

# Coaching Youth Basketball

## Coaching Kids and Working with Parents

You are probably a parent coach, a teacher-coach, a former player, or just someone who likes kids and wants to help coach and work with a bunch of kids. Some of the kids in the league may have played some, and some have never played before. Some are there because they already love the game, and some are there because of their friends. Some were urged by their parents to give it a try. The parents will likely have varying perspectives. A few will think you should win every game at whatever cost, and will be yelling advice from the sidelines. Some will be thankful and happy that their child is on your team. Some will be a little fearful that you may yell at their child, or that their child may not be a good player and will embarrass him/herself.

So how do I go about doing this?

First, make it fun for the kids. Do not yell negative things at them as this embarrasses them in front of their friends, and is actually counter-productive creating more stress and more mistakes. It makes you look like a bully, and you may completely turn the player away from ever wanting to play again. You can yell, but it should always be positive comments. If a player messes up, don't embarrass him/her in front of his/her friends. For example, if someone is having trouble with a certain skill or drill, rather than pointing the finger at him, blow the whistle and say, "Some of you are having trouble doing... blah, blah, blah... let me show you how to do this." So maintain a positive attitude, even if you are losing by 30 points.

Teach good sportsmanship by your example... no yelling at the refs, no demeaning the other team, other players, etc. Teach them to play hard, but do not allow "dirty" play or trash talking. Teach them to respect their opponents and the officials. Wins and losses are not important at this age. Teach them that you don't have to win a trophy to be a winner.

Also, let the kids know that it is OK to make mistakes, that you expect them to make mistakes. Basketball is not a perfect game. All players make mistakes, even Michael Jordan. Coaches make mistakes, and we all know that the refs make mistakes! You just have to keep playing hard and learn from those errors.

Teach the kids about teamwork and their responsibilities to the team... coming to practice, encouraging each other, helping each other, etc.

At the first practice, provide a handout for the players and their parents. This handout could contain some of the following items:

- Your phone number or how they can contact and communicate with you.
- Your game and practice schedules.
- Your goals for the team.

- A roster of all the players (if you know it).
- The League policy regarding playing time.
- You could mention how parents could help (some like to be involved), such as being the Team Mom/Dad, keeping stats, working the scoreboard, driving to games, providing treats, helping with uniforms, post-game pizza parties, and maybe even assisting in practice.
- You could briefly discuss the common problem these days of unacceptable parent behavior at games... yelling advice to their own child, yelling at the refs and other team's players, and "coaching" from the stands.

When dealing with parents, be honest and open and show them that you really care about helping their child... get them on your side. Make yourself available to talk with them after a game. Be diplomatic about any "coaching" advice they have to offer. Rather than getting into an argument with them, just politely thank them for their interest... you obviously don't need to follow their advice, but you also don't have to be snotty about it either! Remember that most parents are good people who care about their kids and just want what's best for them, just like all of us do. Do not simply choose to ignore parents. You may be able to get away with this if you are coaching at the college level, but it is still churlish, inconsiderate behavior. When coaching youth basketball, even at the high school level, parents can help make or break you... believe it!

If you have a son/daughter on the team... be fair. Do not give your own child more playing time than the others. Treat your child like any other player on the team... do not over-criticize and expect more from him/her. And don't provide him/her any special treatment either. When you are at the court, he/she is like any other player on the team. Away from the court, he/she is your special child and needs your love and support, not criticism.

# Teaching Basketball by Drill Progression

When teaching any aspect of basketball, break things down into parts, drill those parts, and then put it all together. Start with individual 1-on-1 drills, progressing through 2-on-2, 3-on-3, 4-on-4, and finally 5-on-5. You can make drills competitive and have them do some extra conditioning.

Early in the season, this method is especially useful for installing your half-court offense and defense, as well as your transition offense and press break, and your full-court press defense. You can use progression in teaching how to defend screens.

Teaching by progression is especially useful early in the season when you are introducing something new, whereas later in the season, you can focus more on certain aspects and details that need more practice and re-enforcement.

## **EXAMPLE:**

### For Defense

- First teach individual man-to-man, 1-on-1, on-ball defense containing the offensive player.
- Next, teach defenders how to deny the pass (one pass away) using a 2-on-2 drill.
- Then teach defenders help and recover, and the importance of stopping the seams and preventing dribble-penetration from the top or wings (using a 2-on-2, or 3-on-3 drill).
- Next, use the 4-on-4 shell drill, teaching help side positioning and rotations as the ball moves.
- Use a drill progression for teaching how to defend screens.

# Planning Practices

Practices, no matter what level you are coaching, must be planned thoughtfully. John Wooden has said that he and his assistants often would spend more time planning a practice than the actual practice itself lasted. Keep a loose-leaf notebook of each of your practices that you can refer back to. After each drill or after practice, you can scribble additional notes on your practice plan from that day things that you have learned, or things that you feel need special emphasis. Don't just come to the gym each day without a plan and think you can just "wing it". You have to plan for success and plan your practices just like a teacher creates a lesson plan for his/her English or math class. Your practice should be like a classroom and you are the teacher.

