

**From Basketball Australia's  
"Building Better Basketball" Series  
(A Straightforward Guide to Basketball  
Fundamentals)**



**For  
Ivanhoe East Basketball Club  
(IEBC)**



**The content of this document is produced entirely by AIS Scholarship Coaches and  
Basketball Australia, reformatted for the purposes of our club by Auden Harrop**

# DRIBBLING

*Dribbling should have a purpose!!  
Dribbling is the most misused skill of basketball!!  
Dribbling is a pass to yourself!!*

This issue focuses on an area of the game that youngsters are more than happy to produce; dribbling. As coaches, we ask that our players learn the value of transference taking what they learn from their practice and playing experiences and apply them. Take heed to do the same and apply the lessons learned in the previous issues!

The specific purpose of dribbling is to

- Advance the ball into the offensive and when a pass is not possible
- Improve the opportunity for passing or shooting
- Relieve pressure
- Make an offensive move

Some key aspects of dribbling that should be taught to beginner players:

**Ball Height** - If the player is in the clear then bouncing the ball at waist height is comfortable. As defence gets closer, bounce the ball lower. It is easier to move the ball around, there is less air time for the defence to steal it.

**Ball Position** - Bounce the ball next to the body so you can move normally. As your speed increases, push the ball out in front, reduce the number of dribbles so you can run faster – beginners tend to bounce more frequently which actually slows them down and makes it more difficult to control the ball!

**A Dribble Is A Pass To Yourself** - Use the dribble to put the ball in a better position. Dribble to create a better pass or a better shot.

**Learn To Dribble With Both Hands.** Against poor defence you may be able to get away with using your dominant hand only – but you are only half as good as you could be! In speed dribble situations, it is advantageous if you can alternate hands to allow a more balanced (and therefore quicker) run.

**Dribble The Ball Hard** - This will cause the ball to “stick” better when it comes back to the hand and reduces the time the ball is away from your hand – leaving the defence less time to get the ball. This is a wrist movement pounding the ball with your arm!

**Keep Your Head Up.** As mentioned last issue, “good vision = good decision”. The ball is round, it bounces and the floor is flat. It will do what and go where your body action tells it to. You don’t need to watch the ball. Keep your head up to watch the things that do change; your position, the defenders positions and your teammates.

**Use Changes Of Pace And Direction-** Playing at one pace and on the same line is easily guarded, incorporate changes of pace and direction to beat your opponent.

**Play From Your Stance** - The same advantages given to starting in a stance apply when dribbling, quicker, longer steps, lower body stance to improve changes of pace and direction, improved vision, ready to pass or shoot if necessary.

**Control Is Better Than Speed** - With the importance of possession, it is important that we maintain control, not only to protect the ball whilst dribbling but also so we can execute a better shot or pass then Keep It Simple (KIS) principle can definitely be applied here. Whilst it is good if

players learn how to execute the various dribble moves, their ability to know **when** is more important!

Once you beat a man, keep them beat. Young players tend to try and go **around** rather than **by** their man. Different coaches again teach different attacking points. Different cues include “shoulder to shoulder”, “your shoulder to their hip”, “knock the shoulder” down but again the key is to get your head and shoulders by the defence and then turn the corner.

The defender gets stuck behind the dribbler and other defenders are forced to come to you because now you are threatening to score. This makes your read easier if no-one guards the dribbling lane-you get a lay-up. If they do, you then have more time and space to pass on a better angle!

There are various dribble moves that can be taught, and kids are naturally tempted to use flashy moves. We need to teach them all correctly, doing a good job of explaining the “why” and “how” of each move. Encourage the use of creative thought in practice and use the games as a learning environment for not only the execution of moves but also the decision of which move to use!

At the beginner level, the crucial 2 dribble moves are

1. The control / protection dribble
2. The Retract dribble
3. The crossover dribble
4. The hesitation (change of pace) moves
5. The speed dribble

Again we could devote an issue to these alone so consult your level Level 0/1 resources and / or your development officer. Other moves include:

- Behind back
- Spin
- Between legs
- In and away (also known as wave and fake crossover)
- Combinations (moves executed back to back to counter the defenders adjustment)

You may see teenagers doing “trick” moves picked up from shoe company, AND1, mix tapes or the Nike Ad. Hopefully you can stress the importance of learning to crawl, walk and then run in relation to dribbling with your youngsters! But again anything that encourages kids to be better at handling is not all bad!

