

Sandwich Youth Basketball

Coaches Handbook

P.O. Box 775, Forestdale, MA 02644

General Information for ALL Grades

Coaches must remain in front of and within the length of their bench.

Coaches are responsible for their players after practice and games to insure the players are picked up and will be taken safely home. If a team has more than one on the bench; only one coach may stand at a time, the second coach must sit.

Canceled games due to inclement weather

If the community school programs are cancelled for any reason then games will also be cancelled. Should any scheduled game be canceled due to inclement weather, the decision to cancel the game will be made by the President of the Board. Announcements will be made on radio stations WQRC 99.9 and WCIB 101.9. It is the Board's intent to play all games as scheduled. Canceled games in the early AM will not necessarily cancel all games scheduled for that day. Canceled games WILL NOT BE MADE UP unless at the end of the season, that game will have a decided effect in establishing playoff situations in the 5, 6, 7, and 8 grade levels only. Coaches of the canceled games will be notified by telephone by their commissioners. Coaches are then responsible to call their teams. If the commissioner does not call, the games will be played as scheduled.

Canceled Practices

If school or community school programs are canceled for inclement weather, practice times for that day are also canceled. Practices are permitted on early dismissal days, and vacation days, but not on Holidays.

Should any situation be encountered during the regular season that requires intervention please contact the commissioner for your age group to resolve the situation. Should the commissioner not be able to resolve the problem, he/she will contact the President of the Board who will attempt to resolve the situation or will call a Board meeting to do so.

Team Practices

The following is a guideline for conducting practices. Available gym time is limited, so it is important that practice time be utilized as efficiently as possible. It should be stressed to the players that they should practice their skills on their own if they want to improve.

The practice times are usually set up so the same sex and grade levels practice together to enable controlled scrimmages to be run. Communicate with the other coach that will be using the gym at the same time to agree on a specific time to run the scrimmage.

The first practice should include a parental meeting. At this very brief meeting, the Head coach should provide handouts of the schedule (both games and practices) and player rosters with phone numbers. The coach should also explain his/her basketball philosophy to the parents and allow the parents to ask any questions or submit input. The coach should also ask the parents if any of the players have any medical situation that the coach should know about.

Planning a Practice

Due to the number of players in the program and the limited gym space, all 4-8th grade teams are allotted one (1) hour of gym time per week. This hour should be used constructively and efficiently. If possible, utilize all the baskets on the half of the court the team is using.

Have a practice plan each week, below is a typical practice plan. Fill in the blanks...

1. Warm up w/ lay up or a couple of laps around the gym.
2. Stretching the muscles. Start with the largest muscles (back, thighs) and work through to the smallest muscles (arms, hands). Follow with another warm up drill.
3. Dribbling and shooting drills.
4. Offensive techniques. Depending upon the grade level, this time could possibly be a basic instruction of holding the ball for proper release during shooting, or teaching the pick and roll.
5. Defense techniques. Teach the basics of man-to-man defense or the fine points of a full court press.
6. Scrimmage for last 10 – 15 minutes with other team. Let the kids have some fun and the parents get to watch a little as they come to pick them up.

Be on time and ready to commence your practice when your scheduled practice time is to begin.

Leave the floor promptly after your allotted time has completed, if you have to meet with your player s before they leave do it in the hall. Do not overlap your practice into the time for the next teams practice.

Many excellent Books on Coaching Basketball are available, here is a sample

- Youth Basketball, A Guide for Coaches & Parents

By: John P. McCarthy Jr.

- Basketball Skills & Drills

By: Jerry V. Krause/Don Meyer/Jerry Meyer

- Basketball Coaches Bible

By: Sidney Goldstein, Dale Brown

- Basketball Basics

By Howard Markus

- Youth Basketball Drills

By Burrell Payne & Patrick Payne

Many web sites also cater to Basketball Coaches. There is a great deal of helpful information available.

Take a look at these - www.bbhighway.com , www.powerbasketball.com

COACHES MANUAL

This manual will help new youth basketball coaches begin to understand their roll as coach and mentor to the players on their team. Please take the time to read these pages and I strongly encourage you to seek additional sources of information on coaching youth basketball to insure that you will be the best coach possible.

THE BASICS:

Knowledge of the basics in any sport can never be under emphasized. Every young athlete should learn the basic principles and techniques about the sport they are playing early on in their experience of playing that sport.

Before the player begins to excel at his or her sport, while the sport is new and they are unsure of themselves they should be taught the basic skills that will stay with them throughout their athletic career. The fine points of shooting a basketball, good defensive positioning, a proper chest pass. All these things must be learned early on or they may never "really" be learned at all.

1. RUNNING A PRACTICE

Perhaps the most common dilemma for new coaches in any sport is "How do I start?" and "How do I run a practice?" The short answer is to have players pass, defend, dribble and shoot basketballs until their arms fall off. The long answer follows.

IDENTIFY YOUR GOALS

Five Key Goals for Practices

1. Get the players in shape.
2. Understand each player's potential
3. Work on individual skills and position skills
4. Work on making them a team with sharp execution of plays and defenses
5. Motivate, Communicate, Lead

Note: Coaches of grades 3 and 4 should not focus on offensive plays. Encourage good ball movement and basketball skills during games. Let them have some fun!

FIRST GOAL; GET THE PLAYERS IN SHAPE

Conditioning is more important in basketball than any other major sport. Frankly, it doesn't take much to get grac school or high school kids into shape; and there is just no excuse when they aren't.

Do: Warm Up

Make sure players warm up before practice. Early in the season the large muscles high on the inner thigh and groin area and the shins are vulnerable. Ankles and knees are cold if the kids just came in from outside. Tell your players that muscles are like bubble-gum. Unless they stretch slowly, they will tear. A half dozen laps around the gym at a slow pace should break a sweat and warm up major leg muscles. Tell them to run backward and shuffle step part of the time. Lay-up lines do the same.

Do: Start on Time!

You only have one hour per week to work with your team, take advantage of every minute.

DO: End on Time!

Leave the floor immediately when your hour is over.

Do: Monitor Your Players

Be aware of the progress of your players and communicate with them and if necessary their parents if you have concerns about the health or mind set of a player.

Don't: Do Wind Sprints, Until the End of Practice

Wind sprints require the loosest muscles, so they should normally be done at the end of practice.

The *suicide drill* is a great sprint drill for ending practice. The kids start at an end line, sprint to the top of the key touch the floor, and sprint back and touch the floor. Then they sprint to half-court in the same manner. They finish up with the down court key and finally a full court sprint. The whole exercise involves eight sprints. Time them!

Tell the players to teach out in a long stride. Do some backward and some sideways.

Finish practice with a few half-court races. Wind sprints are essential for endurance and leg strength. If they are waiting for their parents, remind them that foul shots are hardest to shoot when very tired, and the best time to get a few in is after sprints.

SECOND GOAL; UNDERSTAND EACH PLAYER'S POTENTIAL

You need to figure out what each player can do, so he can concentrate on developing the specific skills needed in his position.

Generally bigger kids play underneath, and smaller kids are guards, but not necessarily. Some big kids have remarkable ball handling and passing skills, and these should be developed. Some average-sized kids have great leaping ability and have a knack at getting into position for rebounds. So, keep an open mind, and figure out what players you need to move around a bit. I've seen many coaches decide too quickly who plays where and then never change it. While it's important to get things set early in order to concentrate on the special skills required for each position, you should allow every player a chance to play multiple positions on the floor.

