

Basketball Coaches' Handbook

When it comes down to it, it's more about a coach's ability to learn and adjust to the game and connect with players than it is about personal athletic experience. If you can keep your temper, never disparage the players or the referees, seek constantly to teach and encourage, and finish the season with improved players who enjoy the game and each other – then we don't need to see your won-loss record to know you're a good coach.

Expectations of Basketball Coaches

1. Participate in all coaches meetings
2. Attend skills clinics for new coaches.
3. Commit to all elements of the Basketball Coaching Philosophy
4. At a minimum, hold a parents meeting at the beginning of the season. Better yet, hold regular meetings with parents throughout the season. Communicate your expectations and your coaching philosophy. Be open to their expectations and concerns and encourage them to be active participants.
5. Once you have the names and phone numbers of the players who are on your team, call the parents personally to introduce yourself and tell them when the first practice will be held. Explain that you'll go over your plans and expectations for the season at that first practice and request that they attend.
6. Submit to a criminal background check.

Basketball Coaching Philosophy

1. A coach's primary goal is to improve the self-esteem of his or her players. Coaches should teach their players to accept responsibility for their actions and to critically examine their strengths and shortcomings
2. Playing basketball should be fun. The enjoyment of playing basketball is in knowing that the individuals and team have done their very best.
3. Winning should provide a focus for the team as a whole – the goal should be to win as a team and have fun in the process.
4. Establish an ethic of teamwork. The team is greater than any individual player.
5. Players will perform better if they trust their coach and trust begins with consistent coaching.
6. Establish high but realistic expectations. Challenge players to do their best. Let them know that you care about them as individuals and as members of the team.
7. There's no substitute for actual game experience and every member of the team has a right to gain that experience. Regardless of ability, every member of the team deserves to be treated with encouragement and to be given equal playing time.
8. Success should not be measured in terms of wins and losses but in the amount of effort put forth.
9. Install a sense of discipline and purpose among the members of the team. Practice and games should be fun but don't lose focus on individual and team improvement.
10. Maintain your integrity. Don't behave in a "do as I say, not as I do" manner.
11. Acknowledge the player's effort not just the result. A shot taken with good form but that falls short is worth as much praise – or more – than a wild shot that falls through.

12. Strive for a 3 to 1 ratio of praise to criticism – but make your praise sincere and specific. Every mistake doesn't have to be cushioned with a "good try" but even a mistake is likely to have some silver lining (become an expert at finding silver). The coach should be the only person allowed to criticize a player – and then only in a constructive way.

Top 10 Characteristics of a Great Coach

1. Understand the Game.
2. Be organized and plan all practices and games (make sure that all administrative matters are handled effectively). On the other hand, be flexible, if it isn't working, do something else.
3. Be patient.
4. Treat people with respect (eliminate rudeness, do not allow disrespect, and coach for the benefit of the kids).
5. Be enthusiastic and keep it positive. Be an optimist and inspire your team.
6. Know that it is OK to yell instructions to players, but not to yell at them.
7. Work hard, insist on hustle, and play to win (within reason, of course).
8. Set a good example and surround yourself with good people.
9. Teach the game in a way that improves play and makes it enjoyable.
10. Be a great teacher by communicating clearly and being consistent.

Measures of success:

- Did the players have fun?
- Did the players' skills improve over the course of the season?
- Did the team's performance improve over the course of the season?
- Did the player's self-esteem improve over the course of the season?
- Was there a sense of cooperation, selflessness, and sportsmanship on the team?
- Will the players continue to play the following season?

Before each game remind your players about:

- The positions they will be playing in the game.
- Their position on defense and who they will be guarding.
- If the opponent is likely to press and the corresponding assignments for the press offense
- General offensive and defensive schemes
- Offensive and defensive assignments for fast-break situations
- Out-of-bounds plays and assignments
- How substitutions will be made

Points of Emphasis immediately before and throughout a game:

- Rebound/box out
- Run the fast break
- Drive to the basket
- Take high percentage shots
- Don't foul
- Pressure the ball
- Always Hustle

Tips to making practices effective

Basketball games are generally not won or lost on the day of the game. Most games are won during the week at practice. It is preparation that largely determines a team's chances for success on game day.

