



by Anthony Reimer

FIBA VS NORTH AMERICAN RULES COMPARISON

During his officiating career of over 20 years, Anthony Reimer became known in the province of Alberta, Canada, for his expertise in basketball rules. While injury forced him to retire from active officiating, "Ace" has continued to contribute to the basketball community through his basketball officiating web site (hoop.jazzace.ca), one of the earliest such sites available on the Internet. This article is based on content from that web site.

There has been a lot of progress made in the last two decades on reducing the differences between FIBA Rules and those used in North America. Still, significant differences remain. For spectators in the United States, this means making small adjustments when watching an NCAA game as opposed to an NBA game, for instance, and a larger adjustment when watching the FIBA World Championships or the Olympics. For those outside North America the adjustment is in reverse. Canadians such as myself find themselves in the middle. I can go to my local University and watch a double-header where the first game is played under FIBA Rules and the second under NCAA Rules (both slightly modified). For Canadian referees, this means that our best officials have to be adept at changing rules from game to game. I created the following guide to the differences between the major rule sets with all three of those groups in mind: people accustomed to FIBA Rules, people accustomed to U.S.-style rules, and referees who need a detailed (but not exhaustive) comparison of those sets of rules. This guide focuses on the three basic "flavours" of rules: FIBA, NBA/WNBA, and NCAA (Men/Women). Unless otherwise stated, NCAA rules listed apply to both Men's and Women's games. Both metric and U.S. measurements are provided; metric measures are

exact in the case of FIBA, while U.S. measurements are exact in the case of the other rule sets. I have omitted NFHS (U.S. High School) Rules, but for readers who want more details on those rules, a comparison between NCAA and NFHS rules is published in the NCAA Rule Book each year. Canadian readers who are interested in the rules used at the College and University level in Canada can view the comparison on my web site.

MAJOR DIFFERENCES

THREE-POINT LINE

Measured from the centre of the basket:

FIBA: 6.25 m (20' 6.25") arc.

NBA: 7.24 m (23' 9") arc, which intersects with lines parallel to the sideline that are 6.7 m (22') from the basket at their closest point.

WNBA: 6.25 m (20' 6.25") arc.

NCAA: 6.02 m (19' 9") arc.

RESTRICTED AREA ("KEY", "LANE")

FIBA: A trapezoid 3.6 m (12') wide at the free throw line and 6 m wide (19' 8.25") at the baseline.

NBA, WNBA: 4.88 m (16') wide rectangle.

NCAA: 3.6 m (12') wide rectangle.

PLAYING TIME

FIBA: 4 x 10 minute quarters; extra periods are 5 minutes.

NBA: 4 x 12 minute quarters; extra periods are 5 minutes.

WNBA, NCAA: 2 x 20 minute halves; extra periods are 5 minutes.

GAME CLOCK OPERATION:

FIELD GOAL IN LAST MINUTES OF PLAY

The clock is stopped after a successful field goal as follows:

FIBA: last 2 minutes of 4th period and any

extra period.

NBA: last minute of quarters 1, 2 and 3; last 2 minutes of 4th quarter and any extra period.

WNBA: last minute of each period.

NCAA: last minute of 2nd half and any extra period.

SHOT CLOCK - TIME ALLOWED TO SHOOT

FIBA: 24 seconds.

NBA: 24 seconds.

WNBA: 30 seconds.

NCAA Men: 35 seconds.

NCAA Women: 30 seconds.

SHOT CLOCK - OPERATION

FIBA:

▼ When play resumes with less than full amount on shot clock (e.g., defense taps ball out-of-bounds), shot clock does not start until team establishes control in-bounds.

▼ Shot clock is reset after most fouls (personal or technical).

Exception:

- Shot clock is not reset on a double foul or an alternating possession situation when the same team retains possession.

NBA, WNBA:

▼ When play resumes with less than full amount on shot clock, shot clock starts with the first touch in-bounds.

