



# From Dribbling Dreams to College Court: A Girls' Guide to Basketball

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From Dribbling Dreams to College  
Court: A Girls' Guide to Basketball

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# Introduction

As a female athlete who has played basketball since the age of 9, I have had firsthand experience of some of the challenges that come with the sport. The rise of women's basketball in the last year has inspired and empowered me as a female athlete and has motivated me to co-author this guide with my coach.

In 2024, "the cheapest tickets to the women's [NCAA](#) Final Four are 47% more expensive than the men's Final Four."<sup>1</sup> The average price this year for a women's ticket was \$532, which is an 82% percent increase from the usual \$291 ticket.<sup>2</sup> These statistics alone indicate how pivotal 2024 was for women's basketball and athletics as a whole. If that doesn't shock you, would you believe that the WNBA was created only 27 years ago, in 1997? Oh and, by the way, the NBA was created 75 years ago in 1949. Not a huge gap at all.

Historically, women's sports have taken a back seat to men's

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<sup>1</sup> *Women's NCAA Final Four Tickets Are More Expensive than Men's: Vivid Seats*, [www.axios.com/2024/03/31/ncaa-final-four-mens-womens-tickets-clark](http://www.axios.com/2024/03/31/ncaa-final-four-mens-womens-tickets-clark). Accessed 10 Nov. 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Chris Bengel Apr 2. "2024 NCAA Women's Final Four Tickets Ranks as the Most Expensive Women's Final Four of All Time." *CBSSports.Com*, 2 Apr. 2024, [www.cbssports.com/womens-college-basketball/news/2024-NCAA-womens-final-four-tickets-ranks-as-the-most-expensive-womens-final-four-of-all-time/#:~:text=According%20to%20TickPick%2C%20the%202024,ticket%20prices%2C%20which%20averaged%20%24291](http://www.cbssports.com/womens-college-basketball/news/2024-NCAA-womens-final-four-tickets-ranks-as-the-most-expensive-womens-final-four-of-all-time/#:~:text=According%20to%20TickPick%2C%20the%202024,ticket%20prices%2C%20which%20averaged%20%24291).

sports. With stereotypes and societal norms that historically defined women's roles as homemakers, there was really never a place for women on a sports court or field. When the NBA was created in 1949, women's stereotypical role in the house, cooking, cleaning, and raising the children, was at its peak. During World War II, as men had to go off to war, there was a lack of workers in the workforce and people turned to women to fill up these jobs. Women became a huge percentage of the workforce; it was one of the first times in history that women were encouraged to work outside of the home. For once women were given the "men's jobs." However, when the war ended and the men came home, they needed their jobs back. Immediately women were pushed back into the home and the 1950's became a time when society focused on restoring pre-war societal norms. So, in short, when the men's basketball league was founded, there wasn't even a thought about women's basketball. And if someone even brought up the topic of a woman in sports, I can assure you it was followed by laughter and mockery.

While there are clearly more opportunities for women in the basketball and sports world today, it is still significantly more challenging — with few role models and little guidance compared to men's sports. Especially in the sport of basketball where the crowd goes wild for a slam dunk, it is genetically impossible for every woman in the WNBA to even have the height to do a slam dunk. However, the popularity of women's sports in general, and women's basketball in particular, boomed in 2023.

It's simply impossible to discuss the rise in popularity concerning women's basketball without mentioning the name "Caitlin Clark." As a four-year college athlete at Iowa State, Caitlin Clark has become the figurehead of women's basketball. She has dominated the court, media, and truly impacted the



world's attitude towards women's sports. She has broken countless records; my favorite record is from December 30, 2023, when Clark set the all-time NCAA assist record and became the first Division 1 college basketball player to have 3,000+ points, 900+ assists, and 800+ rebounds — of any woman or man. While she is not only one of the best female basketball players individually, the fact that she has the record for assists shows who she is as a person and player.

Off the court the “Caitlin Clark effect” is apparent in the influx of viewers of NCAA women's basketball. In the 2023 national championship game there averaged a total of 10 million viewers, a 103% increase from the 2022 championship game. The overtime loss at Ohio State vs. Iowa State game averaged 1.93 million viewers on both NBC and Peacock and 3.9 million during overtime. This is the most watched regular season women's basketball game since 2010. This is only a snapshot of the increase in popularity of women's basketball this year. Recognizing the acclaim that women's basketball has received in just one season, “NCAA members will explore revenue distribution units for the women's basketball tournament.”<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the groundbreaking 2023-2024 season is already impacting the sports world's respect and allocations for women's basketball. Caitlin Clark has also taken measures to inspire young girls to play the game, constantly signing autographs and interacting with her young fans. One could write about the Caitlin Clark fandom for hours, but for now I'll leave you with that.