Keep Track of Players' Strengths: Run sprints to see who your fastest players are. Who can accelerate the best, that is, has the best short-distance time? Who are the most agile? Who are the risk-takers, the fiercest defenders: the strongest players. Who has the best hands. Who wants the ball the most? Who are the natural leaders? Who has a three-point shot, a jumper, a great foul shot percentage? Who can dribble, pass, follow play patterns to the letter?

THIRD GOAL: WORK ON INDIVIDUAL SKILLS

Each week introduce a new skill and run drills that put that skill into practice. Example; setting a pick, boxing out, rebounding, left hand lay ups.

FOURTH GOAL: TEAMWORK

Organize 2 on 2 and 3 on 3 games during your practices. Direct the players to run screen roll plays and finding the open player on offense, and work switching on defense. Scrimmages are fun for the kids, and even 10 minutes at the end of practice is a good idea. However, in the first weeks of preseason they have much to learn, and there will be little time for anything extended.

FIFTH GOAL: MOTIVATE, COMMUNICATE, LEAD

Many coaches seem to spend a lot of time hollering, trying to motivate players, and to get them to increase their concentration. Frankly, whereas energy is sometimes great and you have to yell to be heard, the screamer routine is often quite overdone. Furthermore, there is a line that shouldn't be crossed, and that is humiliating a player.

The idea is to be firm, to let players know that they can do better if they focus a bit more.

Ask yourself what your ultimate goal is. To help a young boy or girl learn how to face challenges, then try the positive reinforcement methods. Coach a kid according to *his* needs—some need caring, some need a gentle boot in the can, some need patience.

Most importantly, reward good effort. Praise good hustle. Yell out, "That's basketball!" It can get infectious. You are the leader of the team, the most significant person out there. What do you want their memory of you to be?

THE PRACTICE PLAN

Each practice should follow a written practice plan. It just takes a few minutes to think through what you want to accomplish, and it does wonders for efficient use of time. A practice plan follows a general routine. It varies somewhat in the proportion of time spent on areas as the season moves along, and the actual drills used (mix them up for variety).

During the first weeks in the season, your plan should focus on (1) conditioning, (2) individual skills development, (3) evaluating your players and (4) "homework" time spent looking at play patterns. Then the plan's focus shifts to team dynamics and specialty plays.

2. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF COACHING

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE YOUR PLAYERS

If your players—or your son or daughter—are very young (less than nine), then it will be a few years before the more technical parts of the game will be understood well enough to routinely occur on the court. But all of it, including the more complicated concepts such as continuous patterns, pick and roll, fast break—all of it, should be taught, or at least covered, at all ages. Don't underestimate your players. Some of them will grasp these concepts. The basics, especially dribbling, passing and shooting, should be emphasized right away before bad habits form. However, a lot of the refinements such as *defending the screen, multiple fakes and switching* take time and maturity.

It's your job to get them started. Someone has to start so the next year's coach can build on it. Maybe if parents and coaches set the stage in the very early years, refinements could happen in grade school. But if your players are green, don't worry about it, concentrate on the basics, cover the advanced stuff, but don't expect too much to soon.

IT TAKES TIME AND PATIENCE

Believe me when I say there is no magic age. Look at kids mastering moves in gymnastics, soccer and other sports at seven and eight years old. It's not that younger kids can't learn. They just need someone who understands refined concepts and has the time and ability to teach them.

It largely depends on how much time you have to practice, and unfortunately that's the biggest problem. We all have many obligations, and youth sports usually can't be practiced every day. Do what you can! Just start somewhere, and the kids will absorb as much as you have the time and patience to teach them.

Some skills will take a few sessions, some require much more, some will take years, but it will happen. Like learning how to whistle, suddenly one day it's there, and you sense it was always really simple to do.

THE COACH-PLAYER RELATIONSHIP

The relationship between a coach and a player is a powerful one. You are not only a father (or mother) figure but you are the final authority in what is, in his or her mind, the most important thing in life.

Through his athletic experiences, a kid finds out things about himself—good and bad—and he will always associate those things with you. Coaching is an awesome responsibility. You may want to ignore this larger picture, but sticking your head in the sand does not change what's really going on. This manual provides many tools you can use to help you make the experience a good one, whether you win or lose as a team, but in the final analysis it comes down to whether you really give a darn enough to accept the larger role of being both a coach and a friend. Most of your players will never make cuts at the high school level, a few may play in college, but you will probably never coach a future pro basketball player. However, every one of your players will become an adult someday with the responsibility of a job and probably a family as well. The whole idea of youth sports is to provide valuable life lessons. It is doubtful that they will remember much about this season twenty years from now, certainly not the scores of various games. But I guarantee you one thing. They will remember you for the rest of their lives. The memory of my coaches is etched clearly in my mind. I remember them vividly, for good or for bad. You may not remember all of the kids you coached, particularly if you do it for a number of years, but every one of them will remember you. How do you want to be remembered.

ON WINNING

Feelings on the importance of winning run strong. As with religion and politics, everyone thinks they are right. Vince Lombardi, the legendary coach of the Packers football team, once said, "Winning isn't everything—it's the only thing." There are still coaches who will tell you that, if you are going to keep score, you should try to win. Let's face it, if you tell kids winning is no big deal, they may blankly nod, but they won't buy it. They *know* about winning. They know the guys on the other team will gloat and taunt them back at school. They know about trophies and news articles. They hear the empty silence after a loss, the lectures from the coach: They feel the pressure.

Well, the truth of it is somewhere in between. Kids talk about winning, but I believe that, down deep, they care a much or even more about how well they are doing personally. Many of you will remember in your playing days, a game where the team won but you didn't contribute. Was that satisfactory? Or how about a game where the team lost, but you had a super day? How did you feel? Sure you wanted to win. Sure it's a team sport. But the personal satisfaction went a long way toward easing the pain.

All right, winning is important in the pro's. Maybe it becomes important even for some kids in high school, since scholarship money rarely looks at anybody on a team with a 3 to 26 record. But in youth basketball, it's just not as important. Parents and coaches may think it is, but the kids often forget the game and certainly the score as soon as they get home.

What they *will* remember however is how they feel about themselves, and how you reacted. Practical advice? I tell my kids something they can believe, that winning is never important in youth basketball, but that it is always fun to win. That's the truth. They can relate to it. I tell them what's important is how they handle victory or defeat; that it's important to try to be as good as they can be, to help each other and to try to do their best. We try to win, but all we can really control is how hard we try.

BALANCE YOUR NEEDS

At the heart of how good a coach you will be is how well you balance your need to win with the need to develop healthy young people. This balance will affect your every action, your relationship with each player and the atmosphere on the court. It will characterize the memory of your coaching experience for many years to come. Striking that balance involves a continuing struggle between the passions fired up by competition and the caring you feel for your players as a responsible adult. A basketball game will stir up some powerful emotions. It's said that winning builds character, while losing reveals it. Competitive fire can quickly melt an otherwise cool, calm, collected attitude.

ON MOTIVATION

Coaches need to rely on more than speeches to motivate their team. Sure, some coaches have that charismatic quality and can motivate a team just by the sheer strength of their personality. Indiana coach Bobby Knight is perhaps the best example.

However, the rest of us "mere mortals" need to consider motivational techniques that can help us get the job done. The "secrets" of good motivation are easily found in the growing science of *sports psychology*. Once considered mere gobbledygook, the mental aspect of competition is now a cornerstone of athletic development at the highest levels of amateur and professional sports. Many teams, including the U.S. Olympic program, have employed full-time sports psychologists.

