

## High School Basketball Practice Planning

As a **basketball coach** you should map your road to success prior start of the school year. Organize each phase of the season for best results.

Many coaches tend to practice too long. A practice session should only be long as players can work at their best ability. Only rarely, should a practice session be more than one and a half hour long. Typical divisions could be as follows:

1. *Pre-season conditioning* - the period from the start of the school to the date of the first permissible basketball practice.
2. *Pre-season practice* - the period from the first permissible day practice with the coach is allowed until the day before the first scheduled game.
3. *In-season practice* - the period from the first scheduled game to the last game of the season.

### Pre-season Conditioning

Conditioning should be a year-round process for any athlete. A conscientious player never gets out of shape. In my opinion an athlete at this level should participate in other sports throughout the entire year; however, I think most basketball coaches should set up off-season conditioning programs for his players.

At the end of each school year, the coach should meet individually with each player to review his, or her, written evaluation. At the same time that player should be given his own personal off-season workout. Issue him, or her, a Daily Summer Workout form. The coach should prepare his own standard forms. One for post players and another for perimeter players. To see a typical Post or Perimeter Player Daily Workout form click on the following links:

[Post Players](#)

[Perimeter Players](#)

### Organizing Practice

An outline of a general practice for the entire season should be made long before the pre-season conditioning. School scheduling, weather, scouting reports, and the team's progress often determine the weekly schedule during the regular season.

Usually a practice schedule should be made no more than one week in advance. Even then, a schedule sometimes must be revised during the week and

occasionally on the day of the practice. A sound practice schedule makes the best use of the practice time. Daily practice plans should be posted so players can report to specified areas without delay.

In high school, pre-season practices usually cover six weeks. Each week must be outlined objectively. Each of the six weeks' objectives must be listed. Daily schedules list the number of minutes allowed to each drill, to each area, and the type of work expected each day. The weekly objectives are kept on a master schedule plan so that the coaches can tell at a glance what has been accomplished and what is yet to be done. These are kept within the framework of the coach's philosophy.

## Selecting Players

On the opening day of practice, the coach should give a get-acquainted talk to the entire group, outlining what will be expected of them during the entire season. Everyone, including the new candidates, must feel it is possible for him to contribute. The players must have a desire to play the game. An aggressive team is always a dangerous team. Every player must be willing to pay the price for the opportunity to play. They should report in good physical condition and practice diligently so that they improve each day. The team's success is based on unity and unselfishness. Loyalty to the school, the coaches, and teammates is expected at all times.

The basketball court is a classroom, not a playground. All players are expected to work towards maximum possible improvement. They either improve daily or they regress; therefore, practice must be designed to bring out the best in every player.

The first pre-season practice session is usually devoted to a discussion of the rules of the game and the rules that the team must follow. Then, quickly as possible, reduce his squad to about twenty-five players. Unless you are blessed with assistant coaches, it is nearly impossible to accomplish any effective group progress with a larger squad.

The coach should never do on the court, what can be done off the court. Furthermore, it has been my observation over the years, that good coaches should never work with only one, or two, players during the team practice time. Individualized instruction should come before, or after, daily practice.

## Teaching Skills

The coach should not over-teach in the early pre-season practice sessions. You want your players to retain what is being taught. Players can and should work when physically worn out; however, they can't learn when mentally exhausted.

The most significant point to stress at all times is the importance of possession of the ball. Also, all players should be warned that bad shots are detrimental to the team. After an incorrect, or unrelated, maneuver the coach should always ask the players, "Why?" If necessary, replace that player in scrimmage for a brief individual conference. Coaches should do this frequently during the practice scrimmages, because the players should know the reason for everything they do on the court. "A coach should *criticize softly* and *encourage loudly*, informing the team often that practice makes playing habits permanent."

Players who practice bad habits should be corrected immediately. Even in a drill on passing, the coach should correct a player who makes a poor, or improper, cut. He should then briefly explain the proper technique. The coach should strive constantly for mental anticipation, instinctive reaction, and intelligent aggressiveness on the part of all players. These intangibles turn a good player a great one.

## Developing Offenses and Defenses

After determining the best offensive and defensive patterns for the material at hand, the coach should be positive in their development. Do this in a way the players will have confidence. Do it in this order.

1. Explain and diagram your tactics.
2. Demonstrate the skills involved yourself, or by using a skilled player, or show a videotape.
3. Walk the players through the various parts of the offense, or defense.
4. Then, run them through at half speed.
5. After that run through at full speed without opposition.
6. Finally, implement the strategy at full speed with defenders; however, at this stage, the opponents should be weakest players.

Following the above enables the team to practice their strategy successfully, thus developing a positive attitude about their ability. Also, this erases any doubt a player may have about the coach's strategy.