▼ The shot clock is reset to 24 seconds on most personal fouls and defensive violations in backcourt (e.g., kicking or punching ball).

Exceptions:

- The shot clock remains the same as when play was interrupted or is reset to 14 seconds (whichever is greater) when (1) a personal foul occurs and the throw-in will be in the frontcourt, (2) a jump ball occurs



and is retained by the offensive team as the result of a held ball caused by the defense, (3) a defensive 3-second violation or kicked/punched ball violation occurs in the frontcourt, (4) a defensive technical foul or delay of game warning occurs, (5) a flagrant or punching foul is called.

- The shot clock is not reset when the offensive team commits a technical foul.

NCAA:

- ▼ When play resumes with less than full amount on shot clock, shot clock starts with the first touch in-bounds.
- ▼ The shot clock is reset after most fouls (personal or technical).

Exceptions:

- The shot clock is not reset on a double foul or an alternating possession situation when the same team retains possession.

- The shot clock is not reset when the offensive team commits a technical foul.

TIME-OUTS - NUMBER AND DURATION

FIBA:

- ▼ Two time-outs in first half, 3 in second half, 1 per extra period.
- ▼ All time-outs are 60 seconds in duration.
- ▼ Time-outs do not accumulate.

NBA:

- ▼ Six "full" time-outs per regulation time (with some restrictions; some mandatory time-outs for television are built into the 6); 3 time-outs per extra period.
- ▼ Full time-outs are 60 seconds, except the first 2 time-outs in each period and the extra mandatory time-outs in 2nd and 4th periods, which are 100 seconds.
- ▼ Full time-outs do not accumulate into

overtime. One 20-second time-out per half; unused 20-second time-out in 2nd half may be carried into extra period.

WNBA:

- ▼ One full time-out per half or extra period.
- ▼ Four TV-type time-outs must occur each half (none in extra period).
- ▼ Full time-outs are 120 seconds in duration.
- ▼ Full time-outs do not accumulate into extra period.
- ▼ One 20-second time-out in 1st half, two 20-second time-outs in 2nd half, one additional 20-second time-out per extra period (one 20-second time-out can carry over from 2nd half, for a maximum of two in extra period).

NCAA - Electronic Media Game:

- ▼ Four 30-second time-outs and one 60-second time-out per game.
- ▼ Maximum of three 30-second time-outs and one 60-second time-out may be carried into 2nd half.
- ▼ One additional 30-second time-out is added per extra period (any time-outs remaining from 2nd half may be carried into extra period).
- ▼ First 30-second time-out of 2nd half is extended to the length of a media time-out.
- ▼ If coach requests 2 consecutive 30-second time-outs, players may sit, so long as the request is made when the first time-out is granted. Normally, players must remain standing and on the floor during a 30-second time-out.

NCAA - Non-Electronic Media Game:

- ▼ Four full time-outs per game (75 seconds, with warning after 60 seconds); add 1 time-out per extra period.
- ▼ Two 30-second time-outs per game (used anytime).
- ▼ All time-outs are cumulative.

TIME-OUTS - HOW TO CALL, WHEN ALLOWED, PRIVILEGES

FIBA:

- ▼ Must be called by the coach through the scorer's table.
- ▼ Time-out will be granted on next play stoppage or, if requested in time, after the next field goal scored against the team that requested the time-out.
- ▼ No time-outs once a set of free throws has started (ball at disposal of free thrower for first or only free throw).

NBA, WNBA:

- ▼ Called from floor by a player anytime a player on that team is in control of the ball, or whenever the ball is dead (once a team is scored upon, that team is deemed to be in control of the ball; therefore no time-outs to the scoring team can be granted after a basket).
- ▼ A player may not call time-out if both feet are in the air and any part of that player's

body has broken the vertical plane of a sideline, endline, or the midcourt line.