Some of the emerging motivational techniques that seem to work best include the following.

Attaboy!

There will never be a better tool than frequent positive reinforcement for young athletes. It is essential to liberally give out some *attaboys (or attagirls)* for good effort.

In *Kidsports: A Survival Guide for Parents* (Addison-Wesley, 1983), Dr Nathan J. Smith, a consultant for the American Board of Pediatrics, studied two groups of coaches. He found that "the single most important difference in our research between coaches to whom young athletes respond most favorably and those to whom they respond least favorably was the frequency with which coaches reinforce and reward desirable behavior."

A pat on the back, a smile, clapping, praise, a wink and a nod, as well as tangible rewards such as mention in the newspaper article, more playing time—all go a very long way toward motivating high performance. I would add to this concept that the rewards are even more effective when they emphasize outstanding effort as opposed to a great result. An athlete has complete control over the amount of effort he puts into his game. The result, however, is dependent on many things, many of which are beyond the individual's control. Even corrective action, pointing out mistakes, should be sandwiched somehow within some positive comments; e.g. "Good try, Jack. Next time get a better shot—you can do it!"

Don't Be A Coach Who Loses It

Coaches spend a lot of time hollering, trying to motivate players, trying to get them to increase their energy level and to develop that all-important *desire to perform*. However, we often see coaches lose it, and cross the line of tolerable motivation. The idea is to be firm, to let players know that they can do better if they reach deeper into their gut. I like to ask players if they gave it their best. "Was that your best effort? Is that all you have to give?"

Focus on the Effort

Let a player know what you think about his *effort*, not *himself*. Don't personalize it—the kid is a decent person. Focus on the effort during practice. A kid can relate to trying harder, but he can't relate positively to your telling him he stinks.

Explain the problem with fundamentals or forms so he *understands the concept*. Take the time he needs to get

the idea.

Most importantly, reward good effort openly and liberally. Praise a good steal. Recognize hustle. Yell out, "That's basketball!" It can get infectious.

Having one set of standards for everyone doesn't mean you shouldn't handle players differently. Some kids respond well when you correct them in front of their peers. Others are devastated when you get on them. Take these kids aside, sit down with them, and find out what's going on in their lives; see if you can learn what the problem is.

We Are Family!

I've read the autobiographies of many great coaches. One constant in all of their stories is their ability to relate to the different individuals on their team, to create a family-type environment. Each kid is different, and each one needs a personal approach. Most importantly, even the lowest substitute should be treated with equal respect to the best players.

I used to start each season with a team discussion on what it means to be on a team. One thing I would tell the players is that for the rest of the season they are all friends. They are all in a special relationship with each other. I tell them they should say hello in the school hallways, and help each other off the court, if needed. I never tolerated criticism of a teammate on the court, and would quickly bench any offender. Kids were expected to urge each other on, to quickly tell a teammate to put a mistake behind him. I promoted team dinners and outings, and moved to break up cliques.

Team building is a proven ticket to success. The concept is widely used in all walks of life, and is a staple of Japanese and American business organization. *It doesn't just happen because a bunch of kids are on a team.* It happens when coaches work at it. Team building is actually quite easy to get done; just put it in the practice plan talk to your assistant coaches about it, and opportunities to promote *teamness* will present themselves in abundance.

Set Realistic Goals

It may seem trite to say, but setting realistic goals is essential to proper motivation, for the team and for each individual. With specific goals, a kid has something clear and achievable to work on, something she can set her sights on. She is not responsible for the whole team, not for winning or losing. She is not overwhelmed and defeated by unrealistic expectations.

ON PARENTS

As you know, parents can be a great help in youth sports; however, *interfering parents* can be a major problem for coaches. This is especially true in basketball because parents are usually right on top of the team, so their complaining is more visible.

There is no problem with parents who, after the game, want to talk to the coach and find out whether there is some problem they need to be aware of. But often they are argumentative, and sometimes downright insulting. Of course, you don't need to take any gas from a pain in the neck. But before you get too defensive, think about what's going on.

Parents Feel for Their Kids

Most parents literally die a little bit when they see their child going through a bad time. Maybe she is not playing much, having self-doubts, and acting out at home or school because of it. Parents feel the pain along with their kids—it's tough for a kid, or anyone, to find out she's not good enough.

Offer Suggestions

Hear parents out! Give them some ideas to help understand what the problem is, and perhaps you can focus them on things they can do to help at home. Tell them you are "on" the kid because you think he can do better, and you are trying to arouse his potential. Maybe, in return, you can get some insight into what is troubling the child.

Maybe, just maybe, you are dead wrong; and you need to give the kid another look. Tell the parents you will do that. I've seen kids sit on the bench as a sub for half a season, suddenly come alive, and wind up as starters.

Be Understanding

Most of all, keep in mind that *she's their kid!* They may feel a bit threatened by your control over their child. As a parent, I have had uneasy feelings about coaches: It's quite natural. A little patience on your part can defuse some strong emotions. You can turn a potential feud into something that helps the child and, ultimately, the team.

Don't Tolerate Abuse

A major problem is the parent who abuses his child during a game. He scorns his son or daughter for missing a shot or bad defense. It's the worst thing in sports to see. You do not have to put up with this! Talk to the parent and ask him to keep quiet. If he doesn't, remove him from the gym. While I was coaching baseball, one parent

threatened me with removing his son as well. My response was merely that I hoped he wouldn't, but that not playing was probably better than what was going on and that it would not continue under my watch! That parent stayed home, the kid played.

3. BASKETBALL POSITIONS

Basketball terminology

Look at the "half-court" diagram below to define areas of the floor.

The "paint" is the area inside the lane lines from the baseline to the free-throw line. If your *offensive* player has a foot on, or inside these lines for 3 seconds or longer, he will be called for the 3-second violation. There is no restriction on the time *defensive* players can occupy the paint.

"Free throw line", ("charity stripe") is the line you must stand behind when shooting a free-throw.

"Low post" area is the area near the "block" on either side of the lane (or "paint" area), to about half way up the lane toward the free throw line.

"High post" is that area along the free throw line, and both "elbows".

The "point" is out front, and the "wings" on either side. The "short corner" is between the corner and the basket, about 12 feet out.

"Ball-side" refers to the side of the floor where the ball is. "Weak-side" is the opposite side away from the ball. Players cutting on the weak-side toward the hoop, are using the "back-door".

"10 second line", or half-court line, is the line down the center of the floor. It divides the "full-court" (entire playing area) into two "half-courts". Your "fore-court" is the half-court with your basket, and the "back-court" is the half-court with the opponent's basket. Once a team gets possession of the ball, it has 10 seconds to get the ball across the half-court line into its fore-court. Once across this line (all three points - the ball and both feet), they may not pass or dribble the ball back across this line, or step on the line (while having possession) or the "over and back" violation occurs. The offense may retrieve the ball without penalty if deflected across by a defensive player.

Numbering players, offensive terminology.

Years ago, numbers were not used. You usually had two "guards" who played the "perimeter" and brought the ball up the floor. The "center" usually played around the high-post area, and the two "forwards", started in the short corner to corner areas, extending out to the wings.

Now, most coaches use a numbering system, as the old definitions often do not apply any more, with players playing in multiple offensive formations. Using a numbering system makes it easier for coaches and players to understand plays, sets, and know their roles. Different numbering systems exist and coaches have their own

favorite ways of doing this.

