

Our final area of emphasis is ball handling. Whilst it has an obvious link to dribbling, our ability to handle the ball is just as important in improving our ability to catch, pass, shoot, rebound and defend. Whenever practicing ball-handling activities, encourage players to work above their comfort zone, at high speed. It is acceptable to make mistakes because that is a sign that you are challenging yourself and improvement is sure to follow. Make them aware of their balance and execute drills without watching the ball. If you have access to 'no-peeks', training aides that partially block vision, use them for your ball handling and dribbling practice. We want soft hands for catching and shooting, we want to be able to get control if we can get a finger to a rebound or a bad pass, we need dexterity for our passes and dribble moves. There are countless drills for ball handling and your imagination can no doubt concoct others. Perhaps one of the best options is to bring in an older player to demonstrate. Some common ball-handling drills include:

2 Ball dribbling	Spider dribble
Wrapping	Tapping
Figure 8 Wraps	Figure 8 Dribble
Rhythm Drill	2 Ball Passing
Straddle Flip	Scissor Dribble

These are often used by a variety of sports and you can find diagrams and explanations in coaching resources or contact your association development officer/coaching director.

Previous Articles

1. Why kids play
2. Communicating with kids
3. Organising kids
4. Game coaching

Future Articles

6. Dribbling
7. Passing
8. Shooting
9. Defence / Rebounding
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BUILDING BETTER BASKETBALL



ISSUE No.5

COACHING

THE FUNDAMENTALS Ball Handling / Pivoting / Stance

Coaching Juniors is a series of informative articles to assist local coaches in the local competitions. The coaching series was written and compiled by Steve Jackson AIS Scholarship Coach 2002 for Basketball Australia and all States and Territories



This issue will be focused on the skills of pivoting and ball handling as well as the importance of a player's stance. Again, it is important to remember that this series is focusing 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, communication, group management skills, planning techniques and game coaching. Your ability to implement the various lessons and strategies discussed in the previous issues will enable you to more readily effect change in your players. As we work through the teaching of fundamentals from this point on, this will become increasingly important. By very definition, fundamental is "to provide foundation or base", is "essential", so what we are hoping to do is ingrain positive habits that will serve the player throughout their basketball career.

Depending upon the era, state or coach that you have learnt about the game from, the stance players adopt with the ball is referred to in a variety of ways: 'ready position', 'triple-threat', basic basketball position are perhaps the most common. The title is less important than the message. The key is that players learn the correct stance and understand the advantages of getting into this stance (the 'why of the how'). Defensive stance will be covered later in the series.

Whilst your Level 0/1 courses will cover this more comprehensively, the basic premise is that players are well balanced (feet approx. shoulder width apart), are an offensive threat (ball held in 'shooting pocket', ready to be shot, passed or dribbled) and ready to move (knees bent). We want to be balanced so we can make a pass or dribble move in either direction or shoot effectively. We need to be an offensive threat. If players assume this stance, they will be hard to read and therefore hard to guard. If you only look to pass, then both the on-ball and receivers defenders will play the passing lanes.

If you only look to drive, the defence will loosen up and contain your first step. If you shape up to shoot, they will tighten up and carry a hand to pressure the shot. By teaching them the correct stance and how to read the defence, they will be able to make and execute much better decisions. Being ready to move enables us to be more effective when executing our decisions. If we do decide to pass we can step into the pass and make it flat and crisp, from a safer angle. If we want to put it on the floor our first step will be longer and quicker (important in beating the defender). If we want to shoot, our legs are 'loaded' with the power to drive our shot and/or jump.

If we use a fake, it is important that we maintain our stance. If the defence reacts or not, we need to be ready to execute the correct read. On a shot fake, we want "Ball up, body down". So the players isolate their arm movement from their body. Then if the defence jumps on the fake, the player rips the ball down and is in a position to take that explosive first step. If the defender doesn't honour the shot and stays down, the player can shoot or execute another fake, without having lost their balance. On drive fakes, we want "short and sharp". The jab step should not cause the offensive player to transfer their weight off their back/pivot foot. Besides potentially leading to a travel, the player must now recover back into stance before they can make a move, also allowing the defence to recover.

Inevitably when we talk stance we talk about 'squaring up' or 'catch and face'. By this we mean that players, upon receiving the ball, adopt their stance with their body's square to the ring (beginner players will tend to dribble straight away). Squaring up allows them to see what is in front of them, and whether we are dribbling or deciding our next move; "Good vision equals good decision". So after facing the basket, and seeing the lane unguarded, they know to drive. If they are open to shoot, in range and there is no opportunity to get closer (because of defence), the players know to shoot. If they see a teammate ahead, in a better position (to score, drive or make another pass), they know to pass it. Again these visual cues will trigger the appropriate response, so it is important that you teach how to catch and face (without traveling) and what to look for.

Whilst learning to square up is vital, it is also important that they understand that is not always necessary. If the players are taught to be aware of where their defenders are, they may have opportunities to drive without catching and facing. For example, if they receive a pass and the defence had attempted to intercept it and failed, leaving them out of position, squaring up allows them time to recover. Or perhaps they are unguarded for some reason, in these situations it would be better to just catch and drive. Again this is referred to by different names; pull-through, grip and rip, ball sweep. In this action the player catches the ball on one side, pulls it through to the other side (away from their defence and closer to where they are heading, usually the basket) and takes a penetrating dribble. This punishes the defence immediately for being out of position. If the defence is caught away from the ball (which often happens with beginners who tend to chase their man rather than guard in the ball-you-man, flat triangle) when the receiver catches, then, if they are aware of this cue, they can just catch & go straight at the basket. We need to teach them how to execute the square up, the pull-through and the catch and go, and also when.

Hopefully just by addressing stance and the reading of defence, you will make things easier for beginner players. An often overlooked skill, and invariably necessary in extracting oneself from pressure situations is the pivot. Whilst this is often important in teaching players to square up, it also has other benefits. Again, players should stay in a stance whilst pivoting, so at any point they are ready to shoot, pass or dribble effectively. An important teaching point is to keep their head at the same height, not bob up and down. Stay low and wide to maintain balance (alleviating the risk of a travel violation) and cover more area. A good pivot then forces the defence to adjust, thereby creating space. The offensive player has now improved the angle for a pass, created a driving lane or room for a shot. Make the players aware of the defender's arm and hand positioning, they may need to sweep the ball hard and low or, leading with upper arms and elbows (legally) over the top. It is important that this is a whole-body movement, using the core strength and leg drive to make an aggressive and effective move, whilst also protecting the ball.