

# Coaching Youth Basketball - What Should You Teach?

- By [Joe Haefner](#)

Many youth basketball coaches don't know where to start or what to teach. Well, we hope to help you out in this area. Below, we provide some advice on what to teach youth basketball players. We break it down between 3 levels. As you perfect each level, you can advance to the next level to teach more skills & concepts.

**All beginner players should start with Level 1 no matter the age.** We put ages next to the level as a general guideline. Depending on the age and skill level, you'll progress through the levels at different rates. You may notice that you'll spend 4 years working on Level 1 with 7 to 10 year olds. At the same time, you may be able to progress to Level 2 after two weeks working with a group of 13 year olds who are playing basketball for the first time.

I would advise to go back and **start at Level 1 every year.** A lot of high school and college coaches start at Level 1 every year. They just progress through the levels more quickly than a youth team. It's a great way to ingrain the fundamentals into your players year in and year out.

We advise to take a couple of hours and write up a [master practice schedule](#) for the season, so you can progressively teach them the skills mentioned below. It may take a few years to teach all of these skills at one level and THAT'S OKAY! For youth players, we want to focus on the long-term development, not how many games they win when they're 11 years old. If you try to progress them too quickly, it will hurt them in the long-run. **You want to have a solid foundation first.** You shouldn't try to teach them every dribble move in one year or every option in the motion offense. The same way in which you couldn't teach a person calculus if they did not know how to do simple addition and subtraction.

**Important Note:** *Throughout this article, you'll find many links to other articles on the website to explain concepts that we advise to teach. My recommendation would be to read the entire article first, then go back and click on the links to read the other articles.*

*You may also want to add this article to your "[Favorites](#)" or "[Bookmark](#)" it, because there may not be enough time to read all of the links in one sitting.*

## Level 1 (7 to 10 Year Olds)

Here's what to teach, ordered by priority:

1. [Lay ups](#) - You should practice lots of lay ups with both hands. Your goal should be to get all players to make lay ups with their left and right hands equally well!! Teach them to jump off the proper foot. They should jump off the left leg when shooting a right hand lay up. They should shoot off their right leg when shooting a left hand lay up. It will be difficult but work on it. You'll probably need to start really close to the basket, with no dribble, and take just one step to practice the footwork. Once you add the dribble, they should dribble with their left hand when shooting left hand lay ups. And vice versa.
2. Footwork - Teach them triple threat positioning, pivoting on their left and right foot without traveling, [jump stops](#), and to square to the basket as soon as they catch the ball in a triple threat position. You should spend a lot of time on footwork!
3. [Shooting form](#) - For this age group, we highly recommend using smaller balls and lower baskets. If that is not possible, allow the players to dip their elbows which will give them more strength. To learn more on shooting, we also have the [Breakthrough Basketball Shooting Guide](#).
4. [Ball handling](#) - You should teach your players to dribble with left and right hands equally. Basic dribble moves such as the speed dribble, crossover, protect-the-ball dribble, and [back-up dribble](#).

[Resource: Progressive Youth Ball Handling & Footwork Workouts App](#) - Players can do the workouts from anywhere. The coaching dashboard also allows you to monitor multiple players or your whole team.

- Athletic & movement skills - Teach them how to run, [jump and land](#), skip, stop, move laterally, squat, lunge and any other basic movements. If you don't know how to teach these movements, ask a professional or PE teacher to show you how. 99% of the time they would be more than willing to help, and they may even come and show the kids themselves.

[Should We Teach Basketball Skills To Players Under the Age of 10?](#) - Useful information for all levels of coaches, not just coaches who work with players under the age of 10.

- [Basic passes](#) - Teach and practice the basic chest, bounce, and overhead passes.
- Play plenty of 2 on 2 and 3 on 3 games to teach concepts ([no dribble keep away](#)). It gets the players more experience and allows them enough space to operate and use the new skills they have learned. Make sure to use plenty of [age-appropriate drills & games](#).

For more on this, read [Could 3 on 3 Basketball Be the Best for Youth Players?](#)

- Offense - Do NOT use any structured or patterned offenses. First, get them comfortable on the court. They will start to figure things out on their own. Your main concern should be to have them move & not stand still.

If you use a few basic cuts and maybe screens in your shooting drills at the beginning of practice, then your players will already know how to move in a motion offense. Then you don't have to waste time teaching offense. Just let them play.

Once players feel comfortable on the court, show them proper [spacing](#).

As they progress, you can start to introduce them to [motion offense](#) situations.

- [Basic cuts](#) & how to get open - If time permits, you can introduce the basket cut and straight cut. I would suggest that you just work these cuts [into your shooting drills at the beginning of practice](#). This will save loads of time.
- Defense - Teach the [basic stance](#), defensive slide, and basic off-ball principles. Don't worry about spending as much time on defense. As they get older, you'll gradually spend more time on defense. Focusing on it 5 to 10 minutes per practice would be more than sufficient.

Basic Off Ball Principles:

- Stay between man and the ball
- Always stop the ball if it is in front of you!

For this age group, we are [against zone defenses](#) for development purposes.

For anyone coaching this age group, we HIGHLY recommend the DVD [Coaching Youth Basketball the RIGHT Way](#) (By Bob Bigelow). You'll get lots of drills and learn exactly how to teach the most important fundamentals the to kids "right way". We truly believe this DVD should be required viewing for ALL youth coaches.

## Level 2 (10 to 12 Year Olds)

You should expand onto more advanced skills for everything mentioned above. But remember, if your 10 to 12 year olds are inexperienced, you should start in Level 1. And at the beginning of each season, you should start at level 1 until those skills are perfected. Then you can progress into the more advanced stuff below.