How you structure your practices, i.e. the amount of time that you spend on (1) drills for teaching basic player fundamentals, (2) drills for developing team skills, and (3) scrimmaging, will depend on your age group and the skill level.

A rough rule of thumb for is to spend about half the time on individual fundamentals and half the time on team skills. If you are working with younger kids, you would slant this more toward fundamental skills. Vary the drills and skills, and the team skills from practice to practice. Certain skills should be practiced every practice, such as the ball-handling and dribbling drills, and shooting drills. Depending on your schedule, the amount of practice time you have and what your specific team needs are, you vary your drills.

When teaching a new offense, defense, plays, press offense, press defense, and other team skills, select your drills and teach by progression.

## **Pointers:**

### **Stretching exercises.**

Stretching is done at the start of practice in order to avoid injuries. It is recommended to avoid wasting precious "gym time" on stretching exercises. So have your players come 10-15 minutes early and do their stretching on the sidelines, so you are ready to go once practice starts. While the team is stretching, you can discuss your plans for the day, or explain what things need to be worked on, use the time to praise good things that have happened.

### **Selecting drills.**

Select drills that help teach individual and team fundamental skills, as well as teaching what you are trying to accomplish, or trying to correct. Use the guidelines below. You might have a "core" of selected drills that you use all the time. But you can throw in other drills from time-to-time to teach a specific skill or just to avoid boredom and spice things up a bit.

### **Move quickly from one drill to another.**

Don't spend half of your practice time on one drill. The kids will get bored and won't learn much after the first 5-10 minutes into the drill. If they mess up, they will get another chance to run that drill the next practice.

## **Make drills competitive.**

Whether you are doing 1-on-1 or 5-on-5 drills, shooting drills, etc., make them competitive with a winner and loser. You can have losers do 5-10 push-ups. In free-throw shooting drills, have missed shots followed by running a lap, as this simulates the running and fatigue in game situations.

## **Budget your time for each drill.**

If you are introducing a new drill, play, offense, defense, etc, you will have to allow more time the first time. If you are reviewing something, like a set of plays or your out-of-bounds plays (that they should already know), move quickly through these... you are reinforcing their memory (a brief repetitive exercise that can be done each day).

## **Follow an up tempo exhausting drill with 5 minutes of something less aerobic.**

Make them work hard, but don't be unreasonable.

## **Free-Throw Shooting**

Do your free-throw shooting after an aerobic, running drill when the players are tired, in order to simulate the leg and body fatigue that occurs in the real game setting.

## **Have every player do dribbling and ball-handling drills.**

Doing these drills will make all your players better athletes in general, will help their overall coordination, and will improve their "hands". Also, how do you know a certain player will be a post player all his/her life (especially younger players).

## **Break-down post/perimeter drills.**

If you have a good assistant, you can plan some time for individual skills with perimeter players on one end of the floor, and your post players on the other end. Have all players do both drills as they will all benefit.

## **Do not show favoritism.**

Do not favor certain players in practice. Make them all work equally hard. Try to instill in your star players that they must lead by example, and be willing to work harder than anyone else on the team to be a great player. Don't ignore any players, make them ALL feel they are contributing and encourage them.

## **Conditioning drills**

Early in the season, run a lot of conditioning drills. Your players and team will improve much more by doing conditioning drills than a lot of push-ups and running without the ball. If you are going to make your players run, make them do it with a ball... like full-court speed dribbling, using the right hand one direction and the left hand coming back. Rather than running a "gut buster", or a "suicide", do a fast-paced aerobic drill like speed dribbling. The kids will get just as tired and will hate it just as much, but their dribbling and conditioning will both improve.

## **Tournament time**

Getting into tournament play, or a crucial game, you might spend most of your time on team skills preparing for the big game, working on any special situations necessary to play the upcoming opponents. For example, you might want to refine your press break, or your full-court press, or how you will defend a certain star player, or how you will attack their zone defense, etc. It has been said that more tournament games are lost by over-practicing than under-practicing. Players can get "burned-out" by the end of the season. You want your tournament run to be fun... mostly looking forward to playing games, with short practices in-between.

## **End practice on an upbeat, positive note.**

Try to end practices with a drill that builds team spirit. This is fun thing to end with. Maybe have each player shoot a shot from half-court or the 3-point line instead. If no-one makes it, everybody runs. If just one player makes the half-court shot, NOBODY runs! So when a player makes the shot, usually the team celebrates with a lot of "high-fives" and hugs, since they don't have to run. In your first practice of the year, tell your players that when someone makes that shot to get emotional and celebrate and be pretty happy about not running. Sometimes, if you feel you've had a really good, hard practice and no-one makes the shot, the coach can try a 3-point shot or free-throw to "save the day". All these little things help build team spirit.