Take advantage of individual abilities. On the other hand, never allow individual abilities to take over the team. The best coaches, however, do allow free-lancing that won't hurt the team. "The style of play that a coach incorporates offensively should blend with the material at hand. It should be based on good offensive floor balance, movement, proper execution of play patterns, and good timing"

## Daily Coaching Duties

"For all daily practice sessions, the coach should arrive on the court dressed for practice at least a half hour before the beginning of practice. He, or she, should review the day's scheduled practice. The coach should be sure that the

necessary materials are available. These include basketballs, scrimmage shirts, training aids, extra shoelaces, tape, and towels to be used for obstacles in a drill (Towels are preferred as obstacles rather than chairs, or other players. Chairs are bulky and stationary players are not taking part in the drills.) Managers can carry an armful of towels and place them in the proper spot easily and quickly."

Before practice begins, the coach can give individual attention to players, discussing shortcomings observed in the previous practice session. He can work with one, or two, players.

"In early pre-season, before cutting the squad down to a workable size, a coach should give time to new candidates for on-the-spot evaluation, making players who are in the questionable category feel that he has given them sufficient time. This attitude and attention by the coach makes the selection process less painful for both coach and players who are dropped."

"The coach should be sure that the players begin before-practice workouts as soon as they arrive. He should make certain that all players are on time and that practice starts at the prescribed time. The organized practice time, in which the timing by the manager is all-important, should begin with a whistle. The manager, or assistant manager, should check the time allotted for each part of the practice session and inform the coach when the time is up for each segment."

## Drills

Drilling is the secret of good performance in a ball game. Early pre-season practice should stress conditioning and fundamentals because the team must be in condition before the first game.

The importance of carefully conceived, skillfully organized, and well executed drills cannot be overemphasized. 20 percent of the practice time should be devoted to all aspects of shooting. "All drills should incorporate the ingredients of the team's planned defenses and offenses; however, do not drill initiative and motivation out of a good basketball player."

"Drills for fundamentals, simulating game conditions as much as possible. An experienced coach will know what drills will be best for his team, both for teaching his offense, defenses, and conditioning his players. A new coach must decide what drills to use and how long to spend on them. Drills should be simple and competitive. They should cover as many techniques as possible. They should also be selective. Don't use too many, or too complicated, drills."

"Drills are good only when they are completely absorbed by the squad. The coach must give the reason for each operation and explain the correct technique because:

1. If players understand they gain confidence.
2. It shows them there is a reason for everything.
3. Proper technique is learned because the coach can analyze any mistakes that the players make and allows him to compliment those players who do the drill well.

Selected drills allow for concentrated practice in specific areas. Pre-season conditioning drills must be efficient; therefore, they should include fundamental techniques. Early in the year, many necessary conditioning drills use running without involving the ball, or defensive techniques.

Some drills serve as a change of pace in the daily practice routine. They are also excellent for before practice, or pre-game warm-up. These should be simple, short in duration, and interesting. A variety keeps players interested in seeking perfection, preventing boredom and complacency. Too little time on drills, leaves a desire for more. This is more effective than too much time in drills. When drills become boring, there is a lack of enthusiasm and bad habits will form. "Drills should be spirited, evoking constant chatter and desire for perfection."

Drills should reflect the team's offensive and defensive philosophy. In fact, coaches should devise their own drills. The most adaptable and inventive coach is generally the successful. Three steps to learning are as follows:

1. The student must be interested and ready to learn. A competent coach who has the full attention of a receptive student can teach him the proper fundamentals of the game, stressing the acquisition of accuracy before speed.
2. Practice makes perfect. Once the player understands the techniques involved, he practices willingly for hours on end.
3. The final examination, in this case, is the actual playing of the game itself and not whether the team wins or loses the game.

To introduce team concepts early in the pre-season, the coach should use skeleton teams offensively and defensively. The concepts should be broken down and practiced in drills involving two-on-two and three-on-three groups. Much of the offense and defense to be used in the season should be broken down into drills.

The man-to-man attack and defense, zone attack and defense, pressure attack and defense, and combination attack and defense must be broken into parts if they are to be used. Drills should be repetitive so that reaction becomes instinctive. Players should not have to think about what they are going to do.

Every drill must demand perfect, or near perfect, performance from every player. Coaches must be constantly observant and highly critical, making corrections immediately. They must overcome a tendency to ignore or overlook slight

irregularities or imperfections in a player's form or habits. Coaches should remember that practicing something incorrectly is just as habit forming as practicing something correctly. Perhaps the most important motto for drills is, "practice makes permanent."