1. Lay ups - jumping off one foot and jump-stop lay ups.
2. Teach [more cuts](#): back cut, curl cut, etc.
3. Continue to focus on [shooting form](#) and introduce some movement for [shooting drills](#) (shooting off the dribble and off the catch). To learn more on shooting, we also have the [Breakthrough Basketball Shooting Guide](#).
4. Ball handling & dribbling - teach more dribble moves such as the inside-out dribble (fake crossover), hesitation move, and between-the-legs.

[Resource: Progressive Youth Ball Handling & Footwork Workouts App](#) - Players can do the workouts from anywhere. The coaching dashboard also allows you to monitor multiple players or your whole team.

5. Passing - continue to teach [basic passes](#) and introduce some [advanced passes](#) (baseball pass and wrap around pass). Use other drill such as [machine gun passing](#) and [pass and switch](#).
6. Passing under pressure - you can use [pair passing](#) with a defensive player in the middle running back and forth to pressure the passer. You can use this drill to practice breaking pressure: [full court press breaker drill](#).
7. Teach [basic screens](#).
8. Footwork - introduce [jab steps](#) and ball fakes (pass fakes and [shot fakes](#)).
9. Rebounding - introduce [rebounding technique](#).
10. Basic [post moves](#). [drop step](#) and jump hook.
11. Spacing - introduce more [basic spacing concepts](#).
12. Offense - keep playing 2 on 2 and 3 on 3 to teach concepts. You can also start to introduce more [motion offense](#) situations and play some 5 on 5.
13. [Defense](#) - keep emphasizing and spend a little more time on the defensive stance, defensive slide, and off-ball principles mentioned in Level 1. If you feel that your players are ready, work on more [off-ball defense principles](#).

In our [Man to Man Defense System](#), we provide step-by-step how to build and teach your defense.

For this age group, we are [against zone defenses](#) for development purposes.

For anyone coaching this age group, we HIGHLY recommend the DVD [Coaching Youth Basketball the RIGHT Way](#) (By Bob Bigelow). You'll get lots of drills and learn exactly how to teach the most important fundamentals to kids "right way". We truly believe this DVD should be required viewing for ALL youth coaches.

### Level 3 (12 to 14 Year Olds)

You should expand onto more advanced skills for everything mentioned above.

1. Lay ups - practice contested lay ups. Also, you could start to teach players, same-leg same-shooting hand lay ups. I know that is against conventional wisdom, but think about it for a second....Your player just blew by a defender or is on a fast break. Do you want them stutter-stepping to give the defense time to recover and contest the shot? So if that means jumping on your right-leg and shooting right-handed on the same side, so be it.

2. Continue to teach basic cuts and add [more cuts](#).
3. Continue to emphasize [shooting form](#) (move to big baskets and bigger balls). Practice shooting on the move off of the pass and the dribble. To learn more on shooting, we also have the [Breakthrough Basketball Shooting Guide](#).
4. Ball Handling & Dribbling - teach more dribble moves such as the spin move, behind-the-back. Incorporate some double-moves (crossover followed with a behind-the-back).  
  
[Resource: Progressive Youth Ball Handling & Footwork Workouts App](#) - Players can do the workouts from anywhere. The coaching dashboard also allows you to monitor multiple players or your whole team.
5. Passing - introduce some other [advanced passes](#) (dribble pass, behind-the-back pass, pick and roll pass).
6. Passing Under Pressure - You use [Pair Passing](#) with a defensive player in the middle running back and forth to pressure the passer. You can use this drill to practice breaking pressure: [Full Court Press Breaker Drill](#).
7. Teach [Basic Screens](#).
8. Footwork - continue to work on [jab steps](#), pivots, and ball fakes (pass fakes and [shot fakes](#)).
9. Rebounding - put more emphasis on [rebounding technique](#) and spend more time on rebounding drills.
10. [Post moves](#) - keep practicing post moves mentioned above while introducing a few more when the players are ready [drop step counter](#) and up-and-under move.
11. Spacing - advance to higher levels of [spacing drills](#).
12. Offense - introduce more [motion offense](#) situations. You should start to notice that your players are becoming much better at reading the defense.
13. [Defense](#) - Emphasize basics from previous levels and move on to rotations and situations.

In our [Man to Man Defense System](#), we go into great detail about rotations and situations.

For this age group, we are [against zone defenses](#) for development purposes.

[Sample Practice Plan for 7 to 10 year olds.](#)

[Sample Practice Plan for 11 to 14 year olds.](#)

**Do you have any questions or suggestions? Let us know by leaving your comments...**

## **[80 Comments](#)**

[Most Likes First](#) **[Oldest First](#)** [Newest First](#)

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**Alex Price says:**

11/18/2008 at 4:17:38 PM

This is fantastic. I have downloaded all of your free ebooks and published materials so far. The icing on the cake would be practice plans for youth and adults (I wouldn't have such a headache each week then!)

Alex

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**Vicki says:**

11/19/2008 at 1:20:33 PM

Thank you soooooo much. I'm going to start coaching a team of 3rd - 5th grade girls. I haven't played myself in awhile, so this is really, really helpful. You have no idea!!!

Thank you to nice people like you who share information.

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**Phil Mccall says:**

11/26/2008 at 1:11:20 PM

I didn't want to disappoint either child so I'm coaching 1st/2nd boys and 3rd/4th girls - these tips and practice plans are a lifesaver!

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**Darryl Agee says:**

11/28/2008 at 9:22:34 AM

I printed out both the Drills and Plays ebooks and read through ALL of them. Great stuff.

