

NEXT ERA LEAGUE

PRESS RELEASE



Next Era League Tips Off Inaugural Season, Bringing Free, High-Level Middle School Basketball to DFW

Eight Teams, More Than 70 Athletes Set to Compete as Jermaine O'Neal's Launches New League

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Irving, Texas (September 25, 2026) – The Next Era League (NEL) officially tips off its inaugural season September 26, introducing a new approach to middle school basketball in North Texas, one designed to give young athletes access to high-level competition, professional-style exposure, and development opportunities at no cost to families.

Founded by six-time NBA All-Star **Jermaine O'Neal**, NEL features eight teams and 75 sixth- through eighth-grade athletes selected from more than 400 players who registered for the league. The 16-week season will feature one game per week, followed by playoffs beginning January 23 and the league's inaugural championship on February 13, 2027.

Games will be played at Dynamic Prep, O'Neal's sports and college-preparatory academy, which will serve as the league's home throughout the inaugural season. NEL is also developing a sports dome at the campus as part of its long-term vision for the league and its athletes.

"This is about creating an environment where young players can learn what it means to compete, prepare and carry themselves at a high level," said O'Neal, founder and CEO of Next Era League and founder of Dynamic Prep and Drive Nation. "At this age, they're still developing the habits that can shape who they become. We want to give them the competition, structure and support to build those habits — not just as basketball players, but as students, teammates and young people."

NEL is built specifically for the sixth- through eighth-grade age group, with a format designed to challenge players while continuing to support their development. The league will feature a 32-second shot clock and an international three-point line, creating a faster-paced style of play while introducing athletes to elements of the game they may not experience in traditional middle school competition.

Beyond the court, NEL is creating a professional-style experience around each game. Every contest will be professionally filmed and produced, giving athletes and families the opportunity to see their games presented in a way typically reserved for higher levels of competition. The league will also feature pre- and post-game player interviews and storytelling throughout the season, highlighting the personalities, backgrounds and journeys of its young athletes.

NEL will also introduce families to conversations around name, image and likeness (NIL), helping young athletes and their parents begin to understand an increasingly important part of the modern sports landscape.

The league represents O'Neal's latest investment in North Texas youth basketball development. Through Dynamic Prep and Drive Nation, O'Neal already created pathways

that combine athletics, education, and long-term development. Drive Nation, a 91,000-square-foot youth sports complex near DFW International Airport, has helped develop NBA Draft picks including Cade Cunningham, Tyrese Maxey, R.J. Hampton and Jahmi'us Ramsey since opening in 2016.

"I know what basketball can do for a young person because I lived it," O'Neal said. "If we can help these players become better basketball players while also becoming better students, teammates and young men, then we've accomplished what we set out to do."

Additional information about the league, teams and season schedule is available at nexteraleague.net, and fans can watch the Next Era League throughout the season on VICTORYROAD+.

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ABOUT THE NEXT ERA LEAGUE

Founded by six-time NBA All-Star Jermaine O'Neal, the Next Era League is a premier youth basketball organization focused specifically on middle school-aged athletes. NEL is designed to elevate the next generation of prospects through high-level competition, structured organization, and professional guidance while creating a new model for grassroots basketball development. NEL is part of O'Neal's broader commitment to developing student-athletes and creating pathways for success on the court, in the classroom and in life.

ABOUT JERMAINE O'NEAL

Jermaine O'Neal is a six-time NBA All-Star, entrepreneur and visionary leader whose influence extends far beyond basketball. O'Neal built an 18-year NBA career defined by hard work, resilience, leadership and impact after becoming one of the youngest players ever drafted directly out of high school.

Today, O'Neal channels that experience into creating pathways for athletes to succeed not only in sports, but in life. He is the founder of Dynamic Prep, a private school for student-athletes that combines elite academics, professional-level training and personal growth, and the founder and CEO of the Next Era League. His work is grounded in discipline, accountability, education and opportunity.

ABOUT VICTORYROAD+ & VICTORYROAD STUDIOS

VICTORYROAD+ is a direct-to-consumer sports entertainment platform available on iOS, Android and the web, built for athletes, teams, leagues and creators to grow audiences and build deeper relationships with fans through live games, original series, premium documentaries and exclusive programming.

VICTORYROAD Studios is an award-winning sports media company whose work includes *Benedict Men*, executive produced by Stephen Curry; *Legacy: In the Shadow of Greatness*, featuring the families of Dwyane Wade, Evander Holyfield and Randall Cunningham; *Strongman: The Brian Shaw Story*; and *Rabid Fans*, the Webby Award-winning animated series developed in partnership with NBA legend Carmelo Anthony.

Together, VICTORYROAD+ and VICTORYROAD Studios combine premium storytelling, distribution and direct-to-fan technology to help sports properties grow audiences and build long-term media businesses.

Media Contact

Tami Howard Carr | Tony Fay PR | 469.525.8850 | tami@tonyfaypr.com

Naya Sharp | Tony Fay PR | 214.673.8336 | naya@tonyfaypr.com

Tony Fay PR | ---- | Dallas, TX 75074 US

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