- ▼ The ball may be advanced to the front-court (i.e. the 28' [8.5 m] line) in some situations after calling a full or a 20-second time-out late in the game.

NCAA:

- ▼ Called from the floor by a player (or by the head coach from within the team bench area) anytime a player on that team is in control of the ball, or whenever the ball is dead (including after a field goal or free throw by either team).

JUMP BALL, HELD BALL, ALTERNATING POSSESSION

FIBA:

- ▼ On all held ball/jump ball situations during the game (including the beginnings of all periods after the 1st period), teams alternate receiving the ball ("alternating possession"), with the team not gaining possession of the initial jump ball being the first recipient.
- ▼ First period begins with a jump ball; alternating possession begins all remaining periods, including extra periods.
- ▼ Shot clock will not be reset if the offensive team retains possession of the ball through the alternating process.

NBA:

- ▼ On all held ball/jump ball situations during the game, play resumes with a jump ball.
- ▼ If the offense retains possession after a jump ball, the clock is reset to 14 seconds or remains the same if there was more than 14 seconds on the clock. If the defense gains possession, the clock is reset to 24 seconds.
- ▼ The first period and any overtime period begins with a jump ball; periods 2, 3 and 4 start with possession based on which team won the opening tip (2 and 3 go to the loser of the tip, 4 goes to the winner).

WNBA:

- ▼ On each held ball/jump ball situation, play resumes with a jump ball.
- ▼ Each half and extra period begins with a jump ball.

NCAA:

- ▼ On all held ball/jump ball situations during the game (including the start of the 2nd half), teams alternate receiving the ball ("alternating possession"), with the team not gaining possession of the opening jump ball being the first recipient.
- ▼ The game and any extra period start with a jump ball; alternating possession begins the 2nd half.
- ▼ If the offensive team retains the ball due to the alternating possession process, the shot clock shall not be reset.

SUBSTITUTIONS

FIBA:

- ▼ A "substitution opportunity" begins when the clock is stopped and the ball is dead (i.e. after a whistle or after a field goal in the last two minutes). It ends when the ball is placed at the disposal of a player making a throw-in, or placed at the disposal of a free throw shooter for the first or only free throw. One major effect of this is to prevent substitutions during free throws.
- ▼ Either team may sub on any foul, violation, alternating possession situation or time-out.
- ▼ A sub for the free throw shooter must report before the free throw activity begins, and the opponents may send one matching sub provided the sub reports before the ball is at the disposal of the free throw shooter for the last free throw. These players may enter only if the last free throw is successful.
- ▼ After a basket in the last two minutes of play, the team scored upon may initiate a substitution provided the substitute(s) request is communicated to the officials (through the scorer) before the ball becomes live after the scoring of the basket. If the team scored upon makes a substitution, the opponents may do so also.
- ▼ Referee's stoppages are included as substitution opportunities.

NBA:

- ▼ Substitutions are permitted for either team when the clock is stopped and the ball is dead. Exception: Substitutions not permitted during the final minute(s) of a period when the clock is stopped due to a successful field goal. In many cases, the player must be in the 8' box (near the Scorer's Table) at the time of the stoppage in order to enter the game.
- ▼ Substitutions are not permitted during a referee's stoppage (e.g., delay of game warning, etc.).
- ▼ During free throw activity, substitutions are permitted after the first free throw in a multiple throw penalty, but not between the 2nd and 3rd free throws, nor after a successful final free throw. A "substitution for the shooter" is not generally permitted.

NCAA:

- ▼ Substitutions by either team permitted when the clock is stopped and the ball is dead, including after a successful free throw.

Exception:

- Substitutions shall not be permitted in the last 59.9 seconds of the second half or any extra period when the clock is stopped (a) due to a successful field goal, (b) to correct a timer's mistake, or (c) due to

an inadvertent whistle.

- ▼ No restrictions on which team must initiate substitutions, even after a successful final free throw.
- ▼ In situations where two or three free throws are awarded, substitutions are permitted only before the last free throw.