- Plan your practice in advance
- Warm-up muscles before stretching. Consider stretching again at the end of practice to avoid soreness and tightness. Avoid the hurdler's stretch, toe touches and full sit-ups. They are not only ineffective but can be harmful.
- Plan in time for players to hydrate. Use that time to discuss what you will be covering next in practice.
- There shouldn't be such a thing as game speed and practice speed. Encourage players to always move at game speed.
- Keep your eyes open and get to know your team. Watch them carefully and get to know their personalities. Be sure to learn every player's name right away.
- Keep your energy high. Your players will feed off your energy and everyone will have a better practice for it.
- Keep the kids moving and positive so that they are too busy to have behavior problems. Young children have notoriously short attention spans so keep the talking to a minimum and keep them as active as possible. Don't spend more than 10 minutes on any given activity.
- Maintain a 3:1 ratio of praise to criticism when instructing your players
- Use the reversible practice jerseys for all team play (including 2 on 2 or 3 on 3). Players need to develop the ability to pass without looking directly at a teammate. This requires that the teams wear contrasting colors.
- Encourage parents to attend practices and be prepared to work with their child outside of practice. The skills you'll be teaching cannot be learned in a single or pair of practices each week. Parents will need to work with their players outside of practices as well.

Coaching your own child:

Quite often, the volunteer coach of a youth team is a well-intentioned parent. If you are in the position of coaching your child there are a few things to consider as you ponder the dual role of parent/coach:

- Ask your child if they want you to coach their team.
- Discuss with your child how your interaction may be different at practices and games than it is at home
- Don't be a parent at practice.
- Don't be a coach at home.
- Treat your child fairly. Don't fall into the trap of treating them more severely in order to evade charges of favoritism.

Coaching your child can be a rich and rewarding experience for the both of you as long as the coach and parent roles are clearly delineated. Make sure you let your child know of the how much you love them, regardless of their athletic performance.

Coaching Girls vs. Boys:

Research has shown that substantial differences do exist between how girls and boys approach physical activity, including sports. The differences do not appear to be grounded in genetics but rather in socialization.

- Even though skill levels in most physical activities are about the same at the youngest ages, boys see themselves as being physically skilled more often than do girls. This results in higher self confidence for boys and greater willingness to test their limits.
- The primary difference between boys' and girls' perspectives on sport is that boys value a hierarchical social order while girls value relationships.
- Young boys define themselves and improve self-esteem by moving up in the social order of the team. Accomplishment and performance helps the male athlete differentiate himself from the group.
- Pre-adolescent girls are anchored in relationships. Interconnectedness is valued so strongly that hierarchical orders are rejected in favor of what might best be called a web. To be singled out from the group is to be on the periphery of the web, a position that makes most female athletes uncomfortable.
- Boys value independence, status, and achievement while girls value belonging, connectedness, and friendships.
- Boys fear failure, dependency, and conformity while girls fear isolation, separation, and loneliness.
- Given their concern with belonging and relationships girls are sensitive to their relationship with their coach and usually make a stronger effort to follow directions and to please. The flip side is that girls tend to personalize criticism to a greater degree than do boys. So couch your feedback in terms of what players can do to make the team better. Girls may not care about becoming better individually because that may mean becoming the best which would marginalize their status among the team.
- In the end, we should be careful about perpetuating differences just because they exist. Rather we should strive to provide equal athletic opportunities and experiences for both boys and girls.
- Take the time to talk to your athletes and listen to why they play. Use that information to provide a positive and fulfilling experience for each of your players.

Dealing with problems:

- Address problems immediately and remember that it's OK to demand respect in a positive and consistent way.
- Try the 4 strikes and you're out rule. If they persist, ask the player if they want to participate or not – make it their decision. If they still continue to be a problem, make them sit out, but don't leave them there. Make it a point to get back to them as soon as possible and suggest that they rejoin the group.
- If a player is talking while you're explaining something, don't single them out. Instead remind all team members that they need to be quiet when the coach is talking.
- If a player has been disciplined and remains sulky after reintegrating them into the action have a meeting with the player and their parents.
- If a player is consistently late to practice, have them sit out until you invite them to join the practice. Take a similar approach with being late to games.
- If one player starts criticizing or making fun of another player, bring the team together and remind them that part of the responsibility of being on a team is to treat everyone

with the same amount of respect. Reinforce the idea that everyone has something different and important to offer. Keep reminding the team to be supportive, light and upbeat.

- Remember, don't punish performance, only behavior. A missed shot or pass is not a cause for punishment. But if that same player throws the ball at a teammate or curses in frustration, it might be cause for punitive measures.
- If you must punish a player, remain calm while doing so. Don't make it personal and let completion of the penance be the end of it.
- When confronted by a parent who is upset, try to remain calm and avoid becoming defensive. If parents seem too emotional, suggest to them that you would be happy to discuss their concerns at a later time. Most important, don't hold a player's parents against the player.
- You can avoid most parental concerns by ensuring that all players get an equal amount of playing time and equal opportunities to start games – not to mention that it's the right thing to do.