The "point guard" is #1. The right "wing" is #2, and the left wing is #3. The right low post is #4, and the left low post is #5.

This is easy for young players to learn if you tell them that the even numbers (2 and 4) are on the right side, and the odd numbers (3 and 5) are on the left.

In this set, you have three guards, or "perimeter players", and two "post players", rather than the old definition of two guards, two forwards and a center.

"Pick and roll" -- a play where an offensive player sets a "screen" ("pick") on a team-mate's defender, thereby freeing up the team-mate, after which the screener moves, or "rolls" off the screen to the hoop, or an open area for the return pass (see Setting Screens).

"Give and go" -- a very basic play where after passing to a team-mate, the passer quickly cuts toward the basket, and receives the return pass back from his team-mate for the lay-up (see "Play 23").

"Reverse the ball" -- this means to quickly move the ball, by passing, to the opposite side of the fore-court, either by a series of quick passes, or by means of a "skip pass" (a pass directly across court, thereby "skipping" one or more offensive players in the succession around the perimeter).

"Post up" -- offensive move wherein a low post player positions himself, and "seals" his defender off so that he can receive the pass down low on the block, where he can use a "post move" for a score, or quickly pass the ball back outside to an open team-mate for a three-pointer (going "inside-out").

Generally in basketball the taller players play underneath the hoop or along the baseline, at the *center* or *forward* positions, and shorter players fill the *guard* positions, where speed is more important. There are usually one center, two forwards and two guards on the floor. Forwards are sometimes called *power forward* or *shooting forward* depending on whether they are generally called upon, the plays selected by the coach, to play close to the hoop (the former) or to shoot from the outside (the latter).

4. SHOOTING

Shooting Can Be Learned

The good news is that shooting can be learned. Sure, naturally talented kids will learn a lot faster and shoot with higher percentage, but *all* kids can learn to shoot.. It takes thousands of shots to significantly raise a shooter's percentage, but remember it really doesn't take that long to shoot a thousand shots!

ABOUT OUTSIDE SHOOTING

In practice, give your kids a chance to show what they have. And stress to them that an outside shot, in particular is not developed during team practice. A player must do that on his own time. It takes ten thousand shots to develop consistent outside shooting.

The Mechanics of Outside Shooting

The Triple Threat Stance

The triple threat stance is a multipurpose position from which the player can shoot, dribble or pass in any direction and fake. The weight is forward on the balls of the feet. The feet are balanced under the shoulders and pointed toward the basket. The knees and waist are bent, ready to move in any direction; head and shoulders are square and level; head and chin are up; the ball is up in front of the chest; elbows are out to protect it.

Fake Moves Open Up Shots

A fake move is used by a closely defended shooter to throw the defender off balance and open up an unobstructed shot. Usually, a faked dribble or jab step will get a young defender to move to the side or to back up a bit. As soon as the shooter gets the ball, she jabs strongly and directly toward the defender. When the defender reacts and takes a step back, the shooter takes the shot.

Another great fake move is to raise the ball high very quickly as if to shoot. This causes the defender to come forward and allows the ball handler to dribble past him. A combination of jab steps and fake shots often creates a good scoring opportunity and should be automatic whenever a player, especially a guard, gets the ball.

GOOD FORM = GOOD SHOOTING

The Gooseneck Wrist Flick

The *gooseneck wrist flick* is as important to shooting as pointing the elbow at the hoop is. Most kids develop all kinds of crazy hand techniques, such as closing the fingers into a fist as they shoot, or coming down with the middle finger or the pinkie finger. The natural and correct form is to flick the ball out of the cradle by turning the palm down and out. The little finger stays in the same position, pointing upward, before and after the shot. The thumb and index finger however move forward, down and out. The index finger does most of the work of shooting.

When the shooting hand turns down and out, this puts a reverse 30 degree (from the vertical) spin on the ball. That's how you know it has been done properly. The final position of the shooting hand is called a gooseneck. The left hand does not add any power on a right-handed shot. It passively cradles the ball and then merely falls away during the shot. The shooting hand does not snap back, but either gently follows through the shot in a downward arc, or is held relatively stationary for a moment. Either style is OK.

If your player does not properly flick the ball from the cradle, this can be remedied with some drills, particularly if you catch it early enough. Perhaps the best way for the child to change form is to shoot repeatedly against a high wall, and go through a few hundred wrist flicks, concentrating only on the form of the hand movement. A few such practice sessions will help make any correction needed. Good form is essential to shooting.

Aim at the Front of the Rim

Concentration is essential to good shooting, and the goal is to reduce any unnecessary movement, to be balanced and still. A shooter should aim to set the ball on or just beyond the front of the hoop. He should do this by focusing on the point of the hoop closest to him and setting the ball on top of that spot. This reduces the focus to a single point, instead of the whole space of the hoop. The shooter tries to loft the ball and set it down just on or past the point of the hoop closest to him.

Arcing the Ball Is Optimal

An arced ball has the best chance of scoring because it drops through the largest possible hoop opening. A lot of players shoot bricks, that is to say, balls that travel directly at the basket. These linear shots utilize a smaller window through the hoop than arced shots and therefore have less chance of scoring. A very high arc, however, unnecessary, and lowers the percentage. For a comfortable arc, a good rule of thumb is to peak the arc at about 4 to 4 feet higher than the basket on a 15-foot shot. In close, a 1- to 2-foot arc is OK.

Follow the Shot

I think the toughest habit for a kid to break is that of standing immobile and watching the ball as it moves to the basket. A small but significant percentage of rebounds bounce back toward the shooter, and a player who moves to follow the shot to the basket will often get a rebound and a second chance. In shooting practice, tell the team to always take at least one or two steps forward following the shot, just to develop the habit.

INSIDE SHOOTING—THE MECHANICS AND DYNAMICS

Basketball underneath the hoop is the tall person's turf. The highest percentage shooting, 70% or better, comes inside, underneath the hoop, or within 6 feet or so. It's rare for a player to be successful underneath without at least average or above average height. Short quick players can sometimes zip past the big men and get a shot off if they are agile. Such players can visit, but not live, underneath. Big players get rebounds, block shots and score points under the hoop. If a player is short, it's not a problem, but he must learn to dribble, pass and shoot outside. Guide him in the direction appropriate to his size.

The Lay-Up

A lay-up is still the most exciting shot in basketball, and it's also one of the simplest. Kids dream of Michael Jordan dribbling toward the basket, leaping and flying through the air, and spinning into a reverse slam dunk. Young kids won't dunk for a while, but a drive and lay-up are certainly possible and should be emphasized and perfected above all other forms of shooting.

The reason is simple. Outside shooting is tough. A kid has to shoot a few thousand shots before she can

consistently hit the hoop. No problem, it just takes time. However, lay-ups can be learned more quickly. Although kids usually play pretty poorly on defense, an offensive player who can dribble a bit will be able to advance the ball close for an inside shot. It looks good, and it will get a cheer from the fans. It will help the team, and your player will take a big step forward in development. Most importantly, it's easy to do and comes quickly with a little practice.

For young beginners, the scores are low. The players generally can't shoot outside (or inside). A kid who can drive a few steps to the hoop and shoot a lay-up will have the best chance of scoring in youth basketball.