Do not teach dribbling in isolation. Teach your players how to pass, shoot and do lay-ups all off a dribble. Not only are these important skills, it also emphasises the use of a dribble to create these!

Invariably keeping things fun is important at this age so these are just a few games you can use to enforce learning.

**Bullrush** (also known as British Bulldog, Red Rover Crossover). Kids line up on baseline with a ball each and have to get to the other end without getting tipped or losing the ball (start with a couple of good dribblers as “in/it”). You can play build-ups until there is only one person left.

**Finger-run.** Coach stays at other end and holds fingers up as players dribble down, calling out the number. Can build it up, adding a “stop sign” (players stop in a control dribble or triple threat position) and “retreat”. Coach is like a traffic conductor, can then make a game of this by playing “Red light-Green light” or “What’s the time Mr Wolf” using basketballs. Kids will show you how this works!

**Stuck in the Mud.** Play in a confined area. Designate who is in. If you get tagged you are “stuck in the mud”, hold the ball on your head, stand with legs apart. To be “unstuck” someone else has to dribble their ball through your legs, you can then rejoin the game,

**Odd Man Out.** Again played in a confined area, it is a bit like musical chairs except everyone stays involved. A few players start without a ball and have to steal one before the whistle goes. Those without a ball on the whistle might do a star jump or push up. Gradually remove more balls on each whistle to increase difficulty.

**Octopus.** Similar to bull rush, players have to try to reach the other end without being tipped. This time, the people that are “in” are the only ones who move around, those tipped sit down cross-legged, ball on their lap. They try and tip those left who have to avoid the people that are in and their “octopus” stuck on the ground.

**Relays** – anything competitive always goes over well!!  
Best of Luck

#### Summary

Do's	Don'ts
Keep the dribble “alive”	Don't automatically start dribbling after receiving a pass
Vary the speed and direction of the dribble	Don't pick up or stop dribbling with no other option
Protect the dribble from the defensive player	Don't dribble into a crowd
Cross over or switch dribbling hands to protect the ball	Don't try to get fancy
Stay in the middle of the court and away from the sidelines	Don't hesitate

# PASSING AND CATCHING

*Passing promotes team play  
Passing contributes to the excitement of the game  
All players are potential receivers – be ready to catch!!*

In this issue we are discussing passing and catching. Perhaps the most pressing issue is to make sure our beginners understand the value of both of these skills and integrate them into their games. Typically most beginners are happy to receive the ball but less inclined to give it up! We want to develop a 'team' mentality and the best way to do this is involve everybody and passing can achieve this. To quote Tom Pottenger (junior coach from Shoalhaven Tigers, NSW) "Kid, if you want to be No.1 by yourself - go play tennis - now pass the ball!"

## **PASSING**

A learning experience I like to use is to pick the fastest runner in the group to race against the ball. I dribble the ball to the top of the key and back while he/she runs. The end result is usually close. Then we race again, but this time I put another person at the top of the key and I pass the ball and they pass it back while the opponent runs - the end result is anything but close! I do this to emphasise how much easier and quicker it is to move the ball using a pass.

Here are key areas to cover in relation to passing:

- Pass away from the defence. See the whole receiving area, where is the receivers defender, where are the help defenders? Teach your players to make their decision on when and where to pass based on that rather than their own predicament or the receiver's insistence. Possession is vital!
- "Fake to make" In this context 'make' means to create. If you don't have a safe pass, use a shot/drive or pass fake, shift the defence and 'create' a passing lane.
- Pass to a target. Using the above rules, learn to pass to a target, it might be a receiver's hand, it may be a spot on the floor. Understand we want to pass for our teammate not just to our teammate. Pass the ball so the receiver is in a good position to execute the next part of the game. The quality of your pass affects how quickly (if at all) and how well, they can shoot, pass or dribble. If the player is on the move, pass it in front so they can move onto the ball and continue.
- Don't teach passing in isolation. Teach players how to pass off the dribble, pass on the run, pass and cut, pass after pivoting (in a stance of course). It's a dynamic game - teach it that way!
- Ball in the air is anyone's ball - passes must be sharp. The big muscles in your legs and a sharp wrist snap will speed the ball through the air.
- To get the ball past the on-ball defender use one of the five safe zones; directly above their head, by their ears or by their hips. It is difficult for the defence to stop

the ball especially if the offence uses a fake first and/or passes away from their hands.