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<sup>3</sup> “The Caitlin Clark Effect.” *NCAA.Org*, NCAA.org, 15 Feb. 2024, [www.ncaa.org/news/2024/2/15/media-center-the-caitlin-clark-effect.aspx](http://www.ncaa.org/news/2024/2/15/media-center-the-caitlin-clark-effect.aspx).

# 1

## Getting Started

**In this section, you will learn about making key decisions:**

- Selecting the right team for your goals and playing style
- Terms you should know
- Essential gear and equipment for success
- Sportsmanship and teamwork

**Finding the Right Team:**

Considering that basketball is typically a male-dominated sport, it can be challenging for young female athletes to find the right team or picture themselves in basketball shoes and long shorts. As a result, there are often fewer basketball opportunities for girls, but don't let that discourage you from chasing your dreams.

When joining a team it is important that you prioritize finding the best team for your goals and playing style. There are many different aspects of a team that you need to consider: how competitive the level of play is, how strict the coaching is, what the time commitment is, and many more. It is important to

use the internet to navigate to find the right team instead of entering one blindly.

From personal experience, even if some leagues and camps are labeled as “co-ed,” it is uncomfortable to show up to a camp the first day and be one of the only girls on the court. One way to avoid this is by doing your homework upfront. In addition to asking your PE teachers and local coaches, the internet and AI are great ways to learn about the programs near your hometown.

**Terms You Should Know:**

When learning about the game of basketball it is important to understand the terminology associated with the sport. You will be expected to understand some of these terms: layup, travel, charge, foul, crossover, for instance. You can use the internet and different digital resources to dive deeper into the meaning of these terms. For a complete glossary of basketball terms, you can refer to resources such as [Epic Sports Basketball](#) which has a full list of over 100 important terms.

**Finding the Right Equipment:**

Once you join your team, it is also important to have the right gear to ensure comfort, support, and durability. Sneakers are especially important considering the amount of jumping and number of quick movements that are involved. When selecting the best basketball shoes, please try them on to ensure they fit well and meet the specific needs of your playing style. Each player has unique requirements based on their position, foot structure, and personal comfort, so finding the right match is essential for both performance and injury prevention.

Just as when finding a team, the internet is a great resource to find the best equipment.

### **Key Considerations for Budget-Friendly Shoes:**

- **Durability:** Look for shoes built with durable materials that can withstand regular use.
- **Comfort:** Ensure the shoes have adequate cushioning and support for your playing style.
- **Traction:** Good grip is essential for quick movements and stopping power.
- **Fit:** Make sure the shoes fit well to prevent blisters and enhance performance.

### **Sportsmanship:**

Sportsmanship and teamwork are some of the most important aspects to the game of basketball. Some games rely on team chemistry to bring the team together. I know the phrase is cliché, but there truly is no “I” in team. When one player tries to dominate the game, it diminishes the confidence of the other players and the whole team can’t play to the best of their abilities. When playing a basketball game, I believe it is vital to support your teammates even when they’re not playing at their best. In my experience, when someone on my team is mean to me because of my mistakes, I don’t only feel frustrated at that person, but also myself. When this happens I tend to get into my head and don’t play to the best of my ability. So, if someone on your team is ever having a rough day, comfort them and give them the encouragement they need to play their best.

## 2

# Building Skills

**In this section, you will learn about important skills:**

- Dribbling and ball handling skills
- Shooting techniques
- Defensive strategies and tactics

When starting any sport, you can never just jump onto the court or field expecting to be talented. While speed, height, agility, and other traits may be helpful, everyone needs to build the skill work before they can be a great player. In basketball, repetition is one of the most important ways to improve as a player. Especially as a young player, it is important to start with the basics to master dribbling, shooting, footwork, and more. I would advise beginners to start with doing 10 minutes of dribbling and 10 minutes of form shooting. If you don't have a hoop or ball accessible to you daily, look up on YouTube different skill work workouts for beginners at basketball. There will be a variety of videos to choose from with different tutorials and

workouts.

### **Offense:**

Offense definitely is and will always be a key component to being a good basketball player. It is true that as you develop more skills as a player and figure out your position on the court, the area that you focus on offensively may differ. However, the best players, whether they are a point guard or forward, start at the same place. As a young player starting out, it is smart to try out all positions on the court to find which one is right for you. Your coach will ultimately help you find the one that suits you best. The player who is the most effective on the court is the one who has versatility when it comes to their skills. A shooting guard who can make a move at the post and a forward who can dribble their way through defenders can be some of the most lethal players on the court. Therefore, I advise young players to learn basketball as if they have no idea how short or tall they are going to be. It is important to learn how to be a great offensive player holistically.

