

## Bonus: The Lazy Genius Guide to Basketball

Hi there! You're listening to The Lazy Genius Podcast! I'm Kendra Adachi, and I'm here to help you be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. Today is a special bonus episode! The Lazy Genius Guide to Basketball. We are about to enter March Madness, and I know a lot of you want to sort of be involved and understand what actually happens in basketball. I did an episode like this for football a couple of years ago, and it was so fun for me because I love teaching about sports but also really helpful to y'all. So many people who had dads as coaches or who were cheerleaders in high school said that it was the most helpful explanation of football they'd ever heard. I hope the same thing happens here today with basketball.

I'll give you the same disclaimer I did for the football episode. I am not an athlete! Like at all! I am quite weak, my knees are made of glass, I have poor hand-eye coordination, and I do not understand my body in space. Please do not ask me to play sports with you. But please ask me to talk about sports with you because that is my literal favorite thing. I understand the game, and I'm a good teacher which is why I'm qualified to do this. I am not qualified to coach your children's church league team or to tell you what to do with your arms. I understand the rules, not the mechanics. Also for the sake of clarity, we're working with the rules of college basketball, not pro. Some of the rules are different. I might mention some differences, I might not, but what I say here is for sure true of college basketball.

Alright, let's start with the basics. I'm going to explain basketball like you're all aliens who just arrived on this planet. Please do not be offended.

In basketball, there are two teams. Each team is allowed 15 players on its roster, but only five players from each team can be on the court at the same time. So five versus five. In basketball, there is a timer (not all sports have timers), and when the timer goes off, the team with the most points wins. Most games operate that way.

Now if you want the most points, how do you score them? The only way to score points in basketball is for the basketball to go through the basketball hoop. That's the only way. Depending on where you are on the basketball court will determine how many points you get which we'll get to.

Now every sport that has a ball has rules about how you can move that ball. This is a key question. How you move the ball in a sport determines so many rules and why the sport is fun or not. Football is confusing because there are so many weird rules about how to move the ball. Basketball is a lot simpler.

The biggest way to think about moving a basketball is that you can't carry it. At no time are you allowed to hold the ball and then walk with it. In order to move a basketball while you move your body, you have to bounce the ball. Football you can carry the football and run. Same with rugby.

Baseball scores without the runner holding the ball at all. See that? Sports are different because of the different ways you're allowed to move the ball.

So in basketball, you have to bounce it up and down, called dribbling, in order to move it around the court. If you stop dribbling, you also have to stop moving. Once you have had a turn dribbling the ball and you stop, you either have to pass the ball to a teammate or shoot it into the basket. Those are your only options. You can't start dribbling again. If you do, it's called a double dribble. You dribbled twice in one turn. Now if you pass the ball to a teammate and they pass it right back to you, that starts your turn over and you can dribble again.

And if you move your body while holding the ball instead of dribbling it, that's called a walk or a travel. You'll hear that a lot.

One important thing to note is you don't have to be completely still to not be called for a walk. When you're holding the ball, trying to figure out if you're going to pass or shoot, a player will still move, almost in a circle. That's because when you are holding the ball, you are allowed what is called a pivot foot. One of your feet must stay planted, but you can pivot on that foot to try and get a better angle for a pass or a shot. So you can technically move. You just can't move in any direction other than around your pivot foot that stays completely planted.

Cool? So you dribble to move the ball yourself or pass it to someone else. You can pass a ball so many times in one possession. Other sports have passing rules, like football. There are lots of rules about how you can pass a ball in football, but in basketball, there's really just one. You can pass over and over and around and around and dribble and then pass or whatever. You just have to do all of that within the boundary of your half of the court. Which is a great place to talk about the court.

A basketball court has a hoop on each end, and there's one big line down the middle separating them. That's called half court. Each team has one half of the court where only that team can score. When you're on your side of the court, your team is on offense or has possession of the ball, you can pass all you want but within your half. If you cross half court with the ball, if you leave your boundary while your team still has the ball, it's called a backcourt violation, and you have to give up the ball. So there are basically no rules with passing as long as you stay in the boundary of your side of the court.