- Players should be able to execute passes with either hand. This change of hands can improve the passing angle, reducing the risk of a deflection by the on-ball defender and an intercept by an off-ball defender.
- Again, your coaching courses will give you greater technical content but players should be shown the:
  - Chest
  - Push (including bounce)
  - Baseball
  - Bounce
  - Curl
  - Overhead

and then when/why to use those passes.

### **CATCHING**

"What do you call a boomerang that doesn't come back? A stick!" Similarly, a pass is only complete when it reaches its destination. The receiver must share the responsibility in regards to this. It is a dangerous assumption to make that our players can all catch. Basketball would not be alone in under-teaching this vital skill. The sequence of catching is "Eyes, feet, hands." Use your eyes to track the ball, move your feet to 'meet' the ball and then, using 10 fingers (especially for beginners), catch the ball. By using this sequence, we put our body in a better position to execute the next skill.

Players should move to meet the ball to reduce the air-time of the pass, decreasing the risk of a turnover. If you stand and wait or fail to move onto the ball, a defender will shoot the gap and steal it! This movement need not be predicated on a pass, offensive players should be constantly adjusting to improve their position in relation to the ball and the defenders.

Receivers should communicate both verbally and visually when and where they want the ball. The call and body language used should be assertive. Beginners tend to call for the ball because they want it, regardless of the defence or their own position. Teach them to call for the ball when it will help the team, not themselves!

Beginners may want to dribble without catching the ball. This is one of my pet hates.

Firstly they do not get proper control of the ball. Secondly they have reduced their options to one, eliminating a chance for a shot or pass. Finally, that dribble tends to be on the spot, rather than being made into a better position. Show the advantages of making the catch.

Players need to learn how to catch and pass, catch and shoot, catch and dribble. They need to be able to do this in all situations: in rebounding for! scenarios, in transition, on the perimeter and playing inside.

### **PASSING GAMES**

Again there are countless passing drills that you will be able to access from your coaching resources. Here are some fun drills you can also play. To facilitate passing and catching in a fun environment:

**"Baseball"** - Designate a batting and fielding team. The batters have to throw the ball into the field (no home runs although you may need to designate out of bounds areas) and run for home (can't stop on a base). If the fielding team can catch it on the full, the batter is out. If not the fielders need to make a set number of passes and get the ball back to home (can include a made basket to increase difficulty) before the runner to get them 'out'. Passes have to include a new person to involve everybody.

**"Tag Pass"** - Used by many sports. Designate players to be in. They may not run with the ball, they have to pass between themselves and try and tag those not yet in. Can play in teams or can play build-ups. Teaches players to think ahead of the play, because it easier to box people in corners or trap them between passers rather than chase them.

**"Captain Ball"** - An oldie but a goody!

**"Relays"** - Races that incorporate different passes.

**"Passball"** - Where the value of a made basket is decided by the number of passes preceding it. Can set a pass limit of passes before a free shot is allowed.

**"Circle Pursuit"** - 2 players start back to back with a ball, opposite a player in the circle. They have to make their way around the circle passing to each player and try to catch their opponent or be first around the circle. You can do this with one or two balls.

Promote the value of good passing and catching in your practice and your games. Emphasize its importance, value the assist as much as a score. Acknowledge good decisions and executions. Teams that pass well not only achieve more, they also enjoy playing more - and that's what we are hoping

# SHOOTING AND LAYUPS

*Good technique and plenty of practice  
can make any player a good shooter!!*

This time we tackle Shooting and Lay-ups, which again presents an area of the game that players have no hesitation in practicing - even if it does include an overly high proportion of 3-pointers and half-way shots! Hopefully we will see the benefits of teaching the ready position, our offensive stance, transfer into shot technique. Despite bearing the brunt of frustration, the ball is blameless, it will go where your body guides it. Below are some important teaching points.

**Balance** - In a correct stance a player will be balanced. The head should be kept centred and slightly forward - "nose in line with toes".

**Alignment** - It should be possible to draw a straight line through the ball, elbow, knee and foot. The ball should be held above the elbow (which should rest comfortably by the side) with "wrinkles in the wrist". This sets us up to get 'in and under' the shot. Another ball should be able to fit between the back of the shooting hand and the shoulder. This allows the player to get 'under' the ball, as opposed to 'behind' the ball.

