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## HoopGurlz: Club changes for 2010

By Chris Hansen  
HoopGurlz

There was a time when youth basketball outside the high-school season simply was called "AAU," for the Amateur Athletic Union, which runs state, regional and national level championships for kids 10-18 years old. With the explosion of women's basketball and increased awareness of the recruiting process the focus for players at high-school age is on getting exposure to college programs, not winning championships.

There was a time when the teams would focus on AAU qualifiers and AAU Nationals with a team's best players going either to the Nike All-America Camp or the adidas Top Ten Camp. In the last six or seven years the youth basketball world evolved again with an influx of "national" tournaments, the dissolution of the Nike All-America Camp and the introduction of the Skills Academy concept which was successful on the boys' side of the game. At nearly the same time, adidas changed leadership with John Phillips III taking over while the Top Ten brand stayed with former adidas front man Michael White.

Things began to change again almost a year ago. Nike went through a nationwide layoff of 1,300 employees, one of which was Youth Elite Basketball Manager, Mary Thompson. The reins were turned over, for the most part, to Jill Pizzoti, Nike's collegiate women's basketball manager, who now carries both titles. The adidas grassroots program also is under new management with the recent hiring of Mike Barnett to replace Phillips, whose contract was not renewed this year.

The upcoming club season again will feature change across all the circuits, shoe company or other.

### Nike

#### Top Events:

- Boo Williams Invitational (Spring)
- Nike Skills Academies (Spring/non-viewing)
- Summer Showcase (Summer)
- USJN National Championship (Summer)
- Nike Nationals (Summer)
- Nike Tournament of Champions (Winter)

#### Top Teams:

- Boo Williams Summer League (Virginia Beach, Va.)
- Cal Swish (Orange County, Calif.)
- Cy-Fair Shock (Houston, Texas)
- DFW T-Jack Elite (Dallas, Texas)
- Philly Belles (Philadelphia, Pa.)
- Tennessee Flight (Murfreesboro, Tenn.)

#### What's New:

Nike has changed its focus and, according to Pizzoti, the changes are designed to reach more kids. Nike is eliminating the National Girls Skills Academy, held previously from June 30-July 3 at Nike's World

Headquarters in Beaverton, Ore., and expanding its Regional Skills Academy program.

The Regional Skills Academies, which for the last five years had 30-40 participants per event, will now target 75-80 players. Nike also will increase the number of skills academies from five to six, adding a Northwest event. Previously, kids in the Northwest would travel to the event held in Southern California.

In previous years the regional events were held on five separate weekends during a six-week period with Nike sending lead basketball trainer, Ganon Baker, to each site. For 2010 all six academies will be held May 1-2. The academies will continue to focus on rising freshmen and sophomores, though they will not exclude rising juniors.

On the tournament front, the company's staple event, Nike Nationals held in North Augusta, S.C., July 28-31, will remain and Pizzoti said Nike also plans on running an event targeted for the U15/U16 age group simultaneously in the Augusta area. Just as Nike Nationals focuses on the teams sponsored by Nike, the U15/U16 event will focus on the younger teams in Nike sponsored programs.

Nike Nationals historically has been a 24-team event. Several years ago there were a total of 24 teams sponsored by Nike, but this year, three teams' sponsorship was not renewed -- the Alabama Roadrunners, Georgie Elite, and the Spokane Stars. With last year's addition of Ring City, the current number of teams sponsored by Nike is 20. No decisions have been made as to whether the tournament will include fewer teams or if at-large bids will be included.

## **adidas**

### **Top Events:**

adidas Hardwood Championships (Spring)

adidas Cup (Summer)

adidas National Championships (Summer)

Candace Parker Invitational (Summer)

### **Top Teams:**

Chicago Hoops Express (Chicago, Ill.)

East Bay Xplosion (Orinda, Calif.)

Full Package (Chicago, Ill.)

Indiana Elite-Central (Indianapolis, Ind.)

S.C. Lady 76ers (Columbia, S.C.)

