

Program Development

The following information outlines the concepts necessary in preparing for a season of coaching youth basketball. With the limited amount of facilities prohibiting the traditional practice environment that allows for daily court time, travel and seasonal teams are limited to 1-2 practices per week, it is important for coaches to have a strong plan of action for program and practice plan development.

1. Organize your system.

This becomes the foundation of all of your teaching. You must identify the style of coaching that best fits your personality and ultimately, your team will reflect. Teams take on the personality of the coach in the aggressiveness, confidence, and sportsmanship that will represent you as a coach, the parents that sit in the stands, and the community you represent with your players. This area needs to be a focus of what you teach and how you will teach it to your players.

2. Develop your Mission Statement

This states your philosophy and should be presented to your parents and players. For example, the system I have adopted since I began coaching in 1987 includes:

“My coaching philosophy is directed towards being fun to coach, fun for players to play, and fun for people to watch. This philosophy centers around the emphasis of fundamentals necessary for players to be successful on the court, but ultimately, understand how to be successful of the court from the values I believe are necessary for players to appreciate the game of basketball and how it pertains to life”.

For over 20 years, this is the foundation in which I have coached each team. As year to year progresses, individual talent will emphasize defensive and offensive sets and the system you put in place that fits your personality and the talent on your team.

3. Develop individual practice plans that will emphasize individual and team fundamentals.

The single most important part of a good learning environment is what you do during the time you are coaching your players. I am a firm believer that the more organized and detailed you are about your practice planning, the less time you will need in actual practice time with your players. Coaches that are not organized and do not properly prepare their practices ultimately teach very little, and end up spending more time in the gym with endless hours of supervision, and very little coaching. I hear coaches use the statement, “We simply don’t have enough practice time each week for our kids to understand the system I am coaching”. When this happens, it’s the coach’s responsibility to simplify practice to maximize the learning environment and create excitement for the players that when they aren’t in practice, they are working on their individual skills.

4. Make a list of specific fundamentals you will coach during the year.

This checklist allows you to develop and evaluate practices. If you follow this plan, and realize during the season you do not rebound well, or do not defend the post effectively, you can go back to your practice plan checklist and see if you spent time on these areas during the series of your practices. Too many times when a player is not performing well, or a team is not competitive, the blame is put on the talent of the player(s), but in many situations at the youth level, this can be corrected with organizational skills in practices.

The overview presented below outlines an example of a 'system' in which I would present to a group of players (either boys or girls) from the elementary to college level.

Practice pointers to remember:

1. Develop your system. Keep information in a 3-ring binder as a reference and available for parents.
2. List your fundamentals on a detailed practice checklist. Keep your practices organized in the 3-ring binder and available to hand out to players and parents for each practice.
3. Determine your practice length based on the level of your players. Based on school activities, family commitments, cognitive development of players, and attention span, teams below the 7th grade level should have approximately 1 hour to 75 minutes of practice time per session. This maximizes attention to detail and performance. 7-8th grade players should have 90 minutes to 105 minutes of practice time per session as the maximum.
4. Practices should be positive and challenging. Players want to be challenged, and disciplined in a positive manner that rewards them for working hard. I do not believe in negative reinforcement to discourage taking chances or risks in playing. Players need to be held accountable and those coaches that can do this in a positive and challenging environment will produce players willing to 'run through a brick wall for them'.
5. The more competitive your drills and practice, the more the players will relate to the actual game environment. Structure your practices with 'consequences' and 'awards' for those that perform well and give the effort. Monitor all shooting drills with competition. Examples include missed layups, pair-up drills that reward success, etc.
6. Idle players create wasted practice time. Create your practices where no more than 1-2 players are ever standing and not competing during each drill.
7. Use parents and family members to help with practice. Passing, catching, mock-defensive player, and supervision makes players accountable and maximizes the learning environment.

8. Keep your individual fundamental drills to a maximum of 7-10 minutes per session. If you want to work on 20 minutes of rebounding per practice, structure this in two sessions of no more than 10 minutes per session.
9. Team drills should be kept to a maximum of 10-15 minutes per session. If your practice calls for a focus on scrimmaging for 30 minutes, split the session up in two, 15-minute sessions. The focus is on detail and effort, and allowing players to continually compete without a high intensity creates complacency and less than perfect execution.
10. When scrimmaging, always start in 'real game' situations. Start your scrimmages with baseline out of bounds, sideline out of bounds, free throw situations, etc. Do not start out scrimmages with a team 'taking the ball out of bounds' at the top of the key. I have yet to see a game in which a dead ball is called, and the official hands the ball to one team at half court to start play, yet, I attend practices for youth and even high school teams and see this all the time.
11. When running individual and team drills, always CONVERT to the other end. Most games are won and lost between the free throw lines, and the ability of teams being able to convert from offense to defense and defense to offense, yet, the majority of practices do not emphasize this concept.
12. Communication. During every individual and team drill, make a strong effort to demand communication from your players. Passing and catching, help side defense, and calling their positions on the floor are a few examples you can emphasize from drill to drill. Those players that communicate on the court should be rewarded with opportunities.