**Rhythm** - Everything "flows from the toes". Use the legs to provide power, arms to provide direction, arc and follow-through. We want players to develop that effortless feeling, if they try and shoot using their arms they will tend to twist to generate the power, the use of legs will make it easier and reduce trunk rotation (and misdirection).

**Follow-through** - A consistent "lock and snap" are vital in being a great shooter. We want players to lock their arm so the ball, if our alignment is set correctly, will go straight. The snap provides back-spin, putting a nice arc on the ball and forcing the ball to grip/stick on contact with the ring or backboard. This 'soft-touch', will hopefully help get the ball in! Other cues to use include "elbow to eyebrow" and "See the ball (your set-up) and "hear your follow-through" (finish). If you can see the follow-through, the ball will most likely have been short and flat.

**Hand Position** - The shooting hand should be in the centre of the ball, which makes it easier to direct because the forces will then act through the ball's center of gravity. The ball should rest comfortably on the fingertips. Some coaches teach young players to draw an imaginary 'T' between the two thumbs. The guide hand should not impart any force on the ball, and stay on the side of the ball as it is lifted up. This improves ball security, balance and protection from the defence. When the shot is complete, the fingers on the guide hand should be pointing up to the sky, and on the shooting hand down into the basket - like a 'gooseneck'.

**Footwork** - The key to a quick release. Whilst I will not delve into the stride stop versus jump stop argument, it is important that players learn to get their feet organised, catch the ball in the air and land ready to shoot and use that landing to 'drive' their shot.

**Aim/Focus** - Again different coaches have their own philosophy. Golfers used to be taught to draw a line for their putt, now they are taught to draw train tracks, similarly I like my players to have this 'soft focus'. Rather than aim for a specific spot, I like to just focus on the whole area, the inside of the ring.

**Backboard** - Demonstrate the value of using the backboard. I use the analogy of a "grandma kiss" to develop that soft touch off the glass. You don't want to plant one on there - just soft, quick and gentle!

When teaching little kids it important that we try and develop a technique that will serve them throughout their basketball career. If any style is practiced enough, it will become increasingly effective. However, if we can practice great shot technique, well obviously it will bear fruit more consistently and stand-up under pressure. "BEEF" is a popular cue 'B' is for Balance, 'E' for Eyes on the target, 'E' for extend legs and arms, 'F' for follow-through. I have also heard people use one of the E's for elbow - I'll let you decide!

A technique drill I like to use for shooting uses the whole court and keeps players active. I ask players to place their dominant foot on a straight line and get in stance. Lift the ball and drop off the guide hand, we call this "statue of liberty shooting". Players start with their upper arm parallel to the floor, forearm at 90 degrees and 'wrinkles in the wrist'. The players practice their "lock and snap" and, hopefully the ball lands on the line. They may repeat this a number of times up to half way. At half way they have to shoot over the head of a coach/teacher/parent. Place a coin on the line behind this person, and if they can hit the coin they can keep it. This is harder than expected, because have to get the line, arc and distance right. They then use this technique at the ring (usually allow 3 shots -one from each side and one in front). If players need more power, allow them to bend their knees and add leg power rather than dropping the ball down to their shoulder and throwing it. They can repeat this process back down the other sideline/ring but adding the guide hand.

As important it is that players become great shooters, it is more important they become great scorers. They have to be able to shoot off a pass, off the dribble and off a rebound. Practice shooting with physical pressure i.e. defence and mental pressure. You can do this by setting goals/targets in shooting drills, shooting buzzer beaters (even imaginary shots to win the game). They can't finish the drill or leave until you make 2 in a row

Use Jordan scoring (as in Michael Jordan). When he shot by himself he kept score by adding 1 for a make and subtracting 2 for a miss. The goal to get to +11 before you get to -11. For the littlies +1 /-1 or +2/-1 may suffice!

Again there are a number of fun games you can play including "Sink the Titanic' and Knockout. Coaching resources can also provide various drills.