Next let's talk about timing. There is one giant timer in basketball for the whole game. In college, that timer is broken up into two 20 minute halves. In the NBA, it's broken up into four 12 minute quarters. So a professional game is eight minutes longer than a college game. As long as the ball is in play, the timer moves and counts down to either halftime which is the halfway point of the game or to the end of the game. And remember, the highest score at the end of that timer wins. Now there are also possession timers or the shot clock. Possession timers don't exist in football or baseball. There is not a limit on how long you can possess the ball before the other team gets a turn. But there is in basketball. Why? Because you could literally hold the ball for basically ever. In fact, that's how it used to be. You sometimes hear the phrase "the shot clock

era.” Before the shot clock era, there was no shot clock. Teams just held the ball as long as they wanted to before they tried to score. Exceedingly boring. But in 1985, basketball implemented the shot clock era where teams had 45 seconds to score. If they didn’t, it’s called a shot clock violation, and they had to automatically give the ball to the other team. In 1993, the shot clock was shortened to 35 seconds, and since 2015, it’s been 30 seconds. That’s college. The NBA’s shot clock is 24 seconds because they’re expected to create a shot and score more quickly than college kids because NBA players are literal pros at it and shouldn’t require as long.

So the shot clock is important and it’s why basketball is such a fun, fast-moving sport. You’re not really still in basketball because you only have 30 seconds to make something happen. So the shot clock rules are that the clock begins when one team has possession of the ball. It will reset when there’s a change in possession, when there’s a defensive foul which we’ll get to, and when a shot attempt hits the rim. So a reset in the shot clock doesn’t necessarily mean the teams take turns. Sometimes a team can have possession for longer than 30 seconds because the shot clock reset while they still had possession. We’ll get into that when we talk about rebounds. But the gist of basketball is that each time has thirty seconds to score before the other team gets a turn. Back and forth back and forth. It’s a fast moving game.

Now let’s go back to scoring. There are two types of shots in basketball - free throws and field goals. Now you might be like wait I thought field goals were in football. They are. But they’re two very different types of field goals. In basketball, a field goal is simply a shot taken while the timer is on. A free throw is a shot you take while the timer is stopped. That’s why it’s free. It’s free of time, and it’s also free of defense. No one is allowed to get in your face to make the shot harder.

One made free throw equals one point. Made field goals can be worth either two or three points. Here’s how you know which is which. On each side of the court, there is a large half circle. That is called the three-point line. Any field goal that is made outside of that circle, like a toe cannot even graze the line, is worth three points. If you are within that three-point line, even just a toe, a made shot is worth two points. So a free throw is one point, a field goal is two unless it’s made outside the three-point line in which case it’s worth three points.

Now in terms of scoring, you might sometimes hear an announcer say “and one!” after a basket is scored or maybe they shout “that’s a three point play” or even sometimes “that’s a four point play.” This is a great time to talk about what happens when you break the rules in basketball.

### **We’ll be right back...**

So what happens when you break a rule? It depends on the rule you break. Essentially there are two kinds of rule breaking - a violation and a foul. A violation is usually a rule against the court, like traveling or a double dribble or a backcourt violation. It’s not really about another player. You just moved the ball in a way that broke the rules. That’s a violation. The consequence of a violation is called a turnover or when you literally have to turn the ball over to the other team and you lose your turn. It’s hard to win a game if your team keeps racking up turnovers.

The other kind of rule breaking is called a foul. There are lots of kinds of fouls. Pretty much all fouls are body on body. It's not body on ball or ball on court. It's body on body.

Now this might get hairy, so take a deep breath and hang tight because understanding fouls really enhances your enjoyment of the drama of basketball.

In college basketball (and in the NBA but the numbers are different), you can only commit so many fouls before the consequences get turned up. It's like parenting. You show grace the first time and maybe even the fourth. But if the kid does the same thing again a fifth time, you're like, "okay we've got to adjust some things over here." That is true in basketball.

