

National Wheelchair Basketball

Policies and Procedures

Proposal to change NWBA Policies & Procedures to permit able-bodied athletes within the intercollegiate and women's division.

Rationale for Change: *Embrace the opportunity to be inclusive in practice and expand overall opportunities for people with physical disabilities to participate in intercollegiate wheelchair basketball.*

1) A concern with the inclusion of able-bodied athletes is that there will be less opportunities overall for athletes with disabilities. The Intercollegiate Division piloted able-body athlete inclusion beginning with the 2016-17 season. As a result of the pilot six new teams have been created, an overall increase of 35% in the number of intercollegiate teams and 30 intercollegiate athletes. Of the 30 additional athletes, only 9 are able-bodied.

A specific example to look to is Auburn's 2017-18 season. Their emerging program had an able-bodied athlete play an average of 35 minutes per game that season. Because that able-bodied athlete was allowed to play it created the opportunity for the other 4 players on the court with a disability to compete. This meant that per 35 minutes of game time by the able-bodied athlete, athletes with disabilities had 205 minutes of playing time per game that they otherwise would not have had.

This demonstrates how the inclusion of able bodied athletes can expand the overall opportunities for athletes with disabilities.

2) During the 2016-17 season, there was greater parity within the eleven men's teams. The perennial "power" teams were challenged and, in some cases, beaten by teams that had been second tier. The emerging teams were also more competitive than in previous years. Overall, through able-body inclusion, emerging programs were given the opportunity to develop into competitive programs.

3) Sustainability, and future growth, of the intercollegiate division is a going concern because of the barriers that are present for athletes coming from the high school age group. The financial obligations of being a full-time college student are exacerbated by the fact that there are few programs to attend across the United States. As a result, many athletes who are not fortunate enough to receive scholarships are restricted in their opportunity to continue playing in college because they cannot afford out of state tuition. A way to address this barrier is supporting the growth of new collegiate programs to increase access and opportunity for a broader base of high school wheelchair basketball athletes. However, because of the aforementioned barriers and having to compete with historically established programs, some colleges have failed to launch and/or maintain a "legal" team. To compete, a program must attract and roster a group of at least eight academically eligible athletes with the right player classifications. These athletes must annually maintain academic eligibility, fund their college education, and be physically able to compete. Permitting able-bodied athletes to participate as 4.5ABs makes it easier for new programs to get started because they are able to supplement their roster gaps as they develop, build relationships with junior clubs, gain institutional support and address other administrative requirements that contribute to long-term sustainability. This ultimately establishes a broader pipeline for athlete development because new intercollegiate programs would be able to develop in unserved regions and create more opportunities for youth to be involved with the game.

4) Future sustainability and success of the intercollegiate division depends upon a strong base of competitive programs. Universities and colleges are motivated to support programs financially and administratively if there is perceived value in doing so. A key variable to the perceived value of a program is critical mass of participation. Meaning that as more schools offer adaptive sport programming, institutions become inclined to initiate or increase their existing support. This is because as the number and density of programs increase it validates the

demand and need for such programming. Second, universities are inherently competitive with one another. Third, COVID-19 has demonstrated the harsh financial cuts that Universities sometimes have to make. A program that exists as part of a much broader network with a strong participant base will have a stronger likelihood of surviving such financial decisions. Overall, more intercollegiate programs will help create new opportunities for the growth of the sport as institutions increasingly recognize the add-value. The inclusion of able-bodied athletes to participate as 4.5ABs can facilitate the development of new programs and expand the overall opportunity for athletes with a disability to play at the intercollegiate level.

5) The NWBA is currently losing the number of female Class 1 athletes playing in the league. In order to get more Class 1 playing time and in the collegiate system we need to increase the number of high pointers in the league.

6) It has been the experience of the Intercollegiate Division membership that the vast majority of disabled intercollegiate athletes welcome the inclusion of able-bodied athletes so long as they are classed as 4.5ABs. Players have noted that they welcome the increase of opportunities for competition because more teams are able to form, able-bodied athletes do not get a competitive advantage because of the classification system, and that able-body inclusion makes the sport more inclusive and contributes to an atmosphere of inclusion and acceptance.

7) Inclusion of able-bodied athletes has helped increase the number of programs in the intercollegiate division and the competitive opportunities for the league. The increase in the number of programs and competitions has contributed to greater spectator/fan interest, overall exposure of the sport, and sponsorship opportunities for intercollegiate teams.

Current Policy: Article Four- Membership section 4.2 Eligibility

Proposal: Alter Section 4.2to read as follows:

ARTICLE FOUR

Membership

Section 4.2 Eligibility.

1. All players will be persons with physical disabilities resulting in at least some functional limitations of the lower extremities, who meet the NWBA player eligibility rules and policies.
2. Within the Intercollegiate division of the NWBA, able-bodied athletes will be permitted to participate as 4.5 classification players
 - A. Intercollegiate Women's Division
 - B. Intercollegiate Men's Division
 - C. Women's Division