Sexual Harassment:

Coaches are authority figures. They control roster spots, practice regimens and playing time. They generally have complete control over their athletes. This is true with any age group but particularly so when coaching youngsters because you have the dual dynamic of coach/player and adult/child at work. In today's hypersensitive climate, it is important that you display appropriate behavior with your athletes at all times. If the receiver feels uncomfortable, then the onus is on the perpetrator to change his or her behavior.

Dealing with injuries:

Basketball is one of the top four injury-producing youth sports. Most injuries are not severe enough to limit playing but they may require some medical attention on your part.

- Have your basic first-aid kit on site for every practice and game.
- Identify a parent (preferably a mother) to handle first aid during games and practices. During games, keep them near the player's bench. This will allow you to remain focused on the practice or game in the event of an injury.
- For minor cuts and abrasions, the first thing to do is don a pair of disposable surgical gloves. Avoid direct contact with the blood. Make an effort to stop the bleeding, then clean out the wound. Finally dress the cut with gauze or some form of bandage.
- For ankle, wrist and finger sprains, think **ICE**:
 - a. **I**ce the area to prevent swelling and to help reduce pain. Avoid putting ice directly against the skin. Actual ice works better and holds its temperature better than the chemical packs but the packs are better than nothing.
 - b. **C**ompress and immobilize the injured area securely with an elastic wrap of some sort. Ensure that the wrap is loose enough to allow blood flow. If fingers or toes appear blue or purple, the wrap is too tight. Hold finger splints in place with a couple of pieces of white athletic tape.
 - c. **E**levate the injured ankle in order to keep blood flow to the affected area to a minimum.

- In the event of a serious injury, immediately call for emergency medical assistance – **always have a cell phone available**. Remain with the injured athlete until EMTs have arrived. Perform assisted breathing or cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) as necessary.
- Fill out an accident report and deliver it to Rob Pierson.

Creating a safe environment:

Most gym facilities are fairly standard in their construction but there are a couple of basic things to keep in mind:

- **Do you need to sweep the floor?** Most gyms serve multiple purposes and the floor can build up a thin layer of dust over the course of the day. Basketball requires a lot of cutting and change of direction movements. If the floor is slippery, there is an obvious increased risk of injury. If dry-mopping the floor doesn't improve footing, you may want to consider placing some damp towels around the dry mop before sweeping the floor. Make sure you allow adequate drying time before your players take the floor.
- **Is there adequate padding on the basket supports and walls behind the baseline?** If not, report the lack of padding to Rob Pierson and to the facilities director of the gym. Limit the amount of active play at such a facility.
- **Is loose equipment and baggage in or near the area of play?** Move all such items out of harm's way into a corner, hallway, or storage closet.
- **Never leave any young person who may be awaiting a ride from a parent or a friend unattended at the gym following a practice or a game.** Require all parents to pick their children up in the gym. Ensure that you have seen each player be picked up by a responsible party by enforcing the following behavior. When a player is ready to leave with their parent or family member they should get your attention by saying "Goodbye coach!" You should verify that you have matched the player visually to a responsible party and then say "Good bye <child's name or nickname>." Follow this procedure at every practice and game. Make sure that all your athletes are safely on their way before locking up and leaving.

Coaching Resources:

- Sample Parents Meeting Agenda
- Sample Parents Letter
- Basketball Team Expectations
- Sample Practice Plan
- High School Basketball Rules Book (hand out at first coach's meeting)
- *MOST COMMON MISUNDERSTOOD BASKETBALL RULES*
- Accident/Incident Forms
- Player/Parent Physical Exam and Consent Forms
- Basic First Aid Kits (hand out at first coach's meeting)
 - Band-Aids of various kinds
 - Disposable surgical gloves
 - Disinfecting wipes
 - Finger splints
 - White athletic tape
 - Elastic bandages
 - Chemical ice packs

- Zip-lock bags for ice
- Carrying bag for components
- Copies of contact information and medical issues forms for team members (hand out at first coach's meeting)
- Team web site access letter with username and password (one copy for each family). Site contains:
 - Calendar of practices and games
 - Player/parent contact information
 - Coach contact information
 - Access to letters and forms
- Coaches' web site access letter with username and password (also provides access to team site). Site contains:
 - A copy of this handbook.
 - Copies of all letters, forms, and templates.
 - Sample practice plan

References:

Much of this handbook is a distillation of three great books:

- *Coaching Girls' Basketball* by Sandy L. Simpson, ISBN: 0-7615-3248-X
- *The Baffled Parent's Guide to Coaching Youth Basketball* by David G. Faucher, ISBN 0-07-134607-4
- *The Complete Guide to Girls' Basketball* by Michael D. Mullaney, ISBN 0-9761005-0-9