Each team collectively can only commit a certain number of fouls before the consequences get higher. The same is true for each individual player. Each player is allowed to commit four fouls without penalty, but on the fifth foul, you can't play anymore. You are done for the game. You have fouled out. That's why you might hear an announcer comment on a player playing with four fouls, especially with a little bit left in the game, because it's risky. Any foul against that player and they're gone. We'll get back to team fouls in a second.

First, let's talk about the different kinds of fouls. We'll make it quick. First, there are offensive fouls and defensive fouls. Offensive fouls are when your team is in possession of the ball and you commit a foul, and defensive fouls are when the other team has the ball and you commit a foul. Both count against team fouls and personal fouls. The distinction between offensive and defensive fouls doesn't really matter except to say that you can break the rules whether you have the ball or not. Also offensive fouls, especially something called a charge when a player commits a foul while shooting, is super dramatic in a game. That means a defensive player took a body hit to defend a shot, and home crowds love an offensive foul. They're big momentum swings. So defensive fouls and offensive fouls. A fairly basic categorization.

There are also shooting fouls and non shooting fouls. They are what they sound like. If you commit a shooting foul, you committed a foul against a player while they were shooting the ball into the basket. A non shooting foul is when you commit a foul against a player and they're not shooting the ball into the basket. Pretty clear. But the consequences or penalties for shooting and non-shooting fouls are different.

Any shooting foul, no matter where it happens in the game, has the same penalty. If a player was fouled while shooting a field goal that did not go into the basket, that fouled player gets to shoot the same number of free throws that they would've scored if the shot had gone in. So if a player is fouled while shooting a three-pointer, that player gets to shoot three free throws. A shooting foul anywhere else on the court gets the shooter two free throws. Basically you get to make up the points you would've made had the shot gone in and you weren't fouled.

Now what if a player gets fouled while shooting but the ball does go in? That's called an "and one." You'll hear announcers or me in my living room shout "and one!" It's a big moment in

basketball. Basically the offensive player or the shooter is so good at shooting that he made the shot even though his arm was hit or his body was hit or whatever the foul was. And just because that shot went in doesn't mean the other team doesn't get penalized for committing that foul and hitting the shooter's body, so the fouled player gets one extra shot. They get one free throw. And one. The points from that shot and one more. That happens on all shooting fouls no matter when they happen in the game.

Now there are also non-shooting fouls where there is body on body contact of some kind, but the player wasn't shooting or didn't even have the ball. You can be fouled without having the ball. So in those cases, for non-shooting fouls, the consequence is determined by how many fouls the entire team has at that point. Let me say that again. The consequence of a non-shooting foul is determined by how many fouls the entire team has at that point in the game. Remember how I said that teams are penalized if their whole team gets a certain number of fouls? Here's where that comes in. And it's good to understand because there are a lot of ramifications for this, especially at the end of games.

Remember how each player gets four fouls, but on their fifth foul, they're out of the game? Each team also gets consequences after a certain number of fouls. The whole team doesn't get kicked out like a player does because that would be weird and very anticlimactic, but there are consequences at a certain point. That point is after six team fouls. Each team gets six team fouls per half before the consequences start, and that number resets at halftime no matter how many fouls the team had. Everybody starts from zero at the start of the second half.

When a team hits their seventh foul in the half, here's the consequence. Even non-shooting fouls get free throws. Remember, shooting fouls always allow the fouled team to shoot free throws, but once a team has committed that 7th foul, even non-shooting fouls result in free throws for the other team. So for fouls seven, eight, and nine, the fouled team gets to shoot what is called a one and one. That means a fouled player shoots one shot. If he makes it, he gets a second shot. If he misses the first shot, there's no second shot. That's called a one and one shot, and when a team gets fouled seven times, it's called the bonus. The bonus is that every non-shooting foul results in a one and one. Now, once a team commits their tenth foul, the fouled team is now in the double bonus and gets to shoot two free throws for every single non-shooting foul. This matters in an end of game strategy. Dean Smith, the legendary coach of the Carolina Tarheels, did what was called "milking the clock" where when his team was behind, he'd have his team foul the other team to stop the clock, the other team would shoot free throws, maybe make them and maybe not, but it left more clock time for the Tarheels to score and catch up. It's a pretty brilliant strategy that's used all the time.

