

# How to Become a Better Youth Basketball Coach

## COACH TRAINING LESSON #1

This course is for you if you've had any of the following thoughts...

*"How much time should I be spending on skill development?"*

*"How much time should I spend on our offense and defense?"*

*"Am I wasting time at practice?"*

*"Are the drills I'm using even helping the players develop?"*

*"Do the parents think I know what I'm doing?"*

*"Am I letting my players down?"*

**Experienced (and better) coaches create and run much more effective practices than the inexperienced coaches.**

Don't worry, I get it...

Everyone must start somewhere.

And there aren't 100,000+ adults with experience to provide coaching to the millions of kids who participate in sports each year.

But what does this tell you?

**The quickest way to improve as a basketball coach is to become better at creating and running effective basketball practices.**

**Here are a few more differences I noticed:**

### **Experienced Coaches:**

- Spent a lot more time on skill development.
- Always had a practice plan.
- Kept practices fresh and exciting with new drills.
- Made practices competitive.

### **Inexperienced Coaches:**

- Spent most of practice running set plays.
- Never had a practice plan.
- Used the same drills over and over and over again.
- Didn't let us compete.

**A step-by-step practice plan structure that any coach can use to develop effective practice plans for their team.**

1. You'll develop better basketball players.
2. You'll become a better coach.
3. You'll feel confident knowing you're creating great practices.

4. Your team will win more basketball games.
5. The parents of the players will be happy you're coaching.
6. You'll have more time to focus on the players during practice.
7. And much more...

**Key Takeaway:**

**The quickest way to improve as a basketball coach is to improve your ability to create and run effective basketball practices.**

## COACH TRAINING LESSON #2

The quickest way to improve as a basketball coach is to become better at creating and running effective basketball practices.

### Mistake #1 - Not Developing Positionless Players

If you were to ask anyone...

*"What are the biggest coaching changes that have occurred in recent years?"*

This answer would inevitably come up...

***"Teams are now playing more 'small-ball' than they used to."***

Meaning, instead of passing into the post on every possession, more coaches are playing shorter players who can all dribble, pass, and shoot at a high level.

But I would argue that the title '*small-ball*' isn't appropriate for what coaches are trying to achieve.

Coaches are not giving players more court time specifically because they lack height...

**Coaches are giving more court time to the players on their team who possess the most skill!**

It just so happens that the players who possess the most skill are often the shorter players on the team.

*"Why is this?"*

**Because most coaches aren't developing positionless players!**

Players join a youth basketball team and are quickly labeled either a 'guard' (short players) or a 'post player' (tall players).

Which players are allowed to train during practice and what they're allowed to do during games depends on the label the coach assigns them.

**Guards** - Allowed to dribble up the court.

**Bigs** - Get told to pass to a guard and run up the court.

**Guards** - Allowed to shoot from outside.

**Bigs** - Get told there's no one to rebound if they shoot from outside.

**Guards** - Pass the ball around the perimeter.

**Bigs** - Get told to stay in the post.

This needs to change.

### SOLUTION:

Coaches need to start creating positionless players by training all players to play the guard position and then allowing them to fill that spot during games.

- Encourage all players to dribble up the court.
- Allow all players to shoot from the outside.
- Let players practice guarding different positions.

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### Mistake #2 - Not Creating a Practice Plan

*"I would spend almost as much time planning a practice as conducting it" - John Wooden*

Having a written practice plan each time you step into the gym with your team is compulsory for all coaches who want to run an effective practice.

### COMPULSORY.

Without one, here are a few things that will happen...

- a. A LOT of practice time will get wasted.
- b. You won't be able to focus 100% of your attention on the players.
- c. You'll spend 90% of practice thinking about what to do next.

It's important to note that you don't need to follow this practice plan to the letter...

You might decide you need to spend more time on a specific drill if your team isn't executing it properly or they're lacking focus...

But it's ALWAYS better to start with a plan and adjust along the way.

### SOLUTION:

- Block of 15 - 20 minutes before each practice to write out a complete practice plan.
- Each practice plan should include the name of the drill you want to run, the start and finish time, and any coaching points you need to remember.
- This doesn't necessarily need to be written on the day of practice. If it fits your schedule better to do it a few days before, do that.

### **Mistake #3 - Spending Too Much Time on Strategy**

'Strategy' refers to offense, defense, and set plays.

I have watched far too many practices where the coach instructs their players to run 5-on-0 set plays for 75% or more of practice.

This is an inferior use of practice time.

Sure, it's great to coach a team of players who know the set plays so well that they could run them in their sleep...

**But these players who spend so much time on strategy are missing out on a huge opportunity to develop their basketball skills.**

We must put our players in positions that will allow them to learn how to play basketball...

### **SOLUTION:**

Sorry, not so fast...SEE LESSON #3

### **Mistake #4 - Getting Frustrated and Yelling at Players**

Take a moment to think about the following quote...