Your site and program has excellent content, advice, instructions and suggestions.

Nothing but GREAT things to say about breakthroughbasketball.com. Thanks for what you do!!!

DAgee

11-12 year old girls coach  
Southwest Virginia

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**Harry says:**

12/2/2008 at 9:32:29 AM

Thanks a lot for all this information. Keep up the good work.

Harry

11-12 year old girls coach  
Oceanside, New York

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**Willie Crosland says:**

12/5/2008 at 11:47:11 AM

This is excellent information for me. I have been coaching 10 - 12 year olds for the past 5 years and this is the first time I've had a crew that needed to learn the basics basketball skills. These books will help me tremendously.

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**Anthony. F says:**

12/16/2008 at 8:11:15 AM

Thanks for this information. This is my second year coaching. However, my 9 and 10 year old team has a very wide range of skill levels. I need to get everyone involved in the games. These drill will help.

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**Art H. says:**

1/20/2009 at 11:26:42 AM

I have been coaching for 30 yrs. from age 5 to junior college in all sports and I must say that first, I can't believe how much free, useful information you are sharing and secondly, how beneficial it is. When I can afford it I will definitely purchase some of your products.

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**Kenneth Bevel says:**

1/29/2009 at 1:47:20 AM

Great drills, I have been playing basketball for a while. Everytime I check out this website I learn something new. I thought i knew everything it was about basketball. Now that I have read and learned something new about the game I can incorporate it into how I play and what I teach my team. What can i do to better my man to man defense as below height average guard?

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**Joe Haefner says:**

1/29/2009 at 11:52:22 AM

Hi Kenneth,

Be a pest and use active hands. Make things as difficult as possible.

Now, if you want to learn more about the stance and how to improve your quickness, check out this page:  
<http://www.breakthroughbasketball.com/defense/man.html>

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**Willie Green says:**

4/15/2009 at 2:15:54 AM

Thank you very much for all of the help and iformation on what to teach youth basetball. I will be teaching the Macth-up zone and 1-4 defence. Keep up the GOOD work. With Gods Favor You are Blessed. Coach Green  
Sacramento,CA

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**Steve Choboter ( Regina, Saskatchewan) says:**

4/21/2009 at 10:36:04 AM

I am so glad I found your site, you are providing a great service to coaches and players alike. Coach Steve Regina, Saskatchewan Canada

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**Marty says:**

5/6/2009 at 3:58:42 PM

I have found your material informative and helpful. I only want to get my local little dribblers board to see things as you guys do: that fundamentals are key and the all other will come with time. Plays and other more advanced terms and ideas are too much for the first few years of basketball.

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**mario c, reyes says:**

5/26/2009 at 12:34:00 AM

its a great blessing for me the information about basketball keep it up God bless

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**coach julian says:**

5/27/2009 at 1:49:01 AM

thank you  
the information is going to assist me as a coach and my young boys and girls which are the community and the future of basketball in my country and the world at large .  
thanks a lot,i will get back to you soonest.  
coach julian.

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**Mtu says:**

6/23/2009 at 4:06:15 AM

Thank you,

I teach ba sketball in rural areas where there was not ba sketball structures and its hard because this is a new sport in the area!

I will have fun with the kids

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**Tanya says:**

7/28/2009 at 5:10:41 AM

Thank you so much for all the great advice and drills, it makes practice a lot more fun for my boys.

Tanya  
12-13 year old boys  
Leimen, Germany

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**Tarrina says:**

9/30/2009 at 5:24:27 AM

Running a programme with our local b'ball association called "Rising Stars" which aims to teach the basics to children aged 5 to 10 yrs so that when they start in our local comp we hope they will have an understanding of the game and enough basic skills to be confident on the court. Thank you so much for all of this fantastic info and drills, this will make things so much easier to structure and fun at the same time. Well done guys, keep it up!

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**VINCE says:**

12/1/2009 at 4:43:08 PM

Ok , I'm thinking about coaching girls basketball grades 3rd to 4th. Any suggestions on getting started. My son is playing 3rd grade for the first time. The problem i have with the coaching is he is not focusing on the basics. He spends more time running 3 to 4 plays. At this point i feel he is missing out on the basics.

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**John Doe says:**

1/19/2010 at 10:09:33 AM

This guy has a pretty good take on the shoulder joints being just as important as the legs in making layups:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=utqRkr2ffVM&feature=related>

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**Ashley Robinson says:**

1/21/2010 at 1:14:42 PM

This is a life saver!!!! I have 7 girls ages 9-12 that have alot of heart for the game but need fundamentals! I haven't played the game in a while and wasn't sure where to start but you guys have given me excitement about going to practice and teaching them exactly what they need to progress to great players over the next few years!!!! Excellent!

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**Scott says:**

2/19/2010 at 4:18:10 AM

I'm struggling with volunteer parents who only care about winning at all costs instead of foster a better team and building up weaker players.

Anyone have any suggestions about approaching coaches who are favoring their own kids or their friend's kids for playing time? We are talking about 9 year olds here, not high school or college athletes. OR, should I just let my kid sit on the sidelines and I will stay silent and watch the favored children get more playing time (this is a house league basketball team where it is supposed to be equal playing time for all)

I watched the practice today where two players ball hogged the entire practice and the coaches were encouraging this style of play. The other kids who were playing but not touching the ball were starting to fight with the ball hogs. The ball hogs would constantly yell and whine at the other kids on the team to pass it to them.

I was going to let loose on the coaches but I thought I would hold off and seek advice. Anyone have any good advice on how to deal with this situation?

