

basketball career is likely to extend beyond that week, that season, that year, so if kids are having fun with a certain game, play it again! Don't fret if something has to carry over to next week. If the kids are struggling to pick something up, have one shot at correcting it and if that fails – DO NOT persist. Move on to the next drill. Next week re-address that skill with a different drill.

Be organised so the equipment you need is handy and won't take long to set up. If you have access to a clock, use it. You may have it counting down to the end of practice, you may use it to time segments. Use it to time drills and set some targets for the group to work towards, use it to keep score in competitive drills. Players need these challenges to create competitive environment (game situation).

No doubt most of you have limited time to train your teams. Your sessions must have a balance of fun and learning. Young players want to learn, so your ability to teach is vital. They should have an opportunity to develop those skills immediately (practice) and then apply them in a game or game situation. You must strike a balance between learning and fun! If you fail to meet their requirements in either of these areas, eventually they won't return. If there is nothing more rewarding as a player, than those games where everything comes together, then surely there is nothing more satisfying as a coach (or as a parent) than seeing the smile on their faces when it does. And it's those moments that make the challenge of coaching worthwhile.

#### **Coaching Juniors Series**

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# **BUILDING BETTER BASKETBALL**



***ISSUE No. 3***

**COACHING**

## **Prior Preparation Prevents Poor Performance**



Welcome back to the series on coaching juniors. The focus is on coaching at the grass-roots level. Up to this point, we have discussed why kids play, the importance of this in relationship to our approach when coaching juniors and last month, communication. Our group management skills and planning techniques will be the focus of this issue.

When working with this age group, remember you are there to help them, to facilitate what they want to get out of the experience. Amongst the priorities for young children are improving their skill level, playing, using those skills and being with friends. Based on this, your practice sessions should include 3 components; teaching, practicing and playing.

Teaching is an important part of their development as a player, it makes their time at training enjoyable and worthwhile – they leave a better player than when they arrived. After teaching a new skill, they must be given a chance to practice it, whilst they may not perfect it straight away, they must be given the opportunity to develop that particular skill. Through the extension of drills they can learn how to apply that skill and finally they should be given playing time. This may be an actual game, it may be a breakdown situation (e.g. 3 on 2), or it may be a skill-based game. Again this is providing an element of fun - not just learning – let them play! You may repeat this a number of times each session.

Whilst extensive stretching and warm-up routines are not as necessary with this age group, it is important that we establish this routine as a habit. Because of your limited time, include skills previously covered in your physical warm-up, this will allow you to reinforce from prior sessions as well as warm them up for this session. Again flexibility is usually quite good at this age, but a stretching routine should be included in both warm-up and, in particular, warm-down.

Group management is an important element of a successful practice. You may remember the TV program “Get Smart”? Well practice with young children is not dissimilar – it is a battle between ‘chaos’ and ‘control’!

Basketball is a dynamic sport, so learning to deal with a number of things (e.g. defence, ball, teammates running, baskets, etc) are an important part of learning but we need to ensure an element of control to facilitate what we are teaching and to prevent injury! Personally I want every kid with a ball in their hand as often as possible but when I talk then they cross their arms over it, or place it between their feet. They DO NOT bounce it, flip it, spin it, chuck it at other people or shoot it. They need to listen to learn effectively, that little ball can be a very big distraction to that player and the group!

Use a whistle to control movement e.g. one whistle means start/freeze, two whistle means run to coach. I have successfully used a ‘gate’ system. Set up 2 witches hats, 1 metre apart, on the side of the court. Players enter the court through the ‘gate’, and players may only talk basketball. If something outside that realm occurs, they have a penalty. When they have a drink break, they go out the gates and can talk about anything they want.

Design your practice so children are actively involved as much as possible. Avoid long

lines. If they have to line up, get them to dribble to other end and back first, or perhaps do crossovers while waiting. The more activity, the less likely it is that they become distracted.

Quite often we work in stations so divide your groups so players get the most out of it. This will depend on what type of skill you are doing. Putting a developing player with the strong players may speed their improvement or alternatively, set them back confidence wise. If the drill leads to competitive situations, make sure one group isn’t stacked. Know your players and pick groups accordingly.

To pick your groups you might delegate by numbers, size, ability, age or gender. A fun way to do it is give them an animal e.g. cat, dog, chicken, cow. To form their group they have to make the appropriate noise until they get everyone together. The key is really to put the players in a position where they can learn, be challenged appropriately and have fun (make sure they have a friend with them). You may even use it to start providing opportunities for leadership and responsibility by delegating a team leader or asking a stronger player to guide less talented group.

It is important that you stay involved. This will include coaching on the run, giving encouragement and correcting technique, etc. Don’t set up a drill and then sit back! Provide feedback throughout. Players are much more likely to buy into what you are teaching if they are shown the ‘why of the how’. If they can see the tangible benefits of performing a skill using the prescribed technique, they may actually take it on board. By jumping in on defence/offence to demonstrate how it works in a game situation, they can begin to understand the point of learning it this way. If you are not physically able to do this because of a fitness or skill issue, you may choose to use an ex or older player (this can also help develop another coach). Alternatively, you can show highlights of an NBL/WNBL/NBA/WNBA star performing the correct execution.

Plan drills with extensions. Instead of moving to a new drill that will use up more valuable time, add-on parts to the drill. The skill/drill may shift from static to moving, from no defence to defence, from practice to playing, etc. This will help develop that particular skill. Give the drill a name so if you want to revisit it later, you can cue the kids by using that name.

Make sure that your practice is planned – but stay flexible. Your session plan is a road map. You probably have a vision of where you want your team to get by season’s end – write that down. Then work backwards – ask yourself, how do we get to that point? Each session then becomes a piece of the jigsaw you are trying to bring together. Again, don’t lose sight of what the kids are there for. Their