PLAYER FOULS

FIBA:

- ▼ Players foul out after 5 fouls, personal or technical.
- ▼ All fouls involving contact, even when play is stopped, are personal fouls.

NBA, WNBA:

- ▼ Players foul out on 6 personal fouls or 2 technical fouls.
- ▼ Fouls committed while the ball is dead are technical fouls.

NCAA:

- ▼ Players foul out after 5 fouls (personal fouls or non-administrative technical fouls).
- ▼ Fouls committed while the ball is dead are technical fouls.

TEAM FOULS ("PENALTY" OR "BONUS")

Note: In all rules, if a shooting foul occurs, or any foul that would lead to free throws regardless of the foul count, the normal penalty shall supercede any penalty related to the foul count.

FIBA:

- ▼ Penalty (2 shots) is awarded on any team foul after the 4th in each period (i.e. on the 5th) unless the foul is a team control (offensive) foul; extra periods are extensions of the 4th period.
- ▼ Team Fouls include all personal fouls and player (not coach) technical fouls.

NBA:

- ▼ Penalty (a total of 2 shots) is awarded on the 5th team foul in each quarter (on the 4th in an extra period), or on the 2nd in the last two minutes, whichever comes first.
- ▼ Team fouls include personal fouls by defensive players and any loose ball fouls (i.e. offensive fouls and technical fouls are not team fouls)

WNBA:

- ▼ Penalty (a total of 2 shot) is awarded on the 8th team foul in each half (on the 4th in an extra period), or on the 2nd in the last minute, whichever comes first.
- ▼ Team fouls include personal fouls by defensive players and any loose ball fouls (i.e. offensive fouls and technical fouls are not team fouls).

NCAA:

- ▼ "Bonus" (1 free throw, plus another free throw if the first is successful) is awarded on the 7th, 8th and 9th foul of each half; the penalty is increased to 2 shots (often called "double bonus") on the 10th and



subsequent fouls; extra periods are extensions of the 2nd half. No free throws are awarded on offensive fouls.

- ▼ Team fouls include all personal fouls, all contact and unsporting (unsportsmanlike) fouls, and all technical fouls to anyone on the bench.

TECHNICAL FOUL - PENALTY

FIBA:

- ▼ Two free throws and possession of the ball at centre; no possession at centre if the foul occurs in the pre-game warm-up (i.e., the game still begins with a jump ball).

NBA, WNBA:

- ▼ One free throw per technical foul; play resumes at the point of interruption; foul is charged to individual in question (and an automatic fine assessed).

NCAA Men:

- ▼ Two free throws; play resumes at point of interruption.

NCAA Women:

- ▼ Two free throws; play resumes at point of interruption; technical foul for excess time-out is penalized by 2 free throws and loss of possession of the ball.

GOALTENDING/BASKET INTERFERENCE

Note: All rules prevent players from touching the ball on its downward flight toward the

basket if it still has a chance to enter the basket. Reaching through the basket to play the ball is also a violation. The major differences centre on what happens after a shot hits the ring but still has an opportunity to enter the basket.

FIBA:

- ▼ Once the ball strikes the ring, any player can play the ball. Once the ball is in the basket, the offense can no longer violate.

NBA, WNBA, NCAA:

- ▼ An imaginary cylinder exists that has the basket ring as its base. Touching the ball while any part of it is in this cylinder (and still has a chance of entering the basket) is a violation.

ZONE DEFENSE

FIBA: Legal.

NBA: Legal; however, a defensive player may not remain in the restricted area for longer than 3 seconds if that player is not actively guarding an opponent (penalty: a technical foul, with shot clock reset to 14 seconds if necessary).

WNBA: Legal.

NCAA: Legal.

FREE THROW ACTIVITY

Note: In all rules, the shooter of the free throw must wait for the ball to strike the ring before

he/she can touch or cross the free throw line.