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**Jeff Haefner says:**

2/24/2010 at 7:19:52 AM

Scott - That's a tough one. It can be tough to tell a coach what to do without upsetting them. You could just ask if you could talk with them for a few minutes. Be very upbeat, positive, and non confrontational. Just say, "Hey coach, I was just wondering what I could do to help get my son and even other players on the team more playing time. You're the coach so I'd like to get your advice and see if you can help me. I just want what is best for my son and want him to be happy, so I just wanted to see what you think I could do to help him?"

I think if you turn things around and make the coach feel good and respected by asking him/her for advice, you'll have better luck.

I once heard someone say "Would you rather be right? Or would you rather be effective?" Sometimes you have to swallow pride and forget about who is right or wrong to be effective.

Beyond that, if you can get a good positive conversation going, you can discuss other things. If you can develop a positive repoir and relationship with the coach, you'll have good luck. Many times life is all about building relationships. Take some time to build a real relationship with the coach and I think you'll have good luck. And if you get to that point, you can offer some of the resources on our website that talk about "coaching the right way", "equal playing time", "winning is not important at this level", etc. Tell the coach about the studies of 3on3, touching the ball more often, etc. We have tons of stuff on our website about that.

Also, the Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA) has excellent advice for coaches in this regard. They talk about Double Goal Coaching and really help coaches and parents see what is important.

<http://www.positivecoach.org>

Hope this helps.

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**Steve W says:**

3/9/2010 at 8:02:59 AM

I have parents who decided it was time to tell me that they are frustrated that we are not teaching our 3rd and 4th graders plays. About as close as we have come is working on spacing and picks. I told them that



the best advice that I had gotten (that's you) is to keep working on athleticism and fundamentals. I can go on and on about how they still cannot dribble well, their shooting form needs work and their footwork is awkward. So I know they need those basics. I doubt I can be so blunt to a parent! Can you provide more information? They think their kids are going to "fall behind."

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**Joe Haefner says:**

3/9/2010 at 8:40:49 AM

Hi Steve,

Have you referenced these articles?

<http://www.breakthroughbasketball.com/coaching/developmental-league.html>

<http://www.breakthroughbasketball.com/blog/index.php/when-did-steve-nash-start-playing-basketball/>

<http://www.breakthroughbasketball.com/coaching/problem-american-basketball.html>

<http://www.breakthroughbasketball.com/blog/index.php/should-we-teach-basketball-skills-to-kids-under-the-age-of-10/>

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**Jeff Haefner says:**

3/9/2010 at 9:34:31 AM

Steve,

Also check out this guide for dealing with parents. I think it will help.

<http://www.breakthroughbasketball.com/coaching/dealing-with-parents.html>

Let us know if this helps and what else you need. Good luck!

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**Isaac Kwapong says:**

6/3/2010 at 7:57:38 AM

Jeff need help,

I run a basketball development training programme for youth players from the ages of 7yrs to 23yrs. Been running this programme for a year now. I have a challenge of having to train the 7year olds with the 15yr old in one session, and the 17yr olds & 20yr olds in another session . I do teach them the same fundamental skills but with less intensity and volume for the younger ones. I want to know if that will affect the younger ones later in their development. The reason why we have put them together is because we dont have much time to break them into different session. What do you advice i should do.

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**Jeff Haefner says:**

6/4/2010 at 7:45:46 AM

Isaac,

What exactly are you concerned about? Are you noticing any particular problems?

Personally, I have not run programs where ages vary greatly. But I have talked to Don Kelbick about this before. He claims that its not a problem for him. Skills are the same no matter what age and the way he runs drills, different ages can work together. The big kids do more and move faster, but they do the same drills. And sometimes the big kids help the young ones along, so the young kids benefit.

Let me know if there's any particular problem you're having and we can help you out.

**Roman says:**

11/28/2010 at 6:01:32 PM

My situation, as a 1st year coach, is I have 12 kids: 4th, 5th, 6th graders. They freeze up, when the point guard passes the ball to the wing, regardless if I'm teaching a 1-2-2 offense (guards swap, 4-5 swap), or man (not yet implemented).

We have one month of practices, this week being the last, 3 times a week, only 1.5 hours each practice, and our first game is Saturday!

All the fundamentals (layups, bounce pass, chest pass, jump stop, dribbling, etc.) have been taught repeatedly. I have a 2-1-2 zone defense. Only 2 kids are athletes, 2 others are my 4-5. My 3 spots is wide open for taking, hence the situation highlighted above, of them freezing. Also, at this age, I believe there's no pressing in our league, and I have to try and play all the kids.

Advice on how to handle the freezing? (aside from a long list of other issues...)

**Jeff Haefner says:**

11/28/2010 at 8:20:27 PM

Roman - I hate to answer a question with a question but... Why are your players freezing up? Is it because they're only 10 and don't know what to do? Is the offense too complicated? Too many options? Do they lack confidence? Is there too much defensive pressure on them? Can they pass the ball far enough?

Every kid develops differently and experience and confidence building might be the only answer. Here's a good quote from one of Don Kelbick's posts on our forum. It might shed light on the issue that we all face with young kids...

"Just about everyone who gets involved with youth sports has good intentions. People want only the best for their kids. When a father gets on the sideline, he thinks he becomes Phil Jackson. But they don't have the knowledge or training that Phil Jackson has. Then again, I don't think that Phil Jackson would be very good with your son. The operative word in "Youth Sports" for too many people is 'Sport' where it should be "Youth."