### LAY-UPS

Scoring is such a poignant skill to young kids, so the sooner we can teach players to score, to do a lay-up, the more likely they are to enjoy the experience - and continue playing! Footwork is the key. Break down the footwork. From a standing start, work on the final step only, concentrating on their knee lift and shot technique. Then work off two steps, beginning with a stationary start and then off a run (coach handing the ball off). It is important that players catch the ball in the air and drive their knee, this changes their momentum from forward to up - hence the term, lay-up! A handy tool is to draw oversized feet on the court with some chalk. Then add a dribble or pass so the players learn to get their feet organized. Put the ball out in front with the dribble/pass so they can run onto it and catch in the air, landing with the appropriate footwork.

Most lay-ups are taught from the wing, but of course this is not always the case in the game, so teach players how to execute the lay-up from all angles. Early on, I advocate teaching 'banana steps', where players final to steps curl around to the side of the basket, to create that angle for a shot off the backboard. As kids (and your coaching) progress, you can teach the 'why and how' of underhand lay-ups, power lay-ups and reverse lay-ups. Again practice lay-ups under pressure e.g. give a dribbler a small head start and have a defender chase them. If they take too many dribbles they will get caught! I like to score lay-ups out of three; focusing on footwork, the use of the backboard and the end result. Invariably if they get the footwork right, the next two fall into place very quickly.

More information on the techniques is available from coaching co-ordinators, resources and from your TV. Watch the truly great shooters and identify the strengths of their shots. Watch shots that miss (from stars and your stars-to-be) and see if you can identify why. Your job as a coach is to provide solutions not just identify the problems. While developing shot techniques and teaching lay-ups may take time, "perfect practice makes perfect" and it will pay off. What we hope to develop is 'muscle memory' so that every opportunity that presents itself triggers a fundamentally sound, consistent and effective response i.e. they put the ball in the hole!

# DEFENCE AND REBOUNDING

*'Rebounding and defence are the key contributors to our offence'*

The Building Better Basketball Coaching Series this month brings you key teaching areas for defence and rebounding. Both of these require the development of a mentality in junior players. As coaches, we need to emphasise and illustrate the value of both these facets of the game, to entice the same application to the development of defence and rebounding, as players show to scoring!

So what is defence? I ask the kids what they are trying to do on defence and "Get the ball" is the usual response. I suggest we let the other team score because then we get the ball! This is not well received so then I ask; "How can we get the ball BEFORE they score?" "Steal it" is the dominant response and I agree but then offer; intercept, out of bounds, rebound, travel, double dribble, 5 seconds, 8 seconds, 3 seconds, cross-court and draw an offensive foul as other avenues to achieve the same outcome - get the ball! We want to develop the players that, regardless of the quality of the opposition, can compete. At this stage of their playing careers, the quality of opponent will vary greatly and getting a steal may be quite easy. Obviously this will not always be the case and you need to equip them with the why and the how of individual fundamental defensive skills and team defensive strategy/philosophy.

## **DEFENCE**

**Stance** - Just as we did with offence, demonstrate the correct stance for defence. Point out the strengths of this position. If we are down low and wide, you take up more space, stopping the offence from going there. We can cover more distance (and do it quickly) because our legs are bent and loaded, ready to move.

**Balance** - Players need to learn how to move, keeping their head centred and at the same height (not bobbing up and down). This is advantageous when they need to change direction and/or speed. Players need to be able to apply hand pressure without leaving their stance, whether it be digging for the ball or carrying a hand, this needs to happen in isolation from the legs. Keep 'nose to chest', so we're in stance and in a good position.

**Foot Movement** - Our initial stance is big. Any movement should be big to bigger back to big, so we don't lose the advantages of our stance. So when we move, teach to push off the trail leg and move the lead foot first. Players should be taught how to slide and also how, and when, to change from sliding to running. The key is position; so if the slide is not quick enough to protect your position (over distance this will invariably be the case), teach the skill of slide-sprint-slide to maintain your advantage.

**On-Ball Pressure** - At this age I suggest that players are taught how to channel, turn and contain the ball-handler. They should have positional pressure (feet), ball pressure (hands) and mental pressure (communication). If the ball is down (on dribble or held low) then they should be 'back and down' (back a little and down in stance). If the ball is held high, defence should be 'up and in' (up closer and in pressuring).