While there is plenty more that goes into offense such as basket cuts, shot selection, passing, and more, the drills included in the Appendix of the Guide will help you develop your skills and they can all be done by yourself.

### **Defense:**

Even though offense is a crucial part of the game of basketball, defense is truly what often wins a basketball game. My school team has always focused on our defensive play and effort because we know that we are never going to be the best team in the league offensively. As a result, we have played teams who are significantly more skilled than us offensively, but if they weren't

putting in the defensive effort like us, the game became much closer than anticipated. A large part of being a skilled defender is about having the right mindset. There is a level of tenacity and drive that is necessary in defense. The player always needs to be open to diving on the ground for a loose ball, or helping their teammate if they lost their defender. The last thing a coach ever wants to hear on the court is the excuse, “but they weren’t my defender.” Defense is a team effort and if you aren’t backing up your teammates for their mistakes then you can never be a good defender, or player. Coaches love when a player is playing solid defense because it means the player is giving their all on the court and trying their hardest. Not everyone can always have a good offensive game; sometimes the shots just don’t go in. Adolph Rupp, the renowned basketball coach, once said, “your defense will save you on the nights that your offense isn’t working.” Even some of the best players have bad offensive days, and it’s the players who step it up and use their defensive skill who win the game.

Another aspect of defense that is vital is rebounding. Many presume that the best rebounders are the people with the most strength and size. Yes, I do agree that it may come easier to those who have the physical advantage to box out smaller defenders. However, in my experience the best rebounders are the people with the most hustle and determination to get the rebound. No matter your size, if the shot goes up and you aren’t paying attention and ready to box out, there is a great chance you won’t be the person receiving the rebound. There aren’t as many drills that you can do alone for boxing out, but if I have any piece of advice when it comes to rebounding I would say to always be alert and attentive to the game. Even the slightest moment of distraction may cost you the rebound that can change the game.

# 3

## Strength and Conditioning

### **In this section you will learn:**

- How to build and maintain basketball-specific fitness and endurance
- Steps to create your personalized training schedule
- Keys to nutrition and recovery for peak performance

While it is crucial for any sport, running is clearly an important aspect to the game of basketball. Unlike most field sports, basketball requires endurance for both long distance running and sprinting especially. The swiftness and intensity of basketball requires you to be on your toes at all moments ready to pounce for a loose ball. Even though a court is not as long as a field, the rapidity and speed with which you run back and forth on the court ends up equaling or exceeding the amount of running you do in other sports. Below I will list some drills which you can do to increase both your endurance and speed on the court.



## 4

# Mentality and Mindset

**In this section, you will learn mental game essentials:**

- Building confidence and mental toughness
- Setting and achieving goals
- Handling pressure and adversity

### **Building Confidence:**

Confidence is one of the most important things when it comes to playing basketball or any sport. However, unlike skill work which is developed through practice and consistency, gaining confidence doesn't come as easily. To start, confidence needs to come truly from within or else it is useless. It's great to have a coach, teammate, or parent who believes in you and supports you at all times, but this will not always be the case. Every coach is different; there will be the ones that still support you after all the shots you miss, but also the ones that reprimand you. It is a similar situation with teammates; not every player will always have your back, and at times there will be some that bring you

down. For these reasons it is vital to be confident in yourself and not solely because of others.

### **Growing From Setbacks:**

Despite all the time and effort put into your shot or other skill work, it is inevitable that not every shot will go in. Some days you can have a great game where your shot is on and other days you won't even be able to make a layup. When interviewing Mary Ashley Stevenson, a sophomore playing basketball at Stanford University, she shared that one of her biggest pieces of advice as a collegiate level athlete was to not let these "off days" get to you. She mentioned that not every day as an athlete is going to be perfect, and that you're not always going to want to put the work in. However, the feeling of mastering the skills and achieving the goals which you've put hours into is one of the most satisfying parts of the sport, overriding all the bad days. While I am not as experienced an athlete as Mary Ashley, I believe that some of my worst games have motivated me to become a better player and put in all my effort in the following games.