Read some of the comments on this site, discussions of offenses and defenses for 8-year olds, discussions of discipline of other people children, etc. People expect more of kids on playing fields than they do in their own homes. How many 9-year olds remember to put their socks in the hamper? But, they are expect to remember both zone AND man-to-man offenses. When in the home, adults look at their kids as kids. Put them out on a basketball court (or soccer field or football field, etc) and they cease to be kids, they become players. The ideal they are held up to is what they see on TV.

Youth sports is not about sports, it is about child development, just as school is. However, most of the people (MOST NOT ALL!) who deal with your kids have had special training, not in the subject matter, but with how kids learn and how they develop. That is where they are expert, not in the subject matter."

**Roman says:**

12/9/2010 at 2:31:30 PM

Joe, to answer your question, they're 4th, 5th, and 6th graders, and it looks like I've been approaching my 1st year of coaching wrong, based on the responses on this site - focus on fun first, and the rest will develop.

Seems wrong, I was always taught discipline 1st, but I started to play late too, in 7th grade. I mean, I learned many a day by shooting, shooting, shooting, dribbling, dribbling, dribbling - constant repetition!

**Joe Haefner says:**

12/10/2010 at 9:40:43 AM

Hi Roman,

I believe in discipline. I always like to be very disciplined the first week. Then, I loosen up a little bit and have lots of fun.

You just need to keep their age in perspective. Youth players won't be able to focus for very young. Need to be active with minimal speeches.

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**Bill says:**

12/14/2010 at 3:15:21 PM

Joe & Jeff-

I wish I knew about your site 4 years ago. That is when I started coaching my daughter's youth basketball team (4th grade). She is now playing for her school in the 8th grade and I now understand what a crappy job I did as a youth coach.

If I could do things over I would have stressed the following:

Lay Ups - Every girl should have been able to make both left and right handed lay ups, even contested ones. We practiced this, but I didn't stress it enough. I am seeing 8th grade girls I coached in youth league shooting with the right hand on the left side. I also see them wanting to stop and take a set shot on a fast break. They just aren't comfortable shooting lay ups.

Left-hand Dribbling - Again, we practiced but I didn't stress. Dribbling with the left hand when going left. Every time I see one of my former players get the ball stolen because they dribble with the right while going left I hang my head, ashamed.

Dribbling & Looking Up - These poor girls still look down at the ball when they dribble. How did I handle this as a youth coach? I limited the amount of dribbling they could do in a game - two dribbles then either shoot or pass. Why? It was easy. Maybe running some drills every practice would have helped these girls more. Nice job, coach.

I could go on and on, but the story is the same. I've probably set these girls back a couple of years in their basketball skills because of my failure to develop the fundamentals.

Anyway, just wanted to say that you guys are spot on with the priorities you share for youth coaching.

ALL CURRENT YOUTH COACHES: Avoid my experience. Winning is not important at the youth level - development of skills is the priority. Get yourself and your kids involved in a program that stresses development - it's the best thing you can do.

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**Joe Haefner says:**

12/14/2010 at 7:37:10 PM

Hi Bill,

Thank you for the kind words and thank you for sharing your thoughts.

Most coaches/parents figure things out and learn from their mistakes by the time they're done coaching. I know it took me a few years to figure things out. And that's after I researched and studied. Most parents don't have time to do that.

That's why we put together this website. We wanted to help youth coaches get started on the right foot.

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**Heather says:**

1/19/2011 at 1:06:58 PM

I am a first time coach who knows relatively nothing about basketball and was thrown into a 10yo team of girls. I was unable to get a response to set up any practice time so what is your suggestion as to how to

coach them during a game. Can I set up some sort of play module or what??? Any help is appreciated.

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**Jeff Haefner says:**

1/20/2011 at 11:53:52 AM

I'm not sure what you can do without some practice. In games, I'm not big into strategy or schemes, especially at the youth level. The only thing you can do is provide positive reinforcement when they do things right. When they do things wrong, you can talk to them on the bench and provide instruction (trying to shout and teach during the heat of the game doesn't really work).

My first suggestion is to get some practice time scheduled. My next suggestion is to find a mentor with basketball experience. Then you and/or your mentor can study as much info on this site as you can.

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**maria says:**

7/26/2011 at 12:31:17 PM

Enjoy your column. My daughter began playing basketball when she was 7 years-old. She played Upward and spring rec until she got a badly sprained finger at age 10. She has had to take a year and a half off so it would heal. She was still having pain when she moved it after a year. Her orthopedist says she can go back now. My question is, has she missed too much to catch up to her peers who have been playing all along? What advice would you give her to prepare her to try out for her schools middle school team one year from now? Should she do fall and summer rec or try club in the fall? Any advice is appreciated. She loves basketball.

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**Jeff Haefner says:**

7/26/2011 at 2:40:18 PM

First, I would not be overly concerned because she is still so young. Steve Nash (2-time MVP) didn't play basketball until he was 13. Dirk Novitski started around the same time. Bill Russell and Michael Jordan were no good as sophomores in high school. So I wouldn't be too worried about "getting behind" just yet.

With my own children I'm more concerned with their athletic development, coordination, and mental development. I know that if they are athletes, coordinated, and hard workers, then they have a real good chance to be as good at basketball as they want to be (even if they never play bball until middle school or high school). So my advice would be to worry less about catching up and more with a good well rounded athletic development. Play soccer, gymnastics, swimming, martial arts, and flag football seasonally. Get a good skill development trainer for basketball. Play some bball games seasonally. A good skill trainer will do more than playing games all summer. A good mix is the key.

<http://www.breakthroughbasketball.com/regional-training.html>

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**maria says:**

7/26/2011 at 2:51:58 PM

Thank you Jeff, I appreciate the encouragement and the link. She is also on a swim team so she works on other skill sets. I have one more question. She went through puberty about 1 year ago and is 5'2" It does not look like she is going to be tall. Could she still be a good player if she is not tall?