Get the Proper Footwork

Pump up the knee on the same side as the shooting hand and drive straight up with the opposite foot. Kids often push off the wrong foot, and it's important right away to get the proper footwork. If the lay-up is right-handed, then the right arm needs to stretch up, and the whole right side should lift with it. Raising the right knee high does this. The concept is to raise the whole right side on right-handed shots (vice versa for lefty lay-ups). It comes after a few practice sessions. Note this means that, coming off the dribble, the first free step for a righty lay-up is with the right foot.

At the beginning of that step, the player grabs the ball with both hands and prepares to shoot, finally driving off the left foot. Lifting the right knee also adds to the height of the jump. Finally, the player needs to remember to jump straight up. This not only adds to the height of the jump, but it also slows down the forward movement of the body so the ball hits the backboard a bit more softly.

Use the Backboard

Pick a spot and lay the ball up softly off the glass. Because the overwhelming majority of lay-ups are shot off the backboard, you should teach even your youngest players to use it for this shot. The hardest thing about shooting lay-ups is controlling the speed of the ball bouncing off the backboard. Most missed shots arise because the ball hits the backboard too hard as a result of the body's forward speed and momentum. Jumping straight up slows the ball a bit, but it still needs to be laid-up softly.

The ball sits in the right hand, palm turned partially inward toward the shooter. The shot can be done with the palm outward like a jump shot, but it's much tougher to control the ball speed. The hand must soften the ball's impact upon the backboard to adjust for the forward motion of the body. This is done by flipping the ball backward a bit to decrease its speed. As a player becomes experienced, spin may be applied to compensate for odd angles. The backboards are usually marked with a square, and the player lays the ball up against the lines of the square. Teach the team to find the right spot and hit it every time. With practice, a player will shoot automatically and no need to focus on the square.

Next, the body rotates or twists counterclockwise a bit to prepare for a controlled landing. This rotation should be coached, but don't confuse things too much in the early stages. Just tell your child to twist a bit in order to land in balance.

Practice the Lefty Shot

Be patient here since, for righties, developing a lefty lay-up is the toughest thing in basketball. Start slowly. Urge your players to try it a few times. It will feel very awkward, and will progress slowly. To execute a lefty shot, reverse the footwork. On the left side of the basket, a lefty shot is more effective since it places the body between the defender and the ball. That's why all your players should be comfortable doing it.

Short Jump Shots and Chippies

Short jump shots and chippies get blocked most often, because they are shot in close to the hoop where the big players roam and they don't have the advantage of body motion, which a lay-up provides.

The mechanics of short shots are similar to those of longer outside shots except that you need to be much more concerned about the defender. The shot needs to be carried out very quickly, with quick moves and quick release. Fakes are even more important in close to the hoop. The best fake is to raise the ball quickly as if to shoot, get the defender to jump, and then go up as she comes down. Sometimes, a few fake pumps with the ball are needed to get the defender to react.

Often, a short jump shot can effectively use the backboard. It's a bit tougher, but it provides a higher, off-line arc which is harder to defend. Ordinarily, any shot within 4 to 5 feet of the hoop and to the side should use the backboard. Jumpers in front of the hoop go directly to the rim. Remind your player to focus on the point of the rim closest to her and to arc the ball softly to that spot. A dish off to an open player can also be a very effective option.

Foul Shots

Foul shots certainly deserve special mention. It can be said that foul shooting wins or loses most close games, and this is so at all levels of play. At youth ages, good foul shooting is rare, but since scores are usually low, a foul shooter can win a game.

Shooting foul shots is much like shooting jump shots, except the feet don't leave the ground. The highest percentage shots, as said before, are one-handed flicks from a cradle. The ball is brought over the head, cradled and shot with one hand. The shooting hand ends up in a gooseneck, just as with jump shots. The head and shoulders are square to the hoop. The shooting elbow points at the hoop.

Much foul shooting comes from the legs. They must bend and extend into the shot. The body starts low and fully extends, up on the toes, and the player stays up on the toes while the ball is in flight. *The key is to stay extended into the shot.*

It's also important to point the front foot, usually the right foot for a righty shot, at the hoop. Don't let it turn in because that will retard full extension. The other foot can be back a comfortable distance. Remember, as with all shooting, shoot with the legs. It's also good to make sure the hands are dry, and shake any tenseness out of wrists and fingers.

Foul shots should be practiced, preferably a minimum of twenty-five, at the end of each practice session, while the player is tired. Shooting while tired simulates game conditions.

Form Drills

There are several form drills, which can be employed early in the season. Coaches should practice the triple-threat stance in conjunction with these drills.

Wall Drill

Players line up along a wall and practice jump shooting form. They jump as high as they can, cradle and gooseneck flick the ball with the wrist. They should start from a certain spot on the floor and ensure that they land at the same spot. They get the rebound, get set and shoot again.

Tapping Drill

Position two players under either side of the hoop. One throws the ball off the backboard or rim for the other to tap in. Then the second player throws it up for the first player to tap in. Switch sides after a while.

5. DRIBBLING

HOW TO DRIBBLE

Here are the seven key aspects of good dribbling.

Finger Control-The ball is dribbled with the fingers, particularly the thumb and the three middle fingers. Some kids initially use the palm of the hand. However, the palm has only a limited role in helping the fingers to receive and cradle the ball. The fingers do most of the work. You want to receive and cradle the ball. The fingers do most of the work. You want the ball out on the fingers and the upper palm near the fingers as much as possible. The upper palm and lower thumb area often receive the bounced ball, especially if the player is on the run, but then the fingertips take over. They direct the downward dribble as the ball rolls off the fingertips.

Receive, cradle and Pump

When little kids start dribbling for the first time, their natural impulse is to *strike* the ball downward when dribbling. The hand should not strike the ball, rather it reaches for, then softens and receives it well before the top of its bounce, cradles it for a split second, and then pumps it back to the floor. The hand actually withdraws as it meets the ball, so it catches the ball, controls it and then directs it down again. The idea is to maximize the amount of time the hand is in contact with the ball, thereby allowing for greater control. Often in dribbling the player needs to make sudden moves or change speeds. The hand needs to have sufficient contact and control so that these moves can be made. It helps the player be able to send the ball back out in the direction desired with appropriate velocity.

The point of contact between the hand and the ball varies, depending on the direction the player takes. Usually, the index and middle fingers are on top of the ball, with the fingertips at or just forward of the uppermost point of the ball's curve. However, if the player is running with the ball, the fingers make contact farther back from the top center so they can push the ball forward. If a left turn is needed, then the fingers will cradle the ball more from the right side. In the past, rules against cradling the ball from underneath, called carrying or palming, were stricter. Fouls for palming, in which the palm and fingers completely control direction, are rarely called any more in the pros, unless the violation is flagrant.

Develop Both Hands

If a player can dribble with only one hand, his ability to move will always be limited. Defenders usually lean to the left a bit to cut off the space to the dribbler's right. The ability to then switch to the left hand and drive to the left side opens a whole new dimension and substantially improves a player's offensive potential. You need to continually remind your players to use both hands. Don't nag, just encourage them to devote some time for the other hand. Use drills to get them started.

If a player is a righty, have him spend time using only the left hand. When you apply pressure to his right side, be sure he attempts the left-handed drive. It will be difficult, sloppy and awkward for him at first, so be supportive. Remind him that he will improve, praise the first sign of improvement. Remind him how hard it seemed to learn to whistle or ride a bike at first, and how easy it was once he got the hang of it.