"Competitive drills hold player's interest. The use of rewards for winners and penalties for the losers creates incentive and enthusiasm. Winners could be given a reward, and the losers made to run suicides.

"All drills should have short, definitive names so that players know exactly what to do as soon as the name is called. Teams develop unity through drills. Players become accustomed to the movements, attitudes, habits, and idiosyncrasies of teammates. New drills can be explained during a brief practice break one day, then incorporated into the practice for the next day. Drills should be scheduled so that a physically strenuous drill is followed by one that is easier. Several small groups in which all players work strenuously are more beneficial than one large group in which several players are not working. The coach should plan to use all his players in drill activities every day in early season. At the end of a hard practice, the coaches should incorporate a drill that the players enjoy. This implementation will leave the players in a good frame of mind. They will anticipate the next day's practice."

## Selecting and Evaluating Players

"Early pre-season scrimmages are necessary in order to help select the squad. At this time, scrimmage teams should be selected for balance. Good players should be scattered evenly among the teams. Daily evaluations of each scrimmage should be made and recorded. Many of today's coaches drill too much and scrimmage too little. The right amount of scrimmage for a team depends on the experience, and physical and psychological condition of the players.

"After the squad has been selected in the early season, scrimmage sessions should involve five-man teams of varying ability. In selecting squads for early pre-season scrimmage practice, coaches should allow designated players of equal ability to pick the other members of their teams. A different selection order should be used each round until each designated player has made four choices. The selectors should be varied as often as possible. Allowing the best players to select their teams enables the coach to see how the players rate each other. He also gains insight into personality clashes, or cliques, within the squad.

"If there are three teams, they should scrimmage for approximately five to eight minutes. The winning team stays on the court. With four teams, play a round robin tournament with winners playing winners and losers playing losers. This procedure should be followed until each player has run approximately twenty

minutes of full-court scrimmage. These scrimmage sessions should be interrupted for criticism and analysis when necessary."

## Teammate Evaluation Sheets

It is my personal feeling that teammate evaluation sheets should be used. Filling these out takes approximately five minutes during a practice session.

"They should be issued to the squad without warning. Be certain that a manager has adequate supply of sharpened pencils on hand. Following is an outline of the factors to be evaluated by the players. (Naturally, each evaluator cannot include himself in any of the Positive factors.)

### 1. POSITIVE FACTORS

- Three players who always take good shots.
- Three best shooters.
- Three best rebounders.
- Three best drivers.
- Three best passers.
- Three best defensive players.
- Three best team players offensively.
- Three best team players defensively.
- Three best hustlers.
- Three quickest players.
- Three players with the best straightaway speed.
- Four players you most like to play with.

### 2. NEGATIVE FACTORS

- Three players who habitually take bad shots.
- Three poorest shooters.
- Three poorest rebounders.
- Three poorest drivers.
- Three poorest passers.
- Three poorest defenders.
- Three poorest players offensively.
- Three poorest players defensively.
- Three poorest hustlers.
- Three players who are least quick.
- Three players with the least straightaway speed.
- Four players you least like to play with.

"The coach should collect the unsigned sheets, transfer the information to a master sheet, and destroy the individual sheets. It is best to destroy them with the manager present, so that he can assure the squad that the sheets are not

kept. The coach and assistant coaches should also fill out evaluation sheets, keeping the results confidential.

"The coaches should then assess the player-evaluation results against their own evaluation. Many times it will be obvious to the coaches that there are possible discrepancies, or inadequacies, in their own thinking.

"Also, personality clashes, or conflicts, may be festering; therefore, evaluations by the involved players should not be taken seriously in the master evaluation. However, for harmonious team relationship the coach should try to resolve any conflicts. Any good coach should be able to meet any contingency; and flexibility is an asset. Coaches should be prepared to learn from these evaluations. The use of teammate evaluation sheets, and player selection of teams for early season scrimmages contributes a great deal toward development of team spirit and understanding of the squad."

## Player Self-Evaluation Sheets

"A self-evaluation sheet is also important to players. This sheet covers the intangibles as well as the qualities that coaches can observe. This sheet is as follows:

### FACTORS TO BE RATED:

1. Basketball instinct.
2. Attention to details.
3. Ability to follow instructions.
4. Alertness.
5. Aggressiveness.
6. Individual defensive ability.
7. Team defensive ability.
8. Individual offensive ability.
9. Team offensive ability.
10. Rebounding ability.
11. Shooting ability.
12. Shot selection.
13. Ability to penetrate.
14. Desire for the game.
15. Physical condition.
16. Selflessness.
17. Dribbling ability.
18. Passing ability.
19. Catching ability.
20. Quickness.
21. Straightaway speed.
22. Hustle.