Thanks again,

Maria

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**Jeff Haefner says:**

7/26/2011 at 3:17:39 PM

I guess it depends on how you define "good player". She can certainly be a very good high school, college, and even pro player. Of course the taller the better, but there are many other things that make up for a good basketball player. If you are short, you better be skilled, athletic, and a smart player.

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**MadHatter says:**

11/21/2011 at 4:38:36 PM

I could not agree more with your sentiments about promoting skills development and fundamental until kids are closer to 13 or 14. The biggest problem in youth sports today is over-coaching younger kids. Good intentions (usually); bad result. The feeding high school issue is also a big problem. It may be good for that coach (who may not even be there in 3 or 4 years) but it is often bad for the player who is not exposed to another offensive system. The concept of a role player has no business in youth sports. In any event, there is no point in a player learning a structured offense if they have no ball handling skills, poor footwork, bad shooting mechanics, no court awareness and no vision. Retention with kids is somewhat of an oxy-moron but fundamental skills are much easier for them to understand and can be practiced at the schoolyard or in the driveway. The bottom line is that youth coaching should be about building a foundation for the future success of the players. It should not be about living out a Bobby Knight fantasy.

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**BREANNA says:**

11/27/2011 at 10:53:20 AM

OH MY GOSH! I CAN NOT READ ALL OF THIS! THIS IS JUST TOO MUCH TO READ! AND I WILL JUST GET TRIED READING THIS BASKETBALL STUFF! I WILL HAVE TO READ IT FOR LIKE 5 DAYS! AND SAVE SOME OF IT!

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**Ken says:**

1/2/2012 at 10:15:00 PM

MadH-

How right you are, teach ALL kids ALL the fundamentals of the game. The center of today might be the point guard of tomorrow.

Teach everyone the fundamentals and how to play... and then let them have FUN!

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**Abby says:**

3/9/2012 at 11:03:38 PM

This helps alot thanks! I'm 16 and I am teaching a basketball camp over the summer and I wanted to know what I should teach younger kids becuz I've played for 11 years but have played varsity ball so much haha I wanted to get back to the basics so thanks! =D

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**Ken says:**

4/16/2012 at 8:11:33 AM

Abby -

Basics & fundamentals is the right place to begin.... Remember to make sure that they have fun also.

You are young but they should look up to you as a role model. Good luck

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**Terry says:**

11/29/2012 at 9:01:00 AM

Thanks for great information. Youth sports is about developing skills and fun.

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**Michael says:**

12/3/2012 at 2:32:01 PM

I am coaching a 5th grade girls team. We only started with them this past January. We finished up a tournament this weekend and got beaten pretty handily. The major issue is that most other school districts have in-house programs that start in 3rd grade (we are a parent volunteer program), so we are essentially two years behind in teaching our girls the fundamentals while the teams we play are very well organized at this point, run set offensive plays, and generally beat us in every facet of the game. I am a competitive person and find it frustrating that we are having difficulty being competitive. An additional problem is that we have a lack of gym availability in our school district and are limited to practice 3 days a week for 90 minutes each day.

I have read various articles on this website and others regarding how to coach youth basketball, but feel that I need more than this to catch up with our opponents. Our ultimate goal is to have the girls be ready for 7th grade when our school's in house program starts, but we don't want the girls to get discouraged by constantly losing.

Any advice on what direction to take is greatly appreciated.

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**Ken says:**

12/4/2012 at 9:42:40 AM

Michael -

I know that this is tough on you and the girls.... heck, everyone wants to win... but you have already set out your goals.....

"Our ultimate goal is to have the girls be ready for 7th grade when our school's in house program starts, but we don't want the girls to get discouraged by constantly losing".

It is hard to catch up with people teams that have 2-3 years on you.... I know what you are saying, I was there too..... teams around us were practicing well before the season started - it took us till Christmas time to catch up.... talked to my AD about it and his reply was, "Don't you feel better about following the rules?" I said NO, I want them to follow the same rules we have, or our teams to play by their rules. Bottom line, this is where you are at.

I think that you should sit down with the girls and parents, discuss your goals and objectives. Your goal is to get them ready to play in the house program... thats great! Keep teaching them fundamentals, make them as fundamentally sound as you can.

Who cares if they win 30 games a year and are BEHIND your players fundamentally when they reach the "House Programs?"

Maybe you can break down your goals into smaller objectives, something your kids can achieve and feel good about themselves. At your level its not about Ws and Ls... its all about FUNDAMENTALS..... your players and parents need to understand this..... back you and your team/players and cheer for the good things they do.

Good luck and I hope things work out for you and your players/team.

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**Jeff Haefner says:**

12/4/2012 at 10:04:41 AM

I can understand the frustration and desire to compete. Been there and I am still there at times.

Since I can't stand sacrificing long term development for short term wins, here's one of the ways that I deal with the problem...

I continue teaching fundamentals and avoid teaching plays and "systems" to help win short term. I then track stats and sometimes set goals. With a really young team this year, here's what I did...

We often play teams that are older and/or much better than us. You just never know at this age level so we'll try to be prepared to make it a positive experience regardless of their level and ability.

Since the score of the game might not be favorable, we are track some stats allowing each girl to have some success on the court. We track...

- Rebounds
- Loose ball recoveries
- Successful passes

So even if they don't score a point, they still can see some tangible positive results. It also encourages them to hustle.

Kids just want to see improvement. If they just see a little improvement each week and each month, even when losing according to the scoreboard, they stay positive and encouraged.