FIBA:

- ▼ Maximum of 5 players in rebound places along the lane (3 opponents of shooter, 2 teammates).
- ▼ Rebound places, if left vacant, cannot be used by opponents.
- ▼ Players in rebound places may leave on release of the free throw; others must remain behind the free throw line extended and behind the 3-point line until the ball strikes the ring.
- ▼ A violation by the free throw shooter overrides all other violations; if the free throw is successful and the shooter does not violate, all other violations are ignored and the free throw counts.
- ▼ Five seconds to attempt the free throw.

NBA, WNBA:

- ▼ A maximum of 5 players can occupy rebound places along the lane (3 opponents of shooter, 2 teammates).
- ▼ The four rebound places closest to basket (two on each side) must be occupied; a delay of game warning can be issued if they are not.
- ▼ Players not in a rebound place must stand 1.8 m (6') away from lane or 90 cm (3') away from the free throw semicircle until ball strikes the ring.
- ▼ A violation by any member of the shooting

team can cancel an otherwise valid free throw.

- ▼ Ten seconds to attempt the free throw.

NCAA Men:

- ▼ A maximum of 6 players in rebound places along the lane (4 opponents of shooter; 2 teammates).
- ▼ The rebound places closest to the basket (one on each side) must be occupied by opponents of the shooter.
- ▼ A teammate of the shooter may fill the third rebound place from the basket if the non-shooting team chooses not to fill it.
- ▼ Rebound places closest to the shooter (i.e., 4th rebound places) may not be filled.
- ▼ Players in rebound places may leave on release of the free throw; others must stand behind the free throw line extended and behind the 3-point line until the ball strikes ring.
- ▼ A violation by any member of the shooting team can cancel an otherwise valid free throw.
- ▼ Ten seconds to attempt the free throw.

NCAA Women:

- ▼ A maximum of 6 players in rebound places along the lane (4 opponents of shooter; 2 teammates).
- ▼ The two rebound places closest to the basket (one on each side) are left open (players fill the 2nd, 3rd and 4th rebound places).
- ▼ The first available rebound place on each side (i.e., 2nd rebound places) must be occupied by opponents of the shooter.
- ▼ Rebound places, if left vacant, cannot be used by opponents.
- ▼ Players in rebound places may leave on release of the free throw; others must stand behind the free throw line extended and behind 3-point line until ball strikes ring.
- ▼ A violation by any member of the shooting team can cancel an otherwise valid free throw.
- ▼ Ten seconds to attempt the free throw.

MINOR DIFFERENCES

PLAYER NUMBERS

FIBA: 4–15 in major FIBA competition; one- and two-digit numbers acceptable in exhibition or domestic play.

NBA, WNBA: any one- or two-digit number; not both 0 and 00 on same team.

NBA: 00, 0, 1 – 5, 10 – 15, 20 – 25, 30 – 35, 40 – 45, 50 – 55; not both 0 and 00 on same team.

BALL OVER BACKBOARD

FIBA: The ball is still in play if it passes over the backboard in either direction, provided it does not hit a basket support.

NBA, WNBA, NBA: Ball is out-of-bounds if it passes over the backboard in either direction (NBA, WNBA wording is “passes behind the

backboard”).

TRAVELLING

NBA/WNBA rule is more liberal than the current NBA and FIBA rules when a player is coming to a stop. The NBA/WNBA rule is identical to the pre-1994 FIBA rule that said once a player comes to a legal stop, there is always a pivot foot. NBA and FIBA rules can leave a player without a pivot foot. As well, if a player lands with a staggered stop (i.e. one foot, then the other, with one foot clearly in front of the other), the back foot is the pivot foot in NBA/WNBA. In NBA/FIBA, the first foot to touch the floor is the pivot foot.