**Off-Ball Pressure** - To teach positioning I teach players the BUM Triangle. B is for ball, U is for you and M is for man (I also use BUG - G is for girl). To build the triangle the player should be basket-side and ball-side of their player, in a stance (of course) and 'pointing their pistols', (maintaining vision on ball and player). I want my players in a position to get the ball at all times so if the triangle is too fat - the pass is easy, too flat - the cut is easy. If the point of the triangle (i.e. 'U') is too close to the ball, we can't stop the pass, too close to the defender and we can't

stop the drive (help) and also any cut is easier because we are not cutting down the angle (much like a soccer goalkeeper does when he moves forward to stop shots on goal) of the pass.

**Movement** - Should be constant. "If the ball's on the move - you're on the move." Even when the player with the ball is not dribbling, they are usually faking or pivoting; we should be moving on the balls of our feet, ready to move. On a pass or shot the defence should "Fly with the ball." Use the time the ball is in the air to adjust your position accordingly, whether to execute a block-out or the next phase of defence. On a pass, defence should "Jump to the ball." By adjusting our position in relation to the ball as it moves, we are in a better position to stop a pass, a cut and to help.

**Transition** - No doubt when teaching offence you will cover the issue of court balance and receivers, both will assist with transition into defence. Good balance will give you safety and the receivers allow you to begin defence as quickly as possible. Should you score or lose possession, receivers can slow the inbound/outlet pass by pressuring both the passer and receivers.

When coaching games you may apply rules. For example no steals, intercepts and rebounds only. Only one person on the ball (if you get beat rotate to someone else) this is good for defence and the game as it avoids the 'bees around a honey-pot' look of most U/8-10 games! You might work on channeling one week and turning the ball-handler the next. Challenge the team and individual kids with different aspects of defence, don't settle for short-term outcomes (i.e. the win) that may harm their long-term development. Not only will they be able to play any style of defence as they continue in basketball, but they will also be better able to recognize and counter different defence as an offensive player (assuming you teach the 'why of the how' of each defensive strategy) correctly. Ultimately we want players to develop the mentality that we will be disruptive, we will make the offence uncomfortable and make what they are trying to do difficult, preferably even stop it! We want pressure and patience, because against better teams you need pressure and time before sterner stuff breaks!

## **REBOUNDING**

I often hear coaches implore their players to dive on the loose ball, well really we should be just as aggressive about rebounding, it is a loose ball - so get after it! Everybody should be encouraged to rebound, not just tall players. Some key areas to cover include:

- Be in stance, ready to move.
- As with catching, follow the flight of the ball with your eyes, move your feet and carry your hands (thumbs pointed at ears).
- Jump! Go and meet the ball, most juniors tend to wait for the ball to come to them, encourage and teach players to jump, work on timing.
- Land ready to act. Teach players how to land in a low, wide stance ready to execute the next skill. Players need to be able to land and shoot (for offensive boards), land and pivot, land and pass, land and dribble. Teach them to use fakes and combinations of the above e.g. pivot, pass fake and then bust-out with a dribble.
- Chin it. Again different coaches have different cues and techniques for where the ball should be held but the underlying premise is that the ball is protected. I like to teach juniors to chin it with their elbows out.
- Rebounding Triangle. As a team, we want a chance to rebound every shot that goes up. A triangle should be formed, so that regardless of whether the ball rebounds to the middle, left or right, our team has a chance of coming up with it! We often teach players to get to spots to receive a pass when a team mate drives, but a key element of that is also to be in a position to rebound should they shoot it. It is the same on defence when we teach defensive rotation, we not only cover likely passes but also the key rebounding positions!

Personally, I am hesitant to teach a lot of blocking out to beginners, I just try and emphasise effort, the rebounding mentality. Technique can come later. If you do want to go down that path encourage them to value inside position. Fight for that position, contest don't concede and remember it is block-out! By this I mean, it is no good being inside your player but directly under the ring, the ball is going to rebound off there! What we want to do is to create space around the ring so it won't go over our heads and we can actually move forward and attack the ball in the air and get the rebound sooner.

Rebounding is a defensive stop; it gets or keeps possession for our team. Defence doesn't end until we get the ball, so stay in your stance and keep playing until we secure possession. Reward yourself for forcing a missed shot! Similarly, good offence will put you in a position to rebound, take advantage of second opportunities! Until next month - have fun with the kids. They all want the ball; well being good at defence and rebounding means they can have it more often!