If you want to get them ready for 7th grade, don't worry about winning now. Give them a foundation by teaching fundamental skills like crazy. And make things lots of fun.

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**Joe Haefner says:**

12/4/2012 at 10:47:50 AM

Michael,

This is what I would do...

Develop a great man to man defense. If your team can learn to defend, it will keep you in games. This doesn't mean that you have to spend 45 minutes every practice on defense. You could probably get away with working 15 to 20 minutes on it at every practice, but you emphasize it during games and practices. With the middle school teams that I coached, if I didn't see 100% effort on the defensive end, I calmly took them out of the game and asked them why they think they are sitting next to me. I would just tell them that their effort on defense wasn't acceptable. If you want to play, our team needs more from you.

As they mentioned above, keep working on fundamentals.

Here is an article that might help as well...

<http://www.breakthroughbasketball.com/coaching/youth-planning-success.html>

This reader also shared a story that may be similar to your situation. He went from not winning a game in 6th grade to winning the conference championship in 8th grade...

<http://www.breakthroughbasketball.com/coaching/youthdefensestory.html>

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**Ken Sartini says:**

9/3/2013 at 1:41:40 PM

Great article Joe IF I didn't mention that before... I think that gives most coaches a good plan for progression.

I coached 6-8th graders for 13 years... and used mostly zones.... because of my own ignorance of the game.

In my last 3 years, I knew I was moving on to the high school level. We started a 6th grade team playing ONLY m2m... ran an open post offense, do what you want and have fun. The 7th grade team ran m2m and we gave them some offense. When they were in 8th grade we played the majority of m2m defense but switched to a zone occasionally.

We did not have a gym but the school rented one for us every day for practice. We were never very good but that last year we won our conference (first time ever) and played for the league championship.... lost by 1. I was very proud of that group.

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**Greg says:**

12/14/2013 at 5:10:24 PM

This is great. I have been coaching for 2 years and have used your advise and tips and drills and I now have a team of 9 year olds who look out for each other and do all the little things on court that go unrecognised in a game. Thank you for helping me teach them the game in a way I wouldn't of been able to without your website and ebooks.

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**Greg says:**

12/14/2013 at 5:10:57 PM

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**Ine says:**

1/1/2014 at 6:31:22 AM

I recently discovered this website, and I love it!  
I am a young coach from Belgium, teaching kids from 13-14 years old and I just wanted to say that this site, all the info is great. I have learned many things thanks to this site, nit only for my kids, but also for my own game... Thanks a lot!!

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**Dwayne says:**

1/14/2014 at 12:08:28 AM

Hi, I just started to coach a six graders team of mostly 13 year olds. I just want to teach them proper fundamentals. I was taught on defense to stay between the man and the basket. I notice that you said between the man and the ball. Some of my players have been taught to stay between the man and ball by another coach. We call that denying the man the ball and I think its ok at times. What often happens to my players is they get burned by back door cuts to the basket. The other players don't switch and help out fast enough, so we give up a lot of points that way.

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**Ken Sartini says:**

1/14/2014 at 10:05:07 AM

Dwayne -

Take a look at what Jeff, Joe and myself have been posting on this subject.

The KEY to a GREAT m2m defense is HELPSIDE DEFENSE..... you can teach that by using the SHELL DRILL.

Check this out -

<http://www.breakthroughbasketball.com/defense/shell-drill-sucks.html>

It takes a little work but it takes your m2m defense to a whole new level, especially at this age.

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**Ken Sartini says:**

1/14/2014 at 10:05:49 AM

Dwayne -

Take a look at what Jeff, Joe and myself have been posting on this subject.



The KEY to a GREAT m2m defense is HELPSIDE DEFENSE..... you can teach that by using the SHELL DRILL.

Check this out -

<http://www.breakthroughbasketball.com/defense/shell-drill-sucks.html>

It takes a little work but it takes your m2m defense to a whole new level, especially at this age.

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**Thomas says:**

3/23/2014 at 10:57:02 AM

I have a 13 year-old daughter who has played two years HS feeder ball, three years rec. league prior to that. She is currently on an AAU spring team. I was looking for drills that may improve throwing (accurately) and catching-both offensively and defensively (basic ball control). Other teams are very opportunistic in this regard and I think this the next step for her. Winning the turnover battle could mean a lot.

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**Tara says:**

3/23/2014 at 6:43:50 PM

Thank you for the advice both in the material and in the responses. My 6th grader was talked into playing basketball by her club soccer coach. (I tried for many years to get her to play). She's in love with it now but has some catching up to do and I was quite sure where to start or what to exactly work on to get her confidence up. Defense came almost naturally to her this season.

Thank you,

Tara

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**Jeff Haefner says:**

3/24/2014 at 9:22:26 AM

Thomas,

Here are some drills that will help with catching, receiving, and turnovers:

<http://jeffhaefner.com/coach/my-favorite-passing-drills-how-to-cut-down-on-bad-passes-and-turnovers/>

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**sherale says:**

5/29/2014 at 3:24:11 PM

My son want to play basketball if any questions please call 816-266-1626

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**chip says:**

9/4/2014 at 8:18:25 AM

My little girl was put on the alternative list. The coach claims she is only allowed 12 players, how many players is 3rd threw 5th in tennessee allowed? The boys had 15 on the roster last year.

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**Jeff Haefner says:**

9/4/2014 at 9:53:26 PM

Chip - I'm not sure how many players are allowed on a team in TN. However my guess is the state does not have a rule but maybe the league you are in has a rule. Generally the youth rules are on a local league level and vary from league to league.