***"You don't scream at your kids when they're learning how to read or write, so why do it when they're learning how to play football?" - Sean Dyche.***

This is one of the most powerful quotes I've ever read.

*(True Story -- When I first read this quote, I wrote it down on a small piece of paper and hung it on the fridge in the kitchen so that I would see it every day.)*

Seriously. Reread it and take some time to think about it...

Like most young coaches, when I first started coaching a U12 team, I would easily get frustrated by simple mistakes.

I bet you've done the same too...

### **SOLUTION:**

Never yell at players for making mistakes due to a lack of skill or experience.

If players are trying their best, that's all we can ask from them.

**I promise you that there are no 5-year-olds out there intentionally missing layups or passing the basketball to the opposition to aggravate you.**

They're simply inexperienced and going through the learning process.

And a player will never improve if they're too scared to make mistakes.

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### **Mistake #5 - Wasting Valuable Practice Time**

One of Monday's action items was...

***"How many basketball practices do you have each week?"***

Nearly half of the coaches who replied to this question said something like...

*"We have one practice a week... But I wish we had more!"*

or

*"We currently practice 2 times each week... But it would help if we practiced 4 times per week!"*

The point is...

**Every coach wants more practice time!**

But it's amazing how many coaches complain about limited practice time when I see so many wasting the time they already have!

Practice plans like the following are far too common...

15 Minutes - Warm Up

15 Minutes - Shooting Drill

10 Minutes - Drink Break

40 Minutes - Set Plays

10 Minutes - Cool down

This needs to stop.

### **SOLUTION:**

- Warm up and cool down off the court — If you coach a team that only has 45-60 minutes of practice time, ask the players to arrive earlier and complete the warm-up on the sidelines or outside, if possible.
- Always have a practice plan (mistake #2).
- Emphasize the importance of moving quickly between drills.

### **Mistake #6 - Running Drills That Don't Suit Your Team**

*"Put great thought into what and how you practice. Once practice is done, you can never get that time back. Did you simulate the game?" - Kevin Eastman*

**Every drill you use during practice must do two things...**

**a. Must translate to in-game improvement.**

**b. Must suit the skill level and age of the players you're coaching.**

Here's an example of a drill I've seen coaches use that doesn't suit their team and how they could improve in the future...

#### **Bad Drill:**

12 players lined up in a single line practicing form, shooting at the basket one-by-one.

This means players will shoot one rep approximately every 1 minute.

#### **Good Drill:**

Players all find a partner and practice shooting the basketball in the air to each other while using perfect form.

This means players will shoot one rep approximately every 5 seconds.

### **SOLUTION:**

- Have a variety of drills to choose from that will suit different teams depending on who you're currently coaching.
- These drills should be added to your practice plans depending on the skill level of the players and the number of players on the team.

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### **Mistake #7 - Not Building Relationships with Your Players**

My favorite thing about coaching sports is the opportunity to have a significant positive impact on the lives of thousands of kids.

Never take this for granted.

**But the only way to have this positive impact is to connect with your players and develop relationships with them.**

It can be a difficult task for coaches who have players for only a limited time, but you must ensure you leave a good impression.

As a coach, you're a role model whether you like it or not.

Here are a few of my favorite quotes on this topic.

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*"He ain't an X. He ain't an O. He's a person. Pour your soul into him. It doesn't matter where he's going on your scribbles if he doesn't trust you" - Buzz Williams*

*"I want to continue to do is to help these young women be successful. You don't just say goodbye at the end of their playing careers and end it there" - Pat Summitt*

*"Relationships with people are what it's all about. You have to make players realize you care about them" - Gregg Popovich*

## **SOLUTION:**

Here are a few tips for developing relationships with your players:

- You must develop a relationship with each player individually.
- Talk about non-basketball topics. Ask a player how their day was, how their subjects at school are going, about their family, etc.
- Smile.

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## **Mistake #8 - Focusing on Winning Too Early**

*"Your greatness as a coach isn't tied to the greatness of your players. Anyone who thinks otherwise doesn't understand coaching," - Jeff Van Gundy*

**If you're coaching youth sports, you should never sacrifice development for winning basketball games.**

This was another area I'm happy to share that I struggled with when I first started coaching youth basketball.

I attributed the success of my youth basketball teams to my coaching.

Which was a silly thing to do...

Here are just a few of the tactics I've seen coaches use to win basketball games that **harm** player development:

- a. Playing the five best players as much as possible.
- b. Playing zone defense and a full-court press.
- c. Only allowing the best players to shoot.
- d. Only allowing certain players to dribble the basketball.
- e. Constantly running set plays on offense.
- f. And many more!

## **SOLUTION:**

A coach must be able to put their ego aside and always do what's best for the players and the team.

**This means putting player development ahead of winning.**

Sure, there are plenty of tactics you can use to win a few more games in the local U10 competition...

