



British Basketball players studying and playing in the US

Basketball in Great Britain is on the rise, in part due to British Basketball's T16s and Game On strategies.

With elite players looking for the best environment to develop, it is important to be aware of different pathways for success, both at home and abroad. Is it schools in England or Scotland, or academies in Europe? Is it domestic clubs or prep or high schools in the States? Is it colleges in the States? Is it Regional Institutes of Basketball or specialist schools of basketball in England?

Performance pathway choices

There are different pathways to develop as a player and to also complete schooling and university study. For many British players the opportunity to play and study in the States is appealing and quickly becomes their goal.

However, it is important to understand that there are many excellent developmental options available in Britain and Europe. Ideally, British players between the ages of 12-22 should seek a 'develop the player at all costs' environment. Ultimately, this is a decision that young players and their families must make with objective guidance from coaches, clubs and governing bodies.

The US college system (NCAA)

No matter how talented a player, there are specific rules that determine who can and can't play basketball at school and college (university) in the United States.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is the organisation that will determine whether players are eligible to qualify for athletic participation at a US college. The NCAA has strict rules of eligibility which will determine whether a player is eligible to play and can be considered for a basketball scholarship should a player be offered one by a college. The NCAA also restricts how much contact time players have with college coaches, as well as governing scholarships and recruiting. The environment at an NCAA college is likely to be one of 'win at all costs' and not necessarily focused on individual development.

Differing education systems

The situation for students educated in Britain is complex and very different from students educated in America. Most issues have to do with amateurism and the multi-tiered nature of the British education system. Here are some of the main points that are valid for possible enrolment in 2011 (and beyond) for NCAA division I and II.

(Please note that this is not intended as the definitive guide to NCAA sport participation, but more a general overview of key rules and regulations that may apply to British basketball players).

GCSEs/Standard Grades establish your graduation date

(For 2011-12 and subsequent academic year entrants)

According to the NCAA, student athletes have graduated from high school after completing **GCSEs/Standard Grades** (typically age 16). Once graduated, student athletes have one more year (a postgraduate year) before they must enrol at a US college/university. If they don't they will receive punishments.

GCSEs/Standard Grades + 1 post graduate year = eligible to play free of punishments

How to move the graduation date

The NCAA recognizes that in Britain prospective student athletes can continue studying at a British secondary school for further qualifications, which are necessary for qualification for British universities.

The NCAA will move the graduation date for the following qualifications:

AS, BTEC National Certificate (1 year), A Level (2 years) (both require two or more exams passed with grades of E or higher), Scottish Highers, BTEC National Diploma (2 years), and NVQ level 3 (2 years).

Important: The NCAA does not recognise equivalencies to AS levels in accordance with the UCAS system—prospective players must complete the full two-year course.

AS, BTEC Nat Certificate + 1 year = eligible to play free of punishments
A-level Scottish Highers + 1 year = eligible to play free of punishments
BTEC Dip, NVQ level 3 + 1 year = eligible to play free of punishments

Core requirements

It is common for some British students to be missing a GCSE social science requirement when applying for US colleges/universities. Players must make sure they have a social science course as part of their GCSEs. This is not an issue in Scotland where all students are required to study a Social Science.

Potential eligibility problems

A common route in the past (before 2010) for British players has been to complete GCSEs and then move to the US for two or three years of high or prep school.

A US high school diploma does not move the graduation date of the GCSE/Standard Grade.

Attending a high or prep school for longer than one year will effectively delay enrolment and lead to punishment from the NCAA.

E.g. A player completes GCSEs/Standard Grades and moves to the states for two years of high school and then enrolls in college.

- They will be **ineligible** for the first year of college (this is called a year in residence) and will have only three years of eligibility remaining.
- If the player attends high and/or prep school for three years they will be required to sit out their first year of college (year in residence) and will only have two years of eligibility remaining.
- This may impact a college's interest as they will likely prefer to recruit players with all four years available.

Playing professional basketball while maintaining an amateur status

Unlike previous NCAA rules, prospective student athletes (those starting college in 2010 or after) are now allowed to play on a professional team or with professionals, as long as they do not receive benefits that are over reasonable expenses, and so long as the player plays within the time of formal education towards graduation, or during the one year after graduation.

With this new NCAA rule British players have a significant domestic advantage in that they may stay in Britain, play for a BBL or EBL team and continue their education prior to attending an NCAA college – without fear of their eligibility being jeopardised.

NCAA definition of a professional team

A professional team is any organised team that:

Provides any of its players more than actual and necessary expenses for participation on the team, except as otherwise permitted by NCAA legislation.

Actual and necessary expenses are limited to the following, provided the value of these items is commensurate with the fair market value in the locality of the player(s) and is not excessive in nature:

- (1) Meals directly tied to competition and practice held in preparation for such competition;
- (2) Lodging directly tied to competition and practice held in preparation for such competition;
- (3) Apparel, equipment and supplies;
- (4) Coaching and instruction;
- (5) Health/medical insurance;
- (6) Transportation (expenses to and from practice competition, cost of transportation from home to training/practice site at the beginning of the season and from training/practice site to home at the end of season);
- (7) Medical treatment and physical therapy;
- (8) Facility usage;
- (9) Entry fees; and
- (10) Other reasonable expenses

Options for seeking eligibility at US colleges

A-levels, Scottish Highers, BTEC 2-year courses/NVQ level 3:

1. Complete A-levels, **Scottish Highers**, BTEC 2-year courses/NVQ level 3 and upon completion enrol at US university/college – so long as the credential is completed within two years of GCSEs. Players can take advantage by playing BBL, EBL with paid players, etc.
2. Complete A-levels, **Scottish Highers**, BTEC 2-year courses/NVQ level 3 in timely fashion and then go to America for a 'postgraduate' year at a US prep or high school.
3. Complete A-levels, **Scottish Highers**, BTEC 2-year courses/NVQ level 3 in timely fashion, remain in UK or Europe and work on developing skills (academy in the UK, abroad, etc).

AS-level or BTEC National Certificate:

1. Same as above, but the player will have only one year after completion of GCSEs to obtain these certifications.

Not sitting GCSEs/Standard Grades:

1. If a player wants to go to an American high school and remain eligible, it is advisable **not** to complete **GCSEs/Standard Grades**. It is imperative that the prospective student athlete receives sound academic advice and enrolls in the appropriate required subjects in order that the NCAA deems him/her eligible once high school is completed. In this case, the student athlete will be evaluated in the same manner as US high school graduates.

Europe

Completing an international credential (such as an International Baccalaureate) in Europe after GCSEs will move the graduation date, similar to AS, A-levels and Scottish Highers. An International Baccalaureate, or the country's equivalent, will move the graduation date to the date that the international credential was completed.

Making the best decision

The choice of career progression for aspiring players is not limited to the US college system. Basketball has developed quickly in the UK and Europe, offering more choices than ever to talented players and their families. The key for all involved (players, parents, coaches) is to learn as much as possible about the various options. Regardless of which route is selected, all talented players should first and foremost establish a commitment to their skill and physical development. This will guarantee success.

Those players aspiring to play college basketball in the States must understand the NCAA rules. The US college route is complicated and failing to understand what may or may not make a player eligible can have a significant impact on a young player's development.

British Basketball will provide objective guidance to elite players and their families. Please contact Head of Performance, Warwick Cann via email at warwickcann@basketballgb.com.