Head Up, Eyes Front

A child initially dribbles with her head down, keeping the ball in her field of vision. As she improves and develops a feel for the ball and its rhythm, she will be able to direct her attention more to what's going on around her. To the extent that she keeps her head down, she will be unaware of opportunities around her: Who is open for a pass, what lane is available for advancing the ball, which way is the defender leaning, what opportunities are developing from the flow of play?

I wouldn't harp on this too much. The head will come up as the player becomes experienced enough to know where the ball is by feel instead of by sight. You need to talk about the concept and why it's helpful to be able to focus on the whole floor. There are practice techniques which can help, such as closing the eyes while dribbling in order to force more reliance on feeling the ball's motion. Patience is needed here since much practice is required before the feel of the ball is sufficiently developed. It is useful, however to quietly remind your players, every once in a while, to try and lift their attention, to be more broadly aware of what's going on around them.

Keep Everything Low

Keep the ball low in traffic, the body balanced and relaxed. A high bouncing dribble is easy to steal in traffic. Also the longer the ball is away from the hand, the fewer the opportunities to change direction or react quickly. During practice, and especially during drills, remind your players to keep the ball, the dribbling hand, the dribbling elbow and the center of gravity of the body low.

Practice keeping the dribble at knee height. Have them observe and feel the differences between a high and low dribble. In a low dribble, the temp and rhythm are much faster and the ball is more under control.

The body should always feel balanced and graceful, weight forward on the balls of the feet. Staying in touch with the rhythm of the ball and staying relaxed help greatly. The great players make it look effortless because they are balanced, relaxed, in touch with the ball and confident in their ability.

For speed dribbling, the ball bounces much higher. The hand pushes the ball out in front, just a bit to the side. High dribbles are for speed; low dribbles to maintain possession.

DRIBBLING DRILLS

Cone Drill-Set up a half dozen or more cones in a line about 4 to 6 feet apart and have players dribble, weaving through the cones. When a player gets to the end, she speed dribbles back. Then start over again. Use a stopwatch or a watch with a second hand to measure the best time and then have them run against the clock. Have players do a series, switching the ball from right- to left-handed dribbling.

Keep Away-Two players stay inside a 10-foot square. One dribbles. One tries to get the ball. The drill teaches how to use the body and to shield the ball.

King of the Hill-Several players dribble in a square area and try to tap each other's ball away, with one hand, while dribbling with the other. The last one "alive" wins.

Dribble Race-Divide players into two or three teams which form lines at one end of the court. The lead player in each line must dribble-race to the other end and return, handing the ball to the next in line who then repeats the sprint-dribble. Do the second race left-handed. Losers get 15 pushups.

6. PASSING:

Nothing is more important to team play than good, snappy passing. A child will play less if he tends to throw the ball away, so he must learn the importance of snappy pass work. A bad pass causes the receiver to lose momentum and usually results in a lost shooting opportunity or a turnover, that is, losing the ball to the opponent. A good pass can set up an easy shot. Kids often just want to go out and shoot, shoot, shoot. I have no problem with shooting, as long as it is put in perspective and other skills are also developed. Good dribbling and good passing lead to good shots. The great ball players—Bob Cousy, Magic Johnson, Larry Bird—were better known for their incredible passing ability than for shooting.

PASSING IN YOUTH BALL

Unfortunately, passing is the nemesis of youth basketball. It is a team skill, so it requires "two to tango." If either the passer or the receiver makes a mistake, the ball can easily be lost to the opposing team. At the very young ages, passing is quite bad and confusion reigns

PASSING TECHNIQUES

When it comes to passing, setting up a *good* pass is key. Good passing is less a technical skill and more the result of good individual or team dynamics. There are, however, some basic techniques for passing and receiving the ball.

Use Two Hands

A basketball is pretty big; it's tough to control with only one hand. The activity on the court is fast and furious and full of sudden movements. Nearly all short or mid-range passes are two-handed, and the main reason for this is to control the ball as it is passed. A one-handed pass can roll off the hand as it is thrown. Control it with two hands. A more important reason to use two hands is that passes must happen very quickly. The ball is usually already in front of the body, and there is no time to wind up for a one-handed pass. The ball is passed from the front of the torso, and the second hand is needed to give strength and power to the pass.

Obviously, a full-court pass needs the full power of an extended arm and must be thrown like a baseball. Otherwise, use both hands.

Use Proper Hand Position

Spread fingers and rotate up toward chest area. Holding the ball at its sides, spread the thumb and index finger to form an oval with each other. The other fingers are spread at a relaxed distance from each other, not too far. The hand position maximizes both control of the ball and power coming through the fingers.

When a ball is caught or taken up from the dribbling position the hands are on the side, fingers out and thumbs up and the ball is usually waist high. The passing motion begins by bringing the hands up and back to the chest. The fingers rotate upward and a bit back toward the upper chest as far as is comfortable. When the hands rotate, the elbows lift a bit to get more shoulder strength into the ball. The farther the hands rotate, the more power can be placed on the ball as the fingers snap or whip outward.

The ball is passed from in close to the chest for maximum power. The chest moves forward and down as the player steps toward the target.

Step Toward The Target

This action helps both accuracy and power, getting the body in motion with the pass. It must be a very quick step however, in order to signal the pass and alert the defense to try to steal. Add power and accuracy by moving toward the target as much as possible.

TYPES OF PASSES

The two-handed chest pass I've described is used in the great majority of situations. However, at times other passes may be needed.

Bounce Passes

These passes are good in close situations, when the traffic is heavy. The bounce pass helps to get the ball down under the defender's hands. One problem with the bounce pass is the floor slows the ball down. Also, this pass needs to be caught fairly low, which is not usually desirable. Use it only when needed to get the ball under and past a defender. Top spin helps speed the ball up after it bounces.

Overhead Pass

The two-hand overhead pass is commonly used to get a pass over the head of a defender. It is a very effective pass and is also a good pass fake. The pass is made with a quick inward flick of the wrists and a short step toward the receiver, and is used often after a rebound to the outlet. The player holds the ball high over her head, arms fully extended. Her body snaps forward at the waist, and her shoulders snap forward as well.

Baseball Pass

The baseball pass is a one-handed throw, like throwing a baseball. It's used primarily for very long passes, usually as part of a fast break or to break a press. At very young ages, it is not used often since it's rather hard to catch; and the rules often do not allow it.

RECEIVING PASSES

The art of passing is mainly in the pass itself. Receiving the pass is not complicated. However, many passes are not caught or are bobbled. These situations are preventable.

Move to the Ball

Unless the pass is part of a play, the receiver must reach for and, if possible, step to the ball. Defenders will look to steal the pass, so it's important to beat them to it. Many, many passes are stolen because the receiver was stationary, waiting for the ball. Teach your players to step to it, reach out their hands to receive it! Teach them to claim the ball!

Give a Target

It's much easier on the passer if the receiver puts up a hand, palms out, to the spot she wants the ball. For instance, if a defender is on the right side, she should put up a left hand as the target.

Hands Must Be Soft

A basketball is big and very bouncy, so it's rather difficult to catch. Many kids tense up when the ball approaches, and this increases the chance that the ball will bounce off their hands.

Soft hands is a term used in many sports, including baseball and football (in soccer, the term is soft feet.) Tell your player she must try to relax. Shake the hands, loosen them up. Make them less rigid and tense. Practice passing and receiving and discuss this concept. Tell her to notice her hands, to make them soft, and then to notice the difference.

