketball team, they should be getting a lot out of it. Unlike school basketball, this organization is used a lot for skill development and improvements. Higher level programs lift to develop more muscle, which helps improve strength and quickness on the court. Along with getting better, aau can also be used for recruitment. Recruited is done at tournaments and tournaments come with lots and lots of fees. (Basketball For Coaches)

While it is obvious that not all AAU teams are the exact same, many high level teams such as NY Havoc, I-90 Elite, and New York City Rocks are all examples of teams that have similar fees and tournament schedules. Teams that play in more local tournaments cost a lot less money because the travel is shorter and a hotel room isn't

required. The teams listed above are all teams that have kids looking to play at high level colleges. While some fundraising can be done to lower prices, it is still a large amount of money!

It's not easy for some families, especially families that have more than one kid. Many players and their parents have to find a way to make extra money to help pay off some of the fees. AAU coaches can help pay for fees at times as long as the family pays back the money over time. The general fee which includes all fees for tournaments which is usually \$200-\$900 per team, gym time, and training in March-July is about \$2,000. On top of that payment there are also other fees such as gas if driving, plane tickets and rental car if flying, food, hotel rooms, and admission to tournaments for non-players. To save money many families drive to far tournaments. Driving tends to be cheaper than flying and renting a car. Most hotels offer a team discount which makes hotels \$100-\$250 per night. Smaller tournaments only require a one night stay in a hotel but some bigger tournaments are up to eight nights in a hotel. Teams in most tournaments play up to 5 or 6 games. In the end spending the money on AAU should be worth it because the majority of players on high level teams end up getting scholarships to colleges.

Whether it's walking around at a large tournament or even just seeing a coach out and about there are very strict rules between players and colleges who are recruiting them. Recruiters aren't supposed to have any contact with players while at a live tournament. They're told not to even make eye contact with players. Although they are told that, there are many cases when there is some kind of interaction.

There are also many restrictions up until September 1st of the players junior year. Kids are allowed to go on unofficial visits at any point but official visits aren't allowed until junior year. An official visit is a visit that is paid for by the college. Colleges that are division one or two are not allowed to send out personalized emails to players, text, or call players until that date. The generic email just tells players to fill out a recruitment form on their website which allows the school to have more information on the player. Many division one and two coaches who are interested in a player contact the player's coach letting them know. The college will also ask the player more information about the player and how they act while they aren't playing at big tournaments. Division three coaches are allowed to send out any emails they would like to and they're allowed to contact players. Division three schools don't offer scholarships for sports while division one and two can which is why there are much more strict rules for the high levels. But it all starts with AAU and high school basketball (NCAA, Coleman)

Many may believe that AAU and high school basketball are very similar. But in fact they aren't. The players, coaches, community, and family are all very different. While I do play AAU with people who also happen to be on my high school team, our relationship in the two different environments are very different. The level of play and competency aren't even close to the same and the reason behind playing are different. Winning during AAU isn't as important as winning during high school basketball. Although teams still like to win during AAU, high school teams play to win since they are playing more local teams. While there are many differences there's also some similar

aspects. For example, the team and coaches are “family” and always have each others backs.

AAU and high school basketball both have a common purpose and that is to have fun. After the having fun part there tend to be some differences that not all people realize. AAU is not only to travel with your team and have a great time but if you play on a high enough level it is used for recruitment and college. You participate in many tournaments with college coaches watching which gives you a chance to get a scholarship. While coaches can go to high school games, many don't go until they know the specific player that they're very interested in. High school basketball tends to come with some more drama. There's lots of drama in high school that carries over into the sports. Along with drama, there's a lot more pressure put on the players in high school basketball. AAU doesn't have any drama, at least on New York Havoc. Everyone is extremely close and we all enjoy spending time together in hotels. There aren't any groups or divisions on the team like school ball. During AAU not only are the players very close but all of the parents form a bond as well. There isn't as big a crowd during AAU but it is in fact just as supportive as the big crowds during high school basketball. The coaches during high school put in lots of plays but during AAU we just play basketball without many plays. Therefore, some things are similar during AAU and high school basketball are similar but there's many more difference.

AAU and high school basketball can be similar in many ways but majority are different. The overall environments are very different and everyone's desire to learn tend to be different in the different environments. Everyone is more supportive in AAU

and everyone is always clapping and picking you up when your down during AAU practices and games. The AAU environment is better than high school basketball most of the time. Along with the great AAU environment there is also a great AAU community.

Thinking about AAU many people make the assumption that the families aren't close since we don't see each other year round. NY Havoc has players on it from all over New York and even some from bordering states. While it's hard to see each other we find a way to go watch each other play at least one game during their school ball season. The bonds we create throughout the AAU season are never lost and the time spent apart doesn't affect our friendships at all.