The setbacks experienced by women in the sports world are not only experienced by athletes. Tracy Wolfson, who is the lead sideline reporter of CBS sports and a co-host for the all female sports show *We Need To Talk*, mentioned similar experiences in our interview. Ms. Wolfson went to the University of Michigan and always knew she wanted to get into the sports industry professionally. She discussed one of her career lows, which happened before she got behind the camera as a reporter, when she was a researcher at CBS, a year out of college. She was interviewing for a job as a broadcast associate; she was one of the only female researchers applying for the job. In the

interview with the executive producer she told him about how this field of work was what she wanted to do and that she'd love the promotion to be a broadcast associate. His response was "I know you know sports and I know you love sports, but not like the guys do." Ms. Wolfson viewed this comment as a wake-up call to the realities of being a woman in the sports industry. Instead of being discouraged, she now looks back to that comment and believes it is one of the best things that ever happened for her career. It not only made her more aware of the challenges she might face, but it also made her work harder for her future endeavors.

## College Level Playing And Coaching

### **The Recruitment Process:**

If you plan on taking your basketball career to the next level after high school, the college recruitment process is definitely something you've thought about. It is important to begin planning for this process early on in your high school career and consider attending competitive tournaments, camps, and programs to gain exposure. You should also consider creating a portfolio of highlights to showcase your best games and performances.

The level of intensity of this process is defined by which division you hope to play for, and many universities have equally high standards for academics; therefore, it is important to focus on balancing your academics and recruitment goals. Here is a website to help guide you through this process: <https://www.ncsasports.org/womens-basketball/how-to-get-recruited>

It is also important to understand the physical and emotional components which come with recruitment. For firsthand experiences, I interviewed two athletes I have played with and admire. I compared their experiences as they are Division I and

Division III athletes.

**Mary Ashely's experience:**

She began getting recruited her freshman year of high school and joined an Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) team to get more exposure. Playing on an AAU team was a segue to high level programs. As she started getting offers the summer between freshman and sophomore year, she decided to move to South Carolina her sophomore year to play in a more competitive atmosphere. Sophomore year was an important year for recruiting and she saw her time in South Carolina to be a big boost for her process. She was on a team with other highly-recruited girls; this not only pushed her to improve as a player, but also showcased her to recruiters from exceptionally competitive schools. She moved back to the East Coast for her junior year, and the summer between junior and senior year she seriously considered possible commitment. In her final stages of recruitment she went on four official college visits. She went to Purdue University, University of Southern California, Harvard University, and Princeton University. She ended up committing to Purdue University during October of her senior year.

Mary Ashley continued to share that one of the downfalls of this process is that it is extremely overwhelming, especially if it begins your freshman year of high school.. As freshmen, students are still trying to figure out who they are, and to be thinking about college, something four years into the future, is extremely nerve-racking.

### **Susannah Zimmerman's Experience:**

Susannah is a current freshman at Kenyon, playing for both the women's basketball and lacrosse teams. Kenyon is a Division III school and therefore Susannah's recruitment process played out differently than Mary Ashley's. Initially she wasn't sure if she wanted to play sports in college, unlike Mary Ashley who had already been considering the opportunity her freshman year of high school. The summer going into senior year is when she realized she wanted to play. She reached out to multiple Division III schools and sent videos of her playing in highlight reels. Soon after, she got a few offers and decided that she was going to play at Kenyon.

### **College Level Coaching:**

I had the privilege of interviewing Debbie Ryan, the former women's basketball coach at the University of Virginia, who shared some insight into what it was like to coach a female basketball team over 30 years ago. Ryan began as a graduate assistant at UVA in 1975, only five years after the school became coed. Ryan described her first years as a transitional period at the university; the inaugural women's basketball program was only two years old. In the early days, the men's and women's teams were not always given the same opportunities or accommodations but Ryan was grateful for even the small adjustments. For example, when Ryan started coaching and UVA would play Clemson University, they would take an eight-hour bus ride to the game. By the time the women got to Clemson, they would be exhausted from the ride, making it difficult for them to play their best. In response to this feedback, UVA started making doubleheader games with farther schools like

Clemson so both the men's and women's teams could take a flight together. While this seems like a small win, Ryan quickly realized that the only way to make a difference in her community was through these small changes. Over time, she learned how to choose her battles and create the right relationships to help her team.

In her early years of coaching, the women on her team couldn't access sports bras. Ryan found a company called "Jog Bra" which produced sports bras that gave women the support they needed. Ryan approached the Associate Athletic Director, asking if they could order these bras. He asked how expensive they were, and when she responded, "\$32," he replied, "32 dollars! No, we are not doing that. That's crazy." While she explained that these were necessary for medical reasons, the Associate AD still rejected her idea. Instead of giving up, Coach Ryan did her homework and presented the research that explained the damage that sports can do to women's breasts. She started a petition advocating for female athletes' access to these sports bras and solicited support from both male and female coaches. Ryan scheduled a follow-up meeting with the Associate AD and when she walked into the office she saw the main athletic director. She presented her case and they still denied her request. However, as she walked out of the office, she asked, "If a men's jock was 32 dollars and a women's bra was five dollars, would you not get the men a jock?" The Athletic Director looked at her and said, "Alright, you can have them."