### **What's New:**

Major changes are under way for adidas grassroots. John Phillips III, the contractor hired to head adidas grassroots girls the last two years has not been retained. In his place Mike Barnett has been appointed to lead adidas grassroots under adidas U.S. basketball director Jeff Robbins.

The new leadership also has selected a new advisory board -- Bryan Alexander (board director) of the Indiana Elite, Vanessa McClendon of NW Magic, Steve Pratt of Full Package and Anthony Toney of the S.C. 76ers.

Decisions on team sponsorship are ongoing, though long-time adidas program, Finest Basketball Club (FBC) has decided to go without the sponsorship this year. The new website, [www.adidasgrassrootsgb.com](http://www.adidasgrassrootsgb.com), is still under construction and no list of teams has been made public to date. Chicago Hoops Express, East Bay Xplosion, Full Package, Indiana Elite, NW Magic, and S.C. 76ers have been confirmed as adidas sponsored for 2010.

On the events front, the new advisory board has announced four events for 2010, starting with a spring event

in Bloomington, Indiana, and three summer viewing events in Chicago, Ill., Las Vegas, Nevada, and the adidas National Championships July 13-15 in Ohio. The realignment of events, primarily in the Midwest, is meant to provide a central location facilitating easier travel from both coasts, according to one of the board members.

## **Fila**

### **Top Events:**

Deep South Classic (Spring)

Showtime Nationals (Summer)

Derby Classic (Summer)

Fila Nationals (Summer)

Top Ten Camp (Fall)

### **Top Teams:**

Cal Sparks (Los Angeles, Calif.)

Charlotte 76ers (Charlotte, N.C.)

Illinois X-Citement (Chicago, Ill.)

Lady Jaguars (Jacksonville, Fla.)

Memphis Elite (Memphis, Tenn.)

Team Unique (Washington, D.C.)

### **What's New:**

In his second year with Fila sponsorship, Mike White has blended his event branding with the sneaker company. The biggest changes on the Fila front are with White himself, as he is now the company's rep for college, high school and club basketball for both boys and girls.

Team sponsorship is relatively unchanged as the Michael T. White stable of events already sponsored teams with some product in the transition years away from adidas.

The biggest event for White and Fila remains unchanged with the Deep South Classic in Raleigh, N.C., still being a spring viewing period mainstay. For teams not able to travel to the East Coast there are now three regional events in the spring as well in Santa Ana, Calif., Louisville, Ky., and Chicago, Ill. In the summer, the Derby Classic in Louisville has been moved up to the first half of the viewing period, July 6-8, for 16U-17U and has been paired with a boys' event. A new addition for 2010 is the Fila Nationals tournament, held in the Atlanta area July 28-31 and will host both boys and girls tournaments.

The Top Ten Camp, which for a long time was the capstone to the Showtime Nationals when they were held in Atlanta, will be moved to the fall viewing period.

## **Blue Star/USJN**

### **Top Events:**

Windy City Classic (Spring)

Nike USJN National Championships (Summer)

Elite Oktoberfest/Battle of the Programs (Fall)

### **Top Teams:**

All Iowa Attack (Ames, Iowa)

Cincinnati's Finest (Cincinnati, Ohio)

Missouri Valley Eclipse (Kansas City, Mo.)

Nebraska Cornhuskers Shooting Stars (Lincoln, Neb.)

Oklahoma Select (Oklahoma City, Okla.)  
Sports City U (Hurricane, W.Va.)

### What's New:

Blue Star and USJN has been growing its menu of events for the last several years and still is anchored by one of the summer's premier events, the Nike USJN National Championships in Washington, D.C. Teaming with Russ Davis of the Cal Swish, the group headed by Mike Flynn and Chris Mennig has a growing presence in the Southwest for events in the spring and fall viewing periods.

The company has, somewhat quietly, grown into a major player in team sponsorship in recent years as well. FBC director Ray Mayes told ESPN HoopGurlz he is no longer going to take adidas sponsorship and is working on something with Blue Star. Other sources indicate a number of teams previously competing on the adidas circuit will move to Blue Star; Flynn said he will have an announcement on the sponsorship front next week.

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