

What's Wrong With Youth Basketball Leagues

- By [Joe Haefner](#)

There are so many youth basketball leagues that are win-loss leagues which focus on the end result of whether the kids win or lose the games and that's it. They play zones, have unequal playing time, and create a stressful environment with coaches yelling at the kids and placing the unwanted pressure of winning & losing on them.

This needs to stop!

You want to know what happens with these kids & teams in 5 to 6 years:

1. Kids Quit the Sport.

The number 1 reason kids quit sports is because it's not fun anymore. So why are we making it so stressful for them?

Don Kelbick informed us about a recent study by AAHPER revealed that over 80% of kids who play in organized youth sports no longer play that sport after the age of 13. THAT'S TERRIBLE!!!! Back in the day, kids did not start playing organized sports until they were 13.

Why does this happen?

Kids respond poorly to stress at a young age.

Kids prefer to have fun & play freely!! Placing an emphasis on winning, having unequal playing time and yelling at the kids create stress which is why so many kids turn to the Wii & playstation. This is part of the reason why we have an UNHEALTHY nation.

Why do you think AND1 basketball has become so popular?

The stress levels are low and the kids are allowed to have FUN. I used to be opposed to AND1 basketball until I learned why kids were turning to it.

2. The other teams that focused on the fundamentals & practiced game-like situations are better!!

They didn't get caught up in the wins and losses. Rather, they focused on creating fun, relaxed atmosphere while teaching the fundamentals. Since they have solid foundation on making lay ups, dribbling, passing, shooting, and playing man to man defense, they now can handle the other teams that spent less time on the fundamentals and focused on the insignificant stuff that won't work at the higher levels.

It's also VERY IMPORTANT to apply the [basketball fundamentals & skills](#) in competitive game-like situations. If you never put them in situations that make them use the new skill in a game-like environment, it'll be very difficult for them to apply it to the games. All of the sudden, defenders are there and the newly-learned skills go out the window because they had few repetitions practicing the fundamentals with a defender guarding them.

Practice the skill WITHOUT the defense to LEARN the skill.

Practice the skill WITH the defense to APPLY the skill.

Also, if the high school coach of these same kids decides to run zones, traps, and presses, they are that much more effective because the players have a solid foundation versus a group of kids that just worked on presses, traps, and any other tactic that took advantage of a flaw in the youth basketball system.

3. Kids that could have been great never got the playing time to develop.

A 6'0 mature 13 year old may be good now, but the 5'9 skinny, uncoordinated kid that is going to be 6'9 may be the best in the future. The timid, smaller player with great decision-making skills loses playing time to the more aggressive, bigger player.

If these players don't get playing how time, how are they supposed to get better? If they don't play, they might QUIT!!

I'm not saying that you don't want your kids to win. The kids should still play to win. I'm just saying that YOUR focus should be on developing the players, so it gives them the best opportunity to win when they get older.

Here is an example of a development league progression:

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8 to 10 Year Olds (3rd & 4th Grade):

- Play 3 on 3 basketball. You can also take a look at this article [Could 3-on-3 Basketball Be The Best For Youth Players](#)
- No pressing, traps, or zone defenses.
- Half court man to man defense. (In some situations, you may restrict defense outside 3-point line.)
- No 3-pointers (or move in 3-point line - 13.5 feet to 15 feet)
- Free Throws - 8 to 10 feet from basket.
- Height of Rim - 8 to 9 Feet
- [Junior Ball - 27.5" International Size 5](#)

10 to 12 Year Olds (5th & 6th Grade):

- Start to introduce 5 on 5. (Still use 3 on 3 and other small sided games to teach basketball concepts in every practice.)
- No trapping defenses, zone defenses, or full court zone presses.
- Half court [man to man defense](#) in 1st half. Full court man to man defense in 2nd half.
- Equal playing time for players that give their best effort and follow team rules. Players that violate rules may get reduced playing time.
- No 3-pointers (or move in 3-point line - 15 feet to 18 feet)
- Height of Rim - 9 to 10 Feet
- [Intermediate Ball - 27.75" - 28.5" \(9"\) - International Size 6](#)

12 to 14 Year Olds (7th & 8th Grade):

- 5 on 5 basketball. (Still use 3 on 3 and other small sided games to teach basketball concepts in every practice.)
- Man to man defense 50% of game. Otherwise, no restrictions.
- Fairly equal playing time. As long as they give their best effort and follow team rules, they should play at least 1 / 3 of the game. (Our goal is to get everyone equal playing time throughout the season.)
- Height of Rim - 10 Feet
- Girls - Intermediate Ball - 27.75" - 28.5" (9") - International Size 6
Boys - Men's Ball - 29.5" - 30" (9.5") - International Size 7 - There are also arguments that boys of this age should use an intermediate (or women's) ball.

All of the leagues should be required to place a heavy emphasis on:

- Teaching skills and concepts.
- Placing players in competitive, game-like situations to practice the skills. You can also use fun, youth basketball drills.
- Creating a relaxed, fun environment. Higher stress levels slow the learning process and cause kids to quit sports.
- Treating competition like fun scrimmages. Too many coaches get caught up with what's happening on the scoreboard rather than teaching their players how to play.