The following checklist below is an example based on my system and what I personally have developed to implement and reinforce my system to players during each practice and throughout the year. During each practice, I will cover each of these concepts during individual and team practice drills. After 20 years of coaching youth and college basketball, I do not schedule practices more than 90 minutes per session.

Practice Plan Checklist

Practice Date: _____ Practice Location: _____

Practice #: _____

***X in area covered during practice session.**

Offensive Transition

- ___ Rebounding/dribble outlets
- ___ Rebounding/pass outlets
- ___ Primary Break (numbers up)
- ___ Secondary Break (positioning)

Post Play

- ___ Low block post moves
- ___ High Post moves
- ___ Post feeds (different areas of floor)
- ___ Passing from post to perimeter

Individual Defense

- ___ Man to man (point)
- ___ Man to man (wing)
- ___ Man to man (high post)
- ___ Man to man (low post)
- ___ *front, $\frac{3}{4}$, behind defense
- ___ Rebounding/box out

Out Of Bounds/Miscellaneous

- ___ Jump ball
- ___ Baseline Out Of Bounds
- ___ Sideline Out Of Bounds
- ___ *start scrimmage situations
- ___ Last second shots
- ___ Zone Press Offense sets
- ___ Man Press Offense sets

Team Defensive Sets

- ___ 52 (1/2 court)
- ___ 53 (sideline out of bounds)
- ___ 54 (baseline dead ball)
- ___ 55 (full court)

Ball-Handling Fundamentals

- ___ Passing
- ___ Catching
- ___ Dribbling
- ___ Hand and arm strength (ball slaps)

Screening/Cutting

- ___ Down screens (wing to baseline)
- ___ Cross screens (across post area)
- ___ Back screens (post to perimeter)
- ___ Ball Screens
- ___ *curl, straight, and back cuts

Team Defense Fundamentals

- ___ *Teach in 4 on 4 shell drill
- ___ Pass for position (ball, you, man)
- ___ Dribble penetration (help defense)
- ___ Weak side exchange (vs. screens)
- ___ Cover down in post
- ___ Help and recover (rotation)

Free Throw Situations

- ___ Defensive sets
- ___ *box out/transition
- ___ Offensive sets
- ___ *stunts

Offensive Sets (1/2 court)

- ___ Single entry
- ___ Double entry
- ___ UCLA entry
- ___ Bulldog entry
- ___ Mustang entry
- ___ 32 zone offense set
- ___ 41 zone offense set

Example of Practice Plan

Practice Date: November 12, 2008

Practice Location: Windsor Middle School

Practice #: 1st practice of season

TIME	ACTIVITY
6:50-7:00 pm	Pre-practice routine <ul style="list-style-type: none">*players pair up shooting drills*stationary jumpers*one dribble jumpers (left/right)*two dribble jumpers (left/right)
7:00-7:05	Power Rebounding team drill <ul style="list-style-type: none">*rebounding/outlet/verbal calls/communication
7:05-7:10	Stretching/team announcements
7:10-7:15	Introduction of team defense concepts for season (52-55) <ul style="list-style-type: none">*whole method to give players visualization of what we will be working on during the season.
7:15-7:22	1 on 1 Player Defense (convert to other end) <ul style="list-style-type: none">point/wing/corner defense (positioning body and feet)*verbal calls (ball, ball, ball, drive, drive, drive, dead, dead, dead)
7:22-7:25	Carolina Free Throws (1/1 with conditioning)
7:25-7:35	4 on 4 Shell Defense (with post coverdown and transition) <ul style="list-style-type: none">Pass for position (helpside, ballside concepts)One dribble between twoCoverdown, transition into 55 defense
7:35-7:40	Review 52 defense (putting it together) <ul style="list-style-type: none">Point of pickup/deny wings, post defenseBallside, helpsideBox out, outlet, conversion
7:40-7:50	4 on 4 Shell Defense <ul style="list-style-type: none">Pass for positionOne Dribble between twoWeakside exchangesBall screensCoverdown,boxout, outlet and transition

7:50-8:00	Post Feeds/Moves *point/wing feeds *introduction/review of drop step (left and right) *introduction/review of square up moves (left and right)
8:00-8:03	Water Break/Free Throws
8:03-8:10	Introduction of Motion Offense 5 on 0 ½ court introduction (4 out/1 in set)
8:10-8:20	3 on 2, 2 on 1 primary break
8:20-8:30	Conditioning (power conditioning ½ court)

***SEE PRACTICE PLAN SKILLS CHECKLIST ON NEXT PAGE.**

***X indicates areas that were covered in this practice plan.**

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