INJURED PLAYER

FIBA, NBA: Referee stops play at an appropriate time to deal with injury (slightly different times in FIBA and NBA). If an injured player is entitled to free throws and must leave the game, the substitute shall attempt the throws. **NBA, WNBA:** Team must call 20-second or full time-out to stop for injured player. If an injured player is entitled to free throws and must leave the game, the opposing coach selects the player to take the throws.

CLOSELY GUARDED PLAYER / 5-SECOND VIOLATION

FIBA: Player holding the ball for 5 seconds; actively guarded within 1 m (3'); anywhere on the court.

NBA: No closely guarded rule, but illegal to dribble with dribbler's back to the basket for 5 consecutive seconds while between the end-line and the free throw line extended.

WNBA: No rule.

NCAA: Front court only; holding or dribbling the ball (not a combination of both) for 5 seconds; “closely guarded” is within 2 m (6') for men, within 1 m (3') for women.

BACKCOURT VIOLATION / FRONTCOURT & BACKCOURT STATUS

FIBA: Once a player touches the frontcourt, that player has frontcourt status; the same applies to the backcourt. It is possible for a player to have dual status as that player progresses from the backcourt to the frontcourt, so once the player touches the frontcourt as a ball holder/dribbler, the player must continue to proceed to the frontcourt.

NBA, WNBA, NBA: If a player is dribbling the ball, the ball and both feet must be in the frontcourt to gain/retain frontcourt status; otherwise the ball has backcourt status. If a player is holding the ball while straddling the centre line, the player always has backcourt status.

8 (OR 10) SECOND VIOLATION

Once a team gains control of the ball in the backcourt, it has either 8 or 10 seconds (as specified below) to proceed to the frontcourt (i.e. the ball gains frontcourt status).

FIBA: 8 seconds. Count is not reset if ball is deflected out of bounds by defense or if possession is retained because of an alternating possession throw-in.

NBA: 8 seconds. Count is reset if the defense kicks or punches the ball, is assessed a technical foul, or is issued a delay of game warning; or if play is stopped due to a player bleeding. For purposes of this rule, the ball gains front court status on a pass when it crosses the plane of the centre line.

WNBA: 10 seconds; otherwise same as NBA.

NBA Men: 10 seconds. Count ends (without penalty) if the ball becomes dead (e.g., if the defensive team deflects the ball out of bounds).

NBA Women: No time limit (other than the shot clock).

NUMBER OF ON-COURT OFFICIALS

FIBA: A 3-person system will be used for World and Olympic Championships, and may be used for other championships; basically the same mechanics as NCAA; 2-person system also acceptable for other levels of competition.

NBA, WNBA: 3-person system, with different mechanics from FIBA/NCAA.

NCAA: Either 2 or 3 officials.

3-POINT SHOT (STATUS CHANGE)

FIBA: Once a 3-point shot has been released, if the ball is touched by any player in the 2-point area, the status of the shot changes to a 2-point shot. Note: If a shooter is fouled in the act of shooting for a 3-point goal and the shot is not successful, 3 free throws will be awarded; the status of the shot does not change the status of the shooter.

NBA, WNBA, NCAA: No rule.

REBOUNDING OWN SHOT

NBA, WNBA: Violation to be the first to touch one's own shot if it doesn't touch the ring or backboard (i.e. an “air ball”).

FIBA, NCAA: Legal, provided the referees judge that it was a shot for a goal.

ONLINE RESOURCES

FIBA Rule Book and Interpretations:

<http://www.fiba.com> www.fiba.com, click on About FIBA > Free Downloads > Official Basketball Rules

NBA Rule Book

www.nba.com/analysis/rules_index.html

WNBA Rule Book

http://www.wnba.com/analysis/wnba_rules_regulations.html

NCAA Rule Book

www2.ncaa.org/media_and_events/ncaa_publications/playing_rules/

NCAA Officiating Bulletins

http://www.ncaa.org/champadmin/basketball/officiating_bulletins