You will also hear the term "fouls to give." That means that a team has not accumulated enough team fouls to trigger those consequences of the one-and-one free throws. So they can be more aggressive defensively and go for a steal, and even if they're called for a foul, it's a non-shooting foul and the other team isn't in the bonus yet and won't shoot free throws even if they're fouled. So there is a lot of fun strategy and game play at the end of games with team fouls.

But ultimately the consequences in basketball are turnovers for violations and free throws or tallies to lead to more free throws for fouls.

I think fouls are the most complicated part of basketball, so good job you did it!

Now let's do some quick vocabulary.

### **We'll be right back...**

These are all words you'll absolutely hear in every single game.

First, some player and position terms. There are five players on the court at once, and the traditional setup for those is a center, two forwards (a power forward and a small forward), and two guards (a shooting guard and a point guard). The center is usually the biggest player who hangs out by the basket to defend and shoot because he's tall. The forwards are the next biggest, usually big guys who can move. The power forward is a post player, meaning somebody who plays towards the basket. A small forward is still pretty big and can go inside but a little more mobile and, well, smaller. Sometimes. Then there are guards. Shooting guards are usually smaller players that can shoot from anywhere, particularly from three. Point guards are like the quarterbacks. They bring the ball up the court and kind of direct the plays. They're on point. Starters are the five players from each team that start the game. Usually you start your best players. And subs are the players that come in and out throughout the game. Basketball usually has a lot of subs, and they happen often.

Next, let's do some court terms. The sideline is the horizontal boundary of the court or the longest side. The baseline is the shorter side, underneath each basket. You'll hear those because a player will inbound at the sideline or inbound at the baseline. Inbound means to pass the ball from out of bounds to inbounds, and depending on where you do that from, you'll hear baseline inbound or sideline inbound.

The paint is the rectangle underneath the basket, usually painted with the team's logo or something which I assume is why it's called the paint. You'll hear the phrase "points in the paint" which is really a way of talking about aggressive play close to the basket. A team that has a lot of points in the paint means they're taking the ball straight to the basket which requires a lot of power, aggression, or in case of Steph Curry who is my favorite player and also tiny for a basketball player, it takes finesse.

The basket is another word for the basketball goal or hoop. The rim is the edge of that hoop. The net is the net, but when you hear the phrase "nothing but net," that means the ball didn't even hit the rim. That's how smooth and well shot it was. It touched nothing but net. The backboard is the board behind the basket that you can bounce the ball off of to make shots. And the top of the key is the top of the three point line, kind of the opening of the offensive area.

Now, these are some ball movement terms. Some of these are a really big deal. A rebound is when you grab the ball after a shot. There are defensive rebounds which is when the defense recovers the ball after a shot and reclaims possession, and there are offensive rebounds when the team that shot the ball gets it back. The reason these are so important is that rebounds affect possession. If you get a defensive rebound, you're preventing the shooting team from getting another chance on their possession. Offensive rebounds are even bigger because, if you remember, if the basketball hits the rim, the shot clock resets. That means that if a guy takes a shot and misses but the ball bounces off the rim, the shooter's own teammate can get that rebound and keep possession of the ball for his team with a fresh 30 second shot clock. Also related to rebounds, you might hear the phrase "crash the boards." That's going up aggressively for a rebound close to the backboard or basket. You also might hear the term "box out" which is using your body to prevent an opponent from being able to get a rebound. Rebounds are huge, and they're one of the main stats recorded for players.

