

2026 Iowa Pacesetter Basketball State Playoffs

Frequently Asked Questions • Notes by Jeff McCarron, Director

What is Pacesetter Sports? “Celebrating our 47th Year!”

Pacesetter Sports was created in 1980 to provide high-level coaching through low-cost basketball camps for players of all ages. Pacesetter grew from offering 8 camps in 1980 to over 100 camps annually throughout North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. Since 1993 Pacesetter Sports has conducted a youth basketball state tournament system for Minnesota teams with an average of 600+ teams playing annually. In 2010 Pacesetter added state tournaments in Iowa, North Dakota, and South Dakota with the top two teams from each state advancing to the Pacesetter Great Four-State Championship at the Target Center in Minneapolis. Wisconsin joined in 2018 to make the final event the Pacesetter Great Five-State Championship. Pacesetter has also published Minnesota Basketball News since 1994, naming the Top 10 teams weekly for the Associated Press rankings.

What is the background and mission of Pacesetter?

Message from Jeff McCarron, Pacesetter Director

“Our mission at Pacesetter is to provide high-quality, low-cost basketball and volleyball camps and tournaments for players, coaches, and parents and enhance these sports and events with news coverage. I am from a small town, Sherburn, MN (pop.approx.1100), just 10 miles from the Iowa border. Three of my high school and college coaches were from South Dakota and North Dakota. This regional background is the reason we are focusing our efforts in this five-state area and the reason we focus on helping “Hometown Teams”. We love basketball, small towns, teaching kids and providing high-quality experiences at an affordable cost. I thank our staff and all who have participated in making Pacesetter a success for 46 years as we provide programs for over 12,000 players annually.”

What is the Pacesetter Iowa Basketball State Playoffs?

The Pacesetter Iowa Basketball State Playoffs for 2026 will involve playoff tournaments at the Mason City High School.

SUNDAY, February 22 Boys & Girls Grades 4-9

Each age/gender division will be limited to 16 teams. All teams that enter the initial round of playoffs will play 3-4 games in one day. The Pacesetter Iowa state champion will be invited to represent Iowa in the Pacesetter Great Five-State Championships at the Target Center in Minneapolis, competing in an 8-team tournament with teams from MN, ND, SD and WI. Other top IA teams could get an invitation as a wild card.

What is the Pacesetter Great Five-State Championship?

Eight qualifying teams from five states are invited to play in the Pacesetter Great Five-State Championship, which is held in cooperation with the Minnesota Lynx and Minnesota Timberwolves. Players and parents from these teams will be treated to a special weekend that will provide a chance to meet teams from the five-state area, play in a highly competitive play off tournament in a world-class setting, and enjoy activities off the court as well in the Twin Cities. All “Great State” tournaments are held in conjunction with Minnesota Lynx WNBA games, so players and families attend a Lynx game and often join in special fan activities. It is a unique weekend with lifetime memories.

Are teams separated by class?

Teams are not separated by class. We will seed the teams roughly based on their team rating in an attempt to balance the bracket and divide the strongest teams. We look at the previous year's bracket to help assess the strength of returning teams. As the tournament progresses, all teams will be playing teams that have fared the same, whether winning or losing, so the competition becomes more balanced as the day progresses.

How are the brackets created? How long will the tournament be?

The format is set for all teams to play 3-4 games in one day. Tournaments with 4-5 teams may involve some shorter pool play games that will be used for seeding into the main tournament of full games. Tournaments with 6-16 teams will play full games with single elimination from the championship. Teams that lose in the first round will play for the consolation championship.

We will do our best to avoid scheduling back-to-back games. If we do, we will try to allow extra time between games. We will also try to play the games as efficiently as possible.

Do all players have to be from the same school?

All youth teams in grades 4-9 are eligible to play with certain restrictions. All players on a team must either be enrolled in the same school, or live or attend school in the same city, the same school system, or the same tribal community. Two or three smaller school teams may combine, however, to form one team if the combined enrollment of these schools for grades 9-12 is 400 or fewer. Teams that combine should be neighboring schools. If any combining schools are not adjacent to the other school or schools, Pacesetter must approve the combination

All tribal communities with a high school in their tribal community must abide by the school guidelines. Only tribes without a high school in the tribal community may play as one tribal community. Multiple tribal communities without a high school may not combine to play as one team.

Some exceptions include private schools whose “feeder” schools are located in another school district, schools or programs consolidating for the following year and transfer students who have officially enrolled. In these circumstances, players are allowed to play together with their future teammates if the connection is official. The philosophy behind this decision is that the whole system is designed to help “hometown teams”, or area community-based teams, improve with their future teammates, and these players are part of that future. A player who is “thinking” about transferring to another school would not be allowed to play for that school.

May players play at an older or younger grade level?

Players may play at an older grade level, but older players may not play at a younger level.

May players play on more than one team?

Players may play at more than one grade level and may even play at two grade levels on the same day if that is the decision of their coaches and parents.

What is the Pacesetter “Lifetime” Rule? *“Once a Pacesetter, always a Pacesetter!”*

Once a team plays together in the Pacesetter system, all of those players will be eligible to play together through grade 9 – even if a player moves into another school district. Players often have no control over family moves, so this rule allows Pacesetter teammates to play together “for life” through ninth grade.

Are exceptions or waivers to the rules ever granted?

It is rare that a waiver is ever granted since players and teams from all five states are asked to abide by the same rules, but occasionally, a situation is so exceptional that a waiver is granted.

Eligibility Question?

If you have a question on eligibility, email Jeff McCarron, Pacesetter director, at jmac8144@yahoo.com.

Can I add players or update my roster?

Yes, if you have already submitted your roster and need to make changes or add eligible players, you can do so by emailing pacesettersportsmbbn@gmail.com. Please provide your team name, grade, gender, players name, player’s grade and school they attend.

Who should I contact with a question?

Please feel free to email either Tracey, office manager, at pacesettersportsmbbn@gmail.com or me at jmac8144@yahoo.com or call us at 320-243-7460 with any thoughts or questions.

Thank you for your cooperation and your efforts to make this tournament system a success.

Jeff McCarron
Director