But by using the tactics listed above, you're hurting the long-term development of the players on your team.

**Always put the players first.**

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## **Key Takeaways:**

Here are the 8 practice mistakes coaches make:

- 1. Not Developing Positionless Players**
- 2. Not Creating a Practice Plan**
- 3. Spending Too Much Time on Strategy**
- 4. Getting Frustrated and Yelling at Players**
- 5. Wasting Valuable Practice Time**
- 6. Running Drills That Don't Suit Your Team**
- 7. Not Building Relationships with the Players**
- 8. Focusing on Winning Too Early**

## Coach Training Lesson #3

Effective coaching requires preparation. To get the most out of your practices, you must have a PRACTICE PLAN. Without a practice plan, you end up with:

- Time wasted between drills.
- Too much time spent on offensive plans
- Not enough competition at practice

An effective practice should be divided into three parts:

1. Skill Development (50%)
2. Strategy (25%)
3. Games (25%)

### 1. Skill Development (50% of Practice)

Half of the entire team practice should be spent on players developing their individual skills.

This is by far the most important part of practice and the section most coaches don't dedicate enough time to.

Skill development involves running drills that develop skills such as:

- Shooting
- Passing
- Rebounding
- Individual Defense
- Dribbling

When introducing a new skill, this is how it should be taught:

1. Introduce the skill
2. Demonstrate and explain
3. Initial practice
4. Explain when and why to use the skill
5. Repetition
6. Incorporate into live play
7. Repeat steps 5 and 6 a lot.

### 2. Strategy (25% of Practice)

A quarter of your practice should be spent on the strategy of the game.

This involves:

- Developing your offense
- Developing your defense
- Implementing set plays

This is the part of practice that coaches often spend FAR too much time on. *If you're coaching at the youth level, 'strategy' is the least important part of your basketball practice.*

Developing individual skills and allowing them to compete in game-like situations is far more important to long-term development.

I recommend that coaches select one of the three (offense, defense, or set plays) and work on only that one for the strategy section of each practice.

### 3. Games (25% of Practice)

For the other quarter of practice, players should spend time competing against each other in different small-sided games and scrimmages that simulate game situations.

This includes games like 2-on-2, 3-on-3, advantage/disadvantage drills, and many others that simulate game scenarios.

Here are a few of the benefits of using them:

1. More Touches
2. Make Easier Decisions
3. More Scoring Opportunities
4. Increased Space
5. Involves All Players
6. Breaks the Game down into Chunks
7. Eliminates Presses and Zones
8. Teaching Players When to Use a Skill

Hold up - What about drink breaks and a warm-up?

If you have a short practice (30-60 minutes), I highly recommend warming your team up on the sidelines or outside before practice starts if possible. This ensures that you'll be able to make the most of the limited practice time you have available.

If that's not possible (or you have a longer practice), add 5 minutes at the start of your practice for a quick talk and warm-up.

### Drink Breaks

Add these to your practice plan in 3–5-minute blocks, taking small chunks from the other practice sections.

The number of breaks you should have during each practice will vary depending on the intensity of the practice, the players' fitness level, and the players' age.

- 60-minute practice - 1-2 breaks
- 90-minute practice - 2-3 breaks
- 120-minute practice - 3-4 breaks



## How to Create Your Practice Plans

Now that you know the three sections that make up a great practice plan, it's time to show you how to put it together!

Each practice plan you create should be broken up into three columns:

1. Time - Exactly how much time you plan to spend running the drill.
2. Drill - Which drill you plan to run with a brief description.
3. Coaching Points - Points of emphasis to remember.

Arrange your practices in the same order outlined above (skill development, strategy, games).

But this can be changed around to suit your personal preference.

Here are a few examples using different practice durations...

60-Minute Practice Plan	
8-Minutes	Dribbling Drill
12-Minutes	Shooting Drill
10-Minutes	Rebounding Drill
5-Minutes	Drink Break
15-Minutes	Offense Practice
10-Minutes	Small-Sided Games

90-Minute Practice Plan	
5-Minutes	Talk + Warm Up
10-Minutes	Passing Drill
12-Minutes	Layup Drill
5-Minutes	Drink Break
13-Minutes	Shooting Drill
20-Minutes	Offense Practice
5-Minutes	Drink Break
20-Minutes	Small-Sided Game

120-Minute Practice Plan	
5-Minutes	Talk + Warm Up
10-Minutes	Footwork Drill
15-Minutes	Passing and Dribbling Drill
20-Minutes	Shooting Drill
5-Minutes	Drink Break
10-Minutes	Defensive Drill
10-Minutes	Defense Practice
15-Minutes	Small-Sided Game
5-Minutes	Drink Break
15-Minutes	Offensive Practice
10-Minutes	Small-Sided Game

### Summary:

#### 50/25/25 Practice Plan:

- 50% - Skill Development
- 25% - Strategy
- 25% - Games
- Add in warm up + breaks.