8th grade, my first year being a part of New York Havoc, I met some pretty incredible people. Two girls on my team, Jenalyse and Maddisyn were my absolute best friends. Their parents treated me like I was their daughter and were always there for me. Jenalyse and Maddisyn always had my back and of course I had their backs as well. Since the day I met them at a Siena basketball game we have been nothing but best friends. Practices and workouts are extremely hard but every single player has a positive attitude and we get each other through it. Whether it's a coach to player conversation, young player to older player, or same age to same age player everyone is extremely nice. We have everyone's backs. Bonding in hotels when we travel is probably one of my favorite parts about AAU. We usually order food and hang out by the pool and have a great time. Every single person I have met during AAU was so nice and very supportive. I couldn't be more grateful for all of the amazing people I have met and can't wait to meet even more people this season.

I'm sure many people who play AAU have't or won't have the same experience as I did but I wish they could. While I am extremely grateful for all of the friends I have made, I hope to make even more in the upcoming two years I get the play for Havoc. There is no better feeling than friends and family who have your back at all times. The friends I have made in this program will be my forever best friends and have given me one of the best experiences ever.

Everyone who plays AAU basketball or knows anything about it is aware that everyone has a different experience. My experience has absolutely changed me, my work ethic, and motivation for the best. While playing AAU basketball for NY Havoc over the past two years, incredible friendships have been formed with my teammates. There can be many challenges throughout the AAU season; however, there are many bonus' such as traveling to different parts of the country.

Have you ever done something and realized it changed your life completely? Well that is how I feel about AAU basketball. Our team works extremely hard in practice to improve so that we can travel to large tournaments where we compete against other competitive teams. During my first year of playing AAU basketball in 8th grade, it was very challenging. I did not yet understand what benefits could come from working extremely hard. My older sister Stephanie played basketball and I looked up to but never imagined to be at her level or ability. Terrance Florence, my AAU coach, taught me how to work hard but still have fun. This is one reason I developed the love of basketball and started to become the player I am today.

While playing 9th grade varsity basketball, I learned what “big girl basketball” is, as Coach Organ would call it. That spring during AAU I had a huge outburst and started playing very well and continued to get stronger and better. Our team played in even larger tournaments in the cities of Indianapolis and Chicago which left me with incredible memories and experiences.

My sophomore AAU season starts in just a few weeks and I couldn't be more excited. It's going to feel amazing to get back into the gym with coaches and teammates and continue to grow for the upcoming season. AAU and NY Havoc have absolutely changed my life and I am beyond thankful for the opportunity to play.

AAU basketball can be a lot to handle if you don't have the right support behind you and if you don't have the right mentality. Time management is very important when devoting a lot of your time to a sport. As I am a three sport athlete for high school, that means running track in the spring overlaps with playing AAU basketball. Academics come before sports and therefore you need to be on top of your school work. If you aren't, school becomes very stressful and your grades will drop. Although very challenging, my current status is student-athlete.

During a very long school basketball season, players muscles are drained. My AAU coach, Terrance Florence, recognizes this and emphasizes getting at least 8 hours of sleep at night and drinking plenty of water. Some players don't get any time off between school basketball and AAU basketball. Our team practices twice a week for two hours with an hour of weight training following. Weight training is very important to make your muscles strong for playing multiple games in a day. Before tournaments



begin, our team has double practice sessions on the weekends. Once tournaments start, we begin traveling and play four to five games per weekend. During the summer, back to back tournaments occur which leads to twelve days of travel and over thirteen games. By the end of each tournament, players usually very tired but need to refresh quickly to get back in the gym.

It is important and beneficial to have a good support system behind a player. I am fortunate and have family and friend that are there to help me, yet push me to my best. Since I do get physically and mentally exhausted this is the best way to get through it. My teammates and coach are also an important factor in a support system. When feeling frustrated after a game, they are the best encouragement to help refocus before the next game.

AAU basketball requires a high level of commitment and is not for everyone. While hours upon hours are spent in the gym working on my skills to get better, it makes me happy to see my hard work pay off. There are many late nights of completing homework and miss fun times with friends such as birthday parties and dances, I wouldn't trade this opportunity for anything else in the world.

AAU basketball is definitely worth the time and money. Not every program is meant for every type of player but AAU allows young players to discover different types of coaching and players. A good player will use other peoples styles of basketball to add to their abilities to become an even better player. While everyone has a different experience, it still comes along with an extremely cool and fun experience. Many kids don't have the opportunity to travel to many other states. Traveling for AAU allows kids

to get out of their hometown and to see new cities and environments. Kids also get the opportunity to visit many different levels and styles of colleges that they thought they would never be able to see. While traveling to all of these new places, along the way many extremely good bonds are formed. That is very important when spending so much time with the same group of people.

## Citations

- “What Is AAU Basketball? (Including Pros and Cons).” *Basketball For Coaches*, 23 May 2018, [www.basketballforcoaches.com/what-is-aau-basketball/](http://www.basketballforcoaches.com/what-is-aau-basketball/).
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