

Coaches Corner

Expectations for children:

CHARACTERISTICS OF UNDER-6 CHILDREN

- Short attention span.
- Most are individually oriented (me, my, mine).
- Activities based on characteristics should be individually based.
- Constantly in motion.
- Go flat out.
- Psychologically easily bruised.
- Little or no concern for team activities.
- Physical and psychological development for boys and girls quite similar. Eye/hand or eye/foot coordination most primitive.
- Love to run and jump.
- Prefer large soft balls and Nerf balls.
- Catching skills not developed.
- Can balance on good foot.
- *This refers to their racing about in games until complete exhaustion sets in, at which point they stop, breathe, and then restart at a torrid pace again.

CHARACTERISTICS OF UNDER-8 CHILDREN

- Attention span beyond U-6 but still not extended.
- Inclined more toward group activities.
- Still in motion.
- Still very sensitive. Dislike personal failure in front of peers.
- Beginning to develop physical coordination. Most can ride a two-wheeler at this point. Still enjoy running, jumping, climbing and rolling.
- Prefer real balls through imitation of the big guys. Sports heroes becoming important. Still lack sense of pace. Go flat out.
- Activities should be individually based and with pairs of players.

CHARACTERISTICS OF UNDER-10 CHILDREN

- Lengthened attention span compared to the U-8 player. Are far more team oriented.
- Still in motion, but not as busy. Will stay in place long enough for a short explanation.
- Psychologically becoming more firm.
- Boys and girls beginning to develop separately, girls at a faster pace. Overall and small motor skills becoming much more refined.
- Prefer balls and equipment with team identification.
- Pace factor becoming developed. (They do think ahead.)

CHARACTERISTICS OF UNDER-12 CHILDREN

- The Under-12 player, though still in need of technical training and playing experience, can be exposed to tactics. The U-12 coach should be careful not to go overboard with tactical training. A coach cannot invade the cranial recesses of U-12s and pour in reams of tactical information. Before describing beneficial activities for the emerging player, a discussion of tactics is in order.

Coaching tips for basketball:

Remember: they are just kids

The very first thing I always suggest to coaches of younger kids is to be very careful trying to apply what you see in your local high school gyms, and what you may see on TV watching college and professional coaches.

Remember that high school, college or pro coaches are coaching 15- to 30- or 35-year-old players, many of whom, especially at the higher-level professionals, have had literally thousands of hours of basketball experience (not to mention the dramatically higher levels of skill and ability grown men and women possess).

So, exercise caution when you compare or contrast anything you might try with younger kids with what you see at these higher levels.

Dumbing down doesn't work

I often compare the challenge youth coaches face to that of a professor used to teaching 20-year-olds in a college-level math class trying to teach math to a bunch of 10-year-old 4th graders. I warn youth basketball coaches who have had some high school or college basketball experience that they may not be able to dumb down, so to speak, the sorts of things that they learned at higher levels to teach their younger players. Unfortunately, I have learned over the years that you simply can't use the way the adults play the game as a model for children.

Remember your audience

So what *should* you be doing with younger kids when they show up for your basketball practice?

Well, there are a number of things you have to consider, but the most critical is the "raw material" you are dealing with, i.e. what are the key aspects of a 6-year old kid, an 8-year old kid, or a 10-year old kid?

When considering children in sports, there are different types of kids. Some will be there because they really want to play basketball and like the social aspect of team sports, but you may also have some less-than-enthusiastic children, whose parents may have primarily signed them up for a bit of activity and some babysitting, and may just want to stand in the corner and wait for practice to end so he or she can go

home and watch TV. There will, of course, be some kids that fall in between, so you have to be very selective about what you do with these kids during the hour you are typically with them.

Every player should have a ball: For the youngest kids (5- to 8-year-olds), a coach's number one duty is to make sure the kids are as active at practice as possible!

The best way to ensure that the kids are active is to make sure every kid has a basketball (a practice I borrowed from youth soccer many years ago). A shortage of basketballs is a fundamental mistake I see many youth programs make.

If a player is standing around with nothing to do, he will be looking to do something to keep occupied, and it might not be something you want him doing! So, be sure to have a ball for every child. That alone really helps keep children active, having fun and learning new skills.

Teach fundamentals

Dribbling: essentially is bouncing a ball under controlled conditions while kids are moving. Running around with a bouncing ball is inherently great fun!

To give kids plenty of chances to dribble a ball, I recommend playing a game of "dribble tag." Kids understand what tag is, and they understand what dribbling is, and all you are doing is combining two things into one very fun game. Someone with the ball is "it" and chases around all the other players in a defined area until he/she tags another player, at which point that player becomes "it."

Shooting: The next thing I do with the younger kids is engage them in some shooting games. There are many games you can choose, such as the classic knockout game "Horse," where they are trying to shoot in competition against their friends.

The challenge is that shooting at the younger ages is difficult because younger kids are just not yet strong or coordinated enough to use proper shooting form. I recommend teaching younger players to shoot with two hands on the ball, trying to keep the ball in front of them, and facing the basket.

Passing: The third thing to teach is passing, which along with dribbling and shooting is the other major offensive skill. Passing is a little more difficult to teach because younger kids tend to be naturally selfish, and, of course, passing involves teamwork and sharing.