## GAME SITUATIONS

*Coaching children takes commitment, good hearing, a quick eye, a ready shoulder, a soft heart, a strong mind and a sense of humour.*

Our final installment looks at Game Situations. As a coach of juniors you have a great responsibility for not only teaching and instilling fundamental skills but also to initiate your players ability to make good decisions, to read and understand the game. Great players are effective, because they can transfer excellent skills and apply them to a game.

Throughout the series I have often discussed the importance of the 'why of the how' when teaching our skills, so kids begin to develop an appreciation of how skills are applicable in the game. At all levels I have seen some excellent shooters who are not prolific scorers, because they practice shooting at a slow pace, or without a defender (imaginary or actual), don't move well off the ball, can't create a shoot with a dribble, etc. We need to improve their ability to play the game. Here are some strategies to assist you:

- Encourage free play. Whether it's 1 on 1, 2 on 2 or 5 on 5, 'scrimmage' can be a great teacher. Especially if the group is going to challenge their skills, lift their intensity and provide an environment that 'forces' learning i.e. sink or swim (within reason).
- Create the game at practice. Rather than just using drills, design a breakdown, a portion of the game you feel needs improving. E.g. To improve player movement off the ball set-up 3 on 0 and show where players can run on penetration. Add a defender and tell them the things to look for, as a passer and a receiver. Then add a second and third defender. Again the key is giving them cues to work with; "Did the player defending you turn his/her head? If they did, run to this position." Etc
- Back to back drills. Basketball is incredibly dynamic. Players should be ready to move. They need to think one step ahead. They need to develop the ability to react quickly. A score or a turnover can happen instantly forcing you to change from offence to defence (or vice versa). Have drills that mirror this. You may have a great rebound/block-out drill. Well now extend it (and your athletes) by adding a fast break/transition component to it. The game is free-flowing except for the occasional substitution and time-outs. Practice should reflect this. I often like to play until there is 2 scores. Ideally if the team/player has done everything correctly and forces the opposition to score over them, they should block out, use their inside position to secure possession and score themselves. If the same team/player scores
- twice, a small penalty is given. The idea is not the punishment but to keep both offence and defence switched on - play does not end when someone scores in a game - so why do it at practice!
- Advantage/Disadvantage. A lot of basketball play involves situations with a numbers difference. Players need to learn to recognize such instances and to either take advantage or minimize the effect of them before the opposition recovery. It might be on the break, or a dribble penetration, it may be rebounding. A common drill used for juniors is the 3-man weave. A good game situation extension is to use two colours in each group (there will always be 2 of one colour, and a remaining person in the other colour). Start the 3-man weave and on the coach's call/whistle make one more pass, the receiver of that pass is on offence and so are other any other players in a like colour. The drill returns to this basket from which it started and will either be 1 on 2, in which case you can trap the handler or 2 on 1, where you can run the break. This can be extended to 5-man weaves (2 on 3/3 on 2).

- Routines. Put in place structures and routines that will avoid delays and indecision.

**SUBSTITUTIONS** - Teach how to ask for subs, where to sit waiting for them, waiting for the referee to call you on, calling off the sub, exchanging information ("you're marking number 6, he's a left-hander"), the sub running off, talking to you, getting their water bottle and sitting down.

**TIME-OUTS** - Demonstrate where you want them to sit/stand, should they drink first or last, can they say anything, if yes when?

**FOUL SHOTS** - Have players develop a routine that they stick to for their free-throws. It should involve breathing, mental focus and physical preparation.

**PASSING** - I instructed players that they couldn't pass until completing a 2 count in their head. They had to count the offence as 1 and that player's defender as 2, only then they could pass it in. I found this made them more aware, and as they got older/better they had to count higher (see more of the floor, more team-mates and read the defence).

**REFEREES** - Put in place strategies for your players and the team as a whole with dealing with judgement calls that have gone against them (that's as diplomatic as I can put it). Basketball is one game where there is a lot of interaction between referees and players/coaches. Perhaps too much? Regardless, draw a line in the sand (different coaches will have different levels of leniency) and appropriate penalties.

These may seem trivial but putting in routines can help the game flow and establish good habits that can stay with players for the rest of their basketball and personal lives.

No doubt through your involvement we have all seen those kids who can just play. We have all had those kids who are technically sound but unfortunately can't seem to get it done in the game. Hopefully through the way we coach, the way you train, can help you produce more players with great fundamentals, a good understanding of the game and with the right attitude. A more enjoyable experience for all involved is sure to follow.