This was a pivotal moment in Coach Ryan's career; she realized that she would need to tap into her intelligence to help her battle for what she wanted. Throughout her career, she continued to advocate for the women's program, and rather than seeing obstacles as a negative, it would inspire her to continue to

further support the athletes. While she was told no many times, she never quit, and eventually, her nos turned into yeses. Ryan said, “The answer “no” was just a reaction to me; I already knew who going to win the battles, as I knew Title 9 inside out and sideways.” When asked what her best advice would be, Coach Ryan said, “Never take no for an answer and never ever give up on anything you truly believe in.”



# 6

## Additional Resources

### **Dribbling Drills:**

#### Stationary Dribbling:

- 1 minute right hand dribble
- 1 minute left hand dribble
- 1 minute crossover dribbles
- 1 minute dribble crossover (alternating)
- 1 minute in and out crossover (alternating)

In a total of 5 minutes you can already have a great ball-handling workout done. If you do this once a day there will be an apparent change in your skill work. If you want to continue this workout and advance, here are some hard stationary skills:

- 1 minute in between crossover
- 1 minute straight in between the legs
- 1 minute behind the back crossover
- 1 minute straight behind the back
- 1 minute crossover, in between the legs crossover

This list could go on but this is a simple 10 minute workout that can improve your ball-handling in weeks.

### **Shooting Drills:**

#### Form Shooting:

- 10 made shots with your dominant hand from all the five spots around the basket
- It is crucial to be close to the basket for these shots and solely work on your form
- 10 made shots with your dominant and guide hand from all the five spots
- Stay at the same distance from the basket from the drill before

#### Shooting Drills:

- 10 made shots with both hands at all the five spots
- Make these mid distance shots
- 10 made free throws
- 5 made rip through jump shots from all the five spots
- 5 made in between the legs jump shots
- 5 made behind the back jump shots

Similar to dribbling, this list could go on forever. After you've mastered the basics, however, it's your turn to be creative. Create a dribble move and then connect it to a jump shot and there you have a new drill.

## **Layup Drills:**

### Mikans:

- 1 minute of Mikans with one hand
- 1 minute of Mikans with the guide hand as well

Mikans are one of the best workouts to increase your endurance and accuracy. Do this 2 minute Mikan drill at least 5 times to see a shift in your layup accuracy.

### Layups:

- 10 made right hand layups with just the right hand
- 10 made left hand layups with just the left hand
- 10 made right hand layups with guide hand
- 10 made left hand layups with guide hand

### More advanced layup drills:

- 10 made scoop right hand layups
- 10 made scoop left hand layups

After you become more skilled with dribbling and your layup accuracy, you can incorporate different types of layups. Here's a list of a few moves:

- Spin move
- Up and under
- Euro steps
- Reverse layup
- Floaters
- These are extremely useful and I would recommend focusing

on these especially

There are plenty more moves that you can research online and use YouTube as a resource for tutorials.

### **Defense Drills:**

- 5 down and back defensive shuffles
- 10 closeouts
- 10 sprint closeouts

There are many other defensive drills, but half of defense is strength and conditioning. It's impossible to stay with your defender without having a certain level of endurance and agility.

### **Conditioning Drills:**

- **17's**
- This drill is a sideline sprints drill where you sprint 17 times between sidelines. The aim is to run as fast as possible and decrease your running time every time you do this drill. For the first time you try the drill, time yourself, and every time after that take off a few seconds from your previous time. This will push you and prepare you for a gamelike situation.
- **Suicides**
- I know the suicides drill may be triggering to some, it definitely was for me. However, there is a reason why most coaches have their players frequently do this drill. Being able to sprint to the line and rapidly change directions is a crucial skill to have especially if you want to be a solid defender. Possessions can change at any moment and it is

important to be ready at any time to sprint to the defensive end of the court.

- **Half-Court – Full-Court**

- A similar drill to suicides, the “Half-Court – Full-Court” drill is a down and back to the half-court and then a down and back full-court.

Both of these drills can also be done with defensive slides if you are focusing on defensive conditioning particularly.

- **Full-court layups and dribble moves**

- This drill allows you to focus on your speed, endurance, finishes, and ball-handling. After a few reps around the court you will definitely be out of breath, and this drill is a good way to focus on finishing layups and pull-up jumpers when you're out of breath, similar to a game time situation. If you want to challenge yourself you can even add in a few dribble moves to work on your ball-handling.