No matter how often you are yelling instructions to your players to "pass, pass, pass," I think they understand what passing is, but they just may not want to do it because they realize that, if they pass the ball, they no longer have the ball to dribble or shoot. So that can create a resistance to pass. This is why I leave passing to

number three, as dribbling and shooting are inherently more fun and engaging, and it's easier to make fun dribbling and shooting games to teach kids skills.

Gross motor skills: Coaches often neglect using fun games and drills with younger kids that also build their gross motor skills. These skills, which include running, jumping, catching and movement in different directions, are the foundation for many sport-specific skills in basketball.

As a youth basketball coach, a game like dribble tag will help develop gross motor skills because it involves children in running forwards, backwards, and sideways, and getting up quickly after they fall down (which they will), all the while using their hands with the ball, which also helps develop hand-eye skills.

Sportsmanship - Remember basic courtesy and good manners? Use your practices and games to reinforce these basic principles. Make sure your players can give a firm handshake with eye contact to officials and opposing coaches, as well as a high five to opposing players.

Teamwork - Teach your players that "we over me" is what most often leads to "us over them," in team sports competition. Encourage your players to be selfless and supportive teammates in both losing and winning efforts.

Positive Attitude - Life is not fair and basketball is worse. Help your players get over it and still do what they need to do to succeed. Playing sports is one the best ways to practice overcoming adversity and preparing to handle tough times in life. Humor helps!

Respect - Pay it forward and get it back. How a coach interacts with other adults--coaches, parents and officials--will naturally influence the behavior of your players. Be mindful that you are a role model and are always being watched. Insist that your players respect coaches, officials and opponents--like you do. Have the courage to enforce your rules with every player and parent involved with your team.

Philosophy - Want a surefire way to be a great youth coach? Lighten up! Here's a tip. Not one of your games will be Game 7 of the NBA Finals. Billions of people don't even know you exist, let alone feel that your practices and games are important. Recreational league and even elite travel team coaches should understand that kids want to play sports and to have FUN! Let your players figure things out. Ask questions, but don't give instruction or answers. Stop teaching so much and give your players a chance to learn. Watching them grow will be fun for you too!

Communication - Have a team meeting to start the first practice of the season, or as soon as possible thereafter. Limit your postgame analysis to positive things that occurred in the game and deal with what went wrong by establishing a specific goal to work on starting at the next practice. Ask parents to delay or even eliminate the dreaded postgame interview with their child. When you need to correct a player, use

the "compliment sandwich" State something positive the player did well, give a very specific correction, then restate the first positive thing.

Continuing Education - All-star coaching requires continuing education. I have been privileged to learn the game of basketball from seven coaches who are in the Basketball Hall of Fame. Each one of them was always striving to learn more. In your efforts to learn, make sure the substance of the material is appropriate for the skill, age and maturity level of the players that you coach.

Use Resources - There are several organizations that offer assistance to youth coaches. Do an online search for youth coaching information sources like iHoops.com. Read books, watch videos and attend coaching clinics in-person whenever possible. One hour online could make you a better coach.

Practices - Play to learn, play to practice, and you will win when you play in games. Remember how much fun you had growing up when you used to just go outside and play with your friends? We advocate using the "compete to learn" approach to practice--it lets kids play and have fun while competing. This type of practice, using competitive drills, does a better job of preparing players to compete in real games. Technically, this is called transference. What you do in practice carries over into what you do in games.

Individual Skills - Want to improve your team's ball handling? Games like dribble knockout are very popular. Every player must have his or her own basketball. Coach starts the game. Every player must dribble constantly, stay in-bounds and try to knock the ball away from all other players in the game. Lose control of your basketball or go out-of-bounds, and you're eliminated. Boundaries for 10-12 players could start as half the court. After several players are eliminated, the boundary is reduced to only inside the 3-point area. Boundary is reduced again to the free-throw lane. Finally, when there are just two players left, they play the "finals" in the free throw half circle.

Team Concepts - Run half your offense by playing 2-on-2 or 3-on-3 restricted to one side of the floor. For example, make even (by size/ability) teams and conduct a 10-minute tournament using an action like the pick and roll. Allow for 20-second timeouts and allow players teach themselves how to make the play work.

Game Strategy- Keep It Simple System (KISS) - Basketball is a simple game. Keep it simple! If you are a regular reader of instructional material, you might think that you need to have lots of practice drills and a complicated or intricate system to win games. No, you don't. Establish one or two alignments and three or four actions, and that's it. At the youth level or even in the NBA, most successful coaches try to have their team master a few simple things. 8-10 year olds can do this successfully. Try KISS at your next practice and even in your next game, your team will show instant improvement!

Simple Transition Offense (Fast break/press break) - Score a lay-up in less than five seconds without dribbling.

Simple Half-Court Offense (Ball movement/teamwork) - Everyone must catch and make a pass before anyone can shoot!

Links to drills: **BASKETBALL**

www.breakthroughbasketball.com - All drills elementary to high school

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z0xQYIU-NME> - 10 ball handling drills

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=32dOSPxfcQw> - Drills and team concepts

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GAt9jNsmuE> - Shooting drills

<http://www.usab.com/youth/news/2012/05/3shooting-drills-for-around-the-rim.aspx> - shooting drills

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LuCTph5wl6s> - Defensive drills

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XDhHu6YxmFo> - Agility drills

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=70HU60MjWrI> - Basics for kids

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v1ocRKLg7R4> - Dribbling for beginners