Assists are equally as huge but quieter. An assist is when one player passes the ball to another player in a position where that player can immediately take a shot. Assists are my favorite stat because they're so team oriented. They're not flashy. The glory always goes to the scorer, but a player that generates a lot of assists is seeing the court, finding openings, and creating opportunities for his teammates. I love assists. Assists are the opposite of hero ball, and I hate hero ball.

Blocks are another stat logged for players, and a block is what it sounds like. It's a defensive stat where a player uses his hands to block a shot from going in the basket. There are rules around this, and if you break the rule and block the shot incorrectly, when the ball is already in the cylinder of the basket or on its way down, it's called a goal tend which means the team that shot the ball still gets the points. Basically, the rule is saying the ball would've obviously gone in if that player hadn't blocked it in that way, and therefore it's not really a block. But blocks are fun. Really dramatic, especially when a player just swats the ball away across the court. Blocking and recovering possession is quite a move but less flashy than a dramatic block. Still, blocks are an important part of basketball and another main stat kept for players.

A steal is when a defensive player steals the ball from an offensive player. Those usually happen towards the top of the key or the top of the court. In general blocks are a defensive stat that bigger guys get - centers and forwards - and steals are the defensive stat that the smaller guys get, the guards. Both again are very dramatic.

The main stats that are kept for individual players are points, rebounds, assists, blocks, and steals. A double-double is when a player's stat line has two categories where the numbers are in double figures. So ten points and ten rebounds. That's a double double. A triple double is when you hit double digits in three of those categories. Triple doubles aren't rare necessarily, but they do indicate that a player had a great game. There are stats for players with the most triple doubles in a season or across their careers. Russell Westbrook who currently plays in the NBA for the LA Lakers has the most triple doubles of any player in NBA history with 197. He's played 197 games where he got double digits in three categories in the same game. Crazy.

Okay, a few more terms.

An air ball is when a shot ball doesn't even hit the rim or the net or anything. It just hits air. College fans love to chant air ball. An alley-oop is a fancy kind of assist where the ball is passed to a player, and that player catches it and in the same breath dunks. A dunk is slamming the ball into the basket where the player's hand actually slams the rim itself. A bank shot is when the ball goes off the backboard and into the basket.

And finally a few defensive terms that are important. First, you'll hear the phrase "man to man." That's a type of defense where every single defensive player has an offensive player they're defending. The defense is man to man or this guy with that guy. No guy is left undefended, and if you're a defender, you just chase your guy around the court. Another defensive style is zone, a zone defense. A zone defense is where the defensive players all have a zone of the court that they cover no matter what player comes into it. A zone defense is a bit less frantic because players aren't all chasing players. I think of parenting in these terms. When Kaz and I had Sam and Ben, we were man to man. One man for every kid. No worries. But then we had Annie, and we had to play zone. We had to be thoughtful about where we were because there were more kids than us. It's an adjustment. Still effective. Just different. You cover what you can.

Okay! Deep breath! We did it! We learned about basketball. There are obviously a lot more things like five second calls and full court press defense and overtime rules, but you now know the essentials to enjoy a game of basketball.

It is getting close to March Madness, and I hope that when games are on, you start paying attention to some of these terms and noticing how they impact the way the game is played and the experience of watching it. Different teams have different styles, and that's based on if they play zone defense which is generally more boring or if they push the ball up the court and move at a fast pace offensively or if it's a team that just crashes the boards on every possession because their coach has prioritized rebounds. Every team has a different style, and every player has a different combination of skills. There are seven footers who shoot threes, and there are small point guards that can do flashy dunks.

But March is the most fun with college basketball. The NCAA tournament is where teams leave it all on the line. It's one and done. If you lose, you're out. There's no best out of three or five or seven. You get one shot to win the game, and that's it. It's also the only place that teams from smaller schools get to play against some of the powerhouses from the bigger conferences, and a lot of times those smaller schools beat the big guy and it's just so much fun. Let this episode help you enjoy March Madness even more!

Okay, that's it for today! Thanks for listening to this special bonus episode, and until next time, be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. I'm Kendra, and I'll see you on Monday! Go Heels!