

Planning Practices



Certain skills should be practiced every practice, such as the ball-handling, dribbling and shooting drills. Depending on your schedule, the amount of practice time you have and what your specific team needs are, you vary your drills. A rough rule of thumb for high school teams is to spend about half the time on individual fundamentals and half the time on team skills. If you are working with younger kids, you might slant this more toward fundamental skills.

Practice planning. You must plan each practice. John Wooden has said he and his assistants often would spend more time planning a practice than the actual practice itself lasted. Have an outline of things to cover and try your best to stick to it. Spend time prior to writing down an outline to think of things your team needs to work on. Having an outline also helps to keep you on track. Don't just come to the gym each day without a plan and think you can just "wing it". You have to plan for success and plan your practices just like a teacher creates a lesson plan for his/her English or math class. Your practice should be like a classroom and you are the teacher.

Stretching is important at the start of practice in order to avoid injuries. I always hated to waste my precious "gym time" on stretching exercises. So I have asked my players to come 10-15 minutes early and do their stretching on the sidelines, so we are ready to go once practice starts. This might not be practical, and you may need to do 10 minutes of stretching at the beginning. While the team is stretching, you can discuss your plans for the day, or explain what things need to be worked on, use the time to praise good things that have happened, reflect on your "quote of the day", etc.

Establish a running program right off the bat. Basketball is a sport that requires lots of running and conditioning. An unconditioned team will struggle with all aspects of fundamentals if they are not in shape during a game. Early in the season run a lot of conditioning drills. I believe your players and team will improve much more by doing conditioning drills than a lot of push-ups and running without the ball. If you are going to make your players run, make them do it with a ball... like full-court speed dribbling, using the right hand one direction and the left hand coming back.

Keep practice disciplined and under control. Whether kids are 8 or 18 they will always want to horse around and it is the coach's job to get a handle on this right off the bat and keep it enforced. Kids that cause distraction not only hinder their learning but also others around them. If kids are not paying attention they are learning nothing and practice is wasted.

Move quickly from one drill to another and don't spend half of your practice time on one drill. The kids will get bored and won't learn much after the first 5-10 minutes into the drill. If they mess up, they will get another chance to run that drill tomorrow. Once again if you have a practice schedule with lots of things to do the kids will like it better.

Budget your time for each drill. If you are introducing a new drill, play, offense, defense, etc, you will have to allow more time the first time. If you are reviewing something, like a set of plays or your out-of-bounds plays (that they should already know), move quickly through these... you are reinforcing their memory (a brief repetitive exercise that can be done each day).

Follow an up tempo exhausting drill with 5 minutes of something less aerobic. Make them work hard, but don't be unreasonable.

Do your free-throw shooting after an aerobic, running drill when the players are tired, in order to simulate the leg and body fatigue that occurs in the real game setting.

Have every player do dribbling and ball-handling drills. I have been asked, "Why have my post players waste their time doing guard-type dribbling drills?" Doing these drills will make your post players better athletes in general, will help their overall coordination, and will improve their "hands."

Do not show favoritism to certain players in practice. Make them all work equally hard. Try to instill in your star players that they must lead by example, and be willing to work harder than anyone else on the team to be a great player. Don't ignore your "role players" (a better term than "subs", or "bench players")... make them feel they are contributing and encourage them.

Scrimmage time in practice is very important to enforce the fundamentals and allow the kids to practice in a game situation. Run your offenses, vary your defenses and force the fundamentals.

"Open" or "closed" practices... whether to allow parents, spectators in the gym during practice is up to you and your philosophy. But make sure you have rules established from the start of the season. If you allow parents in the gym, make sure they understand that it is a classroom and they must keep quiet and not "coach" the kids from the stands. In the event that this becomes a problem, you reserve the right to close your practices at any time.