

What to look for in a basketball tryout

As the spring and summer basketball season approaches, teams will be having tryouts to determine their rosters. For some, tryouts are old news as they have been through them for years, and for others, it is the first time a child is old enough to get involved and participate in a tryout. This information will provide some insight on what to expect and how to evaluate if the tryout your son or daughter is participating in is a fair tryout, and beneficial for their development.

Here are some important questions to consider and ask if your son or daughter is planning on attending a tryout:

The where and when? Is the tryout published for anyone that wishes to attend? The schedule, cost, season, coaches, and entire overview of the program? Many times I have discussions with parents that tell me after their child plays for a program that it isn't "what they thought it was going to be", and it leads back to not getting all the information about the season in advance before you choose to tryout or accept an invite to play on the team.

What to bring? Each tryout is different. Typically you will not need a basketball, but depending on the length of the tryout, water, towel, shoes, and possibly a quick snack during a break is a good consideration.

Are parents and spectators allowed to watch the tryouts, or is it closed to only the players and coaches? Tryouts open to the public are generally more open and honest about their process and can validate their decisions. Parents should attend with the expectations of having NO contact with their child during the tryout. Coaching your son or daughter during the tryout is frowned upon and honestly, hurts your child's performance more than help. Let the tryout take its course and use it as a learning experience that will only help your child in the long run.

How to prepare? Typically, fundamentals are the key in doing well in tryouts. Players that are confident with the basic fundamentals, even if they don't perform well in the scrimmage situations will have a good chance of making a team. A quality tryout focuses on the fundamentals and selects players that have the basic fundamentals knowing that with their coaching, they can develop the team skills and enhance the player's abilities. When preparing for a tryout, concentrate on the basic fundamentals.

Has the organization identified the tryout process, how many players will be selected, and what will be covered during the tryout? A good, fair, and organized tryout outlines the process, who is the tryout director, and who the evaluators will be during the tryout. Big names on the ticket for tryout directors or coaches aren't necessarily the most important. What matters is how the coach can relate to the age division trying out, and do they understand the laws of learning and building positive self confidence for the players during the time they are coaching your child.

Is the tryout fair and open to everyone, or are members of the team already pre-determined? One of the easiest ways to determine if the tryout process is open and fair is finding out who the head coach of the team is going to be? If a parent of a player is selecting the players, more than likely, some of the

players are pre-determined causing the number of available spots for the team being reduced. If a parent is coaching the team, that parent should NOT be involved in the selection process. Parents coaching are a GOOD thing, but with the tryout process, someone other than that person should be selecting the team to ensure fairness and an objective selection process.

Who is the tryout director and who are the evaluators? These should be identified prior to the tryouts.

Who is the coach of the team? Is it going to be a parent of a player, or a 3rd party not related to anyone on the team? The philosophy of the coach is more important than who is coaching. With youth teams, a coach that is organized understands the process of working with the laws of learning that is different for each player, and creates a positive experience that motivates players to want to learn more is the ultimate environment for any player to excel.

What should a tryout look like? Tryouts should have a balance of individual fundamental evaluations, defensive skills, offensive skills and overall team play concepts. A well organized tryout starts with an introduction, simple warm up, and ultimately, is choreographed in a manner that keeps players active, doesn't allow for large number of players standing around and watching while a few are playing, and does exactly what it is intended in evaluating a players overall ability. Intangible factors such as hustle play, aggressiveness, ability to listen and follow directions, willingness to help others and be a leader, and how players interact. Too many times, evaluations are done strictly on talent, and this ends up having a team of talented players with the inability to listen and learn, and play together. Also, pay attention on whether players are identified with a specific position in mind and labeled into one area of play. A well organized tryout allows for all players to play inside, outside, and challenge themselves outside of their traditional comfort zones of where they normally have played.

Will there be a cut policy or will every player that shows up be placed on a team? Most tryouts will have a cut policy. I encourage programs to have a no-cut policy to ensure that any player in the 4-8th grade levels is provided an opportunity to play. It's too early to determine who is 'good' and who will 'excel'. Children grow, mature, learn, and the last thing parents want is to put their children in an environment where they are labeled at an early age and turned off by the thought of playing basketball because they were cut. It is understood that coaches are limited and at times, and only a few spots may be available for a team. Go to several tryouts and have options.

Will there be a written evaluation for each player? A good tryout provides feedback for the players. Whether they make the team or not, they should have either a verbal presentation of feedback or written to help the player move forward. Nothing is worse than a child riding home from a tryout feeling rejected, not good enough or deflated. It's important with feedback to provide the child with something that allows them to be challenged and encouraged to try again.

If not selected, how will the player be informed, and will he/she be provided feedback as to the specifics as to why he/she doesn't make the team? Will the tryouts be determined on that date, posted outside of the building, letters, and phone calls?

Should I tryout for several teams? Absolutely! Attending tryouts is like having multiple interviews for a job. Players gain experience, learn, and improve over time, and just because they don't make one tryout doesn't mean they won't make the next one. Having options is a good thing.

Is the tryout challenging and fun? Tryouts should be designed to evaluate the current age level and abilities of players. A 5th grade tryout is significantly different in the format of that of a 10th grade tryout, and it also differs in gender. Throughout it all, the tryout should be appropriately challenging to the physical size and ability of the players, and ultimately a fun place to play. The ultimate goal is to have a player riding home and saying to his family, "that was a lot of fun!" No matter the outcome of the player, if this is the focus of the tryout director, the event will be a success.

What if I make a team? Take your time to decide. The first reaction is to be extremely excited about the opportunity and jump on board immediately that moment. Good advice center on taking a day to think about the process of the season, games, tournaments, and does it fit within your budget and time commitment. If a director or program pressures you into making a decision that day, be leery of the focus of what the program is honestly about (money or development). It is also a good idea of determining if you want to tryout for another team. Let the director know a specific timeline of your making a decision and work with them in making the right decision that is best for your child.

OVERALL, tryouts are a great learning environment for players. Just as in the classroom, players are going to be evaluated on their ability and more times than not, the number of good coaches available to coach the team will limit whether all players are placed on a team. As you prepare for tryouts, keep the focus on the experience, and make sure your child is going into the situation as a fun experience, and no matter the outcome, you are proud of their taking a chance.

Best of luck!

Respectfully,

Michael Peterson
Director
Power To Play Sports