Keep the Eyes on the Ball

This is the key to catching anything in any sport. The ball is pretty big, and easy to see, but that does not lessen the need to concentrate on it. Watch the ball from the moment it leaves the passer's hands until it's in your hands. Maintain concentration. It's OK to *divide* concentration, to begin to *sense* what to do with the ball, but never take the eyes from it. The transition from the catch to the next movement, whether it is dribble, pass or shot, requires control of the ball. Control begins with a solid reception.

7. OFFENSE:

As a coach or a parent, you must develop your players' feel for the game by discussing offensive concepts. To begin, select a set of play patterns for your team; although different coaches will employ different plays, the basic offensive concepts are the same everywhere. Most kids don't know anything but pass and shoot, and an early understanding of concepts will go a long way in getting a kid some extra playing time and that oh-so-necessary experience.

Basketball is somewhere between football and soccer in play-making. Football has very specific plays that all players follow, while soccer has fewer plays, and the game flows more according to a set of concepts and the opportunities of the moment. Basketball more equally blends both plays and concepts. For instance, *one concept* is that players can free up a teammate to shoot by screening away his defender. The *play* is the specific plan designed to set up that screen. There are obviously several different ways to do it, and you could use several different players for the screen, but the concept is always the same. Kids need to understand concepts, and if they do they can often tailor their own plays to the immediate situation. Also, understanding concepts helps them understand what you as their coach are trying to do.

OFFENSIVE CONCEPTS

The objective of offense is to move your players around the court in such a way that one of them is able to take a high percentage shot. If you have a dominant big player, get the ball to her under the basket. If you have a great outside shooter, run plays that will free her from her defender for a shot. If you have a great passer, use that ability with plays appropriately suited for quick passes. You must assess your team's strengths and employ plays that maximize those strengths. If you know your strengths and also understand how the following basic offensive concepts can utilize them, you can employ the plays that will give your team its best chance to win.

Take the High Percentage Shot

You've got to put the ball in the hoop! The bottom line of basketball is the team with the most points wins! Although we could debate about how important it is to win, I would certainly argue that sportsmanship must balance with competitiveness as the goal of youth athletics.

There are many aspects of scoring. Offense grows out of defense, so scoring starts with a defensive rebound or a steal. It includes being able to control the ball through good passing while bringing it up the floor. But, in the final analysis, scoring comes from good shooting and good shooting comes from good shot selection.

This means that you need kids who can shoot, but more importantly, it means that you have to get them into a position for a *high percentage shot*, a shot as close to the hoop as possible and relatively free of defensive pressure. The way to get the open shot is a combination of speed, screening, faking, quickness and a lot of motion.

Each coach has his or her own system, a series of offensive plays within the context of an overall offensive strategy. The best strategy is usually to try to get the ball safely into the hands of the big guys underneath, or to pick off a defender so someone, usually one of the better shooters, has an open jump shot. The plays are designed to get all players moving in a pattern designed to break up, frustrate and confuse the defense. The ultimate goal is to free someone up for a high percentage shot.

Get It to the Post Man

The highest percentage shots are directly underneath, in the low post area. The bread-and-butter play of basketball is a pass to a big player underneath, posting up his defender or "flashing," cutting back and forth under the hoop from free throw lines. If a team has a good, big center that knows how to post effectively and can make power moves underneath, that's about all they need. It's basketball heaven!

Attack From the Wing

The real attack does not start from the point. The point is like a hinge on a door, feeding the ball to the wing. The point is usually too far from the low post to get a good pass into that area. Likewise, the corner is not the optimal place to start our attack since a player can easily get trapped there. The wing area is the quarterback zone for the actual attack. The great majority of passes from the point are to the wing area, and that's where the real action starts. The wing man, usually an off guard or shooting forward, can either make an individual move, shoot or drive; or she can pass to the post, to the corner, or back out to the point.

The Pick

The workhorse offensive play is the *pick or screen*. These terms are pretty much used interchangeably anymore, although traditionally it's called a "pick" if the player to be freed has the ball, and a "screen" if the idea is to free up someone else to get the ball.

The screening technique is fairly simple. A player runs up to the side of the defender to be picked, preferably from a bit behind so she doesn't see him coming. Timing is important. If the offensive player approaches too early, the defender will have time to avoid him; too late, and a foul is possible from running into the defender.

Once there, the player spreads his legs wide, holds his elbows held out, and

Pulls his hands in close to his chest to avoid a foul. Have your player brace himself because the defender is likely to bang into him, and referees will rarely call a foul, unless it's flagrant.

I play a lot of small three-on-three games near my home, and I *always* look to pick the defender from the player with the ball. It's second nature. It either frees the player to dribble or shoot, or it sets up a pick and roll. I'm always amazed to see guys who never pick a defender. They stand around looking, and it never occurs to them to get involved because they never learned the concept. The pick is one of the two or three most basic offensive moves.

The Pick and Roll

The pick and roll is another bread-and-butter move, and your players must learn to appreciate its value. The pick and roll is based upon the pick concept and means that as soon as your player picks a defender, he pivots or rolls in the same direction his freed-up teammate is moving and moves parallel to him, with hand up, expecting a pass. Usually, the picked defender is now out of the play so there is a two-on-one situation with the remaining picker. Often, the picker becomes free, since his defender now switches to cover the dribbler. If so, then the picker rolls toward the basket for an easy pass and shot.

Often, one player on offense can play at the high post in a stationary position while a guard dribbles close to her. The high-post player picks the dribbler's defender. If the pick is successful in freeing the ball handler, then the picker can roll behind the dribbler. In this case, the picker becomes a trailer and can get a rebound.

Give and Go

The Give and Go is the *best move in basketball*. It doesn't involve a screen, just pure speed. A player simply passes to a teammate, and as he passes, he explodes forward, past his defender, and looks for a quick return pass. If done right, it often leads to an easy lay-up. The give and go works very well at young ages. It goes without saying that the player must also act as the middleman on a give and go, receiving the pass and giving it back quickly.

Don't Be Too Quick to Dribble

Kids develop a bad habit of dribbling too quickly after receiving a pass. However, once you begin dribbling, you forgo other options. Encourage your players to take the time to look inside toward the hoop for an opportunity. Obviously, if there is an opening or some space in front of the dribbler, he should advance the ball. But, if your player is guarded, he shouldn't dribble or "put the ball down" too quickly. Dribbling is only one of the initial opportunities. The best players look for the opportunities even before they get the ball.

Pass to an Open Space

Open space is any space around a receiver in which a pass can be made safely. It's most desirable to pass to space in the direction the receiver is heading; however, if he is guarded that space may be very small. To assure the opponent doesn't get the pass, make it snappy, use fakes and don't broadcast it. A pass directly to a player may freeze his action or lead to a fumble, and certainly slows overall momentum.

Jab Step

To execute a jab step the player steps toward the defender and then suddenly and quickly stops and comes back to her original position. The defender will tend to back up a bit at first, which gets her weight going backward, off balance. Usually, the jab step will get a player open for a good second or so. It's enough.

The Value of Motion

Another way to get open, and a key to offensive play, is simply to get on the move. With motion, a player will get

open at some point. Players need to cut into the lanes, flash from one side of the lane to another, or sneak behind the hoop, along the baseline, and come in through the back door. The back door concept is based on the fact that defensive players are usually looking up court, and may not see someone slipping in from behind. The worst thing to do is just stand around!