With that said, I think 8-9 players on a roster is just about right. 15 is way too many! With 15 players on a team each player only gets 13 minutes in a 40 minute game. That's going to be boring for the 10 players sitting on the bench and not enough minutes for kids to develop or learning anything. So I think 8-9 players is just about right. There is little sitting on the bench and all the players get plenty of playing time.

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 **jyoti says:**

10/20/2014 at 8:07:49 AM

i'm a b.tech final yr studnt ,i want to make the career in the basketball plz give me suggstion that this option is good or not now.

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 **Sergio says:**

11/5/2014 at 2:54:51 PM

Hi,

I have a kid who is 10.

He is practising 4 times a week for an hour + he has a game once a week. We want to introduce one more training a week which would be on the day when he already has a training session. We are a little concern not to put him under a risk of physical damage. How many hours a week would you consider to be too much for a young aspiring athlete?

Regards,

Sergio.

 **Ken Sartini says:**

11/5/2014 at 7:45:36 PM

Remember, he is only 10 and there is more to life than basketball. Make sure that he is having fun and is learning a lot of fundamentals.

Every kid is different. your son might be strong enough to handle another hour, just make sure that he gets enough rest so he doesn't burn out.

JMO

 **Jill says:**

11/24/2014 at 12:22:54 AM

My 9 year old son is playing in an organized basketball league for the first time. He doesn't get much playing time in games or practice. When the starting 5 are practicing, he and 2 other boys are sitting the bench, so they are not getting much experience to learn the plays. When he does get in the game, his coach tells him that he doesn't know what he is doing. He gets the least playing time and honestly the other boys are better. I am just wanting to know how to help him to remember the plays? He is so nervous of messing up during the game. I don't want him discouraged and I don't expect him to start because he is not at that level, but I want him to feel more comfortable. Any suggestions?

1 reply

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**Jeff Haefner says:**

11/24/2014 at 8:25:11 AM

Jill - Maybe the coach can send you the plays and you can practice them at home? And make sure your son knows it's ok to make mistakes. Everyone makes mistakes... even Lebron James. As long as you are trying as hard as you can, mistakes are ok.

1 reply

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**Jill says:**

11/24/2014 at 9:46:12 AM

Will he be able to learn them by looking at the plays on paper?

1 reply

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**Jeff Haefner says:**

11/24/2014 at 11:20:23 AM

Everyone learns different. Some read and get it. Some see a demonstration and get it. Some require multiple methods. So I would suggest trying a couple different methods -- paper, try walking through it at home, try drawing up the play on paper, maybe try having him show you the play in the living room.

1 reply

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**Jill says:**

11/24/2014 at 11:53:03 AM

Ok . We will try it. Thanks so much.

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**Tabetha says:**

12/8/2014 at 8:55:39 AM

Do you teach your kids alk positions? Or do you make them all knowledgeable in every aspect of the game? My daughter had been playing for a few years now. She's in 6th. She had only been taught one position...post. There's only 6 girls on the team but during practice, she basically stands under the basket while 2 or 3 kids play 99% of it. The games are a little different but it does get old watching her stand there. I was just curious to know if that's how they're usually taught. She lacks confidence & I think pay off that is her shyness but pay of it is her not being taught much besides rebounding.

1 reply

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**Jeff says:**

12/8/2014 at 10:07:19 AM

Tabetha - Yes, unfortunately that is how many youth players are taught. But that is not what I would recommend. For my youth teams, all players learn the post, perimeter, and point guard positions. And they all develop the same skills. Who knows how big or little they will be when they get in high school. And a truly skill PG has post skills.... a truly skilled post player has PG skills.

I would highly recommend learning all positions and to get experience playing on the perimeter:

<http://www.breakthroughbasketball.com/fundamentals/Youth-Players-Positions.html>

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**A Hughes says:**

12/6/2015 at 1:30:31 PM

What about 5-7 year old girls ?

1 reply

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**Jeff says:**

12/8/2015 at 11:20:12 AM

Dribbling, passing, footwork, and have lots of fun.

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**Jay Prakash Choudhary says:**

12/24/2015 at 12:31:04 AM

Hi,

You got a really useful blog I have been here reading for about an hour. I am a newbie and your success is very much an inspiration for me.

Thanks,

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**Will Colclasure says:**

2/19/2016 at 9:23:15 PM

What about stealing the ball.

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**Ben says:**

9/20/2017 at 3:38:10 PM

Thank you for all the great content. I'll be coaching both bantam (K-2) and 5-6 grade boys teams this winter and I was struggling determining how much to differentiate between the two age groups. Now i'll largely teach them a lot of the same things, but focus on doing things faster and more crisply with the older boys with just a few extras thrown in for a slightly more advanced game.

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**Ziad says:**

10/11/2017 at 2:48:42 AM

I have a twins 7years and a half, boy and girl,  
Can you advice me if it is better to do one sport or 2 different sports for them, (2 practices basketball or 1 practice basketball and another sport) because I read that multiple sport is better for less injuries and to aquire more skills at this age.

Best regards  
Ziad

1 reply

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**Jeff Haefner says:**

10/11/2017 at 8:21:10 AM

Play multiple sports and play them seasonally. I would not recommend one sport... you want them to develop a foundation of coordination, athleticism, and fundamental movements by playing multiple sports.

As an example:

- Summer baseball
- Fall flag football
- Winter basketball
- Spring soccer

Gymnastics, martial arts, swimming, and dance are also excellent sports activities for long term development. You can't do it all (well I guess you can). But you want kids to have free kid play time too. So try to work in 3-4 complimentary sports each year.

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