23. Leaping ability.
24. Work ethic.
25. Footwork.
26. Ability to get along with teammates.

**Ratings of 4 for excellent, 3 for good, 2 for fair, and 1 for poor should be given.**

Many times a coach will find that players are downgrading themselves. Other players may have an exaggerated opinion of themselves. Through individual talks, the coach may be able to help the players evaluate themselves realistically. Self-evaluation sheets should be destroyed after they have served their purpose.

### Scrimmaging in Early Pre-season

"While you may not be able to scrimmage much during the first week, candidates of dubious ability should scrimmage full court as often as feasible, with some of the better players so that they feel they were given every opportunity to become members of the squad. Coaches should remember that scrimmaging is 10 teaching situations at once. By scrimmaging, players react under game conditions.

:"All scrimmages must be properly officiated. During early pre-season scrimmages clocks must be available, as well as all the statistical sheets that are used in scheduled games. The assistant coaches should record the positive and negative factors during a scrimmage so that constructive changes can be made in practices that follow.

"The head coach should be on the court, using the double-whistle technique to stop practice when something is fundamentally wrong. All aspects of each scrimmage should be charted and recorded so that individual player analysis is complete. All pre-season scrimmage statistics should be recorded on a master copy for dissemination and use with the squad. Shooting percentages, foul shooting percentages, and all other statistical information should be available to the squad as a result of these scrimmages.

"If there are enough players for four balanced five-man teams, run a tournament type of competitive scrimmage allowing two teams to play approximately eight minutes. Then, the next two play for eight minutes. The winners then play for third and second place. The losers play to determine third and fourth place. This brings an element of competition into the practice and motivates the players to play well in early pre-season to reach a visible goal. Scrimmaging in early pre-season enables the players to work under the pressure they will be under once the season starts. This type of scrimmaging should not take place until the team has learned the necessary offensive and defensive fundamentals.

"These scrimmages should be handled by officials. An experienced basketball official should be present at the first early scrimmage to explain the rule changes and the rule emphasis for the coming season."

## Pre-season Essentials

"At the close of each session, there should be a post-practice coaches' meeting, twenty minutes to one half hour long. At this meeting the coaches should analyze the practice session and decide if it accomplished what was planned. The coaches should also analyze each player's basketball progress, attentiveness, and attitude."

## Rate Each Player

"Each player should be rated on a **4 for excellent, 3 for good, 2 for fair, and 1 for poor**. Keep a record of this analysis. At the end of the second week, the coaches can discuss any apparent weaknesses with the players in a before-practice session.

"It is imperative that the following areas be thoroughly covered so the players are completely prepared for the first game:

### 1. **Offense**

- Fast-Break: This could either be a side-line or conventional break.
- Secondary Break: This is the possible scoring opportunities that occur while getting into basic patterns.
- Basic attack against man-to-man defenses.
- Basic attack against zone defenses.
- Basic attack against combination defenses.
- Basic attack against pressing defenses.
- Out-of-bounds plays, both from the side and under the basket, first for possession of the ball and then for a score.
- Free-throw alignment for a possible fast-break.
- Semi-freeze and stall situations.
- A one-shot play for late in the game.
- Rebounding fundamentals for the individual and the team.
- Last minute and late game situations when behind, with the score tied, and when ahead.

### 2. **Defense**

- The methods of stopping the fast-break at the defensive backboard, cutting off the outlet, and guarding the rebounder to delay the break.
- Full-court defenses: Both man-to-man and zone. (Aggressive and loose)
- Half-court defenses: Man-to-man, zone, and combination. (Aggressive and loose.)

- The defensive rebounding pattern for both individual and team.
- Last minute situations when behind, with the score tied, and when ahead."

## Controlled Scrimmages

"The coach must control the offense and defense used by the scrimmaging teams in pre-season practice sessions. For example, in a 15 minute scrimmage, Team A may use a 1-3-1 offense for the first 8 minutes and a stacked offense for 7 minutes.

"Team B may use a man-to-man ball denial defense for the first 5 minutes, a 1-3-1 zone for the next 5 minutes, and a full-court pressing defense for the last five minutes. Similar assignments are made for Team A on defense and Team B on offense.

A manager should keep an offense pattern chart for such scrimmages, noting the number of possessions, the number of shots, and the baskets scored for each team from the offense used. For example:

### TEAM A

1. **One-Thee-One Set offense:** 30 possessions - 28 shots - 15 baskets
2. **Stack Offense:** 20 possessions - 15 shots - 5 baskets
3. **Fast-break:** 7 possessions - 6 shots - 5 baskets
4. **Secondary break:** 50 possessions - 30 shots - 12 baskets

Using statistics like these will indicate the effectiveness of the offenses and defenses used when assessed against the offensive-defensive apportionment.

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