Move Off the Ball

Many skills are hard to achieve, but the easiest of all is one of the most important: hustling. Hustle is key to basketball, and moving, even without the basketball, is what makes teams winners. It's the *movement off the ball* that creates possibilities for successful *action on the ball*. With or without the ball, a player should think about where to go. Her play pattern will give her a direction; but she must then choose how *best* to get there. Tell players they are always in the game, and always impacting the team, every second, for the good or for the bad.

Taking the Shot

When an open player catches a pass within her shooting range, especially within 12 feet of the hoop, the first thought must be to shoot. That's the name of the game. High percentage shots must be taken quickly. Even a poor shooter has a good chance to sink a short jumper. She shouldn't hesitate! She shouldn't think! She must shoot very quickly before a defender comes on.

Following the Shot

Once the shot is of, unless you instruct that player to stay back to stop a fast break by the defense, the shooter must follow the shot. About one in six rebounds will bound back toward the shooter, and a good follow-up move will get many of them. Offensive rebounds are usually those that bounce out a good distance, since defensive players usually have the best position for short rebounds.

8. DEFENSE:

The images most associated with basketball are those of Michael Jordan twisting high in the air for a reverse slam dunk, or Larry Bird popping in a three-pointer. However, more and more, we herald the quickness of the diminutive Spud Webb stealing a pass or a Shaquille O'Neal rejecting an attempted shot.

It's called defense, and you need to talk regularly to your players about its importance. Kids often play poorly on defense. They fail to stay between their opponent and the hoop, allow players to drive around them, are easily faked out and miss opportunities to steal the ball by not being alert.

DEFENSIVE CONCEPTS

There are a number of defensive concepts which need to be impressed upon young players. Remember, defense mainly attitude, and if your player gets that idea, it will help him immeasurably.

Transition Play: Get Back and Set Up

You can't play defense on the wrong end of the court. Players must get back to their defensive post or assignmer very quickly when the other team gets the ball. It's one thing to see a tired player come up court slowly on offense. It's entirely another to react slowly on defense. Players who do will soon find the bench. Getting back on defense is a time to sprint. Many games are lost in this transitional part of the game.

Catch the Dribbler, Pivot and Defend

When a player is beaten by a ball handler, he must turn and run down-court, try to get in front of the ball handler and set up to defend again. Remember, a defender can almost always outrun a dribbler. The common error is going directly for the ball, reaching or bumping the dribbler, often resulting in a foul. Get back and set up. Catch the player first, then pivot and defend.

Stay Low and Apply Great Pressure

This is the heart of a good defense, upsetting the player with the ball in every possible way. Flailing arms, shaking hand movements, grunts, groans, anything that works to distract the opponent. As long as your players don't foul. A player doesn't need a ball to fake. A defensive player can and should fake body movements pretending to charge the ball handler to get him to commit himself to a move. It all serves to confuse the opposition.

The big idea in defensive play is to stay low in the triple-threat position. The low position allows your players to stay fairly close, about a step or arm's length away, and apply great pressure. Think pressure!

Keep the Action Wide, Away from the Lane

This just makes common sense. The free throw lane area—the low and high posts—is where high percentage shots are taken. We want to always deny this inside route to the dribbler or passer. Force the play to stay wide, along the sideline.

The lowest percentage shots are those taken from the corners. These shots are long, and there is no backboard to afford perspective or to allow a lucky bank to an errant shot. Your players should force the ball into the corner if at all possible. Also, the corners act as a natural trap to a player, eliminating options and allowing the defense to bottle up and really frustrate a player. On a baseline drive, you must protect the line and force the ball back out into traffic, where other defenders can help. A successful baseline drive yields a very high percentage offensive shot.

Stick 'Em Up—It's very easy to make body contact underneath. Any movement of the defensive player when attempting to block a shot will usually result in a foul call. Many youth referees will blow the whistle automatically on attempts to block a shot if the players' bodies are close. The best recourse when defending a chippie or short jump shot under the hoop, where bodies are always touching, is just to stand still and erect, hands straight up. I call it "stick 'em up!" It gives up the two points, but puts some pressure on the shot. It can also draw an offensive foul. At the very least, it saves our big player from foul trouble.

Deny the Ball—When an opposing player is underneath, you want to deny her the ball, that is, prevent her receiving a pass. Denying players is the cornerstone of defensive strategy today. Most teams use it. If a player, especially a big player, is in a low post close to the hoop, she will nearly always score if she gets the ball. Make sure she doesn't get it by *fronting* her, that is, playing between her and the ball, or at least playing to the inside of her and getting an arm around her into the passing lane. This generally works only close to the hoop, within 6 feet of it.

Defending Against a Pick—*Switching* is a tricky defensive concept to apply, but an effective defense to pick or screen. When an offensive screen or pick successfully frees a ball handler from her defender, a new defender needs to cover the ball handler. The defender who was guarding the offensive screener is the one who must usually switch to cover the free player.

The best way to defend a pick is to fight through it. Usually other defensive teammates will see the pick as it is being formed and alert the player to be screened so she can *step through it*, that is, step gingerly between the screener and the dribbler or *sink behind it*, that is, step behind the screener. The best course is usually to sink back to avoid fouling the screener. The defender who was covering the screener should also step back to let the defender covering the dribbler through, and also be prepared to switch quickly if needed.

DEFENSE STANCE

The most important fundamental in most sports is proper form. It is the foundation upon which a player uses his individual ability. Good form will best position a player to execute a move. It maximizes quickness, the ability to react and the balance needed to launch a good shot. A proper stance is the easiest thing to coach and is achieved by constant drilling and repetition. However, in the heat of play or when a player is tired, a poorly laid foundation of form is the first thing to fall apart.

The Triple Threat Position

In the defensive position, a player lines up one long step from the person with the ball, just far enough so the defender can reach out and touch the opponent's chest. The triple-threat posture allows the defender to move forward, sideways or vertically to stop a dribble, a pass or a shot. Triple-threat is simply the position which best allows the player to make any one of those three moves in a split second.

Rebounding

Rebounding is a skill used for both offense and defense, but the fact is that most rebounds are defensive and should be if played properly. Rebounding has much more to do with position and strength than with height. Since the defender is usually inside the play between the man defended and the hoop, he is in an excellent position to box out or screen opponents from the ball.

BOXING OUT

Boxing Out an Opponent—A key defensive strategy is *to box out* the opponent as a shot is taken. Upon release of a shot by an opponent, the center hesitates a second before turning to face the hoop for the rebound. This hesitation allows the center to see in which direction the opponent is going to get the rebound. Then your center should step in the opponent's way, rotate her back after the opponent is blocked off, stick her posterior into the opponent and outstretch her arms sideways a bit to make it tough for the opposing player to get around, thereby *making herself wide*. Once the center gets the rebound, she looks to the sideline for a teammate, usually a guard, designated as the *outlet* and passes to her.

The Rebounding Jump—The rebounder jumps up, preferably straight up to avoid a foul. Don't go over another player who has better position—it's an easy foul for the referee to see.

Catching the Rebound—Caution players against getting into the habit of always tapping the rebound away. A well-placed tap against a bigger player may be needed, but always try to catch it. Catch it with both hands and land well, both feet spread out. Keep the ball high for an overhead outlet pass. If you must bring it down, do so with strength—elbows out, ball into chest—and pivot quickly. A lot of hands will attack the ball, so be ready and quick.

COACHING should be enjoyable for you and the time spent with your child, as a member of your basketball team

